



## Prospects for U.S.-Russia Cooperation in Central Asia

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*Introduction by David Speedie:*

We publish today the second set of papers under the U.S.-Russia strand of our [U.S. Global Engagement Program](#).

These papers—two from Americans, two from Russians—embrace an ambitiously broad spectrum of issues, covering U.S./NATO-Russia cooperation on Afghanistan and Central Asia. Four major points may be seen to emerge from the spirited discussion in the papers:

1. The United States/NATO and Russia have clear and urgent common interests in promoting long-term stability in Afghanistan. These include containing and defeating "radical extremist" forces, reversing the noxious effects of the opium trade from that country, and preventing instability in Afghanistan from impacting an extended region. Despite these shared interests, cooperation between Russia and the West is "episodic," rather than strategic or systematic.
2. Afghanistan must be seen, not in isolation, but in a broader regional (Central Asian) context. This is true both in terms of the importance of the region (strategic location, energy resources) and of the formidable challenges (instability, economic reversals). Russia and the West both see advantages and interests to be protected (thus the recent competition for a military presence in the otherwise marginal Kyrgyzstan), but should avoid a new "Great Game" of promoting self-interest over shared concerns.
3. Afghanistan is now, as one paper writer states, "Obama's War." From campaign pledge to return to the "right" war, the President has: appointed new military and diplomatic leadership in Kabul, including a special envoy; invested in an enhanced troop presence; and made strenuous, if incomplete, efforts to drum up international support for the military and reconstruction effort in Afghanistan.
4. The very future of NATO may be viewed through the Afghan lens. The (lack of) commitment of NATO partners, given military and economic constraints, exemplifies the strains and stresses on an alliance that has expanded both geographically and in terms of mission. While the American and Russian paper writers differ considerably in their views of NATO's continuing relevance and role, even the American view of NATO as the most "successful" and "durable" military alliance in history is tempered by the urging to revisit and reconsider the original NATO treaty, which current challenges may be rendering obsolete.

—David Speedie, Director, U.S. Global Engagement Program

The other three papers in this set are:

- [Obama's War](#)
- [State of Denial? NATO at 60 and the War in Afghanistan](#)
- [Pakistani, Afghan, and Iranian Factors of Influence on the Central Asian Region](#)

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At this time, collaboration between the Russian Federation and the United States within the framework of international cooperation in Central Asia aimed at neutralizing the security challenges and threats in the region is episodic in nature. The author of this article proposes several approaches to expanding their cooperation on regional stability, particularly in Afghanistan where the greatest threat to stability originates. Therefore, both the United States and Russia have a common interest in normalizing the situation in that country. They are united by a desire to curb the activities of radical extremists and stop drug production, which represents a rare instance of agreement in a long list of current international security issues.

The proposals put forward have been made solely out of a spirit of cooperation, rather than competition between the actors in the region. Only this will ensure the creation of a regional security system that would meet the national interests of both nations, as well as the aspirations of the international community. This is a highly economical and civilized way of conducting international relations. Hopefully the approaches proposed will be on the agenda of the Moscow summit between Presidents Obama and Medvedev in July 2009.

### **Strategic Uncertainty in the Central Asian Region**

In view of the events of global proportions that marked the beginning of the 21st century, the Central Asian region (CAR)<sup>1</sup> has significantly increased in importance because it has become an important source of petroleum resources as an alternative to the troubled Middle East and the Caspian Sea region among other reasons.

This has led many nations, international organizations, and alliances to pay increased attention to the CAR. First and foremost of these is Russia, as a state that has a close and multifaceted ties with the countries of the region based on a shared historical past, but they also include several post-Soviet states and their alliances, such as Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Georgia/Ukraine/Uzbekistan/Azerbaijan/Moldova Organization for Security and Development (GUUAM).

Other nations with an interest in the CAR are China, India, Iran, Turkey, Japan, and, of course, the United States, along with its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies, as well as the European Union (EU), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). As outside "actors" increase their presence in the region, they inevitably enter into closer and more complex relationships with each other, which will give a new impetus to both cooperation and competition among them.

In addition to the increased activity in the region by these "players," the situation in the CAR is affected by a number of global trends capable of influencing regional stability in the mid-term. The following are the most important of these global trends:

- The effect of the global economic crisis on all activities of the regional states and their alliances, which is increasing the imbalance in trade and capital movement. This will be accompanied by currency fluctuations and will require restructuring of the economies of the CAR nations due both to the crisis and to traditional difficulties, as well as to top regional challenges—environmental issues, shortage of fresh water, climate change, et cetera.
- The increased movement of migrant workers out of the nations of the region due to reduced employment, which will increase the burden on the social system of some countries, notably Russia and some CIS countries, as well as Europe.
- The general depletion of sources of raw materials that can be developed for export in the world and intensification of the struggle to acquire them, which affects both the regional market and systems of national governance.
- The continued status, despite the crisis, of China and India as "locomotives" of world economic growth, which increases their impact on the development of the situation in the CAR and boosts tensions between world powers in the region.
- The likely continuation of the polarization of relations between the international alliances operating in the CAR (with SCO and CSTO, which include Russia, on one side, and Western structures led by the United States (especially NATO and other European institutions) on the other side). Of particular concern to Russia and China is the prospect that the armed forces of the United States and NATO will consolidate their presence for a long-term stay in the Central Asian sub region, which alters the strategic situation, given that Moscow and Beijing perceive the region as their strategic rear.
- The lack of visible progress in the normalization of the situation in Afghanistan has been the main negative factor affecting both regional stability and the situation worldwide. If armed bands are forced out of Afghanistan by the anti-terrorist coalition, there is a danger that militants will infiltrate other nations in the region, which will inevitably destabilize their internal affairs.
- The ever increasing turning of the region into an arena of confrontation between the values of the liberal

(Western) and the traditionalist (Eastern) cultures,<sup>2</sup> because modernization processes taking place in the CAR that are not rooted in that culture and derived from it come in conflict with the traditions of Asian society. As a result, the pressure of the ideology of the developed countries on less developed states in the region has already led to a resurgence in them of traditionalist attitudes, which is increasing the mutual alienation of cultures and exacerbating the potential for conflict.

The internal conditions contributing to the potential for instability in the CAR must be attributed to the weakness of democracy in combination with the clan-based formation of government institutions and the existing approach to addressing socio-economic problems. The external support for this instability potential comes from Islamic radicalism as expressed in the propaganda of separatism and extremism that justifies terrorist methods of conflict, which attracts the most disadvantaged segments of the population.

These circumstances suggest that for the mid-term international relations in the CAR will remain in a state of "strategic uncertainty." Moreover, the dominant paradigm for the development of the region in the first half of the 21st century will be the strengthening of political and cultural diffusion in its countries against a backdrop of economic integration.

Naturally, each of the actors taking part in CAR affairs has its own vision of the region's future. However, it seems that its countries sometimes are not regarded as equal partners, but as "pawns in a geopolitical game" and objects of competing efforts. Analysis of their approaches to the assessment of the situation in the CAR reveals a somewhat one-sided view of how to ensure security in the region, with priority given either to their official national strategy or to the approaches taken by the particular international organizations they belong to. As a result, Russia is trying "not to notice" American security initiatives, and the United States and NATO prefers to develop cooperation with the CAR nations in this field while "not noticing" counter-proposals from the Russian side and their colleagues in SCO and CSTO. Because of this, experts on both sides sometimes disparage the effectiveness of proposals put forward by "the other camp" in an effort to marginalize their rival.

The outcome of this situation is that a struggle for spheres of influence in the region is now unfolding both between pro-Russian and pro-American/Western vectors and between pro-Eastern/Chinese and pro-Islamic vectors for development of the CAR nations. This is illustrated by Russia's "Eurasia Space" project and America's Greater Middle East Initiative, as well as by China's "Assimilation" project, and the EU's "Integration" project. But the competition between these projects appears rather optimistic against the background of the possible inclusion of the region in the "World Islamic Caliphate," which will end prospects for peace, not only for the people living there, but also for their neighbors, even distant ones.

These trends, as well as the relatively short existence of the independent Central Asian nations, have foreordained a certain amount of vacillation in the views of their leadership on national security issues and foreign policy priorities in the areas of economics and military development, which are currently being structured into an official strategy. Uzbekistan's reorientation serves as an example of this; its development vector has changed three times. Its initial focus was on cooperation within CIS; followed by rapprochement with the West and entry into GUUAM; then it withdrew from GUUAM and joined CSTO, Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), and SCO, and broke off of contacts with the West. Today, Tashkent again wants to restore the ties with the West that were interrupted after the events in Andijan, as signaled by Uzbekistan's President I. Karimov at the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest. A short time later Uzbekistan suspended work in EurAsEC.

It should be emphasized that in contrast to Europe, where the NATO/EU security system is clear, the regional security structures in the CAR are still being established. Regional security is currently multilevel, contradictory, and unstructured. Thus, on the one hand military stability in the CAR is supported by the anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan and bilateral agreements between the United States/NATO and Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and other countries in the region. On the other hand, the responsibility for military security in CAR is born by the CSTO forces, whose members are not involved in the military component of the peacekeeping mission of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF) and only provide assistance to it in moving goods. According to some experts, this situation contributes to a permanent threat of the spread of challenges from Afghanistan to neighboring countries.

As far as the EU and the SCO are concerned, they give priority to economic and humanitarian ties in their activities in the region, emphatically stressing the absence of any military interest except for anti-terrorism efforts. China, as one of the major players in CAR and an active member of SCO, despite the existence of threats to national security in the region, and overlapping interests with other actors in the military arena, is attempting to avoid military-political cooperation with both the West and CSTO.

