

## CONCLUSION

# The Strategic Challenge of Kazakhstan and Inner Asia

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**T**he sudden and unexpected prominence of Central Asian states in the American-led response to September 11 eliminated almost overnight any question of the region's importance. American military forces are now deployed in and around Central Asia. The states of the region and even Russia and China are content with this American presence, at least in the war against terrorism and at least for the time being. This increase in the recognition of the strategic importance of Central Asia could be only temporary, ultimately subsiding as operations in Afghanistan wind down and return the region to its former obscurity. Yet it is an underlying thesis of this book that trends beyond that of the current struggle against terrorism are reshaping the Eurasian landmass, breaking down old patterns of diplomacy and power and putting new ones in their place.

These political, economic, social, and military trends create new threats, new patterns of diplomacy and conflict and thus new regions of concern and significance, of which Central Asia is one. These trends do not automatically make Kazakhstan and its neighbors a new strategic heartland of Eurasia, but they are slowly but surely breaking down the barriers of transportation and communication that have made these lands so remote. They have created new and still fragile states, like Kazakhstan, and a new field of diplomatic competition and cooperation for these states and old neighbors like Russia, China, India, and Iran. Most importantly, what happens in the center of Eurasia now has the potential to affect rather suddenly and directly key states along the rim.

The end result could surprise many in the West, who are betting that the development of oil and gas reserves will be the main long-term source of U.S. and western engagement in the region. Indeed, once it was clear that Kazakhstan had no intention of retaining the nuclear wea-

pons found on its territory after the breakup of the USSR, oil and gas dominated western thinking. As the chapters by Robert Legvold, S. Neil McFarlane, and Tomohiko Uyama make clear, there have been other issues and concerns, including political and economic reforms, health and social welfare questions, environmental concerns, and issues of human rights and security. Yet they have been secondary or even tertiary to oil and gas interests. Once nuclear disarmament was assured, Western policy in Kazakhstan and elsewhere in the region pursued a wide range of good wishes and passing fancies but, outside of energy, not a well-defined and interrelated set of threats, risks, and interests in the region. September 11 changed all of that, at least for the time being.

If this moment of serious western, and especially American, military engagement in the region passes, then it is likely that energy interests, supplemented by occasional declarations on reforms or human rights, will be the stuff of Western policy toward Kazakhstan far into the future. As the Russian, Chinese, and Kazakh authors make plain, energy is not the only concern of Russia and China. It is not the only concern of Iran and Turkey, nor especially of Kazakhstan's near neighbors. If the West's rather narrow view of Kazakhstan holds, then it is destined to be a largely disinterested witness to the formation of a new regional system of political, military, and security relations in which the interaction of Kazakhstan and its Central Asian neighbors with outside powers and global predominate. The United States and its allies, collectively or separately, might well intervene to encourage positive changes inside of Kazakhstan or elsewhere in the region or to help it balance off the demands of its neighbors, but these interventions will be the exception, not the rule. Under such a policy, the West is likely to be tolerant of a wide range of outcomes in the region, if not always content with them.

#### AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW

But what if the current heightened sense of the strategic significance of Central Asia, driven as it is by September 11 and all that has followed, is a glimpse of an alternative way of looking at Kazakhstan and its neighbors? This alternative would have its starting point, not simply in the accident of Afghanistan's current importance in the U.S.-led war against terrorism, but in the centrality of Afghanistan and much of Central Asia to a region that was once interconnected and is now reconnecting. Moreover,

it would recognize that vast parts of Asia and even the far-flung Islamic world once separated by clearly defined imperial spheres of influence are being drawn together for good and ill.

