

U.S.–Russian Strategic Relations and the Structuration of Central Asia

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Abstract: Central Asia is only one of the core regional subsystems of international relations that constitute Central Eurasia. The others are Southwest Asia and South Asia. All three subsystems all mutually distinct and do not intersect. The years 1989–1994 saw the geopolitical enlargement of Southwest Asia into Greater Southwest Asia; 1995–2000, that of Central Asia into Greater Central Asia; and 2001–2006, that of South Asia into Greater South Asia. These “Greater” complements overlap, and their intersection is key to the future of international relations in Greater Central Asia and Central Eurasia as a whole. It is through their matrix that powers such as Russia and the U.S. (as well as China, India, Iran, Turkey) play out their search for influence in Central Asia proper.

Introduction

“Central Asia” nowadays is taken to designate the five countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan: a useful political construct, although not wholly consonant with geographic and demographic realities. Central Asia is only one of several overlapping regional international subsystems constituting *Central Eurasia*, and it requires complementation by the concept of “Greater Central Asia.” This latter includes western China, i.e., Xinjiang plus what is called Inner Mongolia; southern Russia, including southern Siberia; northern and northwestern Afghanistan; and northeastern Iran (Cutler 2004b; compare C.E.S.S. 2006; Stone 2005).

Indeed, Central Eurasia comprises not only Central Asia as a regional international system but also South Asia and Southwest Asia, and even in some contexts (although not in this article) also Southeast Europe. The overlap and interaction of these several regional subsystems are key for the future of Central Eurasia and so for the future of international politics and geo-economics. The present article focuses on Central Asia in this context by exploring its interconnections (and those of Greater Central Asia) with the other regional international systems composing Central Eurasia.

Central Asia’s diplomatic evolution during the 1990s is inseparable from the evolution of Russian policy in its Near Abroad (Herd and Akerman 2002; Jonson 2001), particularly as a lack of direction marked U.S. policy towards the region during that decade (Hill 2001). However, despite the transformation of the international system’s structure by the end of the Cold War, it is still possible to take a systemic perspective; and any systematic discussion of Russian–American relations in Central Asia, even military and strategic relations, would be flawed if it did not give a prominent place as well to other means of national power projection. Questions about energy pipelines need therefore to be addressed in any discussion of military-strategic configurations in Central Asia. Just as in the nineteenth century the construction of domestic railroads in West European countries served the centralized national authorities as means for establishing administrative power in the countryside (Gerschenkron 1962), so today the construction and administration of energy pipelines are axes for the international projection of influence by great powers. These pipelines signify and embody alliances and cooperation among different states.

A systematic perspective is possible, moreover, because Cold War bipolarity ended not with the disappearance of the Soviet Union in 1991 but rather with the dissolution of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe in 1989. Following that event, there naturally arose three successive phases in the transition to the now-emerging international system. These three stages are: (1) the *bubbling-up* of possibilities of new patterns of international relations, relatively free from bipolar constraints; (2) the *settling-down* of unsustainable patterns of structuration of regional subsystems, including the incipient coherence of those remaining; and (3) the *running-deep* of reciprocal relations among those newly cohering subsystems, including the beginning of their relatively autonomous self-direction of their own evolution as regional subsystems of international relations.

For both narrative and analytical purposes, the "bubbling-up" phase may be assigned the dates 1989–1994; the "settling-down" phase, 1995–2000; and the "running-deep" phase, 2001–2006. This article explains how the first phase saw the enlargement of Southwest Asia into Greater Southwest Asia; the second, the enlargement of Central Asia into Greater Central Asia; and the third, the enlargement of South Asia into Greater South Asia. Of course, the present article specifies below the geographic domain of the various "Greater" designations. Southwest, Central, and South Asia do not intersect geographically; however, Greater Southwest and Greater Central Asia intersect, as do Greater Southwest and Greater South Asia, and also Greater Central and Greater South Asia.

Bubbling-Up, 1989–1994

The hook that unravelled Russia's capacity for coherent military action in Central Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s was the civil war in Tajikistan. Tajikistan had developed a fairly well functioning multiparty system in 1990–1991. Leaders of the then-opposition parties came largely from the economically disadvantaged areas of the republic and had a pluralistic and tolerant attitude towards Russian-speakers. Even after the former communist leader had won November 1991 presidential elections, the country experienced a genuinely democratic "spring" in 1992. However, demonstrations in the capital Dushanbe in May 1992 led to the outbreak of civil war. Although conservatives from the Leninabad oblast in the north organized and led these demonstrations, with logistical help from Iran, they did not seek explicitly to overthrow the president, who was nevertheless forced to resign that September by the country's Supreme Soviet, which then abolished the presidency and reinstated a government including many individuals from the north (Horsman 1999).

