

REGIONAL POLITICS

**GREATER SOUTH ASIA—
AMERICA'S NEW REGIONAL APPROACH
TO CENTRAL AND SOUTH ASIA:
HOW IT IS DEVELOPING AND
WHAT PROMPTED IT**

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Introduction

Late in 2005 the United States opened a new page in its relationship with Central Asia as a region. Until that time the U.S. Administration still looked at it as a region in its own right, closely connected with the CIS and consisting of five post-Soviet states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Today the U.S. State Department is practicing a new approach based on an absolutely novel idea about regional division. Central Asia and South Asia form a single region, which I will call here Greater South Asia.

In this article I have undertaken the task of tracing the evolution of this approach, starting from the moment of its official recognition. I

shall also analyze the Greater Central Asia project of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at the Johns Hopkins University, which the U.S. Administration adopted as the cornerstone of its new conception. I shall compare the projects of the U.S. Administration and the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute to arrive at certain conclusions.

I shall investigate Central Asia's new importance for the United States created by the new regional approaches. In addition, I shall analyze what prompted this approach (on which the Greater South Asia project rests) in the first place, as well as the aims the U.S. wants to achieve through the project.

Washington's New Approach to Central and South Asia

In October 2005, the United States first demonstrated its new approach to Central Asia and Afghanistan at the official level; later U.S. State Department spokesmen repeatedly confirmed it. It found its way into the press release the White House issued on the results of President George W. Bush's visit to Pakistan early in March 2006 and in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America published in the middle of March 2006. The U.S. State Department was restructured accordingly; the Central Asian Infrastructure Integration Initiative program was launched.

The U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice described America's new approach to the region for the first time in October 2005 during her Central Asian visit. On 13 October, 2005, speaking at the Eurasian National University of Kazakhstan, she said in particular: "Afghanistan needs the full partnership of this entire region to overcome the destitution that tyrants, and extremists, and warlords, and civil war have compounded over several decades. A secure and prosperous Afghanistan, which anchors Central Asia and links it to South Asia, is essential to the future of economic success."¹

Somewhat later, on 16 February, 2006, Richard Boucher, nominated to the post of Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, used similar terms when speaking at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "Afghanistan, at the center of this region, can be a bridge that links South and Central Asia, rather than a barrier that divides them,"² said he, since "South and Central Asia belong together."³

Information supplied by the White House on the results of President George W. Bush's visit to Pakistan early in March 2006 also used similar terms: the American president and President of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf pointed out that they were committed "to working together with Afghanistan to make Pakistan and Afghanistan a land bridge linking the economic potentials of South Asia and Central Asia."⁴

America's new approach to Central Asia became part of the National Security Strategy of the United States of America published in the middle of March 2006; one of its sections, "South and Central Asia," says: "South and Central Asia is a region of great strategic importance where American interests and values are engaged as never before;"⁵ "our relations with the nations of South Asia can serve as a foundation for deeper engagement throughout a Central Asia,"⁶ while "Afghanistan will assume its historical role as a land-bridge between South and Central Asia, connecting these two vital regions."⁷

In this way, the new approach presented first by the U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice and then by President George W. Bush and registered by the National Security Strategy regards Central and South Asia as the elements of one region Afghanistan is expected to keep together.

¹ *Remarks at Eurasian National University*, Speech of Condoleezza Rice, U.S. State Secretary, at the Lev Gumilev National University of Kazakhstan, 13 October, 2005, available at [<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/54913.htm>], 3 June, 2006.

² "Pursuing Peace, Freedom and Prosperity in South and Central Asia," remarks Ambassador Richard Boucher before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington D.C., 16 February, 2006, available at [<http://www.state.gov/p/sea/rls/rm/2006/61317.htm>], 3 June, 2006.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Joint Statement on United States-Pakistan Strategic Partnership*, White House press release, 4 March, 2006, available at [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060304-1.html?pagewanted=all&position=>], 3 June, 2006.