The new states of Central Asia are now restoring links that have the potential of bringing this remote corner of the world into direct and constant contact with the states of Eurasia's rim. These states include China and Russia, of course, but also India, Pakistan, and Iran. These links are not simply roads, trade, telecommunications, pipelines, or air routes, although these are slowly appearing and attempting to break down the region's longstanding isolation from the outside world. These links are also those shaped by national and religious identities which do not neatly coincide with existing borders, weak or even failing state structures, pressures of poverty and population, water, great power interests, and the exploitation of the region by what are called the new security threats of terrorism, narcotics, and organized crime. These links already cast a shadow over Russian, Chinese, Indian, and Iranian identity, policies, and definitions of national interests. They already are reshaping understandings of Asian and larger Eurasian international relations. And there is more impact to come, from Kazakhstan and its neighbors.

In such a Eurasia, the stakes for the United States and the larger international community in Central Asia are much greater than commonly perceived. Indeed, such a Central Asia would heavily influence the character of international relations within Asia and Eurasia. Zbigniew Brzezinski looked at Central Asia as part of an extended "Eurasian Balkans," potentially playing the same destabilizing role in Eurasia as the Balkan Peninsula now plays in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

I would prefer, as does Legvold, to call this region Inner Asia, an area from Russia's lower Volga to its far eastern provinces, through the border regions of China (Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet), across Central Asia, to Afghanistan. This region is re-forming, perhaps even extending through oil and instability, into the Caucasus (and thus to the shores of the Black Sea), northern Iran (and thus to the Persian Gulf), and the Indian subcontinent. As argued above, there are many forces at work bringing these lands into contact—history, trade, culture—but their shared shortcomings may be the leading force at work. Once defined by

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<sup>1</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, New York: Basic Books, 1997, pp. 123–150.

empires, this vast geographic area grows out of the collapse of one, the Russian, and the uncertain evolution of the other, the Chinese. These lands are rich in energy and other natural resources and simultaneously in the sources of state and societal decay and interstate conflict. This area has the potential to influence outcomes for good and for ill in the rest of Asia and throughout the post-Soviet space. Several key factors are worth noting:

*First and foremost, Kazakhstan and its neighbors are sovereign but still weak states.* The very center of Inner Asia is characterized by weak governments lacking the means to control more dynamic and potentially unstable social forces. The near-universal preference for strong presidential rule is more an admission of this weakness than an assertion of strength. Leaders have emerged from the Soviet elite, many having reached an age where succession is a near-term preoccupation. In no country of the region, including Kazakhstan, is the issue of succession settled. Nor do the governmental institutions and structures that support Nazarbaev, Karimov, and other leaders give much hope of constitutional processes dominating the transfer of power. The politics at the top of the structure is itself bitter and often defined by the struggle for control of assets and property. This politics by definition excludes legitimate political actors, often engendering an embittered opposition and disaffection at the grassroots. The decay of economic life and social services for many and the lack of a legitimate role in the political life of the country are the preconditions for radical politics of all sorts. Islam is often singled out for special scrutiny. Though Islamic fundamentalism is still relatively rare, especially in Kazakhstan, the elimination of other outlets for the expression of discontent and political dissent leaves only the mosque and thus repeats a pattern already familiar in other Islamic lands to the south. Regional and ethnic ties also create the basis for radical politics throughout the region.

*Second, the potential instabilities of the region cannot be isolated.* Consider the ethnic and national conflicts spread throughout the region. Diasporas exist in every country (for example, Uzbeks in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz and Tajiks in Uzbekistan, and Kazakhs in China). September 11 has brought new attention to

this Islamic diaspora, but the perspective of the ongoing war against terrorism threatens to distort their challenge more than explain it. Generally these diaspora populations are concentrated in areas bordering their homelands.