Uzbekistan's leader Islam Karimov, after eliminating Islamic parties in the Ferghana Valley in 1989, sent troops to fight in the Tajik civil war and presented himself to the West as a bulwark against revolutionary Islam. Russia's relations with Uzbekistan were distant at the time, in part because of disagreements over the situation in Tajikistan, even though both countries recognized and supported a breakaway Uzbek state in northern Afghanistan. Karimov pursued initiatives to settle the conflict in Tajikistan by trying to coordinate diplomatic efforts with Iran and Pakistan, but the CIS mechanisms presided by Russia had greater effect. The Soviet regime had given Uzbekistan the highest international profile among the Central Asian republics, and so, at the time paradoxically, Tashkent relied on its ties with Moscow for its international stature in South and Southwest Asia; precisely these ties, however, evoked distrust among its potential southern partners.

During and immediately after the Soviet collapse, Russia was still present in Central Asia through the military instruments of the Red Army. After 1991, however, the Red Army was no longer the army of the Soviet state that had ceased to exist. For quite some time it remained unclear

whether Soviet soldiers on the national territories of the newly independent states would constitute national armies of those states. The status of the ex-Soviet military bases and the very command structure were likewise in question (Blank 1995). Thus Russia, while interpreting the situation in Tajikistan as a test of its own resolve could neither define nor assert its interests at the end of 1992 and beginning of 1993, the time of the most acute conflict, and could not act as effective mediator among the Tajik factions. Indeed, different Red Army military formations supported different sides in the domestic Tajik conflict (or remained neutral to safeguard public buildings and the Nurek Dam for its hydroelectric power), and their supply of heavy weapons and motorized vehicles was at times critical.

Moscow blamed the CIS, which had failed to adopt a common military strategy, for its own failure to develop a coherent and effective policy. The CIS states finally signed a Collective Security Treaty in Tashkent in mid-May 1992; that September the governments of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan met in Almaty and issued a statement asserting the need to protect Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan. The January 1993 Minsk agreement (signed also by Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan) provided for a collective security force to guarantee the integrity of the southern borders of Tajikistan, after which a bilateral treaty between Dushanbe and Moscow defined the terms under which Russian, Uzbekistani, and Kazakhstani troops would serve on the Tajikistani-Afghan border. The new government in Tajikistan, following its consolidation, subsequently cemented ties with Russia, and Moscow increased financial and economic assistance to Tajikistan.

When the five Central Asian states (as well as Russia and other post-Soviet newly independent states) joined NATO's Partnership for Peace Program in 1994, this had no direct effect upon situations on the ground in the region. After long hesitation the West established, in December 1994 under the aegis of the United Nations, a small Mission of Observers in Tajikistan to monitor the temporary ceasefire agreement that had been reached and to maintain liaison with the OSCE mission there as well as with the CIS forces in place. Western governments worked informally through international organizations to promote a settlement in Tajikistan. Uzbekistan's diplomacy drew inward and turned southward, including towards Iran, mainly out of fear of unrest in Afghanistan spilling over its border.

Economic-financial instability and uncertainty characterized the region at large in the early 1990s, with strategic consequences. During most of 1991 and early 1992, the Central Asian republics looked to the West and the Far East for economic and political support, but they were largely disappointed. One reason why Kazakhstan sought to remain in the ruble zone in summer 1993, after having made plans to introduce its own currency, was that the U.S. did not redeem promises of bilateral and international financial support that it had made in return for Kazakhstan's agreement to dispose of Soviet nuclear weapons in conformance with international protocols. Indeed, for two years after the unsuccessful 1991 putsch against Gorbachev, through autumn 1993, the ruble continued to be used as the currency of the post-Soviet newly independent states. Their governments could set their national monetary policies using those rubles still in circulation without being responsible for the results. That was because the currency's value was still formally guaranteed by Moscow, even if Moscow was the seat of the executive financial authority no longer of the USSR but rather of the independent Russian Federation.

Despite attempts by Uzbekistan to attract foreign investment in the early 1990s, the West showed only limited economic interest in the country. Even after Western investment began to flow into the country, especially in the tobacco and automobile industries, Pakistan began to play a more significant role because Uzbekistani markets are most easily reached through the port of

Karachi (Reetz 1993). Almaty supplanted Tashkent as the region's economic center exactly because of Karimov's slowness in marketizing. Uzbekistan, despite its large population, was soon superseded by Kazakhstan as Central Asia's economic motor (Alam and Banerji 2000).