⁵ *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, March 2006, p. 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Meanwhile, in Central Asia, Washington is lobbying an idea about Afghanistan as part of the region: “When I was in Central Asia, I was very much struck that the countries of Kyrgyzstan, of Kazakhstan, even of Tajikistan, very much see Afghanistan as a part of the region that is Central Asia,”⁸ said Condoleezza Rice in Washington on 5 January, 2005. Obviously, the idea of Afghanistan as a part of Central Asia, after striking root in the minds of the region’s ruling elite, will help the U.S. to realize its new regional policies.

Ms. Rice’s speech of 13 October, 2005 at the National University of Kazakhstan provides an idea of how Afghanistan could play its role. The U.S. State Secretary said, in particular: “The United States is fully committed to helping Kazakhstan and its Central Asian neighbors integrate themselves into the global economy”⁹ and added that they “already hard at work with our partners in Afghanistan and Tajikistan in rebuilding the roads and bridges that are essential to revitalized regional and global trade.”¹⁰

At the same time, on 27 October, 2005, Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, speaking at the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia of the House International Relations Committee, said: “Regional economic development is one of our top policy priorities in Central Asia. We are deepening our support of the countries of Central Asia to expand regional trade and investment. The trade links of the ancient Silk Road need to be revitalized to provide Central Asia with greater access to the global economy, through both South Asia and Europe.”¹¹

The Central Asian Infrastructure Integration Initiative with a budget of \$1 million the United States launched in October 2005 is designed to execute these plans; it is being carried out by the U.S. Trade and Development Agency and is aimed at Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, the project might be extended to the region’s other countries. Its authors have described the project’s key tasks: “To connect Afghanistan with the rest of the world, to restore and build new infrastructure links between Central and South Asia, to increase stability of the entire region through greater people-to-people contacts.”¹²

Within the Initiative, the Almaty-Bishkek-Dushanbe-Kabul-Karachi highway will receive priority attention. It begins in Almaty, crosses Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan, and reaches Pakistan at the port of Karachi.¹³ Besides, much attention will be paid to the development of the energy systems for transferring electric power from Central Asia to Afghanistan and Pakistan.¹⁴ Other promising trends will be investigated within the project.

Washington clearly intends to implement the idea of turning Afghanistan into a link between Central and South Asia to integrate them into a single region. This will be accomplished with the help of U.S.-promoted transportation and energy corridors that will cross Afghanistan to tie Central and South Asia together.

⁸ “Central Asia Now ‘Arc of Opportunity,’ ‘Not Crisis,’ Rice Says,” Washington file, 6 January, 2006, available at [<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=January&x=20060106145107mvyelwarc0.2283594&t=xarchives/xarchitem.html>], 3 June, 2006.

⁹ “Remarks at Eurasian National University,” 13 October, 2005, available at [<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/54913.htm>], 3 June, 2006.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *A Strategy for Central Asia*, Speech of Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs at the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia of the House International Relations Committee, available at [<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/55766.htm>], 3 June, 2006.

¹² *Central and South Asia Economic Integration*, Presentation of the U.S. delegation representative at OSCE, 14th OSCE economic forum, 23 January, 2006, available at [http://www.osce.org/documents/eea/2006/01/17816_en.pdf], 3 June, 2006.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

Early in 2006, the U.S. State Department was restructured: Central Asia was taken away from the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs to become part of the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs set up on the basis of the Bureau of South Asian Affairs.

On 5 January, 2006, U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice offered the following comment: "One of the things that we did in the State Department was to move the Central Asian republics out of the European bureau, which really was an artifact of their having been states of the Soviet Union, and to move them into the bureau that is South Asia, which has Afghanistan, India and Pakistan."¹⁵ "It represents what we're trying to do, which is to think of this region as one that will need to be integrated, and that will be a very important goal for us,"¹⁶ she added.

Obviously, this reform was carried out in connection with Washington's new approach to Central and South Asia and Afghanistan with the aim of adding efficiency to the U.S. State Department, and in particular with the aim of integrating Central and South Asia and developing Afghanistan as a link between these two regions.