Territorial irredentism, unresolved borders, and ethnic populations straddling borders create a basis for tension and potentially for conflict in virtually every direction. These conflicts would likely spill over into both Russia and China, either directly through the diasporas or indirectly by shaping minority attitudes and political organizations in key regions of these great neighboring states. The very troubles that threaten Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states—most notably, ethnic and nationalist tension and conflicts—are troubles within Russia and China as well. China's hopes of limiting the rise of Uighur nationalism in Xinjiang, for example, depend in no small part on the success or failure of a similar effort on the Kazakh and Kyrgyz side of the border. Given the potential trouble China might have from weak Central Asian states failing to curb local and pan-Islamic movements, it is no wonder that Beijing has encouraged continued Russian-Central Asian security partnerships. Beijing fears uncontrolled ethnic and religious conflict much more than an old-fashioned contest between itself and Moscow for influence in Central Asia.

It is more wary of America playing the Russian role, but sees the importance of a near-term stabilizing force, whatever its origin. From Beijing's point of view, China's most vulnerable regions—Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet—are a part of this extended Inner Asia and very likely to be buffeted by any winds that gather speed in Kazakhstan or elsewhere in Central Asia. Russia too sees direct influence from developments within Central Asia on trends at home. The course that Islam takes in Central Asia will be a strong contributing factor to the attitudes and loyalty of Muslims within Russia. A similar case could be made for drug trafficking, infectious diseases, and organized crime. Most obviously, it applies to global terrorism.

*Third, Central Asia is a potential arena of competition among major outside powers, four of which are nuclear.* The current Sino-Russian rapprochement is solidly established, based for the present

in no small part on common fears of Central Asian instability.<sup>2</sup> Russia and Iran also have forged a partnership based on arms sales and a fear of instability in the lands in-between. The last thing China or Russia wants is a radical Islamic regime serving as a refuge and a beacon for China's Uighurs or Russia's numerous Muslim minorities. Even while carefully cultivating its own ties in the region, China has been content to let Russia continue its security primacy in the former USSR. Beijing has happily supported the Commonwealth of Independent States and other Russian-led plans for integration, as well as Russian military deployments and obligations in the region. Yet the rub comes if states such as Kazakhstan weaken and become unstable. Before the U.S. military presence, analysts worried that Russia's commitments were not matched by its military capabilities. The presence of American forces may put these fears to rest, but are these forces there to ensure regime survival? If so, are they adequate to the task, and is this task understood by all of the major actors in the region? Will the eventual withdrawal of these forces, as a result of a winding-down of the war against terrorism, find these states stronger than before or return them to their pre-September 11 vulnerability? If the roots of instability in the region cannot be addressed, major powers like China and Russia will face unpleasant options that could undermine their cooperation and put them at odds with each other.

For China, the odds of its involvement mount geometrically if trouble in the Ferghana Valley coincides with disorder in Xinjiang. Rising instability in this key border region of China, particularly if met with repression, would inevitably influence China's other restless borderlands and spill over into Central Asia, perhaps even into Russia. Should Xinjiang become China's Chechnya, the consequences for everyone, including the outside world, are likely to be

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<sup>2</sup> For a more extended overview of Sino-Russian relations, see *Rapprochement or Rivalry? Russia-China Relations in a Changing Asia*, edited by Sherman Garnett, Washington: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000 and Sherman Garnett, "Challenges of Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Autumn 2001, pp. 41-54.

serious. Long-term demonstration of regional instability and state weakness could well change the calculations of Iran, Pakistan, India, and other neighboring powers, which now rely on a combination of Russia's long-term security ties and—whether they admit it or not—America's presence to support the stability each desires. In short, major power competition may well be at a lull, but the factors creating this lull are themselves in flux. Ultimately, the stakes for the West that come from conflict among outside powers in the region are raised by the nuclear dimension. Russia, China, India, and Pakistan are bona fide nuclear states, with Iran estimated to be within a decade or a bit longer of nuclear weapons.