That development was ironic insofar as Uzbekistan's elite was seeking independence from Moscow in the late 1980s, whereas Kazakhstan's was not. Kazakhstan declared state sovereignty in 1990, but it was not planning on independence. Before August 1991 Kazakhstan strove to develop foreign political economic activity autonomous of Moscow and to weaken the centralized control of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs over the international activities of the still-Soviet republics, but it did not have a foreign policy and was not seeking to develop one. However, after the attempted coup in August 1991, Nazarbaev saw a danger of the USSR breaking apart into Slavic and Turkic camps, so while the Soviet Union still formally existed, he motivated the Ashgabat meeting where the Central Asian republics announced their desire to be founding members of the CIS. Only after the unequivocal downfall of the Soviet regime did Kazakhstan's diplomatic activity acquire a truly global aspect. Its first official state documents, from May 1992, named five main foreign-policy directions: the CIS, the Asia–Pacific region, Asia proper, Europe and the Americas. Kazakhstan's main disputes with Russia in the early 1990s were over compensation for Russian use of the Baikonur cosmodrome, the international transport of petroleum resources and the ethnic Russian population in northern Kazakhstan, including such policy questions as the official state language.

American and general Western interests in Kazakhstan were fairly clear from the beginning. First of all, there was, the need to regulate the question of nuclear arms following the break-up of the Soviet Union; largely through U.S. efforts this interest was satisfied (O.T.A. 1994). Second, the West (and especially the U.S.) was interested to promote the development and export of Kazakhstan's natural resources, which are by no means limited to the petrochemical sector. So the EU as well as the U.S. worked to enable the implantation in Kazakhstan of domestic legal and economic regimes that would complement the norms of the international trading system. That progress, including the privatization of industry, was partly blocked by the old nomenklatura (which by 1995 still represented roughly three-fifths of the central administrative apparatus); however, the resignation of Prime Minister Tereshchenko in autumn 1994 and subsequent turnover in the Council of Ministers, together with the moving of the seat of government to Aqmola, brought a change in the mode and pace of industrial development, including the ratification of a necessary law on property in land.

Kyrgyzstan, historically close to Kazakhstan, did not have significant strategic relations with Russia in the first half of the 1990s, although this had changed by the next decade (Akaev 2004). Its official foreign policy priorities at the time were China, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. Russia and the U.S. were far from unimportant but they were less central. Kyrgyzstan has no border with Russia, but the new regime valued Russian-speakers for their skills; the country was developing a tolerant and pluralistic system (Goetz 1997). With the possible exception of Kyrgyzstan, Russia's relations with Turkmenistan during this period were perhaps its least problematic in all of Central Asia. The two countries had no security problems; their relations focus on the development and exportation of natural resources. Turkmenistan was the second biggest producer of natural gas in the former Soviet Union, next to Russia itself, and sought to sell its energy supplies directly to foreign consumers, but its only export pipelines went through Russia (Cutler 2003). During this early period, Western interest in Turkmenistan focused on facilitating arrangements for Ukraine's payments of its debts to Turkmenistan for natural gas supplies. Thus high U.S. officials attended at talks in Ashgabat between the Ukrainian and Turkmenistan leaderships in November 1994, which resched-

uled those repayments in a manner accommodating Ukraine's shortage of capital and its needs to concentrate on domestic economic development.

Central Asia thus appeared during the years 1989–1994 as an incipient regional international system that connected to the world through possible energy export routes traversing the South Caucasus. At the time, the big issue is whether Azerbaijani oil would reach the Mediterranean Sea and world markets through the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiisk in the Turkish straits, or overland through Georgia to Ceyhan. In contradiction to the skeptics, sufficient oil for both routes has been found. With of the trans-Caspian connection, Southwest Asia grew into Greater Southwest Asia, including the energy-rich provinces in Western Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, as well as offshore areas.

Settling Down, 1995–2000

By the mid-1990s, a Russian sphere of influence in Central Asia had begun slowly to take shape, established and enforced not by military instruments but by wider political means. Tajikistan, for example, had in the early 1990s stressed its community with Iran as against the Turkic countries, but that had changed by the mid-1990s, partly due to Russia's role in events in the country. Although it was mainly with Uzbek help that the Leninabad group from northern Tajikistan took power in Dushanbe, in the end Russian acquiescence greatly facilitated its consolidation. Moscow decided to back the former communist nomenklatura even though the "democratic" opposition in Tajikistan brandished photographs of Yeltsin in the streets. In the early 1990s, the civil war in Tajikistan had represented, for the Uzbekistani government, an external threat of domestic unrest because ethnic Uzbeks constitute about a quarter of Tajikistan's population and dominate the northern part of the country.