Thus the situation in CAR with respect to stability and security leads to the following conclusion: under the influence of the global crisis and pressure from external actors, several countries in the region are in a state of "strategic uncertainty." In promoting regional stability by military-political means there is overlap, duplication, fragmentation of efforts, and sometimes indifference on the part of the leading actors, which does not serve the

security interests of the region.

### **The Illusion of the Dominance of External Actors in Central Asia**

From a Russian point of view, the hope that one of the outside players involved in the "great geopolitical game in Central Asia" will be able to gain an exclusive right to influence the situation in the region over the long run, is without foundation. This is due to several factors.

First, the CAR nations conduct a multi-vector foreign policy, focusing on cooperation with as many external partners as possible. At the same time, there are key partners in the various spheres of national development, but none is playing a dominant role in all areas of government activity. Therefore, their influence on the internal political and external economic orientation of the countries of the region as a whole is balanced.

Second, it would be naive to ignore the active participation of the Central Asian Republics in the regional security and economic development structures with the participation of Russia—EurAsEC, CSTO, and SCO. These organizations, which are growing dynamically, differ favorably from the CIS in terms of their pragmatic focus (accent on economic development—EurAsEC, military cooperation—the CSTO, multidisciplinary cooperation—SCO) and the feasibility of their tasks. In these organizations, as in Western structures, the consensus principle is observed in decision-making: one nation—one vote, regardless of its size or importance. This ensures a balance of interests within those organizations.

Third, the fact that Russia has substantial political and economic resources in the CAR cannot be disregarded. Russia is not just the region's great neighbor; it is also the largest regional power, which is restoring its authority and influence. In addition, the countries in the region and Russia constitute, although not completely, a civilized whole, due to their close cultural and linguistic ties, education system, interpersonal relationships and family ties, and the presence of large Russian-speaking diasporas in the CAR nations. These circumstances give Russia a geopolitical advantage, in that it is a natural and permanent factor in all affairs of the region. Moscow, which is connected by alliances and other ties with the CAR nations, has continued to influence the situation there. The multi-vector nature of economic cooperation within EurAsEC and SCO; military cooperation in CSTO; cooperation with the United States and NATO through the Partnership for Peace program; and cooperation with China, India, and Iran in the SCO framework gives Russia the ability to maneuver as these changes or others occur in the situation in the region.

Fourth, there is no doubt that the United States, the EU, and NATO nations will continue to expand their presence and involvement in CAR affairs by increasing cooperation with the region's countries in the economic, military, and other spheres. They have sufficient financial resources to do this; and without these resources it would be difficult if not impossible to accomplish most of the economic projects in the region. As far as energy is concerned, it should be stressed that Western companies, in particular, have new technologies, which are very important for energy projects. Arguments concerning the so-called "geographic remoteness" of Asia from the United States and Western Europe are not taken seriously in the region: the Americans have already been successfully developing deposits in Kazakhstan, and it will not be especially difficult for them to acquire a similar stake in other CAR nations.

Lastly, the possibility of a confrontation developing in the region between Moscow and Beijing on one side and Washington and Brussels on the other is unlikely. Both China and Russia consider it vital to maintain positive relations with the West and try to avoid anything that may undermine those relations. China attaches great importance to its financial and economic ties with the United States, which have reached unprecedented levels. America is helping to modernize China's economy and has opened its market to Chinese goods. In turn, China contributes to the growth of consumer demand in the United States by buying up U.S. debt. Russia has responded to the U.S. proposal about the need to "reset relations" between the two countries and is actively engaged in the process. It should also be borne in mind that some of the CAR nations view the foreign presence as positive, both for economic reasons and on grounds of security. Moreover, for the CAR the resumption of confrontation would mean undermining the already quite fragile regional stability, and this is contrary to the interests of all of the international players in the region, especially those involved in international projects, both in bilateral and in multilateral formats.

The following conclusion can be drawn based on the realities of the current situation in the region: it is highly doubtful that powers that pursue purely selfish national interests will become dominant. In addition, none of the foreign countries and organizations within their own development projects for CAR is capable of effectively countering the traditional and non-traditional threats and challenges in the region and the surrounding area.

### **American Policy in the Region, the Strengths and Weaknesses of Actions by the United States, and the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan: The View from Moscow**

Two points stand out when analyzing U.S. policy approaches in the CAR.

The first is that Washington's policy apparently will continue to focus on the formation of the "Greater Middle

East," as well as on drawing the countries in the region into its sphere of influence. Within this framework, the current U.S. administration will also view the CAR as an objective for expanding its "area of responsibility," which includes "areas of instability" (Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan) and a number of other countries in the region.