The Greater Central Asia Project

America's new approach to Central Asia initiated by the U.S. State Department and the working project Greater Central Asia Partnership published in March 2005 by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at the Johns Hopkins University are obviously connected. It should be said here that the July-August 2005 issue of *Foreign Affairs* carried an article by Frederick Starr, who heads the Institute, entitled "A Partnership for Central Asia," which outlined the project.

Mr. Starr subjected the approach to Central Asia and Afghanistan dominating America's policies then to mild criticism: "The geographical delineations used by the U.S. government prevent policymakers from recognizing Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan as comprising a single region,"¹⁷ which, he was convinced, "has impeded the development of a coherent Central Asia policy."¹⁸

The author offered an alternative project devised by his Institute based on the new regional approach to Central Asia, Afghanistan, and South Asia as a single Greater Central Asia region linked to South Asia by including Afghanistan into Central Asia, hitherto composed of five Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), and by describing it as South Asia's natural extension.

He insists that the United States should make economic cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbors one of its key priorities. Mr. Starr believes that, due to its geographic location, Afghanistan is Central Asia's natural outlet to the warm seas, therefore transport infrastructure, railways in particular, as well as transit gas and oil pipelines, are an absolute must for it. Trade and transit will help the region revive economically and politically, thus helping the five Central Asian countries and certain other neighbors to successfully address their own problems.

To realize the new regional approach, a new regional institute Greater Central Asia Partnership for Cooperation and Development (GCAP) with a forum status should be created. The author believes

¹⁵ "Central Asia Now 'Arc of Opportunity,' 'Not Crisis,' Rice Says."

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ S.F. Starr, "A Partnership for Central Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2005.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*

that it might be effective in the spheres of security, administration, democratization, economy, transport and trade, agriculture, and anti-drug efforts, as well as in religion, culture, and education.¹⁹ However, the partnership is mainly intended to promote economic integration between Afghanistan and its neighbors.

From the very beginning, the project has been described as an “open project” in which the United States, the Central Asian countries, and Afghanistan can cooperate with the members of the counterterrorist coalition, as well as regional actors—India, Pakistan, and Turkey—and Russia and China. Mr. Starr has taken the trouble of emphasizing that the project is not directed against the interests of the two latter states and that they might even profit from it.

He described India and Turkey as countries that, together with the United States, might become “unofficial guarantors of sovereignty and stability in the region.”²⁰ He also approves of Pakistan’s involvement, even if “its territory is still used by terrorists to mount raids into neighboring Afghanistan, and the Musharraf regime is no model of democracy.”²¹ Pakistan, India, and Turkey were quite logically invited to join GCAP in order to make them America’s allies within the project.

Greater South Asia Instead of Greater Central Asia

America’s new approach to Central and South Asia and Afghanistan is obviously based on the project of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute. The core was carefully preserved, while the rest was somewhat corrected and enriched with a fundamentally different conceptual approach.

Both the Institute’s project and the U.S. Administration’s new regional approach stress the need to integrate Central and South Asia economically by stitching them together by means of transportation and energy corridors across Afghanistan.

To achieve this, the Institute suggested that a consultative regional GCAP forum should be set up to plan, coordinate, and implement programs in various spheres ranging from security to education. The forum should concentrate, though, on promoting economic integration.

The U.S. Administration, however, has not set up a similar regional multifunctional structure: it initiated the Central Asian Infrastructure Integration Initiative designed to encourage economic cooperation between Central and South Asia as well as development of Afghanistan by implementing regional projects in the energy, transport, and communication spheres. The Initiative can even be described as a “simplified” GCAP structure intended to accomplish the same tasks.

There is an obvious parallel between the restructuring of the U.S. State Department effected within America’s new approach to the region and that part of the work done by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute that compares the structures of the U.S. Defense and State departments²² and recommends instituting the post of Assistant Secretary of State for Greater Central Asia.²³ There is an obvious connection between the Institute’s key recommendation to “arrange a visit by the President or Secretary of State to the region to launch GCAP”²⁴ and U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice’s Central Asian visit in October 2005.

