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The proliferation of an anti-US ideology among radicalized Islamic groups has emerged as one of the most significant security concerns for the United States and contemporary global relations in the wake of the end of the Cold War. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 demonstrated the danger posed by Islamic extremists to US domestic and foreign interests. Through a wealth of case studies this new series examines the role that US foreign policy has played in exacerbating or ameliorating hostilities among and within Muslim nations as a means of exploring the rise in tension between some Islamic groups and the West. The series provides an interdisciplinary framework of analysis which, transcending traditional, narrow modes of inquiry, permits a comprehensive examination of US foreign policy in the context of the Islamic world.

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Eurasia in Balance

The US and the Regional Power Shift

Edited by

ARIEL COHEN

Senior Research Fellow

The Heritage Foundation, USA

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Introduction

Ariel Cohen

Why Was This Book Written?

The 9/11 attack and the subsequent war in Afghanistan have changed the balance of power in Eurasia, defined in this book as the former Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US, Western Europe, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India and China, to mention a few, have projected “soft power” – aid, trade, investment, education and culture, as well as military or “hard power” to the area formerly in the Soviet and Russian imperial grip. The US undertook limited military training and cooperation initiatives, but on a minor scale. The war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), the collapse of the USSR (1991), and the spread of radical, political Islam, were momentous processes, which will define the future of the Eurasian heartland for decades to come. These events have encouraged the renewal of national and religious awareness, such as the revival of Turkic affinities throughout Central Asia and Azerbaijan of which Ali Koknar writes in his chapter on Turkish foreign policy. But they also exacerbated long-suppressed ethnic and religious conflicts, such as between Azeris and Armenians over Nagorno-Karabakh, or between the Abkhaz and the Georgians, analyzed by Svante Cornell in his chapter.

The contemporary rise of Islam with support from and ties to the Arab Gulf and Pakistan, in the Ferghana Valley and throughout Central Asia, would have occurred regardless of US involvement. However, it is a global radical Sunni Islamist organization in the forefront of the international jihadi movement, which attacked Washington and New York in 2001 and caused US intervention in Central Asia. This intervention targeted Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) – a regional affiliate and an ally of Osama bin Laden.

It is, therefore, the 9/11 attack on the United States, which, from the American perspective, has become a watershed event in Eurasia. For the first time in recent history, the US, a Western overseas power, has successfully inserted its ground troops to the region, at least for now. Unlike the land operations by the British Empire in Afghanistan in the nineteenth century, the Russian overland expansion into Central Asia in the nineteenth century, or the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

in 1979, US power projection to Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was executed from great distances and using primarily air and sea borne platforms.

US intervention has addressed – and so far effectively dispatched – the greatest threat to the regional security and to fragile local regimes: a possible Taliban invasion of Central Asian states, or internal Islamist insurrection led by the IMU. Most importantly, the US-led operation destroyed the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda's land base which, prior to that intervention, was effectively immune from American reach. Cooperation with Russia, the Southern Caucasus, and Central Asian states ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union was unprecedented. NATO and the US have obtained an explicit Russian agreement for military overflight rights, and later, used the Russian port and railroad system to supply its expeditionary force in Afghanistan. Washington also received a tacit agreement to this action by the Chinese leadership, which was worried about the Al Qaeda ties to the Uighur Islamists. However, today both Moscow and Beijing are apprehensive about US long-term presence in the region, voicing concerns about encirclement and open-ended American presence in what both great powers consider their geopolitical "back yard", as well as objecting to the American-led involvement in Iraq.

However, not just Russia and China, historically the great powers of the region, but also India, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States (through their funding of Salafi mosques and madrassas), and the emerging European Union are influencing the future of Eurasia. Ariel Cohen's chapter on US policy in the region, Stephen Blank's treatment of China and India, and Robert Freedman's analysis of Russia and Iran all address varied dimensions of security changes in the region.

Looking at the unfolding events from a long-term perspective, it is important to remember that parts of these regions were within the overlapping orbits of religiously and ethnically diverse universes and under the sway of a succession of empires since the beginning of recorded history. Confessionally, linguistically and ethnically, these states and regions are mosaics and alloys, not monoliths. In that respect, the more Central Asia and the Caucasus change, the more they remain the same.

