



Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan army officers train on telecommunications equipment in Germany

U.S. Air Force (Nic Raven)

BATTLING MISPERCEPTIONS

Challenges to U.S. Security Cooperation in Central Asia

By ROGER D. KANGAS

The far northern region of U.S. Central Command's (USCENTCOM's) area of responsibility—the five states of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—is removed from the current main centers of attention, Iraq and Afghanistan. Simply to focus on Iraq and Afghanistan thus overlooks the security reality in the rest of the command's area of responsibility. When issues concerning Central Asia are addressed, it is often in the context of the region being a crossroads or transit area. Whether one focuses on energy reserves and export routes or the stability of supply lines to forces in Afghanistan, there is a tendency to view Central Asia as a part of the world over which states compete.

It is in this context that nearly two decades of active U.S. engagement in the Eurasian region have been viewed. In American parlance, this territory has often been cast as “former Soviet colonies,” the “Muslim

Dr. Roger D. Kangas is a Professor in the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University.

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE 2008		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2008 to 00-00-2008	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Battling Misperceptions: Challenges to U.S. Security Cooperation in Central Asia				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 260 5th Avenue SW Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

south,” the “Near Abroad” (borrowing from the Russian portrayal of the region), “the ‘stans,” or simply as conduits for engagement in Afghanistan. In each instance, the Central Asian states are defined in relation to Russia or to the Middle and Near East. Perhaps as fallout from this confusion, the United States has had to deal with misperceptions, suspicions, and fears that it desires to enter this area and dominate it, setting the terms for political, economic, and even cultural development.

Over the years, official statements and newspaper articles from these states have pointed to an increasingly negative perception of the United States and its role. For American officials, this trend ought to be viewed as an opportunity to present the United States in a more favorable light, given that any U.S. presence in the region could in theory be contrasted to Russian, Chinese, or Iranian “threats of regional hegemony,” as well as with an abysmal Soviet legacy that has been cast as a period of “colonial occupation.”¹ Yet this healthier portrayal of Washington and its interests has not been achieved. The current situation thus raises the question of how the United States found itself in a relatively weak position in the region. More important, how did the current *perceptions* come about?

U.S. Policy in Transition

Much has been written on U.S. policy toward Central Asia, with a few recent publications focusing on the important issue of security cooperation.² These works have carefully laid out the various programs, events, and funding levels since the U.S. Government began such engagement in the 1990s. Moreover, they note how specific security cooperation efforts have been part of a broader regional policy. Given that American policy has shifted over time and priorities have not been as clearly stated as the regional powers might have wanted, it is not surprising that there is uncertainty as to the intent and success of such programs. In this light, some basic trends can be noted.

First, when the Soviet Union collapsed, there was not an immediate rush to recognize *all* of the successor states as independent entities. Would the Soviet Union reunite? Would these “states” end up as confederated appendages to the Russian government? When it was clear that Washington was looking at separate countries, it relied on a policy of “Russia first,” which meant that U.S.-Russian relations were deemed more important than bilateral ties

with other post-Soviet states. As relations changed, so did this policy, but for at least 5 years or so, Central Asia was considered part of Moscow’s sphere of influence. The most significant consequence was the conduct of the civil war in Tajikistan. The United States supported Russia taking the lead on peace negotiations and conflict resolution in that country. Tajikistan was simply more important for Russia than for America.

Second, during most of the 1990s, non-governmental organizations, supported with U.S. Government funding, came to be significant actors in carrying out American goals. This allowed such entities to expand, often resulting in Central Asian officials concluding that they actually represented official U.S. policy. At this stage, programs focusing on democratization, economic liberalization, and human rights dominated U.S. engagement, with scant attention to security cooperation.

