

# Central Asia Seminars

## 1st GCSP-OSCE Academy Seminar: "Central Asia 2008"

Seminar Rapporteur: Selbi Hanova



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On 22-23 September 2008, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Academy, Bishkek, organised a forum for security policy experts from Eurasia, East and South-East Asia, Europe and the United States, to analyse and discuss the continued interaction of key regional security dynamics and functional issues in Central Asia over 2008. A series of panels identified major emergent themes, linkages and trends, and reflected on their strategic impact and security policy implications. The focus included panels on the Afghan factor and Georgian crisis in Central Asian security politics, energy geopolitics, the role of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)<sup>1</sup> and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)<sup>2</sup> in the region, as well as US and Russian policies towards Central Asia. The seminar highlighted and analysed some of the key security tendencies and practical aspects of security in the region including emerging trends and themes, their interplay and contradictions as well as their likely strategic influence and consequences.

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1 The current member states of the CSTO are: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.

2 The current member states of the SCO are: China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan with an observer status for: India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan.



The OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Over twenty-five participants attended, including practitioners from the Russian, Kazakh and Uzbek Embassies in Bishkek and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the European Commission Delegation to Kyrgyzstan. In addition to GCSP and the OSCE, a range of regional and international experts from the policy and academic community participated, including speakers from: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore; Institute of Strategic and Interregional Research under the President of Uzbekistan; Institute for Public Policy, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; Kazakh Institute of Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty, Kazakhstan; Moscow State University for International Relations (MGIMO); Outreach Programs Directorate, George C. Marshall European Center for European Security Studies (GCMC), Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany; and, the Near East South Asia Center (NESAC), National Defense



University, Washington D.C. This Geneva Paper is therefore a synthesis of the works presented and the opinions expressed during the seminar presentations and lively discussions.



# New Problems, Perspectives, and Paradigms

It is now commonplace to contend that the study of contemporary Central Asia suffers from a dearth of comprehensive and rigorous analytical approaches. There are ontological and conceptual problems associated with the study of this region. It has been noted that multiple misperceptions dominate the discussion, beginning with the image of an expansionist Uzbekistan and ending with the potential “Balkanisation” of the region, with all possible alternative characterisations of order falling within this spectrum. Moreover, the studies of political processes are often examined through the prism of the balance of power, hierarchy, zero- and even negative-sum politics. Such a prism implies that relations between the five republics in the region are conflictual rather than cooperative. Scholarly works on Central Asia suffer from the lack of strong theoretical and conceptual underpinnings, giving way to conspiracy, speculation, rumour, public suspicion and allegations that purport to account for the presence, purpose and power of various internal and external actors in the region.

In geopolitical terms Central Asia today faces two key realities. First, there is the geo-politics of new post-Soviet Central Asian “superpowers” in the context of the overall geopolitical transformation of the region after the events of 11 September 2001. One resulting manifestation is the active presence of the US in the region, the “Heartland of Eurasia”, which has transformed the previous status quo. The second ‘reality’ is the response taken by Central Asian states to the post-9/11 US presence. The region is in need of “Central Asian methodology reversed, Central Asian geopolitics revised and Central Asian integration revisited”.



Opening remarks by Ambassador Dr. Fred Tanner (Director, GCSP) and Dr. Tim Epkenhans (Director, OSCE Academy)

## Methodological Approaches

In terms of methodological approaches to the study of Central Asia, various cross-cutting themes are apparent. These include evolving discussions and understanding focussed on misperceptions about the region. The issue of identity development – closely associated as it is with the rising influence of Islam – is central, as is the changing

understanding of history and ideas about democracy that together influence the conceptions of security, and so, the elaboration of security policies in Central Asia.

While a number of simplistic and superficial views have been expressed with regards to the future evolution of security politics in the region, in reality, there exist a set of factors that render any predictions of future regional developmental scenarios highly speculative. In fact, if we examine commonly understood and usually juxtaposed dynamics – the geopolitical versus security, the religious versus civilisational – it is evident that each of these dynamic factors develops according to its own logic and along its own pathway. As a result, a complicated picture of the region emerges. Thus, three basic methodological approaches require revision. First, there is a need to revise our understanding of zero-sum game geopolitics and how it is applied in the analysis of security politics in Central Asia. Second, the theory of distinctive national evolution has proven to be superficial and of limited utility in characterising the development of states in the region. Third, the “Easternisation” or “Asianisation” of the concept of democracy by state leaders in the region has led to the self-legitimisation of authoritarianism in the guise of “national democracy”.

In terms of identity development, the collapse of the Soviet Union promoted debates and discussions around this issue. Such debates present numerous dichotomies in identity politics in Central Asia: nationalism versus regionalism; democracy versus autocracy; and, Islam versus secularism. The increasing significance of an Islamic way of life generates ideological friction in the socio-political processes unfolding in Central Asia. Some analysts point to the threat of Islamic extremism and predict the possibility of potential scenarios or models of political development unfolding, and so, resultant characterisations of socio-political development in the region. The “Algerian scenario” is one such scenario, suggesting that Islamists win elections in Central Asia but are denied the

power by the military and security services which support the status quo regime, and civil war occurs – state against society. The “Palestinian scenario” entails a terrorist organisation in the guise of political party or movement winning an election and securing power and democratic legitimacy. The “Iranian scenario” highlights the possibility of an Islamic revolution that allows for the establishment of theocracy.



Participants at the seminar session

The “Pakistani scenario” – one that gathers increasing contemporary relevance – projects a scenario characterised by the geopolitical involvement of Islamism and a clash between democratic secular political system and Islamists forces. An “Afghanistan scenario” – regionally contiguous as it is - raises the possibility of the “Talibanisation” of a state, leading to regime change. The “Tajikistani scenario” – an example taken from the region itself – entails the legalisation of an indigenous Islamic Party which then merges with criminal elements and is involved in an inter-clan power struggle in the country. A subsequent civil war occurs which is resolved by means of incorporation of Islamists in state

structures. Lastly, the “Turkish-Malaysian scenario” suggests some form of incorporation of Islam in a democratic political process.

Three parallel trends are also evident in the security politics of contemporary Central Asia. First, we witness a nationalisation and “geopolitisation” of the concept and meaning of democracy among the states in Central Asia. This tendency was especially evident in the wake of the “colour revolutions” which occurred in Georgia (the “Rose Revolution” of December 2003), Ukraine (the “Orange Revolution” of November-December 2004) and Kyrgyzstan (the “Tulip Revolution” of February-March 2005). The Western policy of democracy promotion was understood by post-Soviet states, particularly the Russian Federation, as a move to undermine the influence of status quo regimes in the region. The engineering of regime change by the western intelligence services, NGOs and international organisations, through a series of post-modern coups d’état, was undertaken in order to strategically re-orientate these states away from Russia and towards the West. By 2008 Central Asian elites appeared deadlocked in their search for national models of democracy, with little progress at elaborating legitimate and representative models that are transparent and offer accountability and good governance. Second, there is also a trend of “privatising” history, which is especially evident in the discussions of Tajik and Uzbek historians over the origin and current ownership status of disputed territories between the two states. Third, the revitalisation and reinforcement of regionalism is also a major visible trend that shapes the strategic landscape in Central Asia.

It is often argued that Central Asia has constantly suffered from strong external geopolitical pressure, which implied that the states in the region are security consumers rather than producers, more objects of than subjects in international relations. This long-standing paradigm suggests that, as the states in the region are not self-sufficient in the field of security, they require external security assistance. As a result a

“marketplace of and for security services” appeared in the region and various “security umbrellas” are offered, accompanied by historical and current geopolitical baggage. It is often argued that the establishment of military bases and strategic partnerships between the US and respective states in Central Asia after 9/11 and in the wake of the counter-terrorist campaign in Afghanistan “forced” Russia and China to take steps through the mechanism of the SCO to diminish US presence and what they perceived to be an “American threat” to their leadership in the region.

In terms of security conception, the security of the state in Central Asia has often been understood to mean the security of a particular ruling regime, with the foreign and security policy priorities and implications this implies. The concept of national security is often manipulated and used by ruling elites to serve their own purposes and, as a consequence, the securitisation of identity and ideology is taking place with security and stability being understood in terms of ideologies that legitimise the notion of elite continuity and settled political succession within enclosed elites.

## Geopolitics of Central Asia Requires Revision

The reference to Halford MacKinder’s early twentieth century “Heartland theory” (1904) is a common feature in the geopolitical analysis of the region, serving to account for the presence of multiple actors in the region and the interplay of their interests. Moreover, as it is often noted, as Central Asia constitutes the “Heartland” of the Eurasian continent, it has been isolated not only from the world’s political processes and trade due to its geography and superpower engagement, but the region is also self-isolated. In addition to the century-old theory of the ‘pivot of history’, reference to a ‘New Great Game’ in Central Asia is a predominant feature and characteristic element present in many analyses of



power politics in the region. Neither the ‘Heartland theory’ nor the paradigm of the Great Game offer a comprehensive account of the political processes taking place in the region, particularly its geopolitical transformation which has occurred after 9/11. Consequently, any attempt at the analysis of Central Asia ought to be undertaken in ways that include an analysis of the impact of such changes. In order to complement the neo-classical geopolitical perspective, critical geopolitics – an approach that appreciates the weight of history, ideas and identity in shaping the impact of geography on politics – is needed in the analysis of the region. A further difference between neoclassical and critical geopolitics lays in the fact that the previous “imperial” geopolitics is based on the premise that war is possible, while the new critical “democratic” geopolitics is evolved around the idea that peace is possible.

In turn, both the US and Russia are faced with the need to adapt old policies to the new realities of the region. Thus, Russia will require an integrated “southern strategy”, which would include the recognition of the fact that it alone cannot guarantee the security of Central Asia and that its fundamental interests in the region coincide with those of the US. Meanwhile, the US, in any formulation of a new strategy towards the region, will require a substantial rethink that addresses and complements both Russian and Chinese perspectives on developments in the region.

## The Theme of Central Asia Integration Is Once Again Emerging

The contemporary integrationist-isolationist dichotomy in Central Asia can be captured by the phrase: “united in culture but divided by politics”. Indeed, the region is fragmented simultaneously along ethnic lines and in terms of growing differences in economic and political indices, a dynamic especially visible when we compare the GDP per capita income

of Kazakh citizens with others in Central Asia. Certainly, the scholarly perception once again depicts the region as fated to disintegrate further, despite the fact that important existing assets for integration still exist. The lack of multilateral cooperation further undermines any meaningful attempts at creating a collective security system in the region.

## Perceptions of Security in Central Asia

Such perceptions are important to keep in mind when discussing factors that influence the security policies in the region. Clearly, the leaders in the region focus their security policies on the issue of combating terrorism, particularly in terms of breaking a nexus between “radical Islamists” in the region and terrorism. However, the political history of the region poses security dilemmas for such counter-terrorist activity and helps account for the failure of counter-terrorist mechanisms in Central Asia.

The Soviet system’s anti-religious activity – symbolised most potently by a Politburo member for “Militant Atheism” – and the establishment of loyal pro-Soviet clergy have led to the emergence of unofficial “parallel Islam”. In the post-Soviet Central Asian context, the re-emergence of various religious groups is promoted by poor policy responses, including little control over the educational strategies, the continuation of Soviet-style maintenance of the mufti loyal to the government, and disproportionate persecution. What can be currently observed is the generational conflict involving the young generation, mufti and local crime groups. As a result, there is a presence of religious groups in the region starting from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT). HT is regionally renowned for being labelled a terrorist group by the intelligence services of the states in Central Asia and their organisations, like the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) of the SCO. There is a

shared tendency among these and other religious groups in the region to schisms, splits, uncoordinated activity and the personalisation of group identity. Often a connection of religious activity to crime (usually petty crime) is an accompanying element.

The key challenge to the analysis of such fundamental religious and terrorist threats in Central Asia is located in the lack of reliable sources and data upon which to build an accurate estimation of the roles, missions and duties of such groups. Policy responses and assumptions are based on the governmental reports on Islamic groups and movements. Moreover, methods of collecting information are also open to question. The security services heavily rely on informants. Generally, governments in Central Asia are secretive about sharing accurate data on the activities of religious groups and as a result different and at times conflicting narratives are propagated. There is a clear need for the improvement of reportage on the activities of such groups. There is also a need to study how Islam is communicated as well as how it contributes to identity construction within the region. To that end, the agendas of local religious authorities need to be identified and analysed. In the recent years, for example, more young females have been observed joining those religious groups, and the explanation for this tendency needs to be examined.

In terms of elaborating effective and practical policy responses, a clear and transparent strategy is needed in managing disenfranchised and marginalised communities that are most inclined to fundamentalist religious propaganda. Such a strategy should include the isolation of the core elements within religious groups, those that propagate violent solutions to address perceived and actual grievances. At the same time cooperative and beneficial relations should be forged with groups that are non-violent in character and intent, and do not propagate the ideas of violence.

While it is crucial to foster greater economic inclusion for the broader segments of the society rather than maintain the status quo, current socio-economic elite politics in Central Asia are exclusive (with the exception of Kazakhstan where the size of the middle class is growing). It is self-evident that as larger number of young and uneducated people will join religious groups, education strategies must also be revised.

# The Afghan Factor in Central Asian Security Politics

Afghanistan remains one of the key factors shaping military and political security in Central Asia. Central Asian states are therefore interested in retaining US and other coalition forces in the region. Certainly, the role of Western military forces in Afghanistan is widely interpreted in Central Asia, but all parties and observers agree that there is an essential causal connection between the security of Central Asia and that of Afghanistan. Ninety percent of the world's narcotics production comes from Afghanistan, of which thirty percent is transiting through the territory of Central Asia.

What would constitute the success of the NATO operation in Afghanistan? There are three pillars against which International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) success could be measured. Firstly, the building of an Afghan National Army (ANA) and security forces. Secondly, progress in the civil development sector provides another pillar. The international community leads efforts in this sector, which NATO supports as a secondary mission: building of the police forces, providing training, equipment and mentoring, and advancing governance and justice in Afghanistan. Thirdly, the ability of the Afghan government with the international community to both engage the Taliban and provide a comprehensive regional framework to ensure that ISAF's departure

leaves peace sustainable. How might we measure actual progress in each of these areas?

The building of an ANA has moved forward with 70,000 troops projected for 2008. Before 2008, the inability of the Taliban to mount successful conventional attacks suggested that ISAF had mounted an effective counter-insurgency and guerrilla campaign. However, throughout 2008, the Taliban have undertaken both conventional and unconventional attacks. Their influence has spread from South to East, and is now close to Kabul and active in some parts of the North and West. Shahid suicide-bombing attacks have increased month by month, and the majority of the attacks occur in the south-western provinces. ISAF is losing the hearts and minds of the Afghans and is viewed as an occupying power, albeit and at best, a necessary evil. The military situation is at its worst since 2001. It is now clear that strategic errors include initial US pressure to keep ISAF only in Kabul in 2003 rather than supporting stabilisation and reconstruction efforts throughout Afghanistan – ISAF operations expanded into northern Afghanistan in 2004, then moved west in 2005 and south in 2006. In addition, the way in which the ground campaign was won in late 2001 – CIA and special forces with Northern alliance warlords supplying infantry – guaranteed warlordism was institutionalised in the post-Taliban governance system. Lastly, the creation of a strong ANA may prove a double-edged sword for the security of Central Asia in the context of the scarcity of the hydro and energy resources in Afghanistan. A post-ISAF regime in Kabul could dictate its own rules to neighbouring states and the balance of power in the region could change once again.

At the moment, there are two different perspectives on how to approach conflict management in Afghanistan. The first assumes that peace is possible only once all foreign troops are removed from the territory of the country. The second perspective states that the stabilisa-

tion of the situation and the establishment of peace are only possible after the Taliban are completely destroyed.

Progress in the civil development sector is marked by negative indicators. The political situation in Afghanistan is unstable. Several localities in the East and South of the country are controlled by the Taliban including strategic points of Kandahar and Herat. Different regions form parallel government structures that remain loosely, if at all, coordinated by the central government in Kabul. The internal political struggle in Afghanistan is centred along ethnic lines. Economic reconstruction is an obvious failure. Governance is weaker, with no mechanism to screen senior appointments allowing patronage systems to be embedded. The Ministry of Interior and police force are widely perceived to be totally corrupted institutions, colonised and penetrated by drug traffickers and warlords. The gulf between the Afghan government and the people is growing, as is the gap between the Afghan government and international donors. Judicial impunity and corruption are consolidating and societal unrest exacerbated by a coming winter food crisis and high inflation. Pashtuns are sitting on the fence, waiting to see if the Taliban or central government in Kabul wins.

The international community and ISAF have no strategy to engage the Taliban, nor has a comprehensive regional policy been created. No framework of engagement is in place and there are no agreed red lines to act as policy guidance. Pakistan appears to be imploding and the Durand line that separates Pakistan from Afghanistan extremely porous. The threat of the “Afghanisation” of Pakistan also exists and becomes more topical every month. The tension between “no security without development - no development without security” gives rise to a number of dilemmas. A drug eradication programme fuels Taliban resistance; the lack of a drug eradication programme fuels Taliban resistance. This concerns the nature of action to defeat the Taliban. Isolating al-Qaeda from the mainstream Taliban via negotiation and local deals

looks morally ambiguous and messy. Negotiation can be understood to empower locals, gaining government access to towns (this is the UK perspective) or simply as a form of surrender to the Taliban (the US perspective). Even at the tactical level, victory or defeat will be very hard to measure and no agreement is likely.

Critics of ISAF operational effectiveness point to the enduring nature of factors that prevent success from being achieved. Many defence experts argue that resource constraints severely limit ISAF operational effectiveness and place the mission itself at risk: under-resourced, under-financed and under-staffed. Are usually cited as shortfalls: the lack of a mobile reserve; tactical mobility supported by sufficient airlift; combat troops, imagery and intelligence capabilities; as well as how the troops can be deployed – the cancer of national caveats.

What then of a NATO exit strategy? It is logical to argue that NATO operations will succeed when the benefits of NATO as a whole, and NATO operations in particular, are seen by NATO members to outweigh the costs. According to this reading, NATO only fails when it decides that the costs of success are too great. It is unlikely that black or white success/failure in ISAF will occur. NATO has the ability to manage both relative success and relative failure. The costs and benefits of relative success or failure will therefore be ameliorated through NATO's ability to shape perceptions – the domestic perceptions of member states and partners, and perceptions within NATO itself. Ultimately, if failure looks increasingly likely, then NATO may disengage and pass authority onto another international organisation, as well as the Afghan government and its nascent security structures (as the British have done in the south of Iraq): “Afghan problems need Afghan solutions” or “An ‘Afghan First’ approach” will become the rhetorical mantra that cloaks a failure. NATO will have redefined our understanding of its role to avoid too obvious a failure. Declare victory and leave decent interval becomes the strategy.



Thus, ISAF may still internally admit the failure of the counter-terrorist operations in the country, but leave victoriously with elections taking place. Another alternative could be to admit strategic failure, but share the responsibility amongst all members, to avoid a bitter and decimating intra-NATO struggle. The implications for Central Asia, if such an exit strategy cloaks strategic failure, would include the decrease of the credibility and legitimacy of the military bases together with the decrease of the role of NATO and the overall US presence in the region.



# Change and Continuity in Energy Geopolitics

The issue of energy security is an important element in our overall understanding of the strategic environment in Central Asia. Experts have constantly emphasised the need for the diversification of energy exports from the region. Best practice in other parts of the world suggests that the issue of energy security is also a social issue that potentially can lead to different forms of unrest. It is also closely associated with such issues as food security and climate change. In this regard, it is relevant to look at the other regions of the world such as South-East Asia where similar issues arise. The two distinctive cases of Indonesia and Singapore can provide insights into how the issue of energy security has been addressed.

Indonesia is rich in fossil fuels, including oil, natural gas and coal. However, oil production has been declining and the state became a net importer of oil in 2004. The proportion of domestic consumption of natural gas roughly approximates to exports. Low investment in oil exploration is observed. State regulations of the electricity market make it less attractive for private firms to invest. Government subsidises fuel and, as a consequence, cuts in the subsidies have generally led to social protests. As a result, energy security strategies for Indonesia

require diversification of the energy fuel mix to include hydropower, geothermal, biofuels, as well as nuclear energy.

The case of Singapore draws a rather different picture. The country lacks natural resources and consequently imports natural gas from Indonesia and Malaysia. Specifically, Singapore imports 75 percent from Indonesia and there is a cooperative mechanism between the two countries. Yet Singapore serves as a major oil refinery hub. Electricity is generated from natural gas. The energy security strategy of Singapore includes diversification of its imports of natural gas to include liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Middle East, investments in renewable sources such as solar power, and promotion of energy efficiency and conservation.

Multilateral mechanisms adopted by these two states in their quest for securing their energy imports and exports could be compared to the states in Central Asia as well. In Central Asia there are energy rich states and those that lack major natural resources. Therefore, comparisons as such may be useful in the future projects aimed at securing energy supplies in Central Asia.

# Dynamics of Regional Cooperation

Among numerous efforts to foster regional cooperation in Central Asia since 1991, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) stands apart as one of the most recent attempts. However, views on the SCO differ and there are contrasting opinions on the nature and the future of the organisation. The SCO is often seen in the West as an anti-NATO block created to contain American presence in the region. It is also thought to be a Chinese mega project. At the same time, some experts look at it as a rather formal organisation without any tangible influence. Finally, some authors express views that the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) could join in order to create a collective security organisation. Interestingly, each of the three approaches has some relevance. The first one, as the two largest members of the SCO, China and Russia are certainly interested (as they have declared many times) in a multipolar international order, and not in a unipolar one dominated by the US. The SCO also has a heavy emphasis on declaratory policy whereas the implementation of its policies, if ever, takes place in bilateral framework. Last but not least, although largely unfounded, external powers often consider the potential of a merger between the SCO and CSTO.

It is less frequently mentioned, however, that the SCO has been contributing to the development of multilateralism, the political emancipation of the Central Asian countries and their bandwagoning on the two world political players of the SCO, the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation.

Western analysts more often than not draw conclusions from their value judgements and frequently emphasise that the SCO is a cooperation framework of dictatorships. A conclusion that is certainly inaccurate without qualification and differentiation among the six members of the SCO.



Speakers and participants during the session

Evidently, the development and future of the SCO depend on such key issues as the relations between Russia and China, the question of formulations of national conceptions towards the organisation by the member states in Central Asia and the influence of the US and the West at large on the region as well as the priority issues that the SCO puts in the agenda. Since the beginnings of the organisation at the dawn of the

century, there were two major directions in the development of the SCO. Russia put an emphasis on security matters, including counter-terrorism and cyber security. China, on the other hand attributed greater importance to economic cooperation. Both countries have taken advantage of the multilateral reconfirmation of their declarations on world politics.

Anti-Americanism is an obvious unifying factor between Russia and China, yet the nature of this tendency is different in both countries. It would also be difficult to draw conclusions of lasting relevance for the future as a sophisticated US policy may drive a wedge in their unanimity. “Eastern NATO” for China does not appear to be a suitable option. The same applies for the Russian Federation that may contemplate other options to gain multilateral support to its political and other institutional arrangements for its regional security agenda. The Central Asian members of the SCO have been anxious to pay attention to the West, first of all to the United States. Although their western commitment varies (just as the interest of the West in the individual Central Asian states), there is not a single Central Asian state that could ignore the western vector in its external politics. Generally, China becomes the regulator and conservator of the organisation, making it a moderately conservative entity. Illustratively, the 2008 Dushanbe Declaration of the SCO, just as many earlier documents of the organisation, could be seen as a China-Russia compromise. Besides, both Russia and China are still not able to formulate their positions on the organisation and often the relations between the two could be characterised as “cooperation-competition”. Beijing moves forward in Central Asia economically avoiding criticisms. Moscow wishes to maintain the format of the relations keeping the majority of the Central Asian states with China in the organisation.

For Central Asian leaders the SCO remains terra incognita with unclear interests and positions of the members on various issues. In Kazakhstan, the organisation is looked as a space for manoeuvring between Russia and China. Tashkent is attempting to isolate itself and does not support the Kazakh initiative for water cooperation. Since 2005, Uzbekistan has followed Russian policy most closely in the SCO. Not even this has been sufficient to make Tashkent recognise the independent statehood of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Tajikistan is inclined towards multilateral relations south of Central Asia and views the SCO as a space for manoeuvring between various state interests involved. Kyrgyzstan does not have a clear picture of the SCO either and is often led by Moscow. There is an apparent need for Central Asian countries to formulate clear positions on the SCO unless they want to continue to be exposed to the course of the SCO determined by China and Russia.

In terms of the initiatives declared by the SCO, the majority of which are clear and transparent, the economic dimension of the cooperation in SCO could prove to be effective. At the same time, the work of the SCO is heavy with planning as there are numerous challenges and proposed projects that have not been implemented just yet. However, the SCO could potentially become an important player in the region. Its development from a rather small initiative, set up to deal with minor issues such as demarcation of borders, to a large-scale organisation has proven its prospective role. The organisation went through several tests of the level of cooperation, which were especially evident in the 2005 Astana Declaration that called for the removal of military bases of states that do not belong to the region from Central Asia (meaning the US), and in the recent 2008 Dushanbe Declaration that demonstrated the limits of cooperation.

Certainly, there are different interpretations of the SCO activities, however, it remains clear that the organisation has a potential to transform into a well-functioning entity with enormous potential. The future



evolution of the SCO depends on the direction of Russian-Chinese cooperation as well as the adaptability of the organisation and its response to the emerging security threats in the changing geopolitical environment. The issue of extending membership to Iran, India, Mongolia and Pakistan (the current observer states of the organisation) is also important in the discussion. Tehran, beyond its interest to join an organisation and not be a pariah of the international community, is also interested in the anti-American element, however neither Moscow nor Beijing are ready to take position in favour of an Iranian nuclear proliferation programme. Despite some Central Asian states' informal lobbying for the inclusion of Iran into the SCO, China and Russia might pose challenges to Iran's integration. Furthermore, Iran's ambition to become member of the SCO contributes to putting the enlargement process of the organisation on ice.



Reception at the Hyatt Regency Hotel

Another Russia-led initiative in the region is the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Both the SCO and the CSTO are active entities in the post-Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and post-GU(U)AM<sup>3</sup> era and as a consequence matter in terms of regional cooperation and security. (The post-CIS era is demonstrated by the fact that a select group of CIS members, those ready to coordinate their policies more closely with Russia, hold separate meetings. GUAM, in its turn, could not survive the increasing diversity of its members' political agenda particularly as far as their Russian policy. Russia succeeded to bring two GUAM states, Azerbaijan and Moldova, closer to its political line and achieve divergence in GUAM.) The CSTO differs from the SCO in four major respects:

1. It has a clearly defined security agenda. Although it is focussed, as declared, upon collective security, it can develop in the direction of collective defence without any particular difficulty, even without any particular expansion of its current activities.

2. The CSTO has seven member states (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). Every one of them used to be a republic of the Soviet Union. The organisation is composed exclusively of states, which closely coordinate their international political line with Moscow and mostly follow it.

3. In the absence of any other great power (in sharp contrast with the SCO), Russia has unchallenged dominating role in the organisation. This results in a different structure as the Russian Federation may have lasting hegemonic role in the CSTO.

4. The seven members of the CSTO, except for the connecting role of the Russian Federation, do not represent a geographic continuum. There is only one region where several CSTO member states are present: Central

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<sup>3</sup> GUUAM was the group composed in 1999 of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova; it became GUAM again when Uzbekistan left it in 2002.

Asia. Hence, if it is imaginable that the organisation will carry out some major activity, the only area is Central Asia.

The view has emerged several times that the SCO and the CSTO should be merged. In spite of frequent assertions, there is no reason to assume this would happen anytime soon. First of all, China has no reason to get entangled in a permanent military alliance. It cooperates with the only partner that matters for its interests, the Russian Federation, bilaterally and also in the SCO and has no reason to form an alliance with junior partners. Although in the SCO security cooperation goes way beyond the level declared in documents and is not confined to counter-terrorist activity, tacit cooperation may be the way to follow for a long time to come. Contrasting views on the nature of these two organisations have derived from the fact that often the leadership of Central Asia was looked upon as a “league of authoritarian rulers” with no value-system promoted. Yet the complexity of the nature of these organisations requires deeper constructivist analysis.



# US Central Asia Policy After Bush

The US presence in Central Asia has been widely discussed and evaluated in the scholarly literature on the region. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US has been engaged in working out an approach to Central Asia which was initially articulated in the adoption by the US Senate in 1999 of the so-called “Silk Road Strategy Act”, which in turn was based on the earlier adopted Freedom Support Act of 1992. These two documents laid the groundwork for deeper US engagement with the Central Asian countries. The strategic importance of the region was also reflected in a detailed “Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia” commissioned by the Pentagon in 1999. That study, prepared for The Joint Chiefs of Staff and published for the public in January 2001, identified Afghanistan as the primary security concern within the entire Caucasus-Central Asia zone.

In analysing US engagement in the region, it is possible to conclude that the policy agenda in the region has been generally unfocused, shifted and unfunded – characterised by a focus on ISAF in Afghanistan, democratisation efforts in the region and rivalries in energy politics. Initially, the US was perceived to be a power that entered the region in order to assist its development. By contrast, after 9/11, the US was

understood by regional actors to constitute a major great power player in Central Asia, primarily present to assert its national interest. US foreign policy in the region is underpinned by the concept of strategic partnerships, which was evident in the initially friendly US-Uzbekistan partnership. This partnership faltered after the Andijon massacre of May 2005 led to the removal of the American base from Karshi-Khanabad and the overall reorientation of Tashkent's foreign policy towards Moscow. Today Kazakhstan is seen as an emerging yet careful partner of the US.



Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller (US Embassy, Bishkek) and Ambassador Dr. Fred Tanner (Director, GCSP) at the reception in Hyatt Regency Hotel

There was another attempt to shift the policy on Central Asia through the proposal of the “Greater Central Asia Partnership” scheme which would unite Central Asia with Afghanistan and South Asia through the multiple transport ways and energy pipelines. However, the concept of “Greater Central Asia” remains an active academic debate rather than an

element of actual policy formulation. There was an evident perception challenge in the US that necessitated the critical evaluation of the region. Central Asia admittedly does not constitute a vital area for US interests, but the neighbourhood of such key players as Russia and China renders the region important in strategic terms. Certainly the geostrategic location of Afghanistan is crucial.

Lately, there have been different predictions on the possible directions of the US policy towards Central Asia after the November 2008 US presidential elections. It is likely that the newly elected post-Bush US administration will continue the legacy of the Bush administration and the overall policy on Central Asia will not experience any major shifts. Thus, the next US president will be less likely to prioritise the region, but will not ignore it altogether either. It is expected that an Obama presidency will be more inclined to place an emphasis on upgrading US relations with the EU and also Africa, and the protection of human rights is expected to be high on his foreign policy agenda, rather than Central Asia per se.

Clearly, US power projection in the region is in need of reassessment. It was noted that the American presence in Central Asia requires serious consideration of Russian and Chinese interests in the region, let alone other major neighbouring states, such as Iran. US foreign policy, particularly in its Central Asia focus, should be regarded as an element of its global strategy. It is also important to note that post-Bush America does not coincide with post-Karimov Uzbekistan or post-Nazarbaev Kazakhstan: the two strongest Central Asian leaders remain the presidents of their countries. In other words, while a post-Bush America can be regarded as a “new America” in terms of possible innovations in its global strategy, the US will have to deal with the “old Central Asia”.

Evidently, a new generation of leaders is emerging in the region, and although there is little hope that this generation will be fundamentally different from the previous one, it will nevertheless be more exposed to a different global strategic order.



# Russia and Central Asia after Georgia

The events in South Ossetia revealed a crisis of trust in the world, specifically between Russia and the US. It was the first time since the 1969 Soviet-Chinese military conflict in Damansk that such a military confrontation occurred with another State. However, the US, unlike the mediator role it had adopted in the Soviet-Chinese conflict, maintained a different position in the South Ossetia crisis. It is evident that the western states of the CIS, including Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus, as well as the South Caucasus and Central Asian states, form an area of strategic importance for Russia. From a Russian strategic perspective, the geopolitical consequences of the war in the South Caucasus lie in the fact that a hypothetical demarcation line was drawn for the limits of the movements of the West.

According to Kazakh experts in Central Asia, the phenomenon of unrecognised independent republics – as is the case in the South Caucasus – does not exist. Therefore, the careful policy positioning of SCO member states, as expressed in the 2008 Dushanbe Declaration, is influenced by multiple factors, not simply the threat of a precedent being applied to Central Asia. An aggressive Russian foreign and security policy, underscored by military intervention in Georgia, sensitises

CIS member states to the spectre of Russia projecting military coercive power into other CIS states. It is predictable that tension between Russia and Central Asian states will arise in the future. The fact that Russian troops have crossed the state boundaries of another state therefore is likely to alarm Central Asian leaders, and lead them to reconsider their own national security and reevaluate their relations and threat assessments, along with China, towards Russia. Leaders in the region could well seek to balance Russia, and China is often perceived to be the power that can secure this balance.

In Central Asia the foreign policy of Russia could be structurally divided into two levels: first the collective level: CSTO, SCO and the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC)<sup>4</sup>; and secondly bilateral relations' models with each of the republics in the region. In terms of priorities, all states in the region are equally important politically to Russia. However, in economic relations priority is given by Russia to its bilateral relations with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. In the overall context of Russia's cooperation with Central Asian states, two directions are important. First, security cooperation in the framework of the CSTO: the agenda of the last CSTO summit in Dushanbe included increasing anti-terrorist and military components. Second, Russia pays much attention to the economic incentive of cooperation with the specific interest in the energy cooperation. Russia acknowledges the fact that states in Central Asia need to adopt a free market approach to energy politics and begin buying energy at world rather than subsidised prices. The need to diversify the energy resources in Central Asia was also recognised.

Russia itself needs to step back from Tsarist and imperial geopolitical revanchist behaviour, while at the same time, retain its strategic interests in the Caucasus and in Central Asia. One of the challenging tasks for

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4 EurAsEC's current membership is composed of: Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, with Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine as observers.

Russia today is to signal strategically to the US and EU that there are vital and legitimate Russian interests in both regions and