Why the Book is Important

Existing literature has primarily focused on classic international relations approaches to understanding of the post-Soviet space.¹ Others offered a single economic explanation, such as the race for oil, to the great power competition and

internal jostling for control.² Such approaches disregard the complexities of the region's diplomatic, military, political and religious dimensions. This book reflects a intricate military, security, diplomatic and economic environment of a region emerging from a century and a half of imperial domination in an area suffering from multiple identity crises and uneven development and deeply influenced by great powers and global trends. The book provides unique local perspective reflected in the Spechlers' chapter, and emphasizes the role of the two rising powers, China and India.

Organization

The book begins with the examination by Professors Dina and Martin Spechler of the internal and external drivers of security in Central Asia, strategically one of the most geopolitically important areas in the former Soviet Union. Abutting the Caspian with its energy reserves, Iran, Afghanistan, and China, and only a short flight from India and Pakistan, Central Asia is home to 50 million Muslims and diverse minorities, from Russians to Koreans. It is endowed with considerable mineral resources. While acknowledging a host of difficulties, the authors deny that Central Asia is in crisis. They believe that the five countries are pursuing "export globalization" – acquisition of the most economically profitable trading partners. Furthermore, the authors submit that as the region benefited from the lancing of the most significant security danger, US commitment to and involvement in the area will not increase, unless new security challenges, such as an even more aggressive Iran or a hostile Pakistan, arise. While Russia and China view the US with suspicion, the great powers are settling to open, albeit competitive, access to energy resources. And unless the region destabilizes, the security situation will probably return to its pre-9/11 condition, with Central Asian states, Russia and China, sharing in providing security.

The chapter is followed by Svante Cornell's discussion of security in the Caucasus security in Chapter Two. Cornell suggests that the South Caucasus has gained importance through its geographic position and energy resources. The region's location between Russia and Iran, and connection of Europe to Asia, as well as its oil and gas resources and the region's role as the main route for the westward export of Caspian energy resources, has gradually led to an increased geopolitical attention to it. Especially after September 11, 2001, the South Caucasus is no longer a backwater of international politics. With US and allied military presence in Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Middle East, the South Caucasus is a crucial area, enabling the connection between NATO territory and military operations in Afghanistan and staging areas in Central Asia. Yet, as Alexander Rondeli has pointed out, the

important geopolitical location of the South Caucasus has been as much, if not more, of a liability as an asset to the regional states.³ International interest in the region has tended to increase the polarization of regional politics, entrench existing conflicts, and thereby make the region's road to stability more complicated. Having dramatically differing and existential threat perceptions, the three South Caucasian states have developed diverging strategies to ensure their security.

In Chapter Three, Ariel Cohen examines the United States' policy towards Central Asia. Cohen indicates that far from the alleged uncontrolled global power projection, American presence in Central Asia prior to 9/11 was circumspect. Moreover, Washington's disregard of emerging threats and lack of commitment to the region prior to 9/11 have contributed to the strategic surprise of the Al Qaeda attack. With that, US Central Command developed sufficient infrastructure and personal ties to allow special forces, elements of the air force, and other elements of the US military to be successfully projected into the region in December 2001, to achieve a quick military victory over the Taliban.

US officials and analysts have suggested different avenues for rationalizing the current and future presence in the region. Preferred rationales for US involvement cited by experts include protecting energy resources and pipelines; deterring the resurrection of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia; preventing Russian and/or Chinese hegemony; facilitating democratization and market reforms; and using Central Asia as a re-supply depot for possible action in Afghanistan. Moreover, Central Asia has been mentioned as a launching pad for potential future operations against Iraq and Iran. Cohen shows that most of these explanations, with the exception of deployment needs against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, are insufficiently compelling individually. However, it is possible that a combination of these policies could require a heightened level of US military and political presence in the region. The size, scope, and duration of such a potential deployment would be defined by US needs, the balance of power between regional players, and the domestic security and political agendas and capabilities of the host Central Asian countries.

In Chapter Four, Turkish analyst Ali Koknar focuses on development of the security ties between the Turkic countries of Eurasia (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and Turkey proper. The terrorist attacks on September 11 and developments thereafter strengthened these security links as the Turkish military and security establishment and the governments of Eurasia came under pressure from radical Islamist (Wahhabi/Salafi) terrorists. As official Ankara and the Turkish private sector worked to further political and economic relations in the chaotic environment of the early 1990s, the Turkish security apparatus broke new ground in Asia, from the

Black Sea to the Great Wall of China, helping Turkey's distant cousins to protect themselves from a wide range of threats to their infant sovereignties. These efforts continue to flourish today in the face of new and emerging threats to these states' security and independence.