*Fourth, the long-term impact of U.S. military forces adds to the uncertainty.* U.S. forces are now stationed throughout Central Asia, and some sort of U.S. military presence is likely to remain in and around the region for some time. These forces would not be where they are without Al Qaeda's attack on the United States, yet it is worth thinking through the implications for the region if they remain for an extended period. In the first place, the precedent of American intervention—unlikely before September 11—is at least a serious possibility in future regional contingencies, especially if these contingencies may be plausibly related to the war on terrorism. The states of the region have seen both U.S. capabilities and the will to use them to address a serious threat. The U.S. military have in fact accomplished far more to address the threat from Afghanistan in a few months than powers in and around the region have been able to accomplish in decades. Perhaps the long-term consequences of this intervention will reveal more of the downsides and costs to both Washington and regional capitals like Astana and Tashkent, but the latter two can be forgiven if they see the potential utility of stationed American forces in future contingencies. However, for those powers that see such intervention as a long-term fact of life in Central Asia as undesirable—and in the forefront of these are China and Iran—the current intervention might well accelerate Beijing's drive to create a regional security system less permeable to American influence. Russia currently stands somewhere in between. Putin has attained a remarkable if

grudging consensus within Russia for his support of the American war against terrorism and U.S. deployments in Central Asia. A wide range of Russian analysts and politicians see this policy as a vivid demonstration of Russia's weakness. If events conspire to undermine Putin's hold on power, the question of Russian support for American deployments will swiftly re-emerge. U.S. forces on the ground also make it more difficult to use existing NATO or Western (U.S.-Europe-Japan) instruments as neutral and external forces for stability. Washington is already on the ground and has a vital stake in how the region deals over time with the threat of terrorism. U.S. forces may be largely focused on terrorism today, but they will be called on to play a much larger role in regional questions in the future. Whether they play this role or not, they will be seen as regional actors and will have a hard time being neutral to regime transitions that could threaten existing basing and support arrangements.

The re-emergence of an Inner Asia marked by these factors broadens the scope of issues heretofore seen as local or regional. It recasts critical geography, such as that of energy. No longer is the axis of Central Asian oil and gas simply the Caspian region. Instead Central Asian oil and gas blend into a far more extensive energy map whose grids eventually tie together Russian refining capacities and pipelines, Chinese energy markets as well as China's own gas and oil reserves within Inner Asia, and the energy potential of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The poverty and misery of Taliban Afghanistan is no longer just an example of a troubling threat to its neighbors or even a negative role-model for future developments in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, or other Central Asian states, but a breeding ground and support base for terrorism. For good or ill, Kazakhstan and its neighbors appear on a trajectory that will directly influence the future of Eurasia as a whole.

#### THE ROLE OF THE WEST IN KAZAKHSTAN AND INNER ASIA

Other actors in and around the region will find their vital interests engaged, with or without the emergence of the Inner Asia described above. As our Russian, Chinese, and Kazak authors make plain, this region has been and will remain a zone of vital interests. Careful weigh-

ing of the policies, strategies, opportunities, and challenges will go on in Astana, Beijing, Moscow, Tashkent, and throughout the region, even if the region remains remote and disconnected. But as Kazakhstan and other parts of this region take on aspects of the Inner Asia described above, western stakes there will grow. In fact, a western strategy that understood these stakes and acted accordingly could well play a decisive role in this region as a force for economic opportunity, global integration and stability. September 11 made such a strategy a critical priority and left the United States and its allies vitally engaged within this region. Two important questions arise from the requirement for such a strategy: What policies make sense in light of these increased stakes? Can they be pursued in a way that builds cooperation and does not simply cast a more engaged United States or the West as a whole as one more outside rival?