Third, as U.S. relations with Russia deteriorated, there was a renewed interest in Central Asia—as a region to pry away from Russia. Whether one looked at the Silk Road Legislation coming out of the U.S. Congress or an increased discussion on energy pipelines that could circumvent Russia, *energy* became the buzzword for the region.³ The only time Central Asia and the Caspian Region were mentioned in the 1999 U.S. National Security Strategy was with respect to energy security.⁴ In this instance, energy

security was related to the open access to energy deposits in the region by outside companies and countries. Specifically, could American companies participate in the exploitation of energy reserves in the region? Would the United States or its allies be beneficiaries of energy derived from the region?⁵ In this context, it could easily be overstated that America was, and is, solely interested in the energy resources of Central Asia.

as U.S. relations with Russia deteriorated, there was a renewed interest in Central Asia—as a region to pry away from Russia

Fourth, one could claim that the single issue dominating U.S. Central Asian policy after September 11, 2001, was no longer energy, but security. At the time, many believed that the Central Asian states could provide bases for military operations and fly-over rights for aircraft. The United States quickly drew up Status of Forces Agreements with each of the Central Asian states, as well as the Russian Federation, in support of Operation *Enduring Freedom*. In some instances, this was simply permission to use airspace and the possibility of using an airport in an emergency. In other instances, such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and the Kyrgyz



Presidents of Afghanistan and Tajikistan open bridge connecting their countries

U.S. Army (Mark W. Rodgers)

Republic, it included the right to station forces in the country. The resources devoted to the area because of this exercise were tremendous and exceeded past assistance to the region. In the eyes of some analysts, this was a moment when the United States could have made a real difference in Central Asia.⁶ At the same time, it was not surprising to hear criticisms that the

was a more sober assessment of U.S. strategic interests there with several key publications stressing the need to be realistic and more precise in what relations with the five divergent states might be.⁸ Because nongovernmental organizations have been limited in some countries, overall U.S. presence is now spread differently in Central Asia—more in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and the Kyrgyz Republic and less in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Indeed, for the past several years, it appears that Washington has entered a new phase in which the acceptance of American assistance, and even presence, cannot be taken for granted.

Shifting priorities and changing levels of importance have underscored U.S. engagement in Central Asia. For the U.S. side, these phases can be explained by looking at the evolution of security policy and foreign relations in general, especially in light of significant international crises such as the post-9/11 focus on counterterrorism and the war in Iraq. For the Central Asian partners, acceptance of that rationale is less than forthcoming. One sees either a lack of understanding in what the United States would like to do or a belief that America might not be as committed to the region as it has stated.

Problematic Perceptions

It would be naïve to think that engagement in the region would be accepted without question and cynical to assume that it is always received with feigned interest. Those who have worked security cooperation programs since the 1990s note a regular enthusiasm for seminars, training opportunities, international military education and training programs, and the like. Central Asians who have participated in foreign exchange programs (training in

the United States or elsewhere) often maintain ties with their newfound colleagues and speak highly of their American interlocutors. U.S. military representatives in the respective countries likewise have been able to forge positive relations and advance U.S. policy quite effectively, while often working with constrained budgets and staffing.

Over time, practical limitations have been consistently noted. The modest number of participants and the continual change in personnel who engage in cooperative programs mean there still is a familiarization process taking place. Not surprisingly, from the U.S. side, there is a constant stream of new faces; personnel rotations dictate that within 2 to 3 years, those engaged with Central Asian programs will have to move on. Central Asian officers are therefore not sure they even can cooperate with their U.S. counterparts. Moreover, participants noted that during training exercises, U.S. troops tended to be stationed apart from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) units, and the language barrier sometimes prevented real bonding.

Central Asian units are familiar with the Russian training approaches, military culture, and tactics. Even in U.S./North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-backed exercises, the Central Asians will conclude the day with their Russian counterparts. As one officer involved in an early exercise noted, “We’re of the same school. We know each other.”⁹ Likewise, during U.S.-sponsored conferences and programs that take place in the region, U.S. participants often keep to the main hotel and regularly dine with their fellow Americans, rarely venturing out to socialize with their local hosts. One area of continuity has been partnerships with National Guard units under the auspices of USCENTCOM cooperative programming. Today, there is a bit more familiarity, but the cohesiveness found in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) exercises is not necessarily replicated in Western-dominated drills.