Secondly, the decisions made by President Obama on this front are likely to be consistent with the strategy of his predecessor and will depend on solving the Afghanistan-Pakistan problem. This assumption is based on already announced plans to increase military aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan and the increased involvement of the Afghan regime in joint actions as shown by the intensification of training for the Afghan army and security forces. The intent is also to minimize the number of civilian casualties during military operations, enhance support for institution building in the country, and solve the drug trafficking problem.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, no interaction with CSTO and SCO is planned, perhaps because this would require revision of the existing international relations architecture in the region. Although Americans have supported the anti-terrorist centers of both of these organizations, as well as the SCO-Afghanistan contact group (which provides for enhanced international cooperation in combating terrorism in the region), it is more likely that Washington will continue to take an individual approach to CAR countries.

Yet the United States will have to clarify its CAR policy. Whereas the idea of the previous American administration was to pull the region out of Russia's influence, continuing this policy in the light of the declared "reset of Russian-American relations" will cause confusion in Moscow. It will not facilitate the movement of goods to troops in Afghanistan, and it does not serve U.S. interests in this area.

Currently in Afghanistan there are around 75,000 troops, of which 56,500 belong to ISAF.<sup>4</sup> Now, the U.S. president is considering the addition of another 17,000 troops for U.S. forces there. These forces are concentrated in five regional commands and operate from a well-developed military infrastructure, which includes 27 different bases.

Analysis of the actions of the United States suggests that they have recently been "frozen" in the standby mode in preparation for increased activity. After they sharply curtailed their activities, the European and Canadian ISAF forces had to conduct their own military actions in the south and northwest regions of the country, areas where the Taliban is clearly resurgent. This implies that the increase in American forces in Afghanistan will inevitably be followed by a new large-scale military operation both within the country and along the Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier (on both sides of Durand Line).

Such actions obviously require the utilization of experience gained from successful operations by coalition forces in the country, as well as lessons learned from mistakes committed during the "Afghan pacification."

It seems to us that the strong points of the actions taken by U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan include the resolute and timely intervention by the United States and NATO countries in the situation in the country, as well as the use of Northern Alliance forces, which, thanks to military-technical assistance from Russia, were able to provide substantial assistance to the coalition forces. The success achieved during the active phase of the defeat of the Taliban was largely a result of the large-scale, methodical, and effective missile and air strikes on the enemy's command centers and positions, as well as the excellent performance of special operations forces in coordinating the efforts of the coalition headquarters and the Afghan commanders of the anti-Taliban alliance, and organizing the interaction between their subordinate units, including air support for their operations. All this helped in defeating the enemy without employing a large number of forces which made it possible to keep casualties to a minimum.

A very important and effective element of Operation Enduring Freedom has been the use of special psychological and information operations. The main targets of these operations were Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters, Afghan troop units, and the country's population. And because they had few televisions and radio receivers, the primary means used to disseminate information were printed materials and loudspeakers.<sup>5</sup> These operations complemented actions aimed at stabilizing the situation, which included the following: establishing and maintaining steadfast relationships among the jointly operating forces, the coalition headquarters, government and non-government civilian organizations, and the public in order to create favorable conditions for the success of the operation.

The provincial reconstruction teams and the civil affairs teams working in different parts of Afghanistan contributed to the success of Operation Enduring Freedom.

They helped rebuild the devastated economic infrastructure; entered into agreements with local authorities, warlords, and elders to acquire available resources in support of actions by military forces; facilitated support from the authorities and the public for the activities of the U.S. Armed Forces and its allies; and assisted the command authority in solving legal problems.

The defeat of the main Taliban formations made it possible to undertake the development of basic democratic

institutions in Afghanistan. The following achievements were made: a constituent assembly (the Loya Jirga) was convened; political power was transferred to a legitimately elected parliament; and a national government was formed. The granting of a certain amount of autonomy to the large national minorities was an important moment. Thus, the foundation was laid for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

However, subsequently mistakes were made. Apparently, at their root lay an overly optimistic forecast of the situation in the country. It was based on the support of the overwhelming majority of Afghans enjoyed by the coalition forces while they were satisfying their hopes for the Taliban's removal from power.

This resulted in the level of activity during Operation Enduring Freedom being reduced too early. The quick shift in emphasis to solving the "Iraqi problem" relegated this operation to the status of a deliberate and under-resourced mopping-up action. As a result, the remnants of the Taliban were able to retreat deep into the rural areas and mountains, where they began rebuilding their forces.

Also unjustified was the reliance on substantial financial aid for rebuilding Afghanistan from the international community, which had initially expressed utmost concern about the threat to global stability and security emanating from the country. To some extent, this necessitated turning of a "blind eye" to the increase in drug production, which has become one of the primary means of earning money and surviving for the populace. It was also one of the main ways the autonomous warlords, acquired funds for maintaining their numerous semi-legal military forces.

The exceedingly rapid removal of military leaders from power that were popular in their ethnic groups, can also be considered a mistake in that it led them and their followers to join the opposition, which although not active, was ill-disposed toward the coalition and the central authorities.