¹⁹ See: S.F. Starr, “A ‘Greater Central Asia Partnership’ for Afghanistan and Its Neighbors,” *Silk Road Paper*, March 2005, pp. 27-34.

²⁰ S.F. Starr, “A Partnership for Central Asia.”

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² See: S.F. Starr, “A ‘Greater Central Asia Partnership’ for Afghanistan and Its Neighbors,” p. 13.

²³ See: *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

It should be stressed that some of the Institute's propositions and recommendations were left beyond the scope of the new American regional policies: this is true of the GCAP forum idea, which was not fully realized, as well as certain recommendations the Institute described as key ones: broader powers for the U.S. ambassador in Kabul to coordinate GCAP implementation in the region, broader powers for the Department of Defense's top official in Afghanistan, and the post of senior counter-narcotics coordinator in Kabul.²⁵

Finally, there is an important conceptual distinction between the U.S.'s regional approach and the Institute's project. The Institute concentrated on setting up a Greater Central Asia linked to South Asia, while the new American approach looked at Central and South Asia as a single and interconnected region. This means that the Institute came forward with a conception of a new region it called Greater Central Asia linked to South Asia, while the U.S. Administration went further to formulate a conception of a new single South and Central Asia region held together by Afghanistan.

The formula now in use in America's official parlance—South and Central Asia—brings to mind another formula—Central Asia and the Caucasus. Both were born for very similar reasons. Central Asia and the Caucasus, however, are relatively similar in many respects (population strength, GDP, etc.), therefore a conceptual union will create a more or less equal alliance. Central Asia, with its total population and aggregate GDP of 60 million and \$0.23 trillion, respectively, does not come anywhere close to South Asia: India alone has a population of 1 billion and GDP of \$3.6 trillion.²⁶ This means that the two regions could not merge—South Asia would engulf Central Asia.

I called the U.S. Administration's project Greater South Asia because of this conceptual distinction and related circumstances to distinguish it from the Institute's Greater Central Asia project.

It seems that the conceptual changes appeared for several reasons: the Greater South Asia conception looked much more attractive to potential supporters in America and outside it than the Greater Central Asia project. At the same time, the Administration is still exploiting the Institute's key idea of a link between Central Asia and Afghanistan at the local level, in Central Asia.

As for the purely "technical" changes, it can be surmised that, when shaping its own approach, the Administration took into account the present balance of forces in the region, Russia's and China's stronger positions in particular: the two countries are obviously able to disrupt the project altogether. As a result, the more "covert" and less confrontational approach, without setting up a regional organization, was selected.

Finally, a few words about the greatest weakness of the Greater South Asia project—I have in mind Afghanistan as the key, and unstable, link. The project might either fail or not take off at all because of possible attacks on the infrastructure—pipelines and power lines, bridges and highways. This was how Alexander Kniazev, a political scientist from Kyrgyzstan, justified his criticism of GCAP in his article, "Situatsia v Afganistane i proekt Bol'shoy Tsentral'noy Azii" (The Situation in Afghanistan and the Greater Central Asia Project).²⁷

Importance of Central Asia for the United States

America is a key world power resolved to remain one, as well as the world's main consumer and importer of energy resources. The Central Asian countries can be described as smaller states, some of

²⁵ See: S.F. Starr, "A 'Greater Central Asia Partnership' for Afghanistan and Its Neighbors," p. 13.

²⁶ See: "The World Factbook," publication of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, available at [<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>], 3 June, 2006.

²⁷ See: A. Kniazev, "Situatsia v Afganistane i proekt Bol'shoy Tsentral'noy Azii," in: *Novaia bol'shaia igra v Bol'shoy Tsentral'noy Azii*, ed. by N. Omarov, MISI, Bishkek, 2005.

which produce and export oil and gas. It seems that this provides an ample explanation of America's approach to Central Asia.

