

US Primary Policy Towards Central Asia

Enayatollah Yazdani

School of International Studies, Sun Yat-sen University, Zhuhai, China

The emergence of the Central Asian republics into the international stage presented a new frontier for US policymakers. US involvement in Central Asia began with the collapse of the USSR. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Washington initiated official relations with the region's newly interdependent states. From 1991 until the mid-1990s, the region to some extent was of only marginal importance to the United States. The region was viewed as less important, perhaps because the highest US priority at that time was Russia itself. US policy in Central Asia, was initially based on the "Russia first" principle. However, later on Washington paid special attention to the region and recognised American national interests there. This paper aims to address this main question: To what extent were US interests affected by independence of the Central Asian republics during the initial phase? The paper findings indicate that during the early stage of US engagement in Central Asia, there was no uniformity and strategic framework in Washington approach toward this region.

Keywords: USA, Central Asia, Russia, the Soviet Union, and China

Introduction

The emergence of the independent Central Asian republics into the international stage presented a new frontier for US policymakers. They had seen Central Asia as a gateway to three regions of great strategic importance to the United States: To the north lies Russia, to the south lie Iran, Afghanistan, and the Islamic world, and to the east lie China and the rest of Asia. Moreover, Central Asia, in its own right, was a region of vast natural and human resources offering benefits for US entrepreneurs with the foresight to do business there (Talbot, 1994, pp. 280-281). Clifford G. Bond, Acting Principal Deputy Special Advisor to the Secretary for the New Independent States (NIS), Department of State, in a hearing on the Middle East and South Asia of the House International Revaluations Committee on 6 June 2001, identified Central Asia as a "very important region for U.S. interest" (Bond, 2001). US geopolitical, economic, and security interests and ambitions in the region led Washington to struggle for political influence, strategically important positions, economic dividends, and control over resources.

This paper examines the early phase of US policy towards Central Asia. However, the paper does not attempt to provide a comprehensive view of complete US policy towards Central Asia; it only focuses on the early stage of US engagement with the region and examines American primary orientation toward this area. To this, most of the documents and materials which are used in this paper dating back to the 1990s and early 2000s are not covering the next stages of US involvement in Central Asia, particularly the recent time. Accordingly, the paper addresses America's primary interests in the newborn independent states, and explores the mechanisms

and means that Washington used to pursue its objectives in its primary engagement in the region. Here the main argument is that, although, in the primary years of engagement, US policy towards the former Soviet republics was mainly concerned with Russia itself, Washington had other interests in the region. Several issues, such as the republics' independence, potential conflict, denuclearisation, politico-economic reforms, and concern with states like Iran captured US attention in its initial phase of dealing with the area. What this paper indicates is that this initial stage provided a basis for America to increase its regional influence during the next years.

US Policy Towards Central Asia After the Soviet Demise: Early Involvement

US involvement in Central Asia began with the collapse of the USSR. Washington initiated official relations with the region's republics on 25 December 1991, when it accorded diplomatic recognition to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, followed on 19 February 1992 by its recognition of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and in that year US embassies opened up in most capitals of the region. Arguably, US policy towards the region has changed from time to time.

In the early years of Central Asian independence the basic question for American policymakers was: "Does the region matter?" Indeed, from 1991 until the mid-1990s, the region to some extent was of only marginal importance to the United States. This was reflected by some American diplomats' statements: "We do not need to learn the local language of there because all the people we know in Central Asia speak Russian" and that "we cannot put the flag of Turkmenistan up in the State Department lobby because it is too complicated" (Goble, 1994, pp. 1-5). The region was viewed as less important, perhaps because the highest US priority at that time was Russia itself. Some American observers even argued that Russia might soon reabsorb Central Asia into a new empire, though others discounted the possibility (Boulegue, October 7, 2015; Nichol, 19 December 1996; Odom, 1997, pp. 1-8; Hill, February 2001a; Katz, 1992). However, the US government pursued other goals in Central Asia.

US Interests in Central Asia in the Early Stage

Before America's interests in the region in the early stage can be placed in order of priority, they should first be defined. Theoretically, C. Fairbanks and his colleagues classified US national interests as vital, strategic, and important. Vital interests are those that affect the national territory and basic welfare of the American people (Fairbanks, Starr, Nelson, & Weisbrode, 2001, p. 93). These include, for example, peace and stability in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Middle East. Strategic interests involve areas of top priority for ensuring that vital interests are secured, such as relations with China and Russia (Rumer, Sokolsky, & Stronski, January 25, 2016). The third level of interests involves things that are desirable for the United States but do not directly affect its vital interests (Rumer et al., January 25, 2016). These include economic and/or other ties with Latin America or South Asia, and humanitarian and related concerns in other parts of the world.

In a similar study, US national interests are categorised as vital, extremely important, important, and less important or secondary. Vital interests are defined as those considered necessary for US survival, conceived in terms of its territorial integrity, governing institutions, and citizens' lives (Commission of America's National Interests, 2000, p. 5). Extremely important are conditions that, if compromised, would severely prejudice but not strictly imperil US ability to safeguard and enhance the well-being of Americans in a free and secure nation (Commission of America's National Interests, 2000, p. 6). These should be promoted, but threats to them warrant deployment of military force only with coalition of allies whose vital interests are threatened. Important

national interests are those that, if compromised, would have major negative consequences for US ability to secure and develop the well-being of the US people (Commission of America's National Interests, 2000, p. 7). Secondary national interests are desirable, but have little direct impact on US capability to protect and improve the well-being of Americans in a free and secure nation. Secondary interests are based on balancing bilateral trade deficits, and enlarging democracy everywhere for its own sake (Walker & Kearney, September 16, 2016).

To what extent were US interests affected by independence of the Central Asian republics during the initial phase? At that stage US officialdom did not recognise any vital interest in this region, and had no strategic vision for it, as some observers point out.¹ In fact, the early US attitude towards the region placed it at the "important" level of national interests, capable only of indirectly affecting US vital interests. For example, regional instability could impact indirectly on America's security by providing Russia with a pretext to intervene and reintegrate the republics with itself, or a resurgence of Islam could offer Iran an opportunity to expand its influence. An influential American scholar, S. Blank, warned US policymakers in 1995: "While Central Asia itself may not be seen to be vital to the United States, the explosion that [would] ensue if we abandon the region to Moscow [would] spare nobody from its wrath" (p. 32).

US officials thought the republics might be faced with one of three scenarios: preservation of the Communist-dominated status quo, evolution of pluralist democracy, or emergence of radicalised Islamic regimes, both anti-Communist and anti-Western (Starr, Engvall, & Cornell, October 2016; Katz, 1992). However, none of these scenarios eventuated. Indeed, in the early years of engagement, Washington was far from a realistic interpretation of the region. American officials were deeply idealistic and dependent on a flawed understanding of the nature of the Central Asian societies and their leaders (Abdukadirov, 2009; Baker, 1995, pp. 93-112). The US government initially announced its objectives for the region as hoping to safeguard the republics' independence, ensuring removal of all nuclear weapons from Kazakhstan as soon as possible, maintaining stability, isolating Iran, preventing the appearance of fundamentalist regimes, and ensuring that the region's newly independent states formulated their domestic policy in ways advantageous to the West and in keeping with the western democratic model (Nichol, 19 December 1996, pp. 6-11). G. Fuller clarified primary US interests in the region on the following basis: (1) the presence of Soviet nuclear arms in Kazakhstan; (2) the large hydrocarbon deposits in the Caspian Sea; (3) the region's proximity to the Islamic world; (4) the indeterminate development of democracy; and (5) the Russian factor (Fuller, 1994).² Similarly, S. T. Hunter pointed to the following issues: (1) to resolve the issue of Kazakhstan's nuclear weapons and fend off the danger of proliferation by preventing the sale or other transfer of nuclear material or technology to other countries, especially Iran; (2) to prevent the spread of radical Islam, to contain Iran, and to promote Turkey's role as the main regional player; (3) to develop an appropriate and important role for the United States in exploiting the region's mineral resources, especially its oil and gas; (4) to anchor these countries within the

¹ D. L. Smith (17 June 1996, p. 24), for instance, argued: "America has no vital interests in Central Asia, nor will it assume responsibility for Central Asia's security. We have little 'leverage' to directly influence events or push our foreign policy agenda on these sovereign states". Stephen Blank (1995, p. 28), of the Strategic Studies Institute US Army War College, pointed out that Central Asian trends did not directly affect vital US interests, although both the Bush senior and Clinton administrations expressed interest in Central Asia. F. Hill (May 2001, pp. 1-8) also argued that the United States had no discernible vital national interest in Central Asia. Eugene Rumer (2 August 2000, p. 11), a senior fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defence University, wrote, "Washington decided it didn't have a major stake in Central Asia, and American interests would be best served if the struggle for influence there could be avoided all together". Ahmed Rashid asserted, "The US failed to have any overall strategic vision for the region" (Jones, June 2000, pp. 12-19).

² Of course, in the first phase of US policy in Central Asia, the region's energy did not play an important role.

western security and economic system; and (5) to promote democracy and human rights (Hunter, 1996, p. 158). Although the United States had stated that it had interests in the area, its highest priority then was Russia. Overall, US interests in the region during its first period of engagement fall into three categories, geopolitical, security, and politico-economic.