During the period 1995–2000, even as Russia began to reinforce its relations with traditional Soviet allies in the region such as Iraq, a more significant U.S.–Russian cooperation began to take hold as the American embassy in Almaty assisted in the restructuring of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) so that Kazakhstani oil from Tengiz could reach world markets through southern Russia (Cutler 1999). Events during the second half of the 1990s thus altered the impressions of U.S.–Russian competition in the Caspian Sea basin. Also during this period came the political progress during the final signature of the agreements for the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. Russian companies, notably Lukoil, even indicated they would participate in the BTC pipeline until pressure from the Russian Presidency forced them to withdraw, marking the beginning of the subordination of most Russian energy trusts to state interests as defined in the Kremlin.

Explicit military cooperation between Central Asia and the West began to take effect during the second half of the 1990s. In April 1995 NATO supported the decision by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to create a Central Asian battalion (Centrazbat). Each country contributed one battalion to the 600-strong formation. Between 1997 and 2000, Centrazbat participated in NATO military exercises in Central Asia in the Partnership for Peace framework. However, when NATO funding stopped, Centrazbat ceased to exist. In its place, the countries concerned created national peacekeeping forces and enhanced cooperation with the Russian forces in the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

In 1995 the U.S. designated Uzbekistan as a "strategic partner." This was an attempt to reorient Uzbekistan's diplomatic direction away from South Asia, an orientation conditioned by Uzbekistan's geopolitical situation and close inter-ethnic relations with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. At

first, Washington's attempt to orient Uzbekistan's perceptions westward seemed to bear fruit. After Kazakhstan was also designated a "strategic partner" by the U.S. in the late 1990s, Uzbekistan responded competitively by joining the GUAM (Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova) entente, turning it into "GUUAM." Continuing its turn away from Russia and towards the U.S. and the West, Uzbekistan left the CIS CSTO in May 1999.

Even in the late 1990s, Putin's focus on Central Asia was qualitatively new in the post-Kozyrev period. The attention paid to Asia by Boris Yeltsin's foreign minister Evgenii Primakov went to traditional Soviet allies such as Iran, India, and China. Under Primakov, a "Eurasianist" strand did enter post-Soviet Russian foreign policy in the mid-1990s, and it was enhanced by NATO's intervention in the Balkans and its extension of relations with former Soviet-bloc countries in East Central Europe (Lynch 2001). Russia's turn to focus on Central Asia was in part an expression of its exasperation with what it saw as NATO's intrusions into the South Caucasus and former Soviet bloc; nevertheless, Putin's rapprochement with Central Asia may well have occurred irrespective of that. Western hopes for democratization of the Central Asian governments seemed to fall into tatters. The deepening misery of the Central Asian populations established a fertile field for dissident doctrine and political opposition, creating a potential security nightmare that the governments in the region would themselves have been unable to handle without Russian assistance.

Yet even during the late 1990s, when a degree of competition over energy export pipelines seemed superficially still to characterize U.S.–Russian relations in the South Caucasus, the two countries implicitly shared common interests in South and Central Asia, and the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan triangle in particular. In particular, both were concerned about the need to beat back the Islamic fundamentalism of the Taliban and its influence in Uzbekistan through the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Still, the U.S. was, in the months and years leading up to September 2001, increasingly absent from Central Asia, both diplomatically and militarily, limiting its economic activity mostly to promoting energy development in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Before September 2001, no one imagined circumstances under which the U.S. would actually put soldiers' "boots on the ground" in Central Asia.

The year 1999 saw a reversal of Uzbekistan's diplomatic course. The February 1999 Tashkent bombings and the incursions that summer by the IMU from over the border in Afghanistan were principal developments motivating the enlargement of central Asia into *Greater Central Asia*, i.e., that complex of the five Central Asian countries plus those transborder regions with which there are historical, geographic, and demographic ties (including southern Siberia, western China and northern Afghanistan): not to be confused with the U.S. diplomatic and economic initiative called the "Greater Central Asia Initiative" (Starr 2005). The February 1999 events led Karimov to reverse course, publicly recognizing "Russia's interests in Uzbekistan" when President Vladimir Putin visited Tashkent in December that year.

Russia looked southward from the center of the Eurasian landmass to see a soft-underbelly Central Asian buffer zone perilously appear as a political near-vacuum, threatening collapse and incipient chaos, a geopolitical "greater Tajikistan" in the sense of conflict and instability; it moved to fill the vacuum by consolidating its influence. Karimov reasonably decided that Russia had more to offer in terms of actual military and combat support against the Taliban-supported IMU. Even though U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Tashkent in April 2000, Karimov declared a month later, with Putin again at his side, that his country's and Russia's strategic view of Central Asia entirely coincided. A new reorientation of Uzbekistan's international strategy had begun.