As regards the second question, increased stakes need not lead automatically to a position of competition within the region. The United States and the West in general will not have interests that automatically lead it to be pro-Kazakhstan but anti-Uzbekistan, or the reverse. They do not require Washington at this point to tilt toward Russia, China, or Iran. A common fear of terrorism, though this could be overplayed and misused in suppressing local national and ethnic movements, provides additional glue for regional cooperation and regional appreciation for U.S. and Western engagement in the region. Indeed, the raised stakes in regional stability, long-term reform, and energy across the whole of Inner Asia make the West a stakeholder but not a competitor, one more interested in the dampening of regional rivalries and the creation of effective local and regional mechanisms supporting stronger states, greater openness, and collective security arrangements. Such a view ought to be the West's opening approach to the region. It of course could turn out that in individual cases or even over long periods, the West may well find itself siding with one party or group against another. Rival political factions will inevitably attempt to play up to or against Washington and its military forces in the region. Yet, if this should occur, Western policy should consciously present itself as a balancer and mediating force, not an active competitor seeking permanent alliance with one side and maintaining an equally permanent distance from the other.

The first question requires a more detailed answer. The policies needed to support stability and positive change are a mixture of new initiatives and much more of the same, but moved by a heightened sense of what is

now at stake in and around Kazakhstan. This mixture should include, as a minimum, the following:

*A Commitment to a Strategy of Expanded Engagement*

The first and most obvious step is for the United States, the European Union, the G-7, and other major Western actors to form a strategy and to speak publicly of what the heightened stakes are in Kazakhstan and the surrounding region. Regional instability, weak states, ethnic conflicts, and the politics they engender should not remain the province of experts or oilmen. These conditions support terrorism, drug trafficking, proliferation, and regimes much more likely to export these evils to the West. After September 11, one should not have to argue that it is in Western interest to address these conditions before they develop into large-scale security threats.

*Deepening Understanding of the Emerging Inner Asia*

We are confident that a heightened awareness of Kazakhstan and the surrounding region will lead to greater engagement. Yet we are also aware that these states are remote and still largely unknown to many in the West. The West must expand its support for the study of Kazakhstan and its neighbors. Key steps include expanding government and private support for university and institute-based research, scholarly exchanges, university-to-university links, and exchanges at all levels.

*Bureaucratic Reorganization to Reflect the Region's Dynamics*

Many of the West's diplomatic and military structures still see this region narrowly construed, as part of the former USSR or perhaps as a northern appendage of South Asia. Its full significance requires organizing analytical and policy work around an expanded view of the region and its connections with the outside world. The United States and its allies must examine their internal analytical and policy structures to make sure they reflect the region's dynamism.

*Western Coordination and Multilateralism*

Though the United States and American security interests are part of this mix, it is crucial that a broader Western base and scope be established to avoid—as far as possible—tensions and suspicions on the part of established powers in the region. There is a distinct advantage to multilateral-

ism here, one that both maximizes the effect of limited Western resources and also takes advantage of the still inchoate multilateral structures emerging in the region itself. Western policymakers and providers of assistance have to increase their efforts to form a common understanding of the strategic stakes and a shared list of priorities.

The West must see Kazakhstan and the new states themselves, no longer so new, as active partners in trilateral policies. They must be willing to expand their cooperation to include, not only Russia, but Iran, India, Pakistan, and especially China as well. Some of the possible multilateral combinations make for awkward partnerships, but European institutions in the beginning fostered cooperation between old rivals and have succeeded to an extent that could hardly have been imagined in the early days of NATO or the European Community.

Especially in the light of U.S. deployments to the region and long-term Western involvement in Afghanistan, it makes sense to think of using old and emerging U.S.-Russian cooperative mechanisms in NATO and other combinations of EU-U.S.-Japanese instruments to work with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and the surrounding region.

#### *Address Internal Sources of Instability*

Weak states are breeding grounds for ethnic conflict, terrorism, extremism, and humanitarian disasters. The consequences of a failing state are daily presented in the western press in their coverage of the aftermath of the war in Afghanistan. Western strategy must address the extreme human, societal, and governmental needs of states like Kazakhstan. The decline in public health and education, the decay or even absence of basic transportation and other social infrastructure, and the emergence of a wide range of religious and social organizations in need of support, are important places for western engagement to begin. A broad range of public-health and civil-society programs would both meet real needs and foster a lasting link between the West and the populations of these emerging states. The United States cannot be content to let its military commitment dwarf its economic, political and humanitarian aid.