As the sides get to know each other, some things have begun to change. For example, there has been a military culture mismatch revolving around how much responsibility is given to different ranks. Central Asian officers have critically commented that “when you send trainers, you send sergeants, not officers, to train our officers. Is this a sign of disrespect for our military?”¹⁰ What they do not realize is that the U.S. military requires a cadre of well-trained professional noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and enlisted personnel—a tradition not found in many post-Soviet armies—and thus “non-officers” carry out the work that post-Soviet officers would normally do. Such a reaction is to be expected from a region where the military tradition does not include a professional NCO corps. As this aspect of



U.S. Air Force (Felicia Heecker)

Kazakhstani soldiers transport supplies destined for Afghan national army

Central Asian units are familiar with the Russian training approaches, military culture, and tactics

newfound strategic importance of the region in the eyes of the United States overshadowed other goals, such as democracy-building or economic liberalization.⁷

Finally, U.S. interests in much of Central Asia have diminished in recent years in the face of the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. After the summer of 2005, there

the U.S. military is now better known, such contrasting views are not as prevalent.

On a broader level, the strategic significance of the region for the United States is repeatedly questioned. Comparisons between U.S. action in Southeast Europe versus a relatively inactive policy in Tajikistan and even Afghanistan prior to 2001 are inevitable. For example, during the Central Asian Battalion exercise in 1997, Central Asian officials thought the presence of the 82^d Airborne Division suggested that the Americans would assist in securing the southern border of the region. Given the American unit's mandate during the exercise, this was viewed as inconceivable. Consequently, when U.S. troops did appear in 2001, the actions were seen as benefiting the United States more than regional actors. American units, the 82^d among them, are engaged in counterterrorism and stabilization operations in Afghanistan, which have a positive effect on Central Asian security and even address the concerns raised prior to 2001. However, the regional security connection is often not made in the Central Asian media and in public statements. In reality, the Central Asian region does not score well in the U.S. National Security Strategy, nor does it place high on the priority lists of USCENTCOM. Even departmental reorganizations have been cast in this light. With the shift away from fellow Eurasian states to offices that include Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is clear that the Central Asian countries will almost always receive little attention compared to these states with high security concerns. Thus, for understandable reasons, there is a healthy dose of skepticism on U.S. intent in the region.

Much of the skepticism has been articulated by participants from Central Asia in seminar exercises at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. To evaluate the relative long-term importance of U.S. security cooperation, it was vital to compare this cooperation to the presence of other “outside” actors. When asked to rank the most significant external actors in the security and economic realms, Central Asian officials reflected a striking pattern. With regard to security, Russia was consistently placed first. In over 8 years, rare was the individual, let alone the country delegation or course group, who considered Russia to be anything less than “most important.” Second and third places shifted over time. In the late 1990s, one saw the presence of Turkey, Iran,

or the United States. After a strong showing by the United States early in this decade, the second spot is now usually reserved for China. This is not to say that China is viewed positively. On the contrary, concern is consistently expressed that China is “hard to understand” and could easily have designs on Central Asia. While not perhaps desiring to physically take over the countries of Central Asia, China is viewed especially by those from bordering countries (Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan) as wanting to be the primary actor in the region.

Likewise, in the realm of economic relations, Russia plays a leading role. Again, the subsequent positions have rotated—with even the European Union present in some years. However, after 2005, China moved up to second place as well. In this category, America is often left out completely, although one could look at foreign direct investment and U.S. Government assistance programs and still see significant numbers.¹¹ The logic is rather straightforward: regardless of actual numbers, programs, and intentions, U.S. engagement policies are not viewed at face value. This is the concern one should have in hearing such criticisms of the U.S. engagement agenda. That the dollar amounts are lower than expectations is understandable. The problem arises when such figures, which are high relative to those of other countries, are deemed ineffective.

Part of the answer lies in how the assistance is couched. Use of Western language and concepts often translates into apprehension of American motivations on the part of officials in Central Asia. Terms such as *democratization*, *civilian control of the military*, *colored revolutions*, *human rights*, and even *East-West corridors* conjure up images of an America attempting to interfere within the domestic political arenas in the region. Naturally, democratization programs ought to focus on providing assistance to potential political actors in a given country, and, of course, governments in power would be reluctant to give up their share. Following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, Central Asian media and officials were quick to parrot criticisms formulated in Russia and China. While not articulating the “adventurism” arguments expressed in the countries’ media, Central Asians fixated on the issues of “regime change,” “preemption,” and “challenging Iraqi

national sovereignty” as points of departure from their traditional acceptance of the U.S. strategy. This translated into a greater questioning of, and resistance to, security cooperation. Ulterior motives and hidden

regardless of actual numbers, programs, and intentions, U.S. engagement policies are not viewed at face value

agendas—always part of debates on regional geopolitics—became more prominent in discussions. In short, the United States has been viewed as an outside player that might interfere in domestic politics and will not be able to forge lasting and consistent policies.