Geopolitical Interests

Russia first: Reform and liberalisation. US policy in Central Asia, was initially based on the “Russia first” principle. There were at least two reasons for this focus; first, to dismantle the USSR completely, and second, to sponsor genuine independence in Central Asia (and the Caucasus). To these ends, US policymakers focused on Moscow’s relations with the southern republics, and found cause for concern in Russian policies toward its neighbours at least from late 1992.³ A number of Russians, including some in the leadership, still viewed Central Asia as a “former colony”, with Russia largely responsible for its current state of development (Golunov, 2002). Some held the view that Moscow had a “priority right” in the region, as Russia’s “Near Abroad” and given that the region had benefited directly from Russian investment (Dunn, 31 January 2001, pp. 1-9).

Russian officials and media variously emphasised strategic security, economic ties, and the fate of the Russian populations, particularly after proclamation of the “Near Abroad” policy (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 17 November 1992 in Rumer, 2002; Babus & Yaphe, January 1999). Andranik Migranyan, former adviser to President Boris Yeltsin, asserted in 1994: “All the geopolitical space of the former USSR constitutes the sphere of vital interests of Russia”; and in 1995 Moscow began to talk about creating an economically and politically integrated association of states capable of claiming its proper place in the world community (Smith, 17 June 1996, p. 15). Yeltsin had maintained: “The Central Asian countries have had enough of sovereignty and are looking for new forms of confederation with Russia, the only state capable of protecting them” (Mandelbaum, 1994, p. 219). However, due to Russia’s own domestic politico-economic problems and some other issues inside the republics, no such confederation was ever formed.⁴ Moreover, in his September 1995 decree “On Approval of the Strategic Policy of the Russian Federation Toward CIS Member States”, Yeltsin declared: “Our main vital interests in the spheres of economy, defence, security and protection of the rights of Russians are concentrated on the territory of the CIS, and safeguarding of those interests constitutes the basis of the country’s national security” (Russian Federation Presidential Edict No. 940, 14 September 1995, p. 19).

These statements, and certain actions, such as Russia’s intervention in the Tajik civil war, persuaded US officials and experts that Moscow was attempting to reintegrate the south.⁵ In fact, some officials in Washington still viewed Russia with suspicion. As J. Barnes argued, in international affairs old habits die hard, and Cold War habits, with their all-consuming emphasis on countering Moscow, had shaped the mind-set of generations of American policymakers (Barnes, 2002). Sam Brownback, a member of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, stated: “Present Russian actions and rhetoric indicate that the Russians do not really

³ Even in October 1992, Sergei Karaganov, a member of the Russian Presidential Council, declared “Russia is compelled to play an active post-imperial role. Russia must return to its traditional role, bribe local princes, send troops to save someone, and so on. It is an ungrateful job, but it is our history and we partially ourselves led us to it” (Fedorov, September 1996, pp. 34-38; Wishnick, February 2009; Murat, 2007).

⁴ Some issues have influenced the republics’ relations with Russia. For example, Uzbekistan has been attempting to distance itself from Moscow, and some of the states have not accepted dual citizenship for Russians in their countries.

⁵ For example, treaties between Russia and Turkmenistan that permitted Russian citizens to serve in Turkmenistan’s army in 1994, and between Russia and Uzbekistan in 1994, permitting military cooperation, including joint provisioning and equipping. On Russia’s interaction with Central Asia see M. B. Olcott (1995), “Sovereignty and the ‘Near Abroad’”, *Orbis*, 39(3), 353-367, and *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Email Bulletin*, 30 November 1994, pp. 5-7.

accept the notion of the independence and sovereignty of these [the Central Asian] countries” (Brownback, 1997, pp. 1-9). He maintained that Moscow was active “in maintaining instability in the region in order to disrupt outside influences, and thus [was] impeding regional cooperation which the presidents of these countries [were] trying to achieve” (Brownback, 1997, pp. 1-9). In addition, a number of influential American scholars also focused on the possibility of restoring Russian power and its increased influence in the region. Dimitri Simes, founding President of the Nixon Centre, warned, immediately after the Soviet Union’s dissolution, that

The collapse of the Communist establishment does not mean that the imperial, autocratic Russian tradition has come to an end. It only implies that, next time, it may have to reappear in a different form, with different slogans and different leaders. (Simes, September 1991, pp. 41-62; Duffy, Corwin, & Trimble, 2 September 1991, pp. 98-116)

D. L. Smith also argued that Russia was seeking to protect and expand its economic position in Central Asia as part of a large effort to revive its regional economic (and hence political) influence (Smith, 17 June 1996, p. 17; Parker, 5 December 1992). Accordingly, countering restoration of Russia’s power, and keeping it away from its former republics, became a high US priority in the region. Henry Kissinger publicised in 1992 that “the American political priority [was] to prevent the Russian empire from reforming” (Taylor, September/October 1992, pp. 16-18). As a result, Washington pursued a “Russia first” policy, attempting to contain the expansion of Moscow influence into its southern neighbours, particularly through promoting reform in Russia. In a major policy address in March 1994, Secretary of State Warren Christopher mentioned: “Bringing Russia into the family of peaceful nations will serve our highest security, economic, and moral interests” (Christopher, 29 March 1993, p. 175).

In relations with Central Asia, the Clinton administration in particular, viewed a democratised Russia as a factor to play a stabilising role in the area, though with increasing emphasis that Moscow should not seek to dominate it, or to exclude US and other involvement.⁶ In congressional testimony on 14 November 1995, Ambassador at Large to the NIS, James Collins, stressed that the United States had endeavoured to foster stability in the NIS by encouraging Russia to respect the sovereignty and independence of the other NIS (Nichol, 19 December 1996, p. 3). Thus, one can argue that US decision-makers needed, therefore, to monitor Russian policies in the former Soviet regions, in case Moscow might restore its lost power or create imbalances and raise the threat of conflict (Zelikow, January/February 1994). Influential American regional expert M. B. Olcott believed that “for geopolitical” reasons the United States must try to ensure that Russia behaves as a “good hegemon rather than as a bully” toward the Central Asian republics (Olcott, 1992, pp. 123-126; 1996, p. 177). However, supporting the republics, directly or indirectly, financially and politically, was viewed as crucial for constraining any return to an imperial Russian policy.

⁶ This was evident in Clinton’s words in April 1993: “The opportunity that lies before our nation today is to answer the courageous call of Russian reform—as an expression of our own values, as an investment in our own security and prosperity, [and] as a demonstration of our purpose in a new world”. To this end, according to a Department of State report, of the \$4.48 billion of US expenditures through FY 1994 to the NIS in the overall assistance program, Russia received \$2.28 billion, or about one-half of the cumulative total. Clinton (1 April 1993, pp. 189-194) pointed out four major reasons why changes and reforms in Russia were important to the USA. The first was that reforms in Russia would offer America a historic opportunity to improve its own security. The second was that Russia’s reforms could present the United States with the chance to complete the movement from having an adversary in foreign policy to having a partner in global problem solving. The third was that Russia’s reforms would hold one of the keys to investing more in America’s future, because in the Soviet era, the USA spent trillions of dollars to prosecute the Cold War. In the absence of the Soviet Union, the USA could reduce that pace of spending. The fourth reason was that Russian reforms could provide a better opportunity for the US economy.

Besides, the United States was concerned by the considerable number of Russians living in Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan. This is because Washington thought that this issue might encourage Moscow to send military forces or re-impose some sort of imperial relationship upon the region, or at least insist on greater influence, in order to safeguard Russians in the republics, and therefore jeopardise the republics' independence. Statements by some Russian politicians alarmed the US government. Anatoli Sobchak, St. Petersburg's mayor, hinted at possible territorial claims on areas of Russian settlement in other republics (Menon & Barkey, 1992/1993). Ex-Vice Premier Aleksandr Shokhin stated in November 1993 that Russia would deploy every instrument of economic policy to advance the causes of reintegration and of the Russian diaspora, and that the issue of Russian-speakers abroad would figure in all economic negotiations with other CIS members, including in Central Asia (Hill & Jewett, January 1994, p. 43). Consequently, some American scholars argued that Russia sought not only to preserve Central Asia's dependence, but also to codify a lasting privileged position for Russians there (Blank, 1995, pp. 11-23; Tolz, 14 May 1993a, pp. 41-46; Tolz, 7 August 1993b, p. 36).

The "Russia first" policy had been questioned by some US politicians and scholars as giving Russia a free hand in the region. Republican criticism of the Clinton administration's policy towards Russia had been on the rise for years, and would increase with disenchantment in the late 1990s at Russia's apparent failure in economic reforms, and its harsh policy towards the insurgency in Chechnya (Barnes, 2002, pp. 212-233). F. Starr in 1997 described the "Russia first" policy thus: "The policies of a democratic Russia in the region are assumed to be benign, so the Clinton administration has given Moscow a free hand there" (Starr, 1997, pp. 24-27). Similarly, S. Blank argued that, since Russian policy in Central Asia tended towards neo-colonialism, any "strategic alliance with Russian reform" would mean accepting Russia's neo-colonialism, which could neither sustain true market reforms nor promote democracy (Blank, 1995, pp. 29-37). He claimed that Washington's calls for democratisation, open doors for US investment, and support for Russia as a model and leader, involved contradictory logic, since support for Russia in fact, meant excluding foreign investment and hindering democracy, which could not thrive in Central Asia's neocolonial conditions, blasted ecologies and economies (Blank, 1995, pp. 33-35). However, one can assume that foreign investment was not excluded and the "hindering" of democracy in the region resulted from the actions of indigenous leaders.

The extent to which Washington succeeded in isolating Moscow from its old sphere of influence has been debatable. Due to the republics' historical dependency on the central government, it was impossible, particularly in the first years of independence, to exclude Russia from their affairs. As Blank has argued, Russia would not simply let Washington take the lead in integrating into its sphere of influence an area Moscow viewed as part of its own sphere of influence because of geographical contiguity, centuries of domination, and large Russian populations (Bhatty & Shaheen, April 2011; Blank, 1999). In the meantime, US efforts to do so were also tempered by the perceived risk that undermined Russian influence might be replaced by the "greater threat" of Islamic fundamentalism or Iranian religious-based influence.