Scarce and polluted water sources are not only an environmental issue, but an economic and potentially a security issue as well. The effort begun in the mid-1990s, teaming U.S. water and energy experts with their Central Asian counterparts, to devise an equitable multi-year agreement for water-sharing in the Syr Darya River, needs to be given renewed

priority and nestled in a clear and long-term strategy. These projects are not just the right thing to do, they attack serious obstacles to economic development and stability in the region.

U.S. security interests in the region argue patience and even tolerance of the current shortcomings of the regimes in Central Asia. Yet these security interests should not put the West on the side of the tyrant or the oligarchs. These interests are best met by long-term political and economic successes throughout the region that reach the population at large. Human rights cannot be ignored or postponed, but they must be embedded in a long-range strategy for raising the states of the region to world standards. In particular, the most promising near-term focus should be on the sources of peaceful pluralism in these states and societies. Inevitably, engagement of these sources bring Western policies into a closer and much healthier encounter with Islam, a religion and societal force that is much broader than its radical political manifestations.

Western states should attend more carefully to the dialogue that they have with Central Asian states over the obstacles to political and economic liberalization. Security interests should not stifle this dialogue but expand it. The United States, in collaboration with the Europeans, particularly the East Europeans, should encourage a frank discussion of the factors and processes aiding or impeding stable transitions to modern political and economic systems. Much of the exchange should focus on the causes and consequences of the socioeconomic decline devastating these countries and sowing the seeds of disorder. For the Central Asians, the dialogue should be designed to help their leaders think long and hard about the choices open to them. For the United States and the Europeans, the dialogue should assist their leaders to think more systematically about when and how they can most effectively lend a hand in ways promoting stable, positive change. The West's newfound security interest in the region and the growing U.S. military presence there should serve the cause of such change, not retard it.

#### *A Long-term Inner Asian Energy Strategy*

A key element of an Inner Asian-based policy is to give energy its due but also its proper context. An understanding of the energy issue as part of an emerging Inner Asia considerably alters our understanding of Caspian oil and gas, which separated from this larger context does not constitute a major energy security issue for the United States. After all, the bulk of

U.S. energy imports come increasingly from Venezuela, Canada, Mexico, and Brazil, not the Caspian region. The broader Inner Asia region connects the Caspian Basin to the rising energy demands from Asia, especially from China and Japan, and the vast Russian oil and gas resources. The potential for competition between energy have-nots for access to Kazakhstan's oil and gas is still an underappreciated source of potential conflict in Asia. The Chinese-Indian relationship, for example, is already burdened by complications. Neither Beijing or New Delhi needs the additional burden of energy competition.

Broad-based energy development and pipeline diversification are keys to reducing this competition. This pipeline diversification must look well beyond Baku-Ceyhan to include both Iran and ultimately an eastern route (given long-term East and South Asian energy trends and the great pressure these will put on existing sources). The key to ensuring this pipeline diversification, though, is economic viability. Letting the energy reserves of the region and healthy market forces work will prove the easiest way to pipeline diversification.

An additional element is the encouragement of commercially viable consortia that include potential geopolitical competitors. Partnerships formed by Western companies ought to include, where commercially viable, Russian and Chinese energy firms. The normal give-and-take of commercial competition is a valuable model for those who tend to see the region largely in terms of a new "Great Game." Indeed, expanding the number and influence of Russian and Chinese commercial stakeholders in Central Asian energy development is an important Western objective, given the role such interests could play back home in ensuring a balanced national approach to the region. The West could also be a leader in fostering multilateral cooperation on pipeline security and in encouraging—by introducing long-established practices—revenue sharing among federal, state, and local entities.