In Chapter Five, veteran observer of Russian-Iranian relations Robert Freedman warns that the attack on 9/11, which made the US and Russia partners in the war against terrorism, considerably improved relations between Washington and Moscow. Yet in one important area, Russia's ties with Iran, long an irritant in US-Russian relations, there was no appreciable change in Russian policy and by March 2004, when Putin was reelected as Russia's President, Iran had become the single most important problem in the US-Russian relationship. Both Putin and his predecessor Boris Yeltsin have sought the geopolitical benefits that close ties with Iran would bring to a weakened Russia, and both have sought to help the hard-pressed Russian economy through sales of nuclear reactors and sophisticated military equipment to Iran. While under Putin there has been increasing friction with Tehran in certain foreign policy areas such as the delineation of the Caspian Sea and improving Russian-Azeri relations, on balance Russian-Iranian diplomatic ties have been strong through the entire 1991-2004 period, as common economic and geopolitical interests have provided the bedrock of the relationship.

Overall, Putin's central foreign policy aim has been to strengthen the Russian economy in the hope that, in the not too distant future, Russia might regain its status as a great power. In the interim he has sought to create an "arc of stability" on Russia's frontiers so that economic development can proceed as rapidly as possible. This was one of the reasons Putin embraced an improved relationship with Turkey and ended Russian opposition to the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. In theory at least, Putin's goal would appear to require a policy of increased cooperation with the economically advanced West led by the US. Nevertheless many in the Duma, including in the ruling United Russia, the leftist Rodina, and the weakened Communist Party – as well as in the military, the powerful security services, and in the Russian foreign ministry – were unhappy at Moscow's appearing to play "second fiddle" to the US after 9/11. Putin has from time to time asserted an independent position for Russia, as Moscow's behavior during the recent war in Iraq indicated. Russia also used the US's preoccupation with the war in Iraq and the 2004 election campaign to assert itself in the South Caucasus and Ukraine. However, this forward policy is consistently upset by terrorism in North Caucasus, most recently flaring up in Beslan, North Ossetia. The Rose Revolution in Georgia in January 2004 and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in November-December 2004 increased insecurity in the Kremlin. Russia is bound to improve its ties with authoritarian regimes of Central Asia, while it seems to be challenging Mikheil Saakashvili's policy of Georgian independence. Russia's freedom of geopolitical maneuver in Eurasian space is

restricted by the poor performance of its military, as the two Chechen wars and an inability to successfully handle massive terror attacks has repeatedly demonstrated.

Russian foreign policy often looks like it is seeking to create the multi-polar world advocated by former Russian Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, who is still a Putin adviser. The tension between these two alternative thrusts of Russian foreign policy, cooperating with the US, but also competing with it, clearly impacts Russian policy in Central Asia and the Caucasus and the Russian-Iranian relationship. With that, as many recently published analyses focused on Russia and its role in the Caucasus and former Soviet Central Asia, the authors decided not to dedicate a separate chapter to Moscow's policy. Russian policies and interests in the region are assessed throughout the text. This may be a criticism of the current effort, but authors were aware that, due to space limitations, some strategic choices of our own had to be made. We are certainly aware of Russia's giant shadow in the region.

Chapter Six by Stephen Blank deals with the rising power in Asia – China, its growing stake in Central Asia and its enhanced capabilities to pursue its objectives there. China looks to Central Asia for internal security against Islamic and Uighur terrorism, especially in Xinjiang, energy access, economic opportunities, and defense against foreign threats. China's continuing multipolar view of the world and desire that the system of international relations should be organized accordingly go together with recognition of its enhanced power and status in world affairs. China believes that it should represent one of those poles and not be subsumed in a wholly US-dominated regional or global order. Energy reserves greatly enhance Beijing's interest in the region, tying access to hydrocarbons to security considerations. Since China now imports fossil fuels, its interest in secure supplies has grown considerably, especially as it moves from a purely state-run and owned system emphasizing security of supply to one that spreads supply risks through greater reliance on market mechanisms and diversification of supplies. China is also moving towards greater reliance on liquid natural gas. These aspects of China's energy transition will stimulate investment in capital-intensive projects in Central Asia and elsewhere, greater interest in preventing interruptions of seaborne energy trade, and in restructuring the formerly state-owned oil and gas companies. Accordingly China increasingly seeks to exploit short-term advantages to lock in, if possible, overall lower cost delivery of energy over the long-term.