Yet in Central Asia, Putin quickly targeted not Uzbekistan but rather Kazakhstan as his highest priority. Almost the day after his election, one of President Nazarbaev's closest advisors, the head

of the Kazakhstan National Security Council, Marat Tazhin, visited Moscow and signed a cooperation agreement with his Russian counterpart. Continuing the strategic competition with Kazakhstan that ran through the 1990s, Uzbekistan in June 2001 joined the "Shanghai-5" grouping when it institutionalized itself as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This move reinforced its relations not just with China but also with Russia.

It is possible to summarize the nature of Russian–American relations in Central Asia proper, during the second half of the 1990s, according to the most important countries there. It could be schematically argued, that Russian–American relations in Kazakhstan were characterized by cooperation, in Uzbekistan by competition and in Turkmenistan by conflict: not military conflict but rather by irreconcilable differences of interests over routes for Turkmenistan's gas exports to world markets. Russia's desire to keep Turkmenistan's gas production exclusively for its own pipelines, whether for domestic consumption or re-export at world prices. This monopsony was opposed by U.S. policy, which consistently sought to find other routes to market for energy supplies from the newly independent states. In the instance of Turkmenistan, this could have been via the undersea Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline (TCGP) project to Azerbaijan that failed to materialize or the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) pipeline project that was put on hold after the Taliban took power in Kabul.

Notwithstanding this schematic outline, it remains nevertheless the case today (in contrast with the Cold War era when the two only superpowers mainly structured the entire system from the top down) that the networked multilateralism of energy geo-economics has motivated the consolidation of regional international systems participating pro-actively in the restructuring of the international system from the bottom up and having sufficient autonomy to set their own norms and goals in this respect. If by the late 1990s the CPC for Kazakhstani oil to Novorossiisk was a certainty, and some main aspects of energy competition in Central Asia were thereby resolved, nevertheless nearby in South Asia relations were more complex. The next section explains how this occurred, and it brings the analytical narrative up to the present.

Running Deep, 2001–2006

A look back over the 1990s reveals better how U.S.–Russian relations in Central Asia have unfolded so far in the early twenty-first century and why they are less central than was once the case. For this purpose, it is useful to reflect upon the enlargement of the Cold War construct of "Southwest Asia." If before 1990 this term was an artefact of Western strategy during the Cold War and meant the Arabian peninsula (plus Turkey, Iraq, and Iran), then in the first half of the 1990s, the South Caucasus was implicitly incorporated into that construct. This development resulted not from an explicit reformulation of U.S. strategic doctrine but rather from Turkey's attempts to project its national influence into the region as the possibility of Azerbaijani oil exports through Turkey reached the international agenda. The pre-Taliban project for a Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas export pipeline represents in this context a nascent but at the time unrealized reconnection of Central with South Asia.

As the twenty-first century opened, Turkmenistan's diplomacy had begun to lean slightly westward and Uzbekistan's slightly southeastward. These two countries were pivot points for the later adjoinment of western South Asia (mainly Afghanistan plus Pakistan) to Greater Southwest Asia. The Uzbek and Tajik connections in northern Afghanistan also bound western South Asia to Central Asia. Throughout this period the U.S. tried to promote a restructuring of Central Asia (and Central Eurasia) consonant with American interests. The first half of the first decade of the twenty-

first century represented an American attempt to force a unipolar conformity upon the structure and behavior of the international system. This was not possible, and the result has been the emergence of international and transnational phenomena that not only intermediate between Central Asia and the U.S./Western Europe but also are able act with some degree of relative autonomy because of the human and natural resources at their disposal.

The position of Turkey in this complex situation deserves a few additional words. Turkey's relations with the former Soviet republics of Central Asia developed into three types. First, there were cultural initiatives that sought, with less than complete success, to promote the Latin alphabet and the Turkish language as a *lingua franca*. Second, there were (and are) economic relations, including cooperation to assist in the transition to the market, including infrastructural development and also schemes within a framework of regional cooperation. Third, especially at a time when it appeared that the influence of Islamic fundamentalism was weakening inside Iran, there was the propagation of Kemalist principles on the differentiation between Islam and the state, including emphasis on the relevance of the "Turkish model" for the former Soviet republics in Central Asia (Robins, 1998). Turkish foreign policy in the second half of the 1990s did not exhibit the cohesiveness and vision that characterized it earlier in the decade. It is very possible that this was due, in significant degree, to coalition government and insecure political leadership. Indeed, one of the few constants during this period was the U.S.–Turkish cooperation in promoting pipelines for the export to market of energy resources from the former Soviet republics surrounding the Caspian Sea littoral.

