



# DEFEATING TERRORISM

## STRATEGIC ISSUE ANALYSIS



### Central Asia and the War on Terrorism: Towards a New Alignment

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#### Conclusions:

- Upgrade military engagement, security assistance, and PFP relationships.
- Implement intelligence cooperation and training.
- Link assistance to political and economic reforms.
- Support petroleum pipeline routes through Central Asia to India.
- Provide infrastructure, public health, and ecological assistance.
- Assist developmental NGOs and foundations that work in Central Asia.

#### Introduction.

Although the five Central Asian states are similar, there are significant ethnographical, religious (Sunni versus Shia), and linguistic cleavages among them. Therefore, policies and strategic options that involve them must be tailored to their specific needs and conditions. But if we understand their interests, we should be able to devise successful responses and inducements of an inclusive strategic nature, within whose umbrella we can target specific countries' needs. Success in doing so will enhance the U.S. coalition's viability and allow us to exploit the present crisis so that we can bring about a significant and lasting geostrategic realignment in America's interest.

#### Impact of the Crisis and Support for U.S. Goals.

The willingness of the Central Asian states to cooperate with the United States varies. Because of this, our assistance should be tailored and go proportionally to those who help us the most.

The most willing to help is the most independent-minded of all these states, Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan seeks maximum freedom of action and distance from both Russia and China, but must deal with what it perceives as a constant threat of Islamic insurgency and terrorism emanating from Afghanistan. It also is obviously contending with not just the threat of internal unrest and insurgency, but Russian and perhaps Chinese pressure to limit any military cooperation with Washington. President Islam Karimov's regime has stated its willingness to provide the use of air space and one military base for humanitarian missions. It also has allowed 1,000 U.S. troops to be stationed in Uzbekistan, probably at that base. Presumably this involves intelligence cooperation as well.

Kazakstan, the most distant from the scene of current Central Asian insurgencies and the most abundantly endowed with energy, must always balance Russia and China. Therefore, it generally seeks to diversify its external and defense relation-

ships. It, too, has offered the United States bases and air space.

Turkmenistan has followed a formal policy of neutrality since becoming independent, and perhaps due to that has the best relations with the Taliban of any of these states, often serving as an interlocutor. Thus its support is limited to opening its air space to humanitarian flights.

Tajikistan, the victim of civil war and with a fragile regime sustained mainly by Russian troops, nevertheless has consented to use of its bases. But most likely any further or future cooperation from Tajikistan will remain covert and unspoken. Kyrgyzstan, another small state that depends largely on Russian support, has offered its air corridors for humanitarian flights and has not totally ruled out military cooperation. In this context, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan offer excellent bases for missions directed at Afghanistan and are the real logistical keys to any success in launching missions from Central Asia.

### **Central Asian Demands or Needs.**

At the same time, all these states will expect and also need "compensations" from the United States. These rewards for their support are both short and long term in nature. They are not exclusively military, but the military "compensations" appear to be the most urgent ones. As these are states that face permanent and ongoing threats from terrorists aligned to the drug trade from Afghanistan, they will want military assistance. Uzbek officials, for instance, talk of "annihilating the Taliban." Specifically, they appear to want upgraded Partnership for Peace (PfP) relationships and improved bilateral relations and assistance in weapons and training, as well as intelligence, from Washington. The longer-term goal is to obtain, if not a security guarantee from Washington and/or NATO, then a permanently functioning U.S. military presence or relationship in and with Uzbekistan. Thus it is hardly surprising that Uzbekistan now

wants to negotiate a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). Uzbekistan, and probably the other states as well, want independence from the hegemonic plans of both Russia and China, now enshrined in the Shanghai-6 communiqué of July 2001. That communiqué not only licensed the external power projection of Russian and Chinese forces in Central Asia (the latter signing off on such an agreement for the first time), it also defined terrorism, separatism, and extremism as security threats. Despite Russian offers of cooperation, it is clear that Moscow objects to these states having any meaningful or lasting defense relationship with the United States.