The appearance of US military bases in Central Asia, one of which is only 200 miles from China's border, in the context of broader American strategic moves in Asia, could easily create a long-term threat, China analysts believe. As Robert Legvold observes, by committing troops to Central Asia, America has dramatically transformed the regional security equation in three ways. Blank appropriately quotes Robert Legvold who believes that:

... the United States' new dramatic but incidental military involvement in Central Asia added a Central Asian dimension to the US-China relationship. Whether Washington fully appreciated it or not, the two countries were now no longer engaged only in East Asia; the new American role and the old Chinese concern created an Inner Asian front in the relationship. Second, Central Asia became a far more salient factor in the evolution of US-Russian relations. The interaction of the two within the region would have a good deal to do with whether the post September 11 détente deepened or ran aground. And in turn, this outcome would decisively affect international politics within the region.⁴

Blank believes that America's expanding long-term presence there will naturally stimulate China to undertake strategic preparations to counter US presence in Central Asia. Indeed, it is already doing so and opposes America's presence publicly, if not loudly. America's deployment transformed the regional security structure and also altered the region's political make-up.

In Chapter Seven, which deals with India's policy towards Central Asia, Blank notes that current regional assessments generally overlook India's already substantial presence and equally ambitious objectives there, as well as the Central Asian dimension of its ties to China. International relations in the region will to some degree reflect India's steadily rising overall economic and military capabilities and ambitions to play the role of a great power, especially in a theater of enormous historical and strategic relevance to it.⁵ Moreover, India's future approach to Central Asia, like its present attitude, will also be rooted to some degree not just in its rivalry with Pakistan, but also in its competitive relationship with China, which is also a major player here.

The book demonstrates that the United States will not be able, in the long term, to remain a regional hegemon in Central Asia and the Caucasus. One would argue, that the US does not have vital national interests to become one beyond the war on terror. The eight countries of the region, great powers such as China and Russia, together with other players discussed in the book, have concerns and aspirations, which cannot be ignored. It will be a challenge for all involved, starting with the US, to develop international frameworks and diplomatic processes to integrate these interests in a productive and peaceful way.

Notes

¹ Rajan Menon, ed. (1999), "Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: The 21st Century Security Environment" (*Eurasia in the 21st Century: The Total Security Environment*, Vol.2), East-West Institute, New York, NY.

² Lutz Klevevan (2003), "The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia", Atlantic Monthly Press, New York, NY.

³ Alexander Rondeli (1999), *Foreign Policy of Georgia and Priorities of National Security*, Tbilisi: UNDP Discussion Paper Series, no. 3.

⁴ Robert Legvold (2003), "Introduction: Great Power Stakes in Central Asia", in Robert Legvold, ed., *Thinking Strategically: The Major Powers, Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian Nexus*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, p. 37.

⁵ For a comprehensive survey of Indian relations in Asia and its interaction with China throughout Asia, see Francine R. Frankel and Harry Harding, eds (2004) *The India-China Relationship: What the United States Needs to Know*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Chapter 1

Conflict and Cooperation in Central Asia after 9/11

Martin C. Spechler and Dina R. Spechler¹

The dramatic terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which were executed and directed by Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan, drew the attention of the USA and the West generally to Central Asia. Uzbekistan and to a lesser extent Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, have lent valuable assistance to the American (and NATO) war against Al-Qaeda and their Taliban protectors. Not yet completed, this collaboration created expectations by some – and fears by others – that the security and economic situations there would be thoroughly transformed. But changes have proved to be shorter-lived and smaller than expected – less a transformation than an episode in the campaign against extreme Islamist terrorists worldwide, which had begun several years before 2001. It was widely assumed that great power rivalry would have a major impact. The US, Russia, and China have an interest in the area's stability, to be sure, and in countering the flow of drugs, arms, and prostitutes. But the prime areas of their rivalry are elsewhere, and the incentives for cooperation among them are strong. The notion of a renewed "Great Game" in Central Asia is as anachronistic as is the idea of renewing the Great Silk Road as a transportation corridor linking China with Europe. Exploiting the residual rivalry of the great powers allows the Central Asian states to derive material benefits from their proximity to sensitive zones, such as Kashmir, Iran, and Afghanistan. As to economic problems and security within the region, the countries of the area will have to deal with their latent conflicts on their own, as they have, or apply cooperative arrangements which so far have been mostly rhetorical. This essay attempts to explain why.

Plan of Analysis

After explaining our theoretical reasons for emphasizing our internal perspective, as distinct from others' emphasis on the influence of the great powers, we explore the economic and security resources of the countries of the area and their recent