In the second half of the 1990s, when possibilities for trans-Caspian energy pipelines came under international discussion, the eastern Caspian Sea offshore from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and its adjacent continental energy provinces in western Central Asia were geo-economically and geopolitically adjoined to the "new" Southwest Asia that already included the South Caucasus. This enlarged construct is the "Greater Southwest Asia" that is analogous to the extension of Central Asia into Greater Central Asia as described earlier in this chapter. It only remains, for the period 2001–2006, to define a South Asia and a Greater South Asia in such a way that South, Southwest, and Central Asia minimally intersect with one another. Their analytical interrelations would then be revealed through the overlap of their respective "Greater" constructs. Following this logic, South Asia would include India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and at least the Pushtun regions of Afghanistan. Greater South Asia would then include also Sikkim, Nepal, Jammu and Kashmir, all of Afghanistan, areas of eastern Iran populated by ethnic groups that spill over the border into Afghanistan, and even the southern Uzbekistan plain.

The U.S. was comparatively absent from Central Asia prior to the terrorist acts in New York City (compare Collins and Wohlforth 2003: 299), limiting its economic presence to promoting Caspian energy development and export in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Yet the subsequent formation of a U.S.-sponsored "global anti-terrorist coalition," at the time directed against the Taliban regime in Kabul, did not restrain a simultaneously increasing Sino–Russian rapprochement. That rapprochement was institutionalized in 2001 by their signing of a bilateral treaty and by the multi-lateral creation of the SCO with Uzbekistan in attendance as a new member (Khidirbekughli 2002). Two of China's intentions in founding the SCO were to increase pressure on the Central Asian countries to act against Uyghur militants, and to oppose U.S. global political and economic interests; indeed, on 11 September 2001 a Chinese delegation was in Kabul signing a long-term economic and technical cooperation agreement with the Taliban regime.

In 2005, the SCO opened in 2005 its Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), originally planned likewise for Bishkek in fact housed in Tashkent. Following September 2001, Washington acquired two military bases in Central Asia to assist logistically in the attack upon Afghanistan: the

Karshi-Khanabad air base in southern Uzbekistan and the Ganci air base at Manas International Airport near the capital Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan. Second thoughts about these bases grew throughout the region following the subsequent attack on Iraq. In summer 2005, the SCO issued a collective statement inviting the U.S. to set a timetable for evacuating its troops from the region. The U.S. declined, but after Washington criticized the Uzbekistan government's repression of a civilian demonstration in Andijon, Tashkent told them to leave.

Uzbekistan's membership of the SCO seemed to be an element in the ongoing consolidation of regional international systems, in the context of the emergence of a networked global international system following the end of the post–Cold War transition. It seemed that Central Asia would be divided between competing Russian and Chinese spheres of influence, the latter expanding westward from Xinjiang while also threatening Russia through illegal immigration not only to Central Asia but also to Siberia. In the Asia–Pacific region, Russian strategy renewed its attention to a rapprochement with the Central Asian states but also developed limited strategic cooperation with China. Indeed, aspects of Russo–Chinese cooperation were strongly in evidence. The bilateral July 2001 Treaty on Good-Neighborly Relations, Friendship and Cooperation was the first such treaty between the two countries in a half-century. It included provisions for up to two thousand Chinese officers to be trained annually in Russian military schools and for Russian arms sales to China to increase, including high-technology exports for indigenous Chinese weapons development.

Summary

After 1989, how (i.e., both in what manner and to what extent) did relations inherited from the bipolar nuclear superpower system maintain themselves or continue under a different guise? For the period 1989–1994, it is clear that U.S.–Russian relations remained the principal systemic factor still structuring the evolution of Central Asia, even while events in Tajikistan unleashed a fundamental reorientation of regional international relations through the transborder ethnic Uzbek connection. Samarkand and Bukhara, in present-day Uzbekistan, are historical centers of Tajik settlement and influence. Soviet census procedures reported a figure of five per cent as Tajik component in Uzbekistan's population, but the actual figure is several times higher than that (Sengupta 2000). Uzbekistan on several occasions sent its troops across Kyrgyzstan's and Kazakhstan's border to conduct exercises, without seeking permission to enter the respective national territories. Important regional dynamics thus began to unfold that would soon overcome U.S.–Russian bipolar systemic constraints. In the meanwhile, competition between the two countries was focussed mainly through the lens of the hydrocarbon resources in the region, both in Central Asia and in the geopolitically adjacent South Caucasus.