As a result of these and subsequent mistakes, the nation still has not achieved the level of stability required. Recently in Kabul, a government report on the situation in the country was published. It took note of the increased military tension. In 2007 approximately 130 attacks on NATO troops per month were recorded, whereas that number is now approaching 600. In some areas the provincial reconstruction teams have ceased operations. Many international humanitarian organizations are withdrawing their staffs and closing schools. According to various assessments, the Taliban is operating with virtual impunity in the provinces of Paktia, Khost, Zabol, Kandahar, Helmand, and Nimruz.

The human cost of maintaining peace and stability in the country is growing. Since 2006, the number of deaths in Afghanistan has increased. Most have been militants, but among the dead are civilians, humanitarian workers, and Afghan government employees. As a result of fighting in southern and eastern provinces, more than 3,700 Afghans have been killed since the beginning of this year. That number includes at least 1,000 civilians. As of April 17, 2009, the international coalition forces had lost 1,128 people dead (The U.S. dead number 606; more than 2,700 American enlisted men and officers have been wounded in Afghanistan.).

The Afghan leadership has played a passive role in countering Taliban expansion. According to some observers, the leadership is more disturbed by the situation in the north, where many warlords openly ignore it. Against this background, there is noticeable tension between NATO command authorities and the government of Hamid Karzai.

Meanwhile, by all accounts the Taliban's guerrilla war against NATO forces and the official authorities of the country is gathering momentum. Taliban units are mobile and are not dependent on a military infrastructure. They conduct diversionary and terrorist attacks, which are increasing in scope over time. They are supported by al-Qaeda fighters and volunteers from Muslim countries, and they have the sympathy of the people in several Afghan provinces. They are sustained by drug revenues. They have many years of warfighting experience on familiar terrain under their belts, modest domestic needs, and religious zealotry, which, without permanently stationed NATO forces in the south of the country, has allowed them to regain their influence there.

Analysis of the situation in Afghanistan shows that more careful consideration must be given to ethno-national and ethno-territorial factors when planning the new phase of efforts to stabilize the situation in this country.

Patriarchal and tribal relations are still at the core of Afghanistan's social structure. The country continues to adhere to a lifestyle based on archaic clan origins.

Moreover, the nation is highly fragmented ethnically, and therefore there is no unified Afghan nation as the term is generally understood. Its population of more than 27 million people is made up of many ethnic groups. At 40 to 45 percent, the Pashtuns are the dominant group. (They are the main "feeder" for the Taliban movement.) Other important groups are the Tajiks, which comprise up to 20 percent of the population (the majority supported the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance), the Hazaras at 16 percent, and the Uzbeks at 9 percent. There are also Turkmens and Baluchis. In this regard, one should bear in mind that the decisive factor in the political stability of the Afghan state is, above all, Pashtun dominance in it. At present, in the Karzai government it does not exist, and not even powerful foreign support can compensate for that. Attempts to bring common democratic and human values to

the country will most likely enjoy little success.

As far as the ethno-territorial factor is concerned, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that the southern and eastern provinces have traditionally been sources of instability in the country. Therefore, almost no provincial reconstruction teams, civil affairs teams, or humanitarian missions have been deployed there. But even in other places significant efforts by provincial reconstruction teams have been nullified by the Taliban, which forces the local population to destroy everything made by infidel hands. In addition, their personnel often have to restore or build facilities during the daytime and beat off attacks at night. Therefore, the continuing economic stagnation in almost all provinces, accompanied by mass unemployment and deepening poverty, is unlikely to make people want to cooperate with NATO in fighting the Taliban.

Also, the geography of the country is highly unfavorable for conducting military operations. The terrain alone makes movement in Afghanistan a difficult problem,<sup>6</sup> which is exacerbated by the poor weather conditions. In addition, the country is protected by difficult-to-traverse and easily defended mountain systems. Therefore, any ground force operations will face significant problems with movement and logistics, especially in the south.

The experience of coalition forces in Afghanistan in recent years points to the need to overcome a few other disadvantages. For example, ISAF forces from different countries frequently operate unduly independently and often fail to share intelligence. In addition, the Americans in operating under their own command and not as part of a unified command sometimes do not even inform their allies about their combat actions. Also, the disposition of forces and areas of responsibility of coalition forces are not always proportional to the size of the units and their assigned missions. Currently, the main burden falls on units located in southern and eastern sectors, while the German and Italian forces, which are located in the quieter northern provinces, are more concerned with following the instructions of their own governments to ensure their own safety. This is puzzling for soldiers from the United States, Canada, and Denmark, who are bearing the brunt of responsibility (and the losses) in the war against the Taliban.

Drug production is another very important aspect of the current situation in Afghanistan that needs to be addressed in more detail, the volume of which has led the emergence of the term "global Afghan narco-expansion." However, there is much reluctance to link two different processes. According to experts, the facts show that the production of opiates in Afghanistan since the U.S. and the ISAF forces entered the country has increased 44 times and amounted to 93 percent of the world output, which is sufficient to satisfy the demand of drug addicts throughout the world.<sup>7</sup> The area of opium poppy cultivation has increased almost 40 times (from 7,600 hectares in 2001 to 193,000 hectares in 2007), and hundreds of drug labs have been established. Moreover, the country is now the world's second largest producer of cannabis (hashish and hashish oil).