376 AEW (Lesley J. Waters)



C-17 Globemaster III takes off from Manas Air Base, Kyrgyz Republic

Such language was put to the test vis-à-vis Uzbekistan in the early part of this decade. When the U.S.-Uzbekistan relationship was deemed a “strategic partnership” in 2002, the reading from the Uzbek side was quite clear: the United States is a friend who will work with us to achieve our primary goals of stability and security.¹² In actuality, the document signed by both parties stated obligations and commitments that were realistic. It was the perception within Uzbekistan—especially as it felt confident enough to break away from Russia, the CIS, and other regional structures—that perhaps it read too much into the rhetoric that accompanied the “strategic partnership.”¹³ That the events of May 2005 in Andijon, Uzbekistan, were considered such a threat ran counter to the U.S. (and international) accusations that it was a human rights tragedy on par with the June 1989 massacre on Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

The challenge of perception can be illustrated by considering what took place after

the events in Andijon. In the first week of May 2005, I was in the city of Andijon, among other cities in the Fergana Valley, lecturing to alumni from U.S. Government-sponsored programs.¹⁴ Two weeks later, and immediately after the violence, I was back in Tashkent. Within this short timeframe, the discussions surrounding Andijon among Uzbek officials and the general population focused on the instability that such uprisings might cause in the country. Information was limited, and the initial government estimates of casualties and causes were vague. Those with access to international media had already been exposed to reports by the BBC, in particular, that gave more graphic and horrific accounts of what took place.¹⁵ How did this play out in Uzbekistan? Initially, as noted, there was confusion as to the actual events. Moreover, at no time was this seen as anything more than a local event perpetrated by members of the so-called Akromiya group with probable support from a web of international terrorist cells that had been working in Central Asia.

Shirin Akiner, a renowned expert on Central Asia, reported on her experience in Andijon shortly after the violence.¹⁶ As this report questioned the claims of the Western news media and provided some explanation as to the Uzbek actions, she was pilloried by other Westerners. However, in Uzbekistan, she offered what was deemed a middle-of-the-road approach to addressing the problem. Once again, reports originating from Russian media found traction in Central Asia. Moreover, the Uzbek government—now distanced from the West—began to address more sinister aspects of the events, including some outlandish scenarios that suggested Western compliance as a precursor to a “colored revolution.”¹⁷ As has been well reported and debated, U.S.-Uzbek relations quickly collapsed, and the base at Karshi-Khanabad, which was already tenuously supported, closed down later that year. In the region, this was cast as an American failure to support our strategic ally in a time of great need. At the same time, China and Russia *did* declare their support for Uzbekistan, to the point of even comparing their views with those of the United States.

While this event never obtained the level of attention of other acts of violence in the world, it became a watershed moment for those working Central Asian issues. Particularly after President Islam Karimov refused to meet with a delegation of U.S. Senators in late May, the U.S. Government stepped up its criticism

of the Uzbek government. For all intents and purposes, the strategic partnership between America and Uzbekistan was over. Adding insult to injury, these criticisms were less of the individuals and more of the message. The fact

guage and approach as the strategic partnership with Uzbekistan. Perhaps with a bit of “mirror-imaging,” U.S. policy suggests that if we simply encourage the Kazakhs to focus westward, they will adopt our approaches

most acknowledged that the Andijon violence was unfortunate and either preferred not to discuss it or put the blame on an overly zealous Uzbek security force

that such conditions were not perceived to be placed on other countries, such as Saudi Arabia and China, the most often cited comparisons, usually resulted in discussion of double standards—an accusation commonly raised by officials from the region.

The previously mentioned Central Asian groups at the Marshall Center reflected this transition. In the summer of 2005, most acknowledged that the Andijon violence was unfortunate and either preferred not to discuss it or put the blame on an overly zealous Uzbek security force. As Uzbeks had stopped attending Marshall Center courses that year, discussions could take place *without* Uzbeks, thus dispensing with the common courtesy of not speaking ill of a neighbor who is present. Within a year, however, the tenor of the comments changed. Even officials from the Kyrgyz Republic became critical of the West’s approach to Uzbekistan. The 400+ Uzbek citizens who had crossed the border in May 2005 went from “refugees” to “questionable people,” with the concern that they had not been properly screened and were now loose outside of Uzbekistan’s grasp. There was a belief that some of the refugees were not innocent citizens of Andijon, but the perpetrators of the violence itself, contradicting the U.S. position.