A key commercial issue with broad political and security implications is the long-term impact of oil wealth on the energy-producing states such as Kazakhstan. Such energy producers not only face the so-called Dutch disease—the economic distortion an energy-based economy brings—but also the already endemic problem that large cash flows have created in what are still relatively weak, personalized, and corrupt governments. Western commercial interests must do their part through resisting corrupt practices, but Western governments must formulate policies that

encourage broad-based economic development, open competition, a viable business environment, and other outcomes that minimize the potentially corrosive effects of oil wealth.

### *Heading Off Regional Rivalries*

American deployments in the region after September 11 fuel the suspicions of those in Moscow, Tehran, and Beijing of Washington's unipolar ambitions, yet they create a potential opportunity to strengthen weak militaries in the region and simultaneously accelerate regional security cooperation. Carrying out such a policy could be a delicate balancing act, but the leverage for it is now in place. This policy of military-to-military cooperation needs to be embedded in—and not dwarf—the overall political, economic, and societal programs and policies of the United States and its allies.

Moreover, if a near-term core security problem for both Russia and the West is the stability of still-weak states in an extended Inner Asia, a substantial basis for security cooperation exists. Stabilizing Russia's (and for that matter, China's) weak neighbors ought to be a core element of Western strategy and ought also to be an element that would solicit the help of states in and around the region. Ensuring that China's engagement in the region continues to be a stabilizing force is also a priority. The best approach to securing the cooperation of Russia and China is building broad-based security and regional mechanisms where these two countries play a role.

At times, NATO may well have assumed a presence in the region out of keeping with its influence or intentions there. Kazakhstan and its neighbors are not a Euro- or Euro-Atlantic region but an inner Asian one. There should be no attempt to shut NATO out of the region, for the Alliance's many programs offer some of the best-funded and most successful military-to-military programs in the world. Indeed, if Russian-NATO cooperation is to have any real substance, the Central Asian region and the threat of terrorism there provide a real opportunity to move beyond summit statements and rhetoric.

Western security cooperation ought to aim to work with—not against—emerging regional security patterns and institutions. The region as a whole knows few successful multilateral security arrangements. The Shanghai process, bringing together Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and now Uzbekistan, has agreed on a range of

ambitious confidence-building measures and troop and equipment reductions along the old Sino-Soviet border. This same group of states is making progress on settling long-standing border issues. There is clearly room for new combinations, particularly those likely to promote greater security cooperation, openness, and conflict resolution. Both the G-7 and the G-8 could play a larger role here.

Specifically, the West should seek to support the formation of an effective multilateral structure to encourage senior-level dialogue among states of the region, key neighbors like China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran and the West. As the most recent U.S.-Russian summit has shown, there is room for expanded dialogue bilaterally among the major powers and players of the region.

The West ought to provide basic security assistance, particularly that focused on border security, military reform, and long-term integration into multilateral operations. This assistance should be transparent and inclusive, where possible, of multiple regional players and neighboring states.

Expanded anti-drug efforts are needed. Without substantial efforts from inside the region and support from the outside, Inner Asia will continue to expand its contribution to the illegal drug trade.

Cooperation against the spread of terrorism has become a core U.S. and Western security mission after September 11. Afghanistan is rightly a major focus of this cooperation, aiming not only to drive out terrorist organizations but also to create political and economic conditions to prevent any return of the chaos and instability that gave terrorism its foothold in the first place. Such a broad-based understanding of the role of the West needs to guide its policies toward other countries in the region. Long-term programs must aim at improving both the social conditions that breed discontentment and radicalism, and the institutions that must battle against existing terrorist threats. Given the renewed concern about chemical and biological warfare (CBW), a high priority should be a multinational effort to ensure the safety, security, and eventual clean-up of Soviet CBW sites in the region.