During the period 1995–2000, even as Russia began to reinforce its relations with traditional Soviet allies in the region such as Iraq, the U.S. assisted in the restructuring of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium so that Kazakhstani oil from Tengiz could reach world markets. The simultaneous progress towards the final signature of the agreements for the construction of the BTC pipeline, taking Azerbaijan's offshore oil to the eastern Mediterranean for export to world markets, confirmed the enlargement of Southwest Asia into Greater Southwest Asia and its indissoluble linkages with the South Caucasus. Russian companies, notably Lukoil, indicated they would participate in the BTC pipeline until pressure from the Russian state forced them to withdraw. This development confirmed the victory of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over the Ministry of Natural Resources within the Russian state administration, and it marked the beginning of the subordination of most

Russian energy trusts to Russian state interests as determined by the Presidency of the Russian Federation.

The disappearance of the Taliban regime from Kabul after 2001 has led to the restarting of plans for a Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) gas pipeline, not only to supply Pakistan but also to take natural gas to the Indian Ocean and liquefy it there for export to world markets. Discussions for planning the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project have the same effect, with a slightly different geometry. As a result of talks concerning the IPI project, the TAP project does not now exclude extension of the pipeline from Pakistan into India. All these developments have anchored both Pakistan and Afghanistan (still part of Greater South Asia) to Greater Southwest Asia, through the intermediary of Turkmenistan.

Putin's strategic cooperation with the United States after September 2001 confronted opposition among the Red Army general staff. But if his worldview was still in flux in late 2001, divided between the wishes of his military and his own sympathies for Washington's travails (finally someone would understand what Russia confronted in the North Caucasus!), then this has changed since. In retrospect, it seems that it was not the terrorist attacks in New York City nor the direct response to it (i.e., the enforced regime change in Afghanistan) that confirmed the unipolar-vs.-multipolar nature of the emerging international system. This was confirmed not in 2001 but rather in 2003, with the U.S. war upon Iraq. Such actors as China, Iran, Pakistan, India and Turkey have since then taken a place aside the traditional great powers interested in Central Asia; the simultaneous increase in the number of players competing for hydrocarbon energy resources around the Caspian Sea littoral confirms the shift. As for the U.S., it has been caught between its pursuit of strictly bilateral relations with the Central Asian countries on the one hand and, on the other hand, its unipolar tendency that militates against encouraging cooperation among the states in the region (MacFarlane 2004; compare Starr 2005).

If during the twentieth-century interwar system (i.e., 1919–1939), the Soviet Union played the balance between revisionist and *status quo* powers (Ulam 1974), then today it is China that does so. Following that analogy, the *status quo* powers would be the U.S., the EU and the latter's principal member-states; Russia has in 2006 turned in a revisionist direction (Trenin 2006), losing its post-2001 sympathy towards the U.S. and now seeking definitely to alter the geopolitical and geo-economic outcome of the Cold War. For this, Russia plays the energy card *vis-à-vis* Europe and appears to play the China card against the U.S. in Central Asia; however, in fact it is at least as much China that plays the Russian card against the U.S. there.

Conclusion and Prospect

The coordinative and collaborative aspects of the second act of the Cold War international system, 1979/80–1991, which may variously be called its Multilateral Interdependence or Loose Bipolar moment (Cutler 1999a/2004a), still characterized the international transition from 1989/91 to the beginning of the twenty-first century. The years 1989–2000 do not represent a "post-Cold War system" but a transitional period to a new international structure. Russia and the U.S. were the two main "architects" of this post-Cold War transition in Central Eurasia in general, and Central Asia in particular, during the first half of the 1990s. This natural fact was one of the early inheritances, today superseded, from the Cold War system.

Indeed, it is impossible to resist observing that the three phases outlined here, representing the transformation from the Cold War international system in Central Eurasia into what we have now, map onto the three distinct meanings (preservation, destruction, and transcendence) of the Hegelian

dialectical synthesis *Aufhebung*. In particular: the years 1989–1994 represent the *preservation* of U.S.–Russian bipolarity in the region even as new currents were “bubbling up” from lower levels of analysis beneath; the years 1995–2000 represent the *destruction* of that bipolarity as those new currents were “settling down” into pattern of international relations that more and more supplanted the residual dominance of the previous overarching bipolar structure; and the years 2001–2006 represent the *transcendence* of that former superpower bipolarity, of which traces nevertheless remain, confirming that it has also been (and still remains) both preserved and destroyed.

It was not automatic that the collapse of the Soviet Union would lead to the consolidation this crescent-shaped “meta-region” of Central Eurasia containing the Caucasus and Central Asia as an acknowledged new area of geopolitics and energy geo-economics. For this to take place, three conditions were required: international financial and industrial interest in the impressive natural resources in the region, the political will of the only remaining superpower, and the free and rapid exchange of information possible only through the Internet and other electronic telecommunications. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, all these three conditions had taken hold.