Thus, it is not surprising that as the United States has begun to lavish attention on Kazakhstan, one starts to hear concerns raised by Central Asians. The shift to Kazakhstan as the primary country with which to engage has included the same lan-

to political and economic reform, as well as look to Washington and NATO for security, instead of the CSTO and Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

So What Does This Mean?

If the United States were to pull up stakes and leave, the region would plod ahead. Engagement in Central Asia and security cooperation more specifically are not existential challenges to America. However, by ignoring opportunities for positive and mutually beneficial relationships, Washington is missing an opportunity to address key



Kazakhstani performers ride at opening of multinational peacekeeping and relief exercise

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Jeremy T. Locky)

transnational threats and help foster stability in a region that needs it. The irony is that most of this has been said in past years. As early as the late 1990s, analysts were lamenting the uneven nature of U.S. security engagement in Central Asia and were offering proposals to fix it. Fred Starr, for example, advocated a policy that engaged Uzbekistan and focused on a slow, deliberate policy of reform.¹⁸ Sylvia Babus and Judith Yaphe articulated the reason for avoiding false expectations and understanding the broader neighborhood.¹⁹ These views, and those expressed by other experts, generally emphasized a need to understand the context within which the Central Asian states operated. Nearly a decade later, these lessons seem to have not been fully learned. Indeed, the engagement challenges today are hauntingly similar to those of past years, even factoring in the current situation in Afghanistan, which itself has gone on for some time.

Oddly, one could list the key security concerns of all five Central Asian states and find them strikingly similar to U.S. concerns. Afghanistan is foremost on their mind as a security challenge, but there are also the issues of economic development and global integration. From the Central Asian side, a key obstacle to accepting additional U.S. assistance is simply that Washington is deemed to be unreliable, mercurial, and meddling. Altering these views does not require that America shifts its focus completely, but that it simply returns to basics, fulfills promises, and continues to engage with these states as openly as possible. If the United States addressed the perceptions and concerns of the region in a constructive manner, then advantages for both sides could be seen.

Kazakhstan is currently deemed the most important partner in the region and the one with the best chance to more fully integrate with the West. From the Kazakhstani side, however, the United States is one of several outside powers that must be balanced. As expressed in the “multi-vectored security policy,” Kazakhstani officials note that their national interests are best served by cooperating with *all* sides. If there is a strategic partnership with the United States, it is seen in a more utilitarian light and not as an expression of a true alliance. In contrast, while the notion of strategic partnership has receded from U.S.-Uzbekistan discourse, recent actions, including former USCENTCOM commander Admiral William Fallon’s visit to Uzbekistan in January 2008 and the limited basing rights

allowed at Termez in March 2008, suggest that a more modest and realistic approach is being worked out between the two countries. The problem is that the Uzbeks do not play by U.S. rules and continue to ignore calls for loosening controls on civil society.

The base at Manas dominates U.S. relations with the Kyrgyz Republic, and counter-narcotics assistance dominates relations with Tajikistan. Short of those, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan are not significant to broader U.S. security interests and, unfortunately, will be given less attention unless and until violence occurs and instability results in these countries. It is this reactive nature of U.S. engagement with countries considered less vital that precludes the possibility of truly developing and sustaining an active security cooperation program. Even though the United States has global commitments, it does not have to be so unpredictable.

by assessing U.S. security cooperation initiatives over time, the decision to continue or adjust programs can be more intelligently made

Efforts at USCENTCOM over the past 2 years to coordinate security cooperation in a longer-term and strategic manner has resulted in a better understanding of what the United States can and ought to do. Moreover, by assessing U.S. security cooperation initiatives over time, the decision to continue or adjust programs can be more intelligently made. However, if funding levels continue to drop for engagement in Central Asia, these well-articulated plans will be wasted.