### *From Backwater to Bigger Picture*

Central Asia is not going to be the new geopolitical center of Eurasia. It will remain relatively remote and prone to internal and external sources of instability for some time to come. Yet one can now see more of the big

picture there than has been imagined. The states of Central Asia are part of the larger Islamic world and the world at large. Patterns of cooperation here may well portray a very different set of possible outcomes for Western-Islamic interaction than are now on display elsewhere in the Islamic world. Seen in this way, Central Asia becomes the northern quadrant of an Islamic world stretching from Morocco to the Philippines. In that world the vanguard of trouble is not Islam or even Islamic fundamentalism, but Islamic extremism. The creation of more moderate, yet vitally Islamic societies and states in Central Asia is a fundamental foreign-policy challenge for all of the great powers and one that they should be discussing together.

The region remains a potential source of positive engagement with and for Iran. Tehran wants a stable Afghanistan. Those who support President Khatami want a legitimate role in Caspian energy and regional security. Indeed, the concern for Inner Asian stability, especially in Central Asia, may provide a basis for genuine dialogue between Washington, Moscow, Beijing, and others on weapons of mass destruction, the future of Iran, and other key trends. The major powers would start such a dialogue with diverse and divisive views, but they also have common concerns and perhaps common stakes in the emergence of a moderate Iran, in the moderation of the military competition in and around the region (especially in missiles and weapons of mass destruction), and in the securing of a stable Afghanistan. Kazakhstan and its neighbors are not the hidden key to unlock the door to this alternative future, but they are a key to understanding the dynamics that threaten such a future.

## CONCLUSION

Kazakhstan stands at the center of an increasingly interconnected Inner Asia. The trends that make up what is commonly referred to as globalization are slowly knitting Kazakhstan and its neighbors to the rest of Eurasia. Energy-driven efforts to assess Kazakhstan's place in U.S. and Western strategy may well have retained their explanatory power for most observers before September 11, but since that date it is easier to see another way of looking at the country and surrounding region, one that could pose an immediate and enduring challenge to the stability of Eurasia as a whole. Russian and Chinese statesmen, well versed in the

history of their respective countries, understand that Inner Asian lands like Kazakhstan are not backwaters but an additional strategic front, one which in some historical periods constituted the main source of danger and an abiding source of concern. There is, however, no reason that Kazakhstan's future prospects and challenges should lead it to be the source of instability and cataclysm. The war against terrorism in Afghanistan caused many commentators to question whether the crisis might not have been avoided had the United States and its allies taken a greater interest in a failing Afghanistan after the defeat of the Soviet Union. They wonder as a result whether the leading powers of the world can find a way to exercise greater foresight and act before the stakes are so high. We believe the West has this chance to act with foresight now, in Kazakhstan and throughout Inner Asia. The signs of decay and instability are clear enough, but these nations are not yet lost to chaos, conflict, and Taliban-like extremists. The United States and its allies still have the chance to pursue a strategy that helps head off such an outcome, if only they are able to see the signs of future trouble and understand the costs of delay.

Home GLOBAL ECONOMY The Strategic Significance of Central Asia. Global Economy. Critical Analysis. The demise of the U.S.S.R. also led to dramatic changes in the global strategic environment: the Warsaw Pact unraveled, the Soviet Union itself splintered into numerous states, and the Cold War ended. Most of the Western commentary on these developments focused on the reduced military threat and the independence of Byelorussia, Ukraine, and the states in the Caucasus. First, China is the only state that has the potential to directly challenge American global leadership. The major concerns of the Chinese are economic and relate mostly to ensuring access to oil and gas supplies in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. While analyzing the empirics of Central Asian complexes, products of external actors' geopolitical activity in the post-Soviet space were identified and compared. Heuristics have been highlighted in a geographic discourse, which were also revealed in new approaches to modeling the political form of the region. Strategicheskii problemny Kazakhstana i Vnutrennei Azii [Strategic Problems of Kazakhstan and Inner Asia]. Strategicheskii perspektivy: vedushchie derzhavy, Kazakhstan i tsentralnoaziatskii uzel [Thinking Strategically: The Major Powers, Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian Nexus]. Legvold R., ed. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2004, pp. 259-281.