In the late twentieth century, it became evident that regional systems of international relations may be organized around littorals as well as continentally. With the disappearance of the Soviet Union, there are now self-organized regional systems not only over contiguous landmasses (Central Asia, South Asia, Southwest Asia) but also around the Black Sea and Caspian Sea (not to mention the Mediterranean). Against this background, Central Asia appears in relief as a kind of continental littoral: a large part of its central mass is mainly barren desert, surrounded by a regional “demographic littoral.”

The present survey of Russian–American relations in Central Asia reveals the principal secular trend that this region ceases to be the remote province described by Mackinder with a “almost mystical aura” (Hooson 1964: 120) in the middle of the mystical undifferentiated land mass, and instead becomes progressively more and more connected up first with neighboring regions and then with further flung regions (compare Black et al. 1992; Trenin 2001). By 2006, it has become extremely difficult to frame any overall discussion of Central (Eur)Asia solely, or even predominantly, in terms of U.S.–Russian conflict or cooperation. The two countries’ bilateral relations have simply ceased to be a controlling factor in these regions of the emerging international system, except where Russia plays the part of an anti-hegemon against American attempts to impose unipolar structure. This relatively autonomous evolution expresses a self-directed bottom-up restructuring of international relations, free from the compelling top-down constraints characteristic of the Cold War period.

The “core” regional international subsystems of Southwest Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia are all mutually distinct: they do not intersect. The intersections among these regions and the dynamic for their interactions arise from the intersections of their respective “Greater” complements. The foregoing analytical narrative has shown how the years 1989–1994 saw the geopolitical enlargement of Southwest Asia into Greater Southwest Asia; 1995–2000, that of Central Asia into Greater Central Asia; and 2001–2006, that of South Asia into Greater South Asia. Greater Southwest Asia and Greater Central Asia intersect on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea and northeastern Iran; Greater Southwest Asia and Greater South Asia intersect in eastern Iran and western Afghanistan; and Greater Central Asia and Greater South Asia intersect in northern Afghanistan and northeastern Iran plus southern Uzbekistan.

The union of those three two-way intersections is then: eastern and northeastern Iran, northern and western Afghanistan and southern Uzbekistan; plus western Turkmenistan and western Kazakhstan on the Caspian Sea littoral. If the regional subsystems proper are considered as like tectonic

plates on the geopolitical and geo-economic surface of the earth, then the regions of their intersection are the locus of fault-lines produced by the welling-up of demographic and historical realities. Any geographical designation for this critical area would be unwieldy, but the most accurate might be "western Central Asia and northwestern Greater South Asia" (including parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan). This area of intersection first began to take shape in the late 1990s, as (1) western Central Asia, i.e. the eastern Caspian Sea littoral, was confirmed as a region of international geo-economic interest due to its energy resources; and (2) northwestern Greater South Asia, including the transborder regions from western Uzbekistan eastward to Kyrgyzstan, began to be destabilized by Taliban–IMU cooperation after the civil war in Tajikistan had destabilized a smaller sub-region had been destabilized in the early 1990s.

There is a significant analytical literature drawing attention to Uzbekistan as a Mackinder-like "pivot" in Central Asia (Starr 1996; Megoran 2004; Seiple 2005). It is true that Uzbekistan's political-territorial integrity requires deeper attention (Markowitz 2004) and is not to be taken for granted (Li 2002; Beissinger and Young 2002). Yet we cannot exclude either Uzbekistani or Iranian encroachments upon the territorial integrity, respectively, of eastern and southern Turkmenistan during the political succession to President Niyazov, whenever this occurs. It is on the broad trans-regional area of "western Central Asia and northwestern Greater South Asia" that attention should concentrate so as to bring into focus the future of Greater Central Asia as a whole. Just as the civil war in Tajikistan had spill-over effects into Uzbekistan that have influenced the evolution of the whole southern part of Central Asia, so events in the trans-regional area distinguished above (not limited to Central Asia proper) will have spill-over effects eventually reaching the whole of Central Eurasia.

System-level constraints on such evolution will come in large part, although of course not exclusively, from the constitution of networks of energy exploration, production, and export, which today require multilateral cooperation and for which pipeline construction will remain the best indicator of system-level cooperation and alliances among greater and lesser powers. The social and cultural orientations of the populations in this meta-region, together with and in part conditioned by those geo-economic and geo-strategic structures, hold the key to the stability or instability, not only of the regional systems of international relations here delineated, but also of the international system as a whole. These local effects will be mediated to the international systems through the aforementioned intersecting regional subsystems Greater South Asia and Greater Southwest Asia, as well as Greater Central Asia.

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