Whether or not we think they are valid and properly reflect U.S. intentions, these perceived “realities” in American policy toward the region are common knowledge among the security officials of the respective countries. While one can still hear accounts of “American grand strategies” toward the region, for the most part, the common line of argument is that the United States came in with a bang, promised much, and delivered little. Whether the delivery shortfall was a result of changing policies, the limitations inherent in foreign assistance, and the difficulties in distribution (including the siphoning off of aid by government officials) is irrelevant. After years of developing relationships in the region, the

United States still has much to learn. However, modest steps that include concrete and long-term planning—with *consistent funding*—are a promising way to ensure that America can engage Central Asia. After all, a Washington that is willing to remain active in the region in specified areas can still play a constructive role.

It is imperative that, in this continued engagement, we seek to monitor *how* our message is being perceived. On the one hand, questionnaires filled out by participants at the end of training courses or programs tend to be positive, but that can be a function of the individual writing what he thinks he ought to say, as the notion of an “anonymous survey” is looked on with great skepticism. At the other extreme, one can rely on a handful of anecdotes (positive or negative) and draw generalized conclusions about entire engagement programs. A constant study of these approaches, plus the inclusion of public statements by officials and the media (which reflect official views for the most part) can offer at least a sampling of perceptions of both specific engagement programs and the broader strategic environment within which they are placed. Moreover, we must be mindful that while we often operate under an implicit sense that they want to think and act like us, mirror-imaging can result in the sort of misperceptions that have arisen in past years.

As for the information that surveys gather on the United States and the regions closer to home, how these questions are addressed is shaped by the countries’ cultural and historical processes, as well as the information readily available. While the U.S. Government continually debates funding for Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty offices that broadcast in Central Asian languages, Russian programming is all-pervasive and accessible. The modest costs associated with supporting American information efforts can make a difference and, in turn, create a more positive environment for security cooperation in Central Asia. After all, changing perceptions of the United States in general and of U.S. security cooperation in particular has no magic bullet.

The United States must stop believing that it can reorient the states of Central Asia to the West, at the expense of their other links and identities. This is not to abandon any hope of engagement, but rather to put our presence in the region in a proper perspective that is equally intelligible within Central Asia. As much as we wish that people in these countries will want

to be like us, create democratic regimes with market economies, and see the United States in a positive light with the best intentions, the reality is different. None of the states is so malleable that it can quickly alter past patterns and current interests. It is much better to understand that the Central Asian countries have multiple identities.²⁰ To assume that we must somehow limit their access to officials from outside of the West is a mistaken and short-sighted policy. In the context of Department of Defense regional centers, it is a positive sign that Central Asian officials can participate in programs at the Marshall Center, Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, and the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies—given that these countries must have a better understanding of, and relations with, neighboring states in all directions.

Integral to a successful solution is patience. A generation that is deeply mired in a Soviet-like mindset cannot change. Even how they perceive threats to their respective countries is articulated in Soviet-style language.²¹ They can be partners in cooperative efforts, especially if national security interests correspond, but one should not expect to see a radical shift in outlook. Indeed, the next generation—the young officers and government officials currently in place—has already accepted certain truisms about the United States. However, with constant, transparent engagement, there will be a change. This change will not be subject to “measures of effectiveness.” After all, to not fixate on immediate change requires more than patience. It also calls for a true belief that one’s approach is correct. In the 1990s, many outsiders exhibited a euphoria that the Russian/Soviet influence was over and that the Central Asian states would “naturally” bond with the West—be it the United States, Turkey (considered our “proxy”), or Europe—but this did not happen. For deep-rooted ideas about the West and about America in particular to be truly challenged, one must be prepared to keep engaging and working on these ideas for some time to come. This does not bode well for those interested in instantly measurable results, but it is more in line with the situation on the ground.

In the fall of 2005, there was a sense that the United States somehow “lost Uzbekistan.” In the years since, the relationships with the other Central Asian states have also been cast in the light of ownership and control. In reality, Washington is not “losing” the region

or finding itself irrelevant to its future. Rather, to better engage, the United States ought to reexamine claims of past officials who have worked in the region to realize that the answers are already present.²² True security cooperation is a dialogue that requires a better understanding of how our partners view things that we assume to be clear. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Especially in the early 1990s, published works on Central Asia focused on the disastrous Soviet legacy. Representative of this thinking is *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*, ed. William Fierman (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991). Likewise, studies of great power competition emerged, among them *The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and Its Borderlands*, ed. Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

² For a current and insightful look at the evolution of security cooperation in Central Asia, see Michael McCarthy, *The Limits of Friendship: Security Cooperation in Central Asia* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2007). In addition, the writings of Jim Nichol that address overall U.S. policy toward Central Asia are most helpful, especially his recent *Central Asia’s Security: Issues and Implications for U.S. Interests*, RL-30294 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 29, 2008).