To sum up, in the first years of the post-Soviet era, Central Asia remained of only marginal significance to US policymakers because Russia itself was their primary concern. However, one can say that, although policy initiatives in the region were all adjuncts to the "Russia first" policy and to a strategic priority of confining the Soviet military machine within Russia, Washington's policy was also to support the republics' independence and sovereignty. Yet in mid-1994 the United States came to realise that it could not just aid Russia at the expense of other republics, and adopted a less complacent policy towards Moscow (Hunter, 1996, pp. 159-162). It began moving toward increased support of the Central Asian states (Table 2 shows this increase in financial aid).

Helping Central Asians to maintain their independence. Although Central Asia was initially marginal to the US global concerns, Washington did not totally overlook it. Overemphasis on Russia was criticised by some US figures. For instance, Ex-Secretary of State James Baker described the Clinton administration's policy as too "Russocentric", and advocated "support for reform in the newly independent states and support for the republics' territorial integrity and independence" (Mollazade, 1995, pp. 48-50). On the other hand, the republics' ability to remain fully independent and sovereign was important to US national interests. It was believed that they needed help to complete the transition from being dependent states under the USSR to being entirely independent from Moscow (Standish, November 5, 2015; Stephens, 2000, p. 15). Accordingly, Washington stressed that US and other Western aid and investment would strengthen the "Stans" independence, and act as a counter and example to Moscow or any other powers, such as Iran (Yazdani, 2/6 October 2003). Former US ambassador Stephen Sestanovich once described the overreaching goal of American policy in Central Asia as securing the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the region's states (Sestanovich, 17 March 1999; Nichol, 1996, pp. 1-6).

The issue became important when some observers speculated that Russia might soon reabsorb the Central Asian countries into a new empire. W. E. Odom argued: 'If we want to see a democratic Russia, therefore, we have a strong strategic interest in maintaining the independence of all eight states [the Central Asian and the Caucasus] in this new strategic zone' (Odom, 1997, pp. 1-8). To this end, the Clinton administration tried to assist the republics to maintain their independence and thus counter Russia's influence (Olcott, 1992, pp. 123-126). Washington's policy was to inject financial aid into the countries, as discussed below, in order to help them to overcome their economic obstacles and reduce dependence on Moscow. Meanwhile, US decision-makers were concerned at the possibility that instability in Central Asia would lead Russia to interfere in the region's affairs. In this connection, security, including conflict resolution and denuclearisation, became a prime concern.

To counter Iran's influence. Iran has a long history of relationship with, and cultural influence over, Central Asia, which was essentially part of the sphere of Iranian civilization in its various manifestations. Accordingly, after independence of Central Asia, Iran did show great interest in expanding relations with the region's countries.⁷ Tehran established official relations with the Central Asian states in November 1991. In this context, the possible strengthening of Iran's Islamic-based influence in the region made Washington nervous, because it had the potential to create a fundamentalist anti-Western/American bloc in the heart of Eurasia. As M. J. Malik noted: "Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fear of the 'evil Empire' has given way to the fear of the 'Islamic Empire' stretching from North Africa in the West to Central Asia in the East" (Malik, June/July 1992, pp. 35-36).⁸ From the US viewpoint, Iran's strategy was to export its revolutionary brand of Islam and exploit Central Asia's potential as a market, so that the region would become a hotbed for political Islam. Furthermore, Washington saw Tehran projecting itself as a redeemer of Islamic

⁷ For a comprehensive analysis of initial interests of Iran in Central Asia see S. Peyrouse (January 4, 2014), "Iran's Growing Role in Central Asia? Geopolitical, Economic and Political Profit and Loss Account", Aljazeera Centre for Studies, retrieved from <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/dossiers/2014/04/2014416940377354.html> [accessed 21/03/2020]; D. Cristiani (10 September, 2010), "Iran's Growing Interests and Influence in Central Asia", *World Politics Review*; R. Lal (2006), *Central Asia and Its Asian Neighbors: Security and Commerce at the Crossroads*, RAND Corporation; and V. Mesamed (2002), "Iran: Ten Years in Post-Soviet Central Asia", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, (1).

⁸ President Ronald Reagan called the USSR an "evil empire", Speech on 8 June 1982, J. M. Malik (June/July 1992), "The 'Great Game' Begins", *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, pp. 35-36. J. E. Yang (12 February 1992), "US, Turkey Pledge Aid to New States", *The Washington Post*, p. A30. A. Lieven (1999/2000), "The (Not So) Great Game", *The National Interest*, (58), 63-92.

values against all non-Shiite challengers, particularly Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and acting as a key player in the game of petrol politics (Yang, 12 February 1992, p. A30; Lieven, 1999/2000; Smith, 17 June 1996, p. 7; Menon & Barkey, 1992/1993, pp. 68-89). This was evident in the words of Ex-Secretary of State Baker: “[The Iranians] are active in some of the former Central Asian republics. It’s one of the reasons we think it’s important that we ourselves, have contact and dialogue with these former republics” (Friedman, 6 February 1992a, p. A3). A. Cohen claimed that Tehran, with its militant Islamic Shiite ideology, had been spending money rebuilding mosques and religious schools neglected during the Soviet era (Cohen, 17 March 1999).⁹

Accordingly, from the beginning, Washington was anxious about Iran’s search for increased politico-economic and religious influence in the region, and used various policies to isolate Iran and prevent it from establishing any significant presence in the region. James Baker made this clear during a visit to Central Asia, when he said that the USA would move quickly to open embassies in the republics to counter expanding Iranian influence there (Friedman, 6 February 1992a, p. A3). In February 1992 T. Friedman wrote in *The New York Times* that “[t]he Bush administration has already begun consulting with Turkey and Egypt on how they can all cooperate in order to help prevent Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan from falling under the political sway of Iran” (Friedman, 6 February 1992a, p. A3). Later in 1993 this became part of the Clinton administration’s broader strategy for containing Iran in the framework of “Dual Containment” (Hunter, 1996, pp. 133-147).¹⁰ This policy was outlined by Clinton’s Adviser for Near East and South Asian Affairs, Martin Indyk, in June 1993. He emphasised the need for “Dual Containment” of the regimes in power in Iran and Iraq until they modified their behaviour (Indyk, 18 May 1993).

The US decision-makers saw increased Iranian influence in the area as a threat to US national interests, and so tried to prevent Tehran from achieving its strategic goals, while Iran attempted to expand ties and maximise the benefits from its relationships. R. Menon and H. Barkey described Iran’s diplomacy in, and radio broadcasts to Central Asia as a threat to the West, particularly the United States (Menon & Barkey, 1992/1993, pp. 68-89; Nichol, 1996, pp. 1-9). In the meantime, the Civil War in Tajikistan prompted concern that Iran could feed unrest (Pipes & Clawson, 1993). In addition, the US government saw Iran as wanting to use the region’s markets to reconstruct its own war-ravaged economy.

To counter Iranian influence in the region, Washington tried on the one hand to discourage the republics’ ties with Tehran, and on the other hand attempted, as discussed below, to increase Turkey’s influence, as an alternative to Iran.

To evaluate US policy towards the involvement of Iran in Central Asia, one can argue that initially American policymakers did not realise that Tehran was doing little to foster Islamic resurgence in the region. In contrast to Washington’s assumption, Iran was following politico-economic interests, not trying to export its revolutionary brand of religion (Bal, 2000, pp. 116-119; Hyman, 1994, pp. 12-16). Former Deputy Iranian

⁹ Forecasts of the early 1990s of possible dissemination of Iranian fundamentalism in Central Asia have proved wrong. The fundamentalist threat can be described as hypothetical rather than real. However, Turkey, Israel, and the United States are still brandishing the forecasts.

¹⁰ For detailed discussion on Dual Containment see C. F. Gregory III (March/April 1994), “The Illogic of Dual Containment”, *Foreign Affairs*, 23(2), 56-65; R. H. Curtiss (June 1995), “Dual Containment and Crackdown on Iran: Wrong Policy, Wrong Reason, Wrong Administration”, *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, XIV(1), 33-34; P. Clawson (1998), “The Continuing Logic of Dual Containment”, *Survival*, 40(1), 33-48; R. O. Freedman (1999), “American Policy Toward the Middle East in Clinton’s Second Term”, in S. Blank (Ed.), *Mediterranean Security in Coming Millennium* (pp. 371-416), Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle; and K. Katzman (September 2001), “The End of Dual Containment: Iraq, Iran and Smart Sanctions”, *Middle East Policy*, 8(3), 71-89.

Foreign Minister, Abbas Maleki, in 2001 made this clear: “Despite western accusation of Iran for exporting religious extremism to Central Asia and the Caucasus, Iran expanded economic and social relations with its neighbours”, and that “Iran’s position in the republics has been given a great boost by the fact that its policy is not based on ideology, but on trade and cultural links between it and the republics” (Maleki, 2001; 1998, pp. 21-26).¹¹ Moreover, Russia was, and still is, more important to Iran’s economy and particularly security than Central Asia, so its relations with Russia rank above those with the region’s states (Pieper, 2012; Herzing, 2001). In his visit to Uzbekistan in late 1991, former Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati reiterated the principle by which Tehran was to conduct its policy in the region: “Whilst respecting the aspirations of the Soviet republics for self-determinations, Iran’s relations with them would be formulated within the framework of [its] relations with Moscow” (“BBC Summary of World Broadcasts”, 29 November 1991, p. A5). In fact, Tehran has seen Russia as the most important country in the region, and feels that it must have the best relations with it, believing that “Russia is a vast market for Iranian goods, on the one hand, and that Russia is a land of opportunities, on the other. These opportunities involve high-tech equipment, military industries, and nuclear technology and weapons, such as submarines” (Maleki, 2001). In relation to the Tajikistan conflict, first of all this problem resulted from local ethnic, regional, and inter-elite conflict, not from outside interference nor the influence of fundamentalist Islam (Pipes & Clawson, 1993, pp. 124-142). Second, Tehran played an important mediating role to end the conflict.

Therefore, one can argue that Washington’s primary understanding of Iran’s attitude towards the region was more myth than fact. Nevertheless, US policymakers did come to realise that Iran’s limited resources and other problems deprived it of any capacity to monopolise Central Asia, and raised questions about the need to promote Turkey or any other country, such as Pakistan, as alternative models for the region.

Furthermore, compared to Iran, Saudi Arabia, a US ally, has been a much stronger backer of Islamic cultural and political renaissance, providing vast sums of money covertly to Islamic community leaders throughout the region. In this connection, M. Haghayeghi argued that, judged by the range and scope of Islam-based activities undertaken, Saudi Arabia seems “to have had a far more persuasive presence than Iran” (Haghayeghi, 1994, pp. 249-266). Yet, the US administration encouraged the Saudis to expand their activities in the region.

Security Objectives

Denuclearisation of Kazakhstan. In 1991, over 80 percent of Soviet nuclear weapons were deployed in Russia; the rest were located in the Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan (Nichol, 16 October 1991, pp. 8-10S; Miller, 1995, pp. 90-103). They remained under control of Russia, as agreed successor to the Soviet Union’s nuclear power status, but the early focus of both the George Bush and Clinton administrations on establishment of a single nuclear successor to the Soviet Union brought Kazakhstan into sustained focus. According to *The Guardian* in 1993:

Washington [was] concerned about the distribution of nuclear materials in Central Asia and about a possible coalition of states, including Kazakhstan, Pakistan and Iran to produce nuclear weapons. There [was] talk of an “Islamic Bomb” and of fundamentalism sweeping the former Soviet republics. This is why the Bush administration [was] encouraging Turkey to play a role and set itself as a model of a secular modernising Islamic state, in contrast to Iran. (14 February 1992, p. 21)

¹¹ For western accusations of Iran for exporting religious extremism to Central Asia, see, for example, B. Rumer (2002) (Ed.), *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm*, pp. 34-37; G. E. Fuller (1992), *Turkey Faces East: New Orientations Toward the Middle East and the Old Soviet Union*, Santa Monica: RAND.

In fact, Washington's officials viewed the Ex-Soviet nuclear weapons deployed outside Russia as potential threats to US national security, and sought to prevent the appearance of new nuclear states through inheritance of former Soviet nuclear weapons, or of proliferation by transfer to neighbouring states, in particular Iran (Cox, October 1994; Gertz, 4 June 1997).¹² Of course, one can argue that the US fears were exaggerated if genuine, and propagandistic if not. There was never any likelihood that Russia would hand over any nuclear weapons to Belarus, Kazakhstan, or Ukraine, let alone Iran. The most the three could have done would have been to make it difficult or impossible for Moscow to use the weapons deployed on their territory. To avert these contingencies Senators Nunn and Lugar devised the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program, which became law in 1991. It authorised expenditure of Department of Defence funds in the NIS for non-proliferation and Safe and Secure Dismantlement (SSD) of nuclear weapons. SSD assistance facilitated the denuclearisation of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine and the dismantling of nuclear weapons in Russia (Lockwood, March/April 1994; 1994/1995).

Indeed, the United States provided Kazakhstan with support and constructive help in liquidating nuclear arsenals. The practicalities of cooperation in this field were discussed during several high-level meetings, particularly during the visit of Secretary of State Baker to Kazakhstan in December 1991, and during the negotiations between Presidents George Bush and Nazarbayev in Washington in May 1992. Nazarbayev confirmed Kazakhstan's obligation to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and in a letter to Bush on 19 May 1992, he stressed: "Kazakhstan guarantees the carrying out of the elimination of all kinds of nuclear weapons, including strategic offensive arms, located on its territory, over a period of seven years in accordance with the START [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] Treaty" (Moltz, 1995, pp. 163-167; "N. Nazarbayev's Letter to US President George Bush", 19 May 1992). In addition, at a news conference following his 17 September 1992 meeting with Baker, Nazarbayev declared that his country did not want to become a nuclear power (Woolf, 27 November 1996; White House: Office of the Press Secretary, 23 November 1994; Laumulin, 1995a). However, there was never any chance that Moscow would have given him the option.

Moreover, in December 1993, former US Vice-President Gore and Nazarbayev signed a US-Kazakh umbrella agreement, committing \$85 million in initial funds for "safe and secure" dismantling of 104 SS-18 missiles, destruction of their silos, and related purposes (Potter, October 1995a; Laumulin, 1995; Nichol, 1996). In 1994 the United States and Kazakhstan signed a defence cooperation agreement, aimed at dialogue on training, and budgets (White House: Office of the Press Secretary, 23 November 1994; Kramer, 5 December 1994; Potter, 17 November 1995b). By April 1995 all the nuclear warheads had been removed to Russia (see Table 1).

Therefore, elimination of the region's nuclear weapons was described as a major US security interest (Potter, 1994; Laumulin, 1994; Nacht, 1995; Nichol, 18 May 2001). However, despite Washington's fears, Kazakhstan could not threaten the United States, as the nuclear weapons deployed on its territory remained fully under Russian control (Woolf, 1996, pp. 12-16; Laumulin, 1994; 1995a; 1995b; Potter, Ewell, & Skinner, 1994).¹³ On the whole, the US strategy of getting Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet nuclear republics to fulfil their obligations under START-1 as quickly as possible succeeded.¹⁴

¹² See "Reducing the Nuclear Dangers From the Former Soviet Union" (January/February 1992), *Arms Control Today*, 22(1), 24-31; and "US Assistance to the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union in Dismantling Their Weapons of Mass Destruction" (21 September 1993), Assistant Secretary of Defence for Nuclear Security and Counter-Proliferation A. B. Carter, House Foreign Affairs Committee.

¹³ This was also true of Ukraine and Belarus.

¹⁴ For more information see START I: Lisbon Protocol, signed by Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and USA Lisbon on 23 May 1992, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/acq/acic/treaties/start1/protocols/lisbon.htm> [accessed 23/10/2002].

Table 1

Operational Strategic Nuclear Warheads and Operational Strategic Nuclear Delivery Vehicles in the Former Soviet Republics

Country	Operational strategic nuclear warheads		Operational strategic nuclear delivery vehicles	
	1991	1995	1991	1995
Russia	7,327	6,530	2,074	1,345
Ukraine	1,512	300	210	50
Kazakhstan	1,360	0	144	0
Belarus	81	18	81	18
Total	10,280	6,848	2,509	1,413

Note. Source: Defence LINK, USA, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/prolif/toc.html> [accessed 11/03/2020].

Conflict resolution. The increased potential for conflict, civil war, and instability across Central Asia became a US initial concern, due to the belief that they would allow Russian or other powers, such as Iran or China, to intervene in these newborn states, which lacked armed forces capable of countering conflict and keeping peace (Nichol, 11 March 2010; Hill, May 2001b). Washington also believed that instability would create conditions in which Islamic movements would increase, and, more importantly, encourage countries like Iran to try to expand their influence in the area. Moreover, emergent nationalism in Central Asia was also seen as capable of impacting on neighbouring states with potentially grave international consequences, and it was also feared that the Afghan conflict could spread into the region.

In particular, the Tajikistan Civil War was a significant issue for Washington. This was partly because the Tajik government's military weakness prompted it to request Russian military intervention, and partly out of concern at the conflict's potential to expand into the neighbouring republics, thereby increasing Russian military influence over them.¹⁵ *The Christian Science Monitor*, in explaining why the United States should care about the Tajik civil war, wrote:

Tajikistan, which borders Afghanistan and China, show[n] what [could] happen when a potent mix of political, ethnic, clan, and regional rivalries [were] added to a cultural and religious Islamic revival taking place in both a former Soviet republic and a neighboring country. What [made] Tajikistan unique, apart from being the most violent Central Asian republic, [was] the role of Afghanistan and Islam. Unfortunately, the strife tearing Tajikistan apart could spread throughout the region. ("Tajikistan Troubles Could Embroil Others", 9 October 1992, p. 3)

Therefore, the US administration tried to prevent the spread of conflict to other republics, which would provide Moscow more excuse to reenter Central Asia (Talbot, July 1997a).

Washington's primary goal was to prevent existing problems from escalating into crises that might engage Russia, China, Iran, or even India. The United States attempted to resolve, and where possible prevent, violent conflicts that would endanger regional stability (Jones, 10 April 2003). Moreover, promoting control over nationalist separatism and ethnic conflicts necessitated close and careful monitoring of regional issues, and "focus on the early identification of ethnic conflict, its potential dimensions, and possible methods of solution"

¹⁵ For details on the Tajikistan civil war's effects on stability see S. Gretskey (1995), "Civil War in Tajikistan: Causes, Developments, and Prospects for Peace", in R. Z. Sagdeev and S. Eisenhower (Eds.), *Central Asia: Conflict, Resolution, and Change* (pp. 218-224), Washington: The Centre for Political and Strategic Studies; M. N. Katz (1997), "Tajikistan and Russia: Sources of Instability in Central Asia", retrieved from <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/usazerb/243.htm> [accessed 12/04/2020]; and J. Nichol (8 January 1997), "Tajikistan Civil War: Recent Developments and US Policy Concerns", *Congressional Research Service* (pp. 23-27), Washington: Penny Hill Press.

(Fuller, 1994, pp. 129-142). Consequently, conflict resolution became an important US foreign policy goal in this region, and as Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott put it, “job one” to promote all other desirable outcomes (Blank, 1999, pp. 249-270). In this connection, Washington believed that promoting democratic and economic reforms in the republics would help prevent conflict. Strobe Talbott articulated in 1997 that it was US policy to press for the creation of democratic, free market systems, promote conflict resolution, and seek the region’s integration into Euro-Atlantic economic, political and security frameworks (Talbott, 1997a, pp. 10-13). To this end the US Agency for International Development (USAID) tried to support development of civil society, promote employment and income growth, and help improve health, education and the environment (Gold, April 2002). USAID allocations to the region grew from \$77.5 million in FY 1993 to \$199 million in FY 1995 (Lubin, 1995). However, this was only a small part of total US assistance funds to the NIS. Central Asia, with roughly 20 percent of the NIS’ total population, consistently received only 10-13 percent of USAID allocations to the NIS (Nichol, 1996, pp. 6-9).¹⁶

However, one should take into consideration that, except for the civil war in Tajikistan, there was actually no other major conflict in the region. Of course, there were some potential conflicts within and between republics, such as between Tajiks and Uzbeks in Uzbekistan or elsewhere, and border disputes, though none were as important as Washington claimed. As P. Croissant and B. Aras argued cogently, predictions at the time the Soviet Union collapsed, that its demise would spawn a series of bloody ethnic conflicts, had mostly not been borne out (Croissant & Aras, 1999, p. XV).

Politico-Economic Reforms

The rhetoric of democracy and freedom is apparent in discourse on US national interests around the world. The belief seems to be that open and democratic societies serve as instruments for furtherance of US national interests. According to G. J. Ikenberry, democracy promotion is a strategy based on the view that the political character of other states has an enormous impact on US ability to ensure its security and economic interests (Ikenberry, 1999). This conviction about the value of democracy has run through much US foreign policy thinking in the last decades. In 1995 Anthony Lake, then former Director of the National Security Council, maintained:

We led the struggle for democracy because the larger the pool of democracies, the greater our own security and prosperity. Democracies, we know, are less likely to make war on us or on other nations. They tend not to abuse the rights of their people. They make for more reliable trading partners. And each new democracy is a potential ally in the struggle against the challenges of our time—containing ethnic and religious conflict; reducing the nuclear threat; combating terrorism and organized crime and overcoming environmental degradation. (Ikenberry, 1999, pp. 56-65)¹⁷

In this context G. E. Fuller noted: “Part of American interests in the rest of the world at large includes the assisting of democratic governments that respect human rights, allow open political dialogue, have free market economies, and exhibit concern for the global environment” (Fuller, 1994, p. 139). However, Washington has frequently supported and/or financed non-democratic states in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

¹⁶ During 1992-1994 the USA provided NIS with \$4.68 billion. Department of State, 1995.

¹⁷ In an address on 3 May 1994. Talbott (1994, pp. 280-281) remarked: “Market democracy makes not only for prosperous citizens but for safe neighbors as well. History shows us that market democracies tend not to go to war with one another; they tend not to sponsor terrorist acts against each other; and they are more likely to be reliable trading partners, to protect the global environment, and to respect international law. In short, market democracies are the kind of friends and stable partners that the U.S. Government and U.S. businesses seek throughout the world”.

After the collapse of the USSR, President Clinton formulated a new policy, “enlargement of free-market democracies”, to replace containment of Soviet communism as the centrepiece of US foreign policy (Simon & Emmerson, September 1996). Washington declared its objectives in the former Soviet republics to include promotion of human rights and democracy, fostering of which in the NIS was claimed by some to be a top priority of US foreign policy (Nichol, 2001, pp. 4-16). This has enjoyed prominence in US Central Asian policy since 1991, when former Secretary of State Baker, outlined his “five principles” for peaceful and orderly dissolution of the Soviet Union: first, peaceful self-determination consistent with democratic values and principles; second, respect for existing borders, with any changes occurring peacefully and consensually; third, respect for democracy and rule of law, especially elections and referenda; fourth, human rights, particularly minority rights; and fifth, respect for international law and obligations (Baker, 1995, p. 72). Rhetorically, Washington encouraged pluralism, freedom, and democracy in strategically important states, as much as was feasible without destabilising the region. Baker said:

We believe it is important that reform towards democracy and free markets take place and it is also important that the United States makes it clear that it supports the territorial integrity of these countries and the independence of these states. (Mollazade, 1995, pp. 48-50)

Commitment to these principles was even a US condition for establishing embassies in the republics (Friedman, 1992a, p. A3; 1992b, p. A7).

The United States continued to support democratisation in the former Soviet republics, Central Asians included, through various programs such as the Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets (FREEDOM) Support Act (FSA), passed by Congress on 24 October 1992. With the passage of FSA the USA laid the foundation for multifaceted assistance to the Central Asian states, initially focusing on democratisation and promotion of free market economies, and funding many educational and social programs. In addition to FSA, the Central Asian-American Enterprise Fund (CAAEEF or the Fund) was incorporated in August 1994. Its function was to provide budgets for policies and practices conducive to promoting development of the Central Asian private sector. Both organisations were directed by the State Department.

The question is whether US assistance was or was not restrictive. In other words, was progress in democratic reform really a US condition for providing the republics with aid? While visiting Central Asia in 1993, Talbott called on the states to improve their human rights performance and suggested that “aid might be tied to their record in this area” (Fuller, 18/19 September 1993). On 19 May 1993 Washington signed a bilateral agreement with Kyrgyzstan, pledging cooperation and assistance, ostensibly to signal US support for Kyrgyzstan, which seemed to score highly on ratings of liberalisation, as a model for the other Central Asian states, because of its bold pursuit of macroeconomic stabilisation and democratic reform, and because it had been praised as “an island of democracy” in the region (Anderson, 1999; Osorova, 15 March 2000; ICG, 28 August 2001; IRIN, 21 January 2004).¹⁸ By contrast, Washington shunned Niyazov of Turkmenistan (who, unlike his Kyrgyz counterpart, was not invited to meet President Clinton when he visited Washington in March 1993), on the grounds of disapproval of his human rights record (Fuller, 1993, p. 4). However, in practice the

¹⁸ “US, Kyrgyz Sign Bilateral Agreement on Assistance” and “Bentsen Calls Kyrgyzstan a Model for All CIS Republics” (21 May 1993), *USIS European Wireless File*, (95/93), p. 12. However, the Kyrgyz government has increasingly been criticised for an alleged rise in human rights abuses and restrictions on press freedom.

states' poor record on human rights, particularly in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, did not stop the United States from aiding them in furtherance of its own interests.

Despite the stated US goal, the Central Asian countries are far from democracy, as some politicians and scholars in the United States have acknowledged. In October 1996 Ambassador James Collins (21 October 1996) insisted that progress in democratisation in the region "has been much slower than we would have liked". J. Nichol further argued that "...the majority of Central Asian states appear more authoritarian than during the Gorbachev period, according to many observers, and commit many human rights abuses" (Nichol, 1996, pp. 7-12). The nature of leadership in most of the republics has placed maintenance of their own power ahead of democratic reform.

In market reform, Washington also made little headway. Because it was expected to generate political reform and preclude return to totalitarianism, US policymakers funded programs for economic reform and accelerated privatisation (Clinton, 4 February 1997). Talbott argued that the US aim was "to help them towards democracy", and noted: "Since 1992, the US has obligated more than 2.2 billion dollars in overall assistance to the eight states of the Caucasus and Central Asian region" (Talbott, 1997a, pp. 10-13). Despite these injections of funds, neither democracy nor the market economy flourished in Central Asia, as some regional observers have noted. For example S. Duvanov, a Kazak journalist, wrote:

The Americans believed that market reforms in the national economy would trigger democratic reforms in political life. In fact, it turned out vice versa: concentration of power by the president has resulted not only in elimination of democratic institutions, but also in the restricted freedom of enterprise. Kazakhstan has become known as a highly unfavourable place for entrepreneurship. Doing business in Kazakhstan got more and more dependent on those at the top. Strictly speaking, by 1998 authority had merged with business. Those at the top either owned or acquired the control over major profitable sectors and companies. In fact, all those people have divided the major bits of the national pie. (Duvanov, 2018)

He noted that the United States had provided the Kazak government with funds to promote free enterprise and democracy, but the government envisaged something different, namely to gather personal wealth, consolidate more power, and neutralise opposition. In other words, the elite deftly co-opted US aid to its own advantage. Duvanov concluded: "All those years, the Clinton administration used democratic slogans to imitate aiding Kazak democracy, but in fact helping to curtail democratic processes in Kazakhstan" (Duvanov, 2018).

Washington's policy toward Tashkent was another example of insufficient development in democracy. Uzbekistan was and (still is) far from a democratically; authority remaining centralised with former President Karimov in the 1990s, and had been plagued with widespread governmental and societal corruption. Furthermore, political repression and disproportionate responses to threats associated with political Islam have encouraged rather than diminished the radicalisation of Islamist movements, and galvanised popular support behind them (McGlinchey, 2009; Fairbanks, Starr, Nelson, & Weisbrode, 2001, pp. 50-56). Support for Uzbekistan contradicted the US commitment to principles of democracy and freedom. By playing the "our sonuvabitch" game, Washington has implicitly encouraged undemocratic Uzbek policy, and flagrantly contradicted rhetorical claims that US contact influences states towards moderation (Lieven, 1999/2000; Rohramacher, 22 July 2002).¹⁹

¹⁹ This policy is contrary to what Representative Dana Rohramacher said in July 2002: "We need to let the people of the world know that the United States is not the friend of totalitarian regimes, of gangsters who beat people up and slaughter them and refuse to allow the people of their country to control their destiny through the ballot box". Speech by D. Rohramacher (22 July 2002), *Congressional Record*, 148(10026), H5061.

One can certainly argue that “promotion of democracy” in Central Asia has been a “failed policy”. Not only did US money and policies not improve the situation in the republics, in most cases, such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, they helped the leaders to establish monopoly on power. In fact, a family-state has replaced communist-state monopoly in these countries. Some in Washington have acknowledged this. In testimony to the House of Representatives in November 2000, Congressman Christopher H. Smith said:

It may sound bizarre, but it may not be out of the realm of possibility that some of these [Central Asian] leaders who already head what are, for all intents and purposes, royal families, are planning to establish what can only be described as family dynasties. (30 October 2000, pp. H11576-H11580)

Power never left the hands of the region’s old communist elite, and Washington’s double-standards toward such leaders never motivated them to change their behaviour.²⁰ The United States has clearly lacked commitment to promotion of democracy and human rights in the region. According to Human Rights Watch reports, countries like Uzbekistan, in the first decade of independent, had around four times as many political prisoners as the whole of the former Soviet Union had in the early 1980s (Lieven, 28 May 2001). According to an “International League for Human Rights” report, in 2002 Uzbekistan had over 7,000 political prisoners—more than in all other post-Soviet states combined.²¹ This means that in some of these republics, the post-independence human rights situation was considerably worse than it was under late Soviet rule (Lieven, 2001). Although in 1992 all the region’s leaders assured the USA that they would pursue democratisation, and pledged on joining the OSCE that they would abide by international human rights standards, democracy has not yet reached Central Asia (Nichol, 1996). But the question arises: Why did the USA support leaders who had shown no willingness to democratization?

In fact, one can argue that Washington feared political Islam would be, in regard to its interests, a worse alternative to the existing regimes, so as long as these regimes served US interests, its policymakers were none too concerned about their flagrant abuses of democracy and human rights.

A contradiction emerged between the declared US policy of promoting democracy and the reality of the determination of the region’s leaders, particularly Karimov and Niyazov (former Turkmenistan president), to retain power (Hunter, 1996, p. 162). Nor, given Central Asian political nature and cultures, was fostering democracy there an easy task, as the various peoples lacked the cultural underpinnings necessary to support democratisation (Olcott, 2002).²² The political culture of the region is very different from that of the West; in particular decisions on power and patronage are based more on personal and clan connections than on publicised abstract criteria (Omelicheva, 24 May 2018; Akiner, 1994).

Hence, it is obvious that, in its first stage of engagement with the region, despite its advocacy of democracy, the United States did not pressure the leaders to consider democratic standards. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher held that Washington’s policies are among the primary reasons why this large part of the world is falling into despair. He maintained that the Clinton administration lowered the priority of human rights as an

²⁰ For American double-standards in promoting democracy see D. Larison (28 January 2011), “Dictatorships and Double Standards”, revisited, *The American Conservative*; and R. Kagan (August 1997), “Democracy and Double Standards”, *Commentary*, 104(2), 19-26.

²¹ “Human Rights Violations in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan”, statement from the International League for Human Rights, Agenda Item 11, 58th Session of the Commission on Human Rights, 12 April 2002, see also I. Rotar (16 February 2004), “State Policy Towards Muslims in Central Asia”, *Forum 18 News Service*, retrieved from http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=253 [accessed 12/05/2020].

²² Karimov has mentioned this point several times.

international goal (Smith, 30 October 2000, pp. H11576-H11580). Other analysts, such as B. Rumer, argued that Washington took no action against the region's brutal leaders because it recognised that the alternative was not democracy but either Islamic theocracy or chaos like that in the Balkans (Rumer, 2002). Both may be possible, but the likelihood of theocratic states emerging in Central Asia was very remote.

Therefore, promotion of democracy in Central Asia was in effect a lost cause, and the rulers' poor record in human rights and high levels of repression presented no barrier to US establishment of military and politico-economic relations. It would appear that the policy of promoting democracy and human rights was of only tactical significance in Washington's involvement with the region. In pursuit of its geopolitical interests, the United States ignored the authoritarian characteristics of the Central Asian regimes. As N. Chomsky in 1992 pointed out:

Consider the President's proud boast that *dictators and tyrants* know "that what we say goes." It is beyond dispute that the US has no problem with dictators and tyrants if they serve US interests, and will attack and destroy committed democrats if they depart from their service function. The correct reading of Bush's words, then, is: "What we say goes", whoever you may be. (Chomsky, 1992, pp. 61-64)

US Policy Mechanisms and Devices

Important national interests cost nations some of their national treasure, in the form of funding to support engagement and development, and of military assets to defend those interests. Washington in its first stage of engagement with Central Asia used different mechanisms and devices to develop its interests in the newly independent republics, ranging from "soft power" to military assistance and manipulation of allies.

Soft Power

As Mackinder developed his formula of the "Heartland", he advised strategists that maintaining balance in Central Asia would require a security coin where one side was "hard power" such as military assistance, and the other "soft power", namely diplomacy, financial aid, educational programs, culture, etc. An unstructured projection of influence is inherent in J. S. Nye's conception of "soft power" (Nye, 2002, p. 9). "Soft power" has an ability to entice and attract, or to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences of others (Nye, 2002, p. 9; 2004). It is ideational in form, and its characteristic is essentially influential. Nye argued that "soft power" involves "getting others to want what you want...it co-opts people rather than coerces them" (Nye, 2002, p. 9) Accordingly, Nye believed that

...we [Americans] must win friends through the use of our "soft power" instead of relying solely on "hard power." If we can persuade others to want what we want, we save having to spend on expensive carrots and sticks. Hard power works through coercion, using military sticks and economic carrots to get others to do our will. Soft power works through attraction. Our attractiveness rests on our culture, our political values and our policies by taking into account the interests of others. At a world gathering, [former] Secretary of State Colin Powell correctly reminded Europeans that although we won World War II using hard power, we followed it with the Marshall Plan and support for democracy. And soft power was essential to our victory in the Cold War. (Nye, 17 February 2003, p. 3)

He argued there are times when hard power is essential, but that US success in the long term depends on balancing both soft and hard power (Nye, 2003, p. 3).

To achieve their primary goals and interests in Central Asia, American policymakers mainly concentrated, at this stage, on "soft power". In this connection, US assistance programs were the most important instrument

for influencing the new republics including the Central Asians.²³ FSA directed the US President to designate a coordinator within the State Department to oversee assistance to the states of the former Soviet Union, excluding Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.²⁴ The Fund was also used to direct financial support to Central Asia. In July 1994 it planned to send \$150 million over five years to the republics. In addition to FSA and the Fund, some other US bodies provided the Central Asian republics with aid. In 1994 the Department of Agriculture gave \$10 million to Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan received \$500,000 in food and \$5.5 million in medical assistance under Operation Provide Hope (OPH). Washington also provided Kazakhstan with \$30 million in food aid. In Fiscal Year (FY) 1995 the US government set aside \$23 million for privatisation, plus \$10.5 million for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan to engage in economic restructuring, and Tajikistan received \$7.1 million in humanitarian aid. Through this kind of assistance the United States claimed to help the region's countries to promote democratisation, privatisation, and creation of free markets (Nichol, 2001, pp. 11-16; Blank, 1999, pp. 249-273).²⁵ However, it is doubtful that such goals could be gained by financial aid. In this connection, M. B. Olcott argued that money spent on developing civil society in the region is likely to have little impact (Olcott, 10 April 2001). In practice, the financial support was aimed at reducing dependence on Russia and pulling the republics gradually away from it. Washington viewed its assistance to, and cooperative activities with, the NIS, Central Asia included, as a significant element in its engagement with the former Soviet republics.²⁶ According to a US government annual report:

...the U.S. Government view[ed] its NIS assistance programs not only in developmental terms, but as an essential component in our overall relationship with these countries—these programs are not only promoting democratic and market reform, and helping prevent WMD proliferation and other threats to U.S. national security, but they are also helping the U.S. to build constructive diplomatic, trade and people-to-people relationships with the region.²⁷ (FY 2000)

But where did the money go? Did Washington know where it went? It seems that despite stated US interest in democracy promotion and economic reform and undertakings to provide aid, the money has not been

²³ At its peak many US government agencies were involved in US assistance efforts to the NIS: Departments of State, Defence, Energy, Commerce, Treasury, Agriculture, Congressional Research Service, Security and Exchange Commission, USAID, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Overseas Private Investment Corporation, Peace Corps, Trade and Development Agency, IREX, Eurasian Foundation, Program for Research and Training on Eastern Europe and the NIS, Export-Import Bank, Anti-Crime Training and Technical Assistance Program, United States Information Agency, CIA and FSA. For more information see CRS Report RL30148, Curt Tarnoff, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Division, "US Assistance to the Soviet Union and Its Successor States 1991-1994: A History of Administration and Congressional Action", 23 August 1995. The US Government allocated approximately \$886 million to fund assistance programs in Kazakhstan, plus \$190 million in surplus Department of Defence and privately donated humanitarian commodities from FY 1992 through FY 2002. And it has budgeted approximately \$218 million to fund assistance programs in Turkmenistan, plus \$45 million in surplus Department of Defence and privately donated humanitarian commodities from FY 1992 through FY 2002. The US Government has also allocated approximately \$634 million to fund assistance programs in the Kyrgyz Republic, plus \$146 million in surplus Department of Defence and privately donated humanitarian commodities from FY 1992 through FY 2002. The US Government has budgeted approximately \$508 million to fund assistance programs in Uzbekistan, plus \$209 million in surplus Department of Defence and privately donated humanitarian commodities from FY 1992 through FY 2002. *Fact Sheet, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs*, Washington, 15 November 2002. See also "US Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities With the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union", FY 2000 Annual Report Prepared by the Office of the Coordinator of US Assistance to the NIS.

²⁴ See testimony of Serge Duss (17 February 1995), Associate Director for Government Affairs, World Vision, in "Briefing on US Assistance to Central and Eastern Europe and the NIS: An Assessment", Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Washington, p. 49.

²⁵ Surprisingly US financial aid to these countries and others in the world has been called "Dollar Diplomacy", see Blank, "The United States: Washington's New Frontier in the Transcaspian", pp. 249-273.

²⁶ US Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities With the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union, FY 2000.

²⁷ Ibid.

directed appropriately. Instead, the region's leaders have enriched themselves, their families and a favoured few, while the rest of the population struggles to eke out a miserable existence and drifts towards desperation (World Bank, 1995; Howell, March 1996; Klugman, 1998; Coudouel, 1998; Anderson & Pomfret, 3/5 January 1999; Pomfret, August 1999).

Table 2

USAID Assistance to the Central Asian Republics, 1992-1994 (US\$ Million)

Country	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	Total
1992	2.00	1.00	10.00	5.00	n.a	18.00
1993	6.00	11.00	14.00	9.00	1.00	41.00
1994	131.1	65.1	30.1	101.00	30.6	357.9

Source: *US Agency for International Development (USAID) Annual Report 1994*, Department of State, Washington, 1995, and Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD), *Geographical Distribution of Financial Flows to Aid Recipients*, OECD, Paris, 1995.

Moreover, the US government set up a variety of educational programs, such as student exchange and scholarships, in the Central Asian countries, involving the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), the premier US nonprofit organisation specialising in education. IREX expanded academic exchanges, educational advising, alumni programming, independent media assistance and development, Internet training and access, professional training, non-governmental organisation (NGO) development, and partnership building.²⁸ Elizabeth Jones described the programs as the “most important tool” for US policy in Central Asia (Jones, 29 October 2003). Former Ambassador Sestanovich also acknowledged their importance for US objectives in the region:

We are providing the assistance necessary to help: exchanges that expose students, businessmen, farmers, government officials, and academics to the American way of life; judicial reform programs; advice on how to draft election laws in accord with international norms; training; observers for elections when they are held; and support for non-governmental organisations that will increasingly play a genuinely independent role in these countries' future. (Sestanovich, 30 April 1998)

These various programs initiated in and after 1993 have provided opportunities for students and scholars from the region to spend from a few weeks to one or two years in the USA, with access to academic facilities, libraries, faculty, scholars, and the opportunity to attend some courses, seminars and so forth.²⁹ As a result, Central Asians, particularly the youth, became familiar with American culture and values. Furthermore, each year the US government sends many trainers, teachers, and scholars to the region, to run educational programs for young people.

US Manipulation of Turkey

Two issues had led Washington to manipulate Turkey in its policy towards Central Asia. First was a belief that “Central Asia being so remote and so alien to Americans, the US government [was] not likely to get directly involved in that region” (Pipes & Clawson, 1993, pp. 124-142). Second, as noted earlier, US policymakers unrealistically feared that the vacuum left by the Soviet Union's demise would lead to enhanced

²⁸ For more detail on IREX activities in Central Asia see <http://www.irex.org/eurasia/> [accessed 20/05/2020].

²⁹ During my fieldwork in the USA, March/May 2003, I met many of these student and scholars from the region at University of Indiana, University of Chicago, and University of Washington.

Iranian activity in the region and a consequent spread of political Islam into the newly independent states. Such an assumption and fear led the United States to promote Turkey's role in Central Asia, encouraging ties to Ankara (Bal, 2000, pp. 107-165; Aras, 2002, pp. 7-26, 69-79). Turkey, as a western ally and secular state, was seen as a US bridge to the region and as an alternative to Iran.

Because of its cultural and linguistic affinities with all the Central Asians except the Tajiks, Turkey was regarded by the West, especially the United States, as a gateway to Central Asia and Transcaucasus. Furthermore, the secular quality of Turkey's official culture and, most significantly, its leaders' thoroughly pro-western orientation, induced Washington to support Ankara's engagement with the newly independent republics. Accordingly, many in the West, particularly in the United States, began to discuss Turkey's potential role in the post-Soviet era. *The New York Times* of 17 February 1992 observed that fear of fundamentalism spreading in Central Asia had, in turn, stimulated the USA to encourage Turkey in its approaches toward the region (17 February 1992, p. A10).³⁰ In early 1992 Secretary of State Baker, while visiting several Central Asian capitals, recommended to the political leaders that they adopt the Turkish model for political and economic development, and European politicians and media followed suit (Kramer, March/May 1996).³¹ President George Bush took to calling Turkey a "model to others, especially those newly independent republics of Central Asia" (Pipes & Clawson, 1993, pp. 124-142). Richard Burt, an official in the Reagan and Bush administrations, provided an emblematic view of Turkey as "the key 'front line' state in confronting the dominant post-Cold War dangers: state-sponsored terrorism, proliferation of nuclear and conventional weapons, and spread of radical Islamic fundamentalism" (Burt, 17 June 1997, p. A18).

The United States therefore, favoured a greater role for Ankara as a counterweight to Iran, and, as R. Israeli pointed out, to bring "Central Asia closer to the West" (Israeli, 1994, pp. 19-31; Malik, 25 October 2000, p. A22). On the eve of Prime Minister Demirel's visit to the United States in February 1992, a State Department spokesman proclaimed: "We undoubtedly prefer for Turkish influence to prevail over Iranian. This is in our interest" (Cited from *Izvestiya*, 12 February 1992, by Lipovsky, 1996, pp. 211-223). During a meeting with the region's leaders, Mme Catherine Lalumiere, the former Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, said Turkey provided a valid model of development for the independent Central Asian countries (Mango, 1993; Bal, 1998). Furthermore, Turkish politicians and scholars also envisaged a unique role for Turkey in Central Asia. M. Aydin, for example, did argue that Ankara could, and should, play a dynamic role in connecting the newly independent Central Asian and Caucasian republics to the rest of the world, and help them in their "quest for an identity" (Aydin, 1996, pp. 157-177).

Whether Turkey could play its proposed role, and Washington continued to support the Turkish model for Central Asia, remains undecided. Turkey had serious limitations on its ability to play an instrumental role in Central Asia. In the first flush of enthusiasm the region's leaders called Istanbul "the Mecca of Turks", but they did not maintain their initially positive view of the Turkish model (Pipes & Clawson, 1993, pp. 124-142; Sayari, 2010, pp. 225-247).

³⁰ *The New York Times*, 17 February 1992, p. A10. A. Rashid wrote "The United States and NATO, who wished to see Central Asia follow the Turkish model of pro-Westernism, capitalism, and secularism, also encouraged Turkey". A. Rashid (2002), *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 22.

³¹ In a meeting in 1992 with the Turkmen president, US Secretary of State James Baker urged Turkmenistan "to follow Turkey, rather than Iran". Quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 February 1993, on the same issue see also "The Go-Between Turkey Islam's Link to the West" (19 October 1992), *Times*, (42), 34-35.

In addition to Turkey, Washington had also encouraged Pakistani and Saudi Arabian influence in Central Asia to limit Iran's presence. It acknowledged overlapping regional priorities with Pakistan, which it subsequently depicted as a "moderate" Islamic state, and a model to be emulated. A draft defence planning document, leaked to *The New York Times* early in 1992, underlined Pakistan's strategic importance, asserting that "a constructive US-Pakistan relationship [would] be an important element in our strategy to promote stable security conditions in south-west and Central Asia" (Gerges, 1999, pp. 35-97).³² In a meeting with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in April 1995, Clinton called Pakistan "a good partner" that had "stood for democracy and opportunity and moderation".³³ Tomas Niles, the former Assistant Secretary of State, clearly insisted that the United States has also encouraged Saudi Arabia and others to provide assistance to the newly independent states of Central Asia (Niles, 9 April 1992; Haghayeghi, 1994, pp. 249-266). He said that in Central Asia the Saudis feel a cultural, traditional link which they do not necessarily feel in Central and Eastern Europe, and that "we believe that the Saudis will be prepared, working with us, working with Turkey" (Niles, 9 April 1992). All three states, especially Turkey, have been active in Central Asia at US urging, in presenting alternative Islamic paradigms to counter Iran's influence.

Hard Power: Expediting Military Assistance

The United States began military engagement with Central Asia soon after independence, aiming to support the region's integration with western political-military institutions, as well as to protect the new states' sovereignty and independence. Former Ambassador Sestanovich in 1998 described US efforts as aimed at helping the region's countries to create effective border controls, participate fully in bilateral and international arms control and non-proliferation programs, better control imports and exports, and develop modern military-civilian relationships (Sestanovich, 1998). From the early days of the Clinton administration, the United States and its NATO partners envisaged a security strategy encompassing the CIS, to be conducted through multilateral bodies and mechanisms, such as the UN, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), and bilateral links across the old Cold War divide. Such themes are particularly prominent in the work of some US scholars. Brzezinski, for example, outlined an ambitious strategy for NATO, under US leadership, to move closer to becoming an "international policeman" in the Transcaspian region, and lending vigorous support to the Central Asian states, but the main preoccupation was with building a new security structure for Europe and providing a multilateral umbrella for peacekeeping operations (Brzezinski, 1997, pp. 15-30).³⁴ Within this broad framework, the western powers' mission has been seen as promotion of the norms and rules of international peacekeeping procedures and teaching the methods of democratic control of defence policy and armed forces (Hollis, 1994; Clark, 1994). According to Talbott, expanding military-to-military cooperation during the Clinton administration would help reduce regional instability, promote mutual security, and seek to avoid any replay of the 19th century "great game" with its zero-sum competition for influence among great powers (Talbott, 1 September 1997b, p. 18).

One aspect of US military assistance to the republics was training and exercises. In 1993 Central Asian officers began to receive training at the George C. Marshall Centre in Garmisch, Germany, under a

³² *The New York Times*, 8 March 1992, p. A9.

³³ "Clinton: Pakistan, India Should Eliminate Nuclear Weapons", remarks by President Clinton and visiting Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto regarding elimination of nuclear weapons in South Asia and Pakistan-US relations, Washington, 11 April 1995.

³⁴ For more information on US military assistance to the region see also K. Butler (17 September 2001), "US Military Cooperation With the Central Asian States", NIS Nonproliferation Program, pp. 15-19.

German-American security initiative. In addition, the USA gave International Military Education Training (IMET) grants, and maintained other military contacts with all the countries except Tajikistan. During his visit to the United States in February 1994 Nazarbayev signed a memorandum on US-Kazak defence cooperation, including talks on defence, training, and budgets (Nichol, 1996, pp. 5-8). In December 1995 Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan formed a joint peacekeeping unit, with support from US Central Command (CENTCOM). This unit, the Central Asian Battalion (Centrazbat), was created to maintain stability in Central Asia and enable the three participants to share information in support of their bid to join UN peacekeeping missions. Centrazbat exercises have been held annually since 1997, with participation by forces from the USA, other NATO members and regional states (Wishnick, 2002, pp. 1-12).

From 1994 NATO forged stronger links with all the region's republics through the Partnership for Peace (Groves, 1999, pp. 43-53; Bhatti & Bronson, 2000, pp. 129-145; Fairbanks, Starr, Nelson, & Weisbrode, 2001, pp. 7-11, 38).³⁵ By mid-1994 Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan had joined this program, and Tajikistan followed in 2001 (Akiner, 2000, pp. 90-128).³⁶ Central Asia's leaders reacted positively to NATO's expansion. Akayev, former Kyrgyz President, claimed in 1997 that cooperation with NATO had helped Kyrgyzstan partially to resolve several urgent problems, including advanced training of military personnel, overcoming natural disasters, and providing expert aid to various ministries.³⁷ Niyazov thanked NATO for helping train Turkmen military personnel, and Karimov proclaimed that US advisors were helping form the Uzbek armed forces.³⁸ Karimov also claimed that NATO might become a stabilising force not only on the European continent, but also, by strengthening its political structure and "Partnership for Peace", in the vast Eurasian region (Karimov, 1997, p. 185). He maintained: "Our participation in the 'Partnership for Peace' program we regard as strengthening our independence and sovereignty, as connecting ourselves to modern military and technical achievements, and as expanding opportunities in our military experts' training" (Karimov, 1997, p. 185). Nazarbayev in 1999 praised NATO's contribution to Kazakhstan's defence structure, and said "Kazakhstan considers the participation in this program [PfP] and the whole cooperation with the Atlantic Block principally important" (Nazarbayev, 20 December 1999, p. 1). However, while Central Asian regimes expressed interest in expanding partnership with NATO, they denied that this would be to the detriment of their relations with Russia. Yet, and despite their positive reaction to NATO expansion, in discussions with NATO, the presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan emphasised that they understood Moscow's concern about NATO's eastward expansion and its policy in the Balkans, and that Russia's interests should be taken into consideration (Jekshenkulov, 2000). They also indicated that the republics were not planning, even in the far future, to seek membership of NATO. Karimov pointed out that Uzbekistan's law on the fundamental principles of foreign policy bans participation in military or military-political blocs (Jekshenkulov, 2000).

The PfP's long-term strategic goals have been to involve the region in the security agenda, exchange information and expand military cooperation, plan for peacekeeping operations, and finally strengthen stability in furtherance of US targets and interests. Moreover, inclusion of the countries in the PfP formalised their

³⁵ PfP was the basis for practical security cooperation between NATO and individual Partner countries (19+1). Activities include defence planning and budgeting, military exercises, and civil emergency operations.

³⁶ *RFE/RL*, Prague, 25 February 2002.

³⁷ Cited from *Onyok*, Special Issue, Kyrgyzstan, June 1997, pp. 22-23.

³⁸ Quoted from *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 13 March 1997, p. 6; and *Segodnia*, 17 December 1997, p. 8.

relations with NATO, and established a basis for combined action.³⁹ NATO's key priorities in Central Asia have been to operate in harmony with the new world order, cooperate with other international organisations (UN, OSCE, and EU), strengthen security on the Eurasian continent, accentuate preventive diplomacy, and support introduction of integrated systems of military planning and standards.⁴⁰ The PfP program hosted a series of exercises to provide training in peacekeeping and develop interoperability. Central Asian troops have participated in PfP exercises since 1995. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan participated in operation NUGGET, exercises in peacekeeping tactics in August 1995 and in July 1997 at Fort Polk, Louisiana, where Kazakhstan also took part.⁴¹

Indeed, expanding military engagement with the republics was viewed as a significant mechanism to promote their integration into western political-military institutions, encourage civilian control over militaries, institutionalise cooperative relations with NATO, especially the United States, and deter other regional powers, particularly Russia, China, and Iran, from seeking to dominate the region. From the early 1990s Washington began laying the groundwork for future enhancement of military influence in the region. In this connection, R. G. Kaiser argued in *The Washington Post*:

During the 1990s the United States began to quietly build influence in the area. Washington established significant military-to-military relationships with Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Soldiers from those countries have been trained by Americans...The militaries of all three have an ongoing relationship with the National Guard of a U.S. state—Kazakhstan with Arizona, Kyrgyzstan with Montana, Uzbekistan with Louisiana. (Kaiser, 27 August 2002, p. A1)

Following the events of 11 September 2001, the existing military interaction facilitated Central Asian cooperation with the USA in the “war on terror”.

Conclusion and Analyse

Before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the United States paid no attention to Central Asia. Considered a “backwater of the Soviet empire”, the region was primarily perceived as vast, remote, and unfamiliar (Fairbanks, Starr, Nelson, & Weisbrode, 2001, p. 94). The Soviet collapse offered Washington an opportunity to extend its influence into the region for the first time. However, US officials did not initially recognise any vital interests in Central Asia. This was acknowledged by some American scholars, who described the region's relevance as something that people in the West are only “just beginning to understand” (Fairbanks, Starr, Nelson, & Weisbrode, 2001, p. 97).

Yet uncertain views about the region did not stop the USA from establishing relations with the newly independent republics soon after the demise of the USSR. Indeed, they had important geopolitical interests there. The United States, seeking to maximise and maintain its status as the only post-Cold War superpower, wanted to ensure that no single state, such as Russia, China, or Iran, or group of states, such as the Islamic countries, could challenge its position in the area. Since Russia has been trying to reorganise its extensive

³⁹ The general objectives of the PfP program had been identified as follows: to facilitate transparency in national defence planning and budgeting processes; to ensure democratic control of defence forces; to maintain the capability and readiness to contribute to operations under the authority of the UN and/or the responsibility of the OSCE; to develop cooperative military relations with NATO, for the purpose of joint planning, training and exercises, in order to strengthen the ability of PfP participants to undertake missions in the field of peacekeeping, search and rescue, humanitarian operations, and others as may subsequently be agreed; and to develop, over the longer term, forces that are better able to operate with those of the members of the North Atlantic Alliance. See <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/index.htm> [accessed 22/05/2020].

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Cooperative NUGGET is a military training exercise designed to foster interoperability between the participating forces.

military and politico-economic linkages with the republics from mid-to-late 1992 onwards, it has occupied a major place in Washington's policy in the region.

In short, this paper demonstrated that, in the early stage, the US engagement with Central Asia was a mix of misleading, misunderstood, and to some extent failed policies, rendering US policy toward the newborn republics far less effective than it might have been. In this connection, P. A. Goble, an expert on Central Asia and the Caucasus, wrote in 1994:

Unfortunately, even now, when the six Muslim states (Central Asian republics plus Azerbaijan) that have emerged from the wreckage of Soviet power call out to be taken seriously as countries, all too many in the West—and especially in the United States—remain trapped in the old paradigm for the region. As a result, we not only continue to misunderstand this region, but, equally seriously, we are failing to recognize its likely impact on the international scene, precisely the issue we claim to care about and the one with enormous consequences. (Goble, 1994, p. 1)

Finally, during the early years there was no uniformity in US approach toward Central Asia. As regional expert A. Rashid has also argued, US policy was “stymied by the lack of a strategic framework—the United States dealt with issues as they came up, in a haphazard, piecemeal fashion, rather than applying a coherent, strategic vision to the region” (Rumer, 2002, pp. 57-68). However, this initial phase provided a foundation for next stages, in which Washington pursued a clearer policy in the region, and focused particularly on energy resources, security and other issues.

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