The local resources have been and remain the key issue for the United States. This is not all: the region is important in America's strategy aimed at preserving its status as the world's only superpower. It should be said, however, that in the past Central Asia remained on the periphery of American interests, attention to which was gradually increasing.

The terrorist acts of 9/11 and the subsequent U.S. military operation in Afghanistan irrevocably changed the situation. Central Asia became very important to the United States: new priorities were added to the old ones. At first, America needed local support for its military campaign in Afghanistan; later, for its military presence in Afghanistan and its efforts to stabilize the situation there.

The United States is the leading industrial power and the main oil importer. Since it accounts for a quarter of the world's oil consumption and imports about 60 percent of oil, the American government must ensure uninterrupted supply of adequate amounts of oil at acceptable prices. Significantly, annual oil consumption is 7.5 billion barrels of oil,²⁸ while in 2004 America's proved resources were 21.3 billion barrels.²⁹

Since different sources offer different estimates of the Caspian oil reserves, the Energy Information Administration of the U.S. Department of Energy offers its own estimation of between 17 and 44 billion barrels.³⁰ At worst, the proved Caspian reserves are equal to America's proved reserves, at best, they are twice as much.

America's interests in the region were limited to its energy sources; this is confirmed by the fact that Central Asia was mentioned only once in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America published in 2002: "We will strengthen our own energy security and the shared prosperity of the global economy by working with our allies, trading partners, and energy producers to expand the sources and types of global energy supplied, especially in the Western Hemisphere, Africa, Central Asia, and the Caspian region,"³¹ says the document. The National Energy Policy published in May 2001 contains a similar formula.³²

At the same time, America's interest in Central Asia was supported by geopolitical as well as geo-economic considerations: its geographic location in the heart of Eurasia is extremely important for the United States, which positions itself as the global hegemon. Halford Mackinder, one of the classics of geopolitics, described Central Asia as part of the Heartland and a key to global domination: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island (Eurasia and Africa), and who rules the World-Island commands the World.³³

Even if we disagree with the Heartland theory, we should recognize that Central Asia is a strategic region from which two great powers (Russia and China), the interests of which often clash with American interests, can be influenced. The region borders on anti-American Iran, which President George W. Bush described as one of the "axis of evil" countries and which heads the list of potential targets of Washington's military strikes.

²⁸ Calculated on the basis of *World Oil Balance, 2001-2005*, published by the Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy, latest renovation in June 2006, available at [<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/ipsr/t21.xls>], 3 June, 2006.

²⁹ *Crude Oil Proved Reserves, Reserve Changes, and Production*, published by the Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy, latest renovation on 15 March, 2006, available at [http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/dnav/pet/pet_crd_pres_dc_u_NUS_a.htm], 3 June, 2006.

³⁰ *Country Analysis Briefing: Caspian Sea*, published by the Energy Information Department of the U.S. Department of Energy, latest renovation in September 2005, available at [<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Caspian/Full.html>], 3 June, 2006.

³¹ See: The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002, p. 19.

³² National Energy Policy, May 2001, pp. 8-13.

³³ Quoted from: N.A. Nartov, *Geopolitika*, Moscow, 1999, p. 55.

It seems that U.S. policies should be analyzed in this context: on the one hand, America promotes the local countries' "independence" (interpreted as independence from Russia, China, and Iran), while on the other, it encourages stronger cooperation with the United States and the West.

The events of 9/11 and America's military operation in Afghanistan later in 2001 changed Washington's priorities in Central Asia and boosted the region's importance. The energy fuel and "independence" issues preserved their priority; several more issues connected with the geographic location of the region that borders on Afghanistan gained more importance.

At the beginning of its intervention in Afghanistan America needed military bases outside the country to be used to deliver blows at the Taliban and ensure sustainable military deliveries. The talks with Uzbekistan provided the United States with access to the former Soviet military base of Karshi-Khanabad; the Americans also deployed their forces at the civilian airport of Manas in Kyrgyzstan. The leaders of both countries expected that Washington would support their regimes and ensure a flow of foreign investments.