Note that up to 60 percent of the opium produced in Afghanistan is processed into heroin inside the country, which is essentially impossible without huge quantities of precursors from outside the country.<sup>8</sup> According to the United Nations (UN), about three million Afghans, or 13 percent of the population, are employed in drug production. In fact, it has become an integral component of socio-economic life of Afghan society, and the creation of a competitive alternative to it has thus far proven elusive. The \$40 million allocated by the U.S. Government to destroy plantings and encourage cultivation of alternative crops, is not consistent with the complexity of this task. Another factor that reduces the effectiveness of efforts to curb the flow of narcotics from Afghanistan is the low level of development of the border infrastructure and its technical equipment, which makes the border virtually transparent in many areas.<sup>9</sup>

This state of affairs gives rise to a paradox. Given the existing conviction that terrorism must be fought in its den, the financial and economic basis of terrorist activity remains essentially untouched.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, efforts to destroy the Taliban movement's infrastructure—the system of personnel, military, and financial support for the operation of the "militant industry"—require not only a new military operation in Afghanistan, but also joint efforts with the world community to combat drug trafficking, which is the main support for terrorism.

As to that last point, a new phase of efforts to normalize the situation in Afghanistan will require coalition forces to enter Pakistani territory, since there can be no talk of a complete solution to the problem without the destruction of the Taliban's rear infrastructure, which is based in the Pakistani province of North Waziristan. While Islamabad itself is concerned with this extremist movement, it does not want ISAF forces to enter the northern part of the country. It is no coincidence that Pakistani leaders are discussing the appropriateness of mining the border with Afghanistan. Of course, this move is motivated by an interest in impeding free movement by the Taliban across the Durand Line, but it would also serve as an obstacle to the entry of NATO forces into Pakistan.

In general, Moscow feels that the upcoming coalition military operation in Afghanistan will have the following political and military objectives:

- Final defeat of the Taliban forces controlling the southern and eastern provinces of the country and the elimination of its most intransigent leaders. (This does not exclude its eventual transformation into a more

moderate movement led by a new leadership that will be ready to negotiate with Kabul.)

- Creation of conditions for the political and socio-economic reconstruction of, first and foremost, the areas of the country liberated from the Taliban, which include cooperation with the leaders of Pashtun tribes near the Afghan-Pakistan border in order to create a security zone along it.

At the same time, the historical experience of attempts to interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan has shown that efforts to ensure stability in this country by force alone have never succeeded. Therefore, it would seem that the problem of rebuilding Afghanistan as a secular and peace-loving nation can be solved by working out mutually acceptable options for its development by political and economic methods, whereas military actions should be directed solely against the Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters. Moreover, comprehensive measures must be adopted to protect the civilian populace, which is something the ISAF forces, unfortunately, cannot boast about.

In this regard, the most promising model is the formation of international cooperation in the region that would involve similarity or congruence of strategic interests for both Afghanistan and several other countries, including the United States and its allies, as well as Russia and its partners in SCO and CSTO. However, objectively this requires the development of a common, coordinated, and balanced policy to neutralize a wide range of threats and challenges in the region. A concrete expression of such an approach could be a joint strategy to respond to existing challenges and threats in the Central Asian region, with the participation of domestic actors, world powers, organizations, and alliances interested in achieving a stable situation in the region.

### **Prospects for Cooperation between Russia and the United States within the Framework of International Organizations Operating in the Region**

Despite differences on some issues related to stability and security in the CAR, Moscow and Washington have common interests: combating terrorism, maintaining strategic stability, conflict resolution, and non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), among others. The struggle with regional challenges and threats is a common problem, the solution of which involves cooperation between the sides, rather than competition. Uniting the efforts of Russia and the United States, as well as the international organizations in which they participate, would seem to be an effective approach within the framework of this cooperation.

It is possible to identify several promising directions for such cooperation, which will also interest other Central Asian nations. A constructive dialogue between them and between such regional security structures as NATO and the CSTO needs to occur. It should be aimed at developing and jointly applying methods to affect the sources of the threats to stability in the region, given that NATO at the Istanbul Summit was in favor of sharing the responsibility for maintaining security in CAR with CSTO. In addition, CSTO has already taken the initiative in promoting cooperation with the Alliance on key areas of mutual relations.<sup>11</sup>

Obviously, the main objective of cooperation between Russia and the United States at this stage in their relationship is the restoration and deepening of trust between them, after it was completely spoiled by the events in the Southern Caucasus. It would be advisable to do a critical analysis of the events that occurred there in 2008, which largely repeated what happened in the Balkans in 2001. At that time Moscow initiated a "freezing" of relations with the Alliance, but now Washington has taken the initiative. Meanwhile, an impartial analysis of these events would enable the partners to avoid recurrence of similar situations in the future.

