

FOREWORD

The events of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent war in Afghanistan saw their fair share of winners and losers in the international arena. The Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, at the very least, got noticed. As the United States scrambled for tactical support from willing allies, several of the aforementioned states immediately complied. In exchange for military bases and overflight rights—essential for U.S. success in Afghanistan—the Central Asian republics received aid and orders to maintain sluggish democratic reforms.

Optimism bloomed inside and outside the region. Eager for their slice of the fortune, these states, rich in oil, could generate great wealth with sufficient investment from abroad. This excessive optimism, however, overlooked a few facts. The Central Asian republics are, for the most part, tyrannical regimes. Militant Islam is on the rise, as is the suppression of democratic opposition groups. The region is home to the world's worst environmental disaster and is a key thoroughfare in the global drug trade.

September 11th also cast the Central Asian republics in a new strategic light. They suddenly became important to many nations, particularly the United States. This importance gave the region's leaders unforeseen leverage. But have changes been felt in the countries themselves?

With this regionally focused issue on Central Asia, the *Journal of International Affairs* sets out to address this question. Martha Brill Olcott's capstone article introduces key issues that other articles illustrate in depth. Part one contains analyses on Islam, drug-trafficking, economics and energy development, environmental degradation and census politics. Part two looks at Russian, Iranian and U.S. foreign policies toward the region, while the Cordier Essay offers a take on the domestic sources of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. The importance of the war in Afghanistan should not be understated in this assessment of the region. Operation Enduring Freedom brought Central Asia to the forefront of many states' policies. Thus, part three looks at Afghanistan and its prospects for stability from two unique perspectives: an analysis of warlord politics and the link between governance and ethnicity.

This collection captures neither all relevant perspectives nor all relevant topics. It does, however, offer a nuanced view of the most pressing issues, from some of the world's foremost scholars on the region. Although each author offers a distinct voice, there is one clear commonality: The problems facing Central Asia are not new; they are merely new to those of us who, prior to September 11th, did not appreciate their importance.

The Editors