The military campaign that defeated the Taliban made the military bases in Central Asia less important for the United States: now it could have set up similar structures directly on Afghan territory. The situation in Afghanistan, however, was far from ideal, which meant that the Uzbek and Kyrgyz bases were still needed as safer locations. The United States never publicized another aspect, of which it as well as Russia and China were well aware: the bases were important geopolitically in the context of the region and its neighbors.

America, which at first insisted that its troops were deployed in Central Asia temporarily, began talking about its longer military presence there.³⁴ Russia and China were not overjoyed: from their perspective, permanent American bases in Central Asia looked like a threat to their influence in the region.³⁵ In mid-2005, Russia and China responded to the American initiative in the way discussed below.

While the 9/11 events provided the United States with a unique opportunity to penetrate into the geopolitical heart of Eurasia, the gradually restored normalcy in Afghanistan was expected to confirm America's strength and efficiency. In this way, Washington would acquire a foothold to control the region and potentially influence Russia, China, and Iran. Failure in Afghanistan, on the other hand, would deprive America not only of part of its regional influence, but also of its image and worldwide influence. Central Asia obviously has an important role to play in both scenarios.

The U.S.'s New Regional Approach: Reasons and Aims

There are two main reasons for America's new regional approach: the changes on the American domestic scene triggered by the Afghan and Iraqi developments and the geopolitical changes in Central Asia that undermined the U.S.'s position there. This was why the U.S. Administration armed itself with the Greater South Asia Project rooted, to a great extent, in the GCAP devised by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute.

As a response to the domestic and foreign challenges, the project was intended to help the U.S. achieve certain strategic aims in Afghanistan and acquire greater weight in the region (and, indirectly, throughout the world). These strategic breakthroughs called for several tactical moves, such

³⁴ See: S. Blank, "U.S. Strategic Priorities Shifting in Central Asia," *Eurasianet*, 25 March, 2005, available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav032504a.shtml>], 3 June, 2006.

³⁵ See: *Ibidem*.

as stirring up a greater interest in Afghanistan inside and outside the U.S. (in Central Asia and the world community) and assisting Afghanistan's more vigorous economic development, as well as putting up active opposition to Russia's and China's regional presence with the help of Pakistan and India.

In America there is mounting opposition in the public and among the elite to the country's military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan: in his 2006 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush mentioned the world "isolationism"³⁶ three times in a critical context and emphasized that "retreat"³⁷ was impossible. The developments in Afghanistan affected the American ruling elite even though the media and the public were engrossed in what was going on in Iraq.³⁸ After a while it became clear that stability in Afghanistan required much wider military presence there fraught with greater fatalities and financial losses. In 2004-2005, its military presence in Afghanistan cost the United States \$10 billion; nearly \$2.6 billion more was spent on non-military aid.³⁹

The U.S. budget deficit of \$445 billion in 2004⁴⁰ forced Congress to start talking about a possible reduction in spending on Afghanistan. In his article, Frederick Starr wrote: "Members of Congress are pushing to reduce U.S. assistance to Afghanistan, arguing that the principal U.S. objective there—the destruction of the Taliban—has been achieved."⁴¹

In Central Asia, meanwhile, the situation was developing contrary to U.S. interests; a revolutionary wave arose in Georgia, engulfed Ukraine, and reached Kyrgyzstan. In March 2005, the so-called Tulip Revolution shook the country. The revolution was associated with the United States because of the "democratization" policy supported by George W. Bush's Administration. Apprehensive of similar developments at home, the local authoritarian leaders turned away from America toward Russia and China as less dangerous partners.

The events of May 2005 in Andijan (Uzbekistan) not only caused numerous losses, but also forced the country's leaders to change their foreign policy course: under domestic and foreign pressure Washington criticized its key regional ally. The local leaders learned their lesson.

On 5 July, 2005, in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, the SCO heads of state adopted a declaration that reflected the changed position of the local states, as well as of Russia and China regarding U.S. policies. The document said that the members of the counterterrorist coalition (the United States in particular) should set a deadline⁴² for its military presence in the region, which meant that America should remove its troops from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The SCO members also stated that a rational and just world order should be maintained without claims to monopoly and domination on the international scene.⁴³

Significantly, Chairman Hu Jintao paid a four-day visit to Moscow on the very eve of the SCO summit (30 June-3 July), where the two countries signed, in particular, a Declaration on the World Order in the 21st Century, which stated that none of the countries should claim domination when it came to international issues.⁴⁴

³⁶ See: State of the Union Address by the President, 31 January, 2006, available at [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/state-of-the-union/2006>], 3 June, 2006.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ See: P. Rogers, "Iraq, Afghanistan and US Public Opinion," *International Security Monthly Briefing*, June 2005, p. 3.

³⁹ See: S.F. Starr, "A Partnership for Central Asia."

⁴⁰ See: *Budget of the U.S. Government. Fiscal Year 2005*, Mid-Session Review published by the White House Department for Budget and Management, p. 1, available at [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2005/05msr.pdf>], 3 June, 2006.

⁴¹ S.F. Starr, "A Partnership for Central Asia."

⁴² The member states issued a statement on the results of the SCO summit, Xinhua, 5 July, 2005.

⁴³ See: Ibidem.

⁴⁴ See: "V Moskve proshli peregovory prezidenta Rossii i predsedatelia KNR," Radio Svoboda, 1 July, 2005, available at [<http://www.svobodanews.ru/news.aspx?item=117891>], 3 June, 2006.

Soon after the Astana summit, Uzbekistan, supported by Russia and China in connection with the Andijan events, informed the United States that it was withdrawing from the treaty under which the U.S. had use of the Karshi-Khanabad base. This deprived the White House of one of its two military bases in Central Asia, the more important of the two from the point of view of America's operations in Afghanistan.

As a result, Russia and China boosted their influence in the region, while America lost some of its. This came as an unpleasant surprise, which weakened America in Afghanistan as well: further stabilization in this country largely depended on the U.S.'s continued cooperation with the advantageously located Central Asian countries.

As Pál Dunay and Zdzislaw Lachowski put it, "any new administration's agenda would be dominated by the need to stabilize Afghanistan and Iraq."⁴⁵ The country needed stabilization once the active military phase was completed. At the same time, this meant that the political and civil institutions had to be built from scratch: the country was slowly recovering after nearly 30 years of civil war.

This fully applies to the economy, an important stability factor. The economic situation likewise suffered because of the civil war. Today, locally produced narcotics supply the lion's share of the country's income and constitute the most important economic component; they are responsible for the "shadow market" and an extremely high corruption level. The local feudal lords buy their independence from Kabul by trading in narcotics; drug money supports the Taliban fighters who stand opposed to the government.

The U.S.-led coalition cannot stage a head-on attack against this evil: this will inevitably stir up a lot of opposition among the ordinary people surviving on opium poppy money, as well as among the local leaders who profit from poppy processing and illegal trade in drugs. The bureaucrats and the power-related structures, which have already grown accustomed to bribes from the drug barons, would not be overjoyed either. As a result, activation of the anti-drug struggle, meant to promote Afghanistan's development, is fraught with immediate destabilization in this country.

Alternatives to poppy growing and drug production should be sought and found in the economic sphere: in agriculture and other sectors. Unfortunately, even before the civil war, the country had neither a developed infrastructure nor industry; after the civil war its barely developed agricultural sector remained the only functioning sphere of the economy. The country has no important raw material reserves that might replenish the budget to create an alternative to the drug market.

Today, its geographic location between South and Central Asia is Afghanistan's only advantage. The Greater South Asia project is expected to tap this advantage and promote the country's economy by developing its infrastructure. As a link between Central and South Asia, Afghanistan is expected to attract the world's attention.

On the one hand, this will help Washington enlist the support of India and Pakistan, two key South Asian countries, which, if interested enough, could extend considerable assistance to Afghanistan. On the other hand, the project might interest other developed countries, which means the increase in material and technical assistance and the support coming from the international financial institutions (the World Bank, EBRD, the Asian Bank of Development, etc.) when the time comes to fund the projects designed to develop the Greater South Asia region.

The projects designed to develop the region will contribute to Afghanistan's economic growth and, consequently, stabilization. Over time, it will be able to look after its security and support its state structures itself, which will lighten America's financial burden and allow it to reduce its military presence in the country while preserving its position.

⁴⁵ P. Dunay, Z. Lachowski, "Euro-Atlantic Security and Institutions," *SIPRI Yearbook 2005*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, p. 52.

It should be said that the Greater South Asia project is expected to create a Southern energy and transportation corridor that will help the landlocked Central Asian countries reach the world energy and trade markets. In this respect, the project is reminiscent of the American Silk Road project the Congress initiated in 1999 to create the Western energy and transportation corridor across the Caucasus designed to link Central Asia and the Caucasus with Turkey and Europe.

The energy part of the Western corridor has been implemented as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and is being continued as the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline with America's active lobbying. In 2001, the National Energy Policy mentioned above recommended that the U.S. president support the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan project.⁴⁶ Even before the United States adopted the Silk Road strategy, Europe was working on the transportation aspects of the Western corridor through TRACECA; this project is still being carried out.

The Silk Road project designed to strengthen the ties between Central Asia and the Caucasus with Turkey and Europe, two of Washington's friends, decreases the dependence of Central Asia and the Caucasus on America's rivals (Russia, China, and Iran). In this sense, the Silk Road is not merely a geo-economic, but also a geopolitical project. The Greater South Asia project is expected to weaken the influence of Russia, China, and Iran in Central Asia and tie it to America's allies (Pakistan and India).

Washington obviously wants to fortify its position in Greater South Asia by relying on Pakistan and India and undermining the position of Russia, China, and Iran. The project is an element of America's strategy designed to preserve its global domination.

C o n c l u s i o n

Late in 2005, the United States formulated a new regional approach to Central and South Asia, the principles of which have been repeatedly outlined by the U.S. State Department and personally by Condoleezza Rice. It was also mentioned in the White House's press release that summarized President George W. Bush's visit to Pakistan. Finally, Washington's new regional conception was reflected in the U.S. National Security Strategy published in March 2006. The U.S. State Department was restructured accordingly, while a new project with a budget of about \$1 million was initiated.

Earlier, the United States regarded Central Asia as a separate region tied to the CIS: today Central Asia and South Asia are seen as a single region America calls Greater South Asia. In this context, Afghanistan acquired the role of a bridge between Central and South Asia and a transit territory crossed by transportation and energy corridors expected to create a new single region—Greater South Asia.

The new regional plan is based on the Greater Central Asia conception formulated by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at the Johns Hopkins University published in mid-2005. The plan hinged on transportation and energy corridors created to tie Central and South Asia together. The Institute spoke about the Greater Central Asia conception applied to five Central Asian countries and Afghanistan, while the U.S. Administration plans to join Central and South Asia together.

The new regional approach was suggested by the U.S. domestic and external factors. It seems that the fact that the United States lost much of its influence in the region following the revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the Andijan events in Uzbekistan urged the American leaders to seek a new regional approach. Inside the country, the conception was prompted by the growing dissatisfaction with the

⁴⁶ See: National Energy Policy, May 2001, pp. 8-13.

results in Iraq and Afghanistan, the loss of life, and America's heavy financial burden caused by its involvement there.

The regional project has been devised as an answer to the challenges described above, it is expected to stir up an interest in Afghanistan and rebuff the regional ambitions of Russia and China. At the same time, it is intended to attract the world community's favorable attention to the greatest extent possible and help to achieve security and economic progress in Afghanistan, a U.S. protectorate. The project is obviously intended to receive more support at three levels: inside the country, in the Greater South Asia region, and in the international community. This will obviously boost Washington's regional and global position.