³ Nichol. See also Alec Rasizade, “The Bush Administration and the Caspian Oil Pipeline,” *Contemporary Review* 279, no. 1626 (July 2001), 21.

⁴ *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 1999, 33–34).

⁵ Ronald Soligo and Amy Jaffe, “The Economics of Pipeline Routes: The Conundrum of Oil Exports from the Caspian Basin,” James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy Paper, Rice University, April 1998, available at <www.rice.edu/energy/publications/docs/UnlockingtheAssets_EconomicsPipelineRoutes.pdf>.

⁶ Charles William Maynes, “America Discovers Central Asia,” *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 2 (March–April 2003), 120–132.

⁷ An active and effective information campaign was carried out by groups such as Human Rights Watch and Freedom House—both organizations that annually reported on human rights abuses in the Central Asian countries. A particular focus was placed on Uzbekistan, especially as it was deemed a close U.S. ally and “strategic partner.” See Human Rights Watch, *Dangerous Dealings: Changes to U.S. Military Assistance after September 11*, Human Rights Watch Report 14, no. 1 (G), February 2002. Also see *Nations in Transit* by Freedom House, which is published annually, for analysis on the domestic environment in the Central Asian states.

⁸ For an official view, see Richard Boucher, “U.S. Policy in Central Asia: Balancing Priorities,” address

delivered to the House International Relations Committee, April 26, 2006.

⁹ Central Asian Battalion exercise participant comment to author, July 1999.

¹⁰ Participant response during NATO School mobile education and training team in 2003. Similar reactions were seen during a visit on a U.S. Coast Guard ship in New York harbor in spring 2002. The ship was largely manned by an enlisted crew. While other countries send their senior NCOs to courses designed for those ranks, such as at the NATO School in Oberammergau, Germany, the Central Asian militaries are still reluctant to make these changes.

¹¹ From 1992 to the present, the U.S. Government provided nearly \$1.4 billion in assistance to all five states, with Kazakhstan receiving 55 percent of the total, Uzbekistan 25 percent, and the remaining three countries the other 20 percent combined. U.S. Department of State figures.

¹² John Heathershaw, “Worlds Apart: The Making and Remaking of Geopolitical Space in the U.S.-Uzbekistani Strategic Partnership,” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 1 (March 2007), 123–140.

¹³ The public text of the “Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework Between the United States of America and the Republic of Uzbekistan,” dated March 12, 2002, remains on the Web site of the Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United States. See <www.usembassy.uz/home/index.aspx?&mid=400>.

¹⁴ The program developed by the U.S. Public Diplomacy office included visits to Tashkent, Fergana, Namangan, and Andijon, May 2005.

¹⁵ See International Crisis Group, “Uzbekistan: The Andijon Uprising,” ICG Briefing #38, May 25, 2005.

¹⁶ Shirin Akiner, “Violence in Andijan: An Independent Assessment,” The Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, May 12, 2005.

¹⁷ One of the more bizarre scenarios suggested that U.S. forces in Afghanistan actually provided lift capabilities to insurgents who worked their way from Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan.

¹⁸ S. Frederick Starr, “Making Eurasia Stable,” *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 1 (January–February 1996), 80–92.

¹⁹ Sylvia Babus and Judith S. Yaphe, *U.S.-Central Asian Security: Balancing Opportunities and Challenges*, Strategic Forum 153 (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, January 1999).

²⁰ Brenda Shaffer, ed., *The Limits of Culture: Islam and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2006).

²¹ For an illuminating account of the 1999 Tashkent bombings and the Soviet “spin” on them, see Oleg Yakubov, *The Pack of Wolves: The Blood Trail of Terror* (Moscow: Veche, 2000).

²² One of the clearest assessments of U.S. policy in Central Asia was delivered by Assistant Secretary of State Elizabeth Jones to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on December 13, 2001.