The Central Asia states may not fully be able to escape the Russo-Chinese defense straitjacket, but they certainly wish to have real alternatives to it. For Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, this is realistic. Perhaps it would be possible to provide some or all of these kinds of assistance. However, the danger for the United States is that it creates too close an identification with these extremely repressive regimes whose policies, including disregard for civil and human rights, massive corruption, authoritarianism, and fierce religious repression, are creating the grounds for insurgency. Not surprisingly, the increasing impoverishment of masses of people as a few grow very rich, the unresolved socio-ecological-economic issues, and an apparently growing identification with Islam as a form of political expression provide fertile grounds for internal and possibly interstate conflict. Thus military and security assistance must be finely calibrated and should not be the only card in our deck.

### **Economic-Political Needs and Assistance.**

All these regimes desperately need large-scale and long-term economic, ecological, and political support. They require help to obtain favorable terms of trade for their

products and access to markets. That means major infrastructural investments in transportation and pipelines to free them of dependence on Russia. Only such investments, coupled at the less glamorous end with developmental programs of a smaller scale such as have worked elsewhere in the Third World, can allow these regimes to make substantial economic progress and eventually a breakthrough. This would include substantive assistance to build the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, or pending the pacification of Afghanistan, UNOCAL's proposal for a pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Indeed, for Turkmenistan and Kazakstan, as well as the states less endowed with oil and gas, a major realignment can be realized if we can pacify Afghanistan and reverse Pakistan's support for insurgents in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Kashmir. To the degree that Washington can persuade or, more bluntly, frighten either Tehran or Islamabad into renouncing terrorism and negotiating with their rivals, it can support more alternatives for Turkmenistan, Kazakstan, and Uzbekistan, as well as smaller Kyrgyzstan and even the Russian client, Tajikistan, to expand and diversify their international trade. That possibility entails energy pipelines and construction of major infrastructural and transportation outlets that will greatly stimulate all commercial traffic, not just in energy products, among all these states. Such large-scale growth of trade offers Central Asia major security and economic benefits, provided Afghanistan is pacified and becomes the recipient of sustained international efforts at reconstruction. Certainly it would help overcome the logjam concerning pipelines and shatter the material basis for Iranian-Russian alliance, partly directed against Central Asian states and Azerbaijan.

This strategic realignment also offers a possibility for genuine Indo-Pakistani negotiations and reduced tensions between Iran

and its neighbors and/or Israel. Either or both of those outcomes would clearly be mutually beneficial for everyone in the Middle East, Central Asia, and/or South Asia. While this vision may seem too audacious, this crisis and the fact that the war will not likely be a short one offer the possibilities for major restructuring of Central Asian alignments to the benefit of local regimes and the United States.

## **Recommendations.**

U.S. inducements for support should avoid long-term and binding ties like SOFAs. Rather, we should make the following kinds of military-political-economic offers in return for real support.

- Upgraded bilateral military exercises, training, weapons sales, IMET agreements, and more frequent participation for all who want it in PfP exercises.
- A regular program of intelligence cooperation and training as needed.
- Political assistance to bolster those countries against China and Russia. This assistance can also take the form of the bilateral and multilateral military programs listed above, since those enhance these regimes' capability to defend themselves or to solicit Western support. However, we cannot ally ourselves with repressive domestic tactics. Ideally, a discussion should begin that requires political and economic reforms as a condition for aid.
- Support for pipelines through those countries to India and beyond, giving producers a real outlet to the sea that is an alternative to Russian and Iranian pressures, pipelines, and ports.
- Large-scale assistance to build roads for rail, truck, and commercial trade south from Central Asia, tied to the EU Silk Road project.

- Large-scale assistance with water purification and cleanup and development of renewable sources of water.
- Large-scale assistance in public health and pollution cleanup.
- Major financial assistance to NGOs and foundations with a proven record of success that are working to develop areas from the bottom up to parallel the larger, macroeconomic projects cited here.



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