Another area of cooperation might be cooperation in the military sphere between Russia and the United States within the Russia-NATO Council. Here one can expect a significant effect from the implementation of such activities, such as restoration of the work of the Council, increased military exchanges, and expansion of discussions on future operational coordination: from counterterrorism to peacekeeping, as well as further development of force interoperability, development of compatible communication equipment, exchange of experience in training units, and more.

Considering the possible coupling of individual cooperation to the collective dialogue, it would be useful to examine the military and political resources accumulated by Russia and NATO within the framework of the Partnership for Peace Program. This task can be formulated as the use of experience gained from bilateral relations by other CSTO countries and for the development of partnership programs between the two organizations. This is important, because in the near term the prevailing function of CSTO may become peacekeeping, since the political decision on the peacekeeping activities of the organization have already been made.

Meanwhile, both Russia and its CSTO partners have a lot to learn in this area from both the United States and NATO. This is especially true when it comes to the forms and methods of "civil-military cooperation" (CIMIC) during reconstruction of damaged infrastructure in peace-keeping mission zones. The author was dramatically convinced of their effectiveness from his study of the training of peacekeepers in NATO training centers in Europe,



as well as by observing their actions during the operation in Afghanistan as part of the provincial reconstruction teams in the northern part of the country. Unfortunately, such an important element for stabilizing the situation in a conflict zone is not part of the training plan for Russian peacekeepers. Washington could take on the function of training coordinator for Russian and CAR peacekeepers for their possible future involvement in multinational peacekeeping forces.

Now there is a basis for joint peacekeeping, which is based on the agreement of the heads of state and the government of the NATO countries and Russia on cooperation in the crisis management area.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, a decision was made for the future development of a joint peacekeeping operations concept in the Russia-NATO format. This is acquiring even greater importance with the recognition of the need for joint "crisis response" in any given region of the world. All the more so because Russian peacekeepers have acquired experience in working with American soldiers, for example, during the peacekeeping mission in the Balkans, where they operated as part of the American Division North.

The third area of cooperation is the joint fight against drug trafficking. The problem of successfully countering it, especially in Afghanistan, may be resolved only by using an integrated approach. This would be a change from cooperation between government departments in the interested countries to joint international operations. It would be advisable to introduce the Afghan issue gradually on the basis of the UN platform and maintain contacts on both the working and official levels through the partnership between Russia, the United States and NATO, the EU, and the OSCE.

There is also a need to develop a road map that would provide for gradual progress towards solving the problem of Afghan drugs; every possible assistance to the Afghan government, not only in combating the opium poppy plantations, but also in creating a full-fledged socio-economic infrastructure in the country; and the formation of an international "board of directors" to coordinate and increase the effectiveness of aid to Afghanistan.

Closure of the drug distribution channels from Afghanistan to neighboring countries requires that the borders be secured. This includes using the latest technology. The countries interested in solving this problem is not limited to just Russia and the CAR nations but also include the NATO countries, which are capable of providing appropriate assistance to the bordering countries. One may also explore the desirability and feasibility of practical cooperation between border troops and the special operations forces of the SCO/CSTO countries and ISAF forces to interdict the flow of drugs at the Afghanistan border: initially during joint exercises, and then in practice.

The development of an international drug trafficking database and an exchange of experience among the organizations on the problems and achievements in combating these threats would enhance the effectiveness of the fight against drugs, which are the main source of funds for terrorism. The training of counter-narcotics specialists from Afghanistan and Central Asian countries in SCO and NATO and under UN auspices, including mobile training courses, should also be further developed.

The fourth area is the elimination of the underpinnings for the negative impact of radical Islamic movements on the situation in the region and the involvement of legal Muslim organizations in the fight against them. The potential for conflict in the CAR is "fed" by the activities of foreign radical Islamic fundamentalist centers. This is not only a political and military problem, but a humanitarian one as well. The lack of legal and religious understanding, the political immaturity of a portion of the region's population, and the presence of functionally illiterate and unemployed youth, whose number is increasing because of the difficult socio-economic situation in the region, are also not conducive to stability. Obviously, it would be wise within the framework of the U.S. and Russian cooperation to consider the possibility of a joint research program to study the origins, causes, and incentives for the expansion of religious extremism and the channels through which it penetrates the CAR and how it is financed. It also appears to be important to carry out joint research in order to predict the location and intensity of outbreaks of ethnic intolerance and religious extremism.

One aspect of the ideologues of Islamic extremism and terrorism is their ability to manipulate public opinion using religion. It therefore seems appropriate under auspices of humanitarian cooperation to develop a religious education project aimed at active promotion of secular Islam, to be carried out by legitimate theological institutions. In the context of the revival of traditional religious institutions in the CAR nations, the achievement of agreements with recognized Islamic organizations on sending their teachers, clergy, and missionaries to Afghanistan appears to be entirely likely.

The fifth area is the establishment of peaceful living conditions in Afghanistan, for which broad international aid is needed. In this context it is useful to consider the possibility of involving the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group with U.S. and NATO efforts in the country as a basis for regional cooperation. This will help identify suitable areas for collaboration on the Afghan issue. A potential area of economic cooperation is the development of Afghanistan's road network. An example would be the joint construction with India of a highway from Zaranj to Delaram, which would connect with the Garland highway in Afghanistan. This would make the ports of western India accessible to truck traffic and reduce the distance by highway to the sea by 1,000 km.

The stabilization of Afghanistan is also linked to the availability of water, which is needed for reconstruction and further development of its agriculture. There are several options for the development of this resource, including the use of water from the Amu Darya. They all require investment in Afghanistan's water infrastructure, which, in our view, should become a priority not only for Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, but also for Russia and the United States, and the international organizations.

Energy supply and sustainable development of the entire region are important factors in the restoration of peace in Afghanistan. Investment in the construction the Termez-Puli-Kabul electric power transmission line is within the abilities of international organizations and transnational corporations, which spearheaded by the U.S. and Russia, should assist India in carrying out this project.

The development of Afghanistan is also linked to the need to restore the destroyed infrastructure objects, including those built by the Soviet Union while it was in the country (about 140 facilities of state importance). However, talk about the Russian participation in ISAF actions is obviously premature due to the complicated military situation in the country and the existence of the "Afghan syndrome" in Russian society (similar to feelings in the United States after Vietnam).

The following conclusion can be drawn in the summarizing possible areas of cooperation between Russia and the United States within the framework of international cooperation to neutralize the threats and challenges in CAR. These areas of cooperation can be realized, provided the Western actors led by the United States, "open their eyes" to the actual presence in the region of CSTO and SCO, in both of which Russia participates, and start a constructive dialogue with them. In addition, the leaders of the member nations of these organizations must recognize that the West is in the region "for the long haul," and therefore to suppress or ignore their initiatives for ensuring stability and security does not serve the common interest. There must be a mutual desire of the sides to work together, backed by the political will of their leaders; the United States, Russia, and the international organizations they head, have the physical and other resources.

## Conclusion

The process of maintaining stability and security in the CAR is a difficult and long-term matter, requiring the application of the good will and efforts of many actors. But the process is long overdue and it is vital in the current situation, which is characterized by an abundance of threats and challenges to civilization. In this regard, there is an objective need to develop programs and plans for the practical implementation of a comprehensive policy to provide regional stability and security through joint efforts, the safeguards for which could be cooperative and, later, universal approaches to security issues. Each nation participating in the multilateral cooperation format should see concrete benefits from its contribution to the process of stabilizing the regional situation, otherwise it loses meaning.

Therefore, the policies and practices of Russia and the United States of America need to attend to developing a common crisis response strategy that covers all areas of stability and security in the CAR—not only military, but also economic, humanitarian, and other components—and it needs to be done on a multilateral basis. In this respect, Moscow and Washington have a real chance of international cooperation in the Central Asian region, given the "resetting" of relations between them. In the interests of global security this opportunity must not be missed.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> By CAR the author means that part of the Asian continent where a group of countries without direct access to the World Ocean is located. It covers the Central Asian subregion, which includes Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as Kazakhstan on the north, Mongolia on the east, and Afghanistan on the south.

<sup>2</sup> N. Omarov, the "Century of Global Alternative" for Formation of a New Security Space in Post-Soviet Eurasia [Stoletiye global'noy al'ternativy dlya formirovaniya novogo prostranstva bezopasnosti v postsovetskoy Yevrazii], 2007. p. 252.

<sup>3</sup> NATO Integrated Data Service/NATO News, February 26 to March 11, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Over the past seven years the number of ISAF troops has increased by more than ten times.

<sup>5</sup> During the operation a total of more than 80 million leaflets were printed and dropped in the country (for a population of approximately 27 million).

<sup>6</sup> For example, units on foot in the mountains cannot travel faster than 200 to 500 m/hour, which is ten to 15 times slower than on flat terrain.

<sup>7</sup> Report delivered by Yu. Maltsev, Deputy Director of the Russian Federal Service for Drug Control, at the international conference "The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Activity in Counteracting New Challenges and Threats in Ensuring Regional Security" (April 15, 2009, Moscow).

<sup>8</sup> Approximately 13,000 tonnes of precursors are required to process 60 percent of the opium produced. And according to Kabul, over the past two years a total of 200 tons of precursors have been seized.

[9](#) Statistics show that only 2 percent of the total amount of drugs is seized at the border.

[10](#) In 2008, American intelligence officials acknowledged that a portion of drug revenues goes to support terrorist groups in Afghanistan.

[11](#) Letter from CSTO Secretary General Nikolay Bordyuzha to NATO General Secretary Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, dated July 8, 2004, setting out the key areas for a dialogue and relations between the two organizations.

[12](#) This agreement was reached at a meeting in Rome on May 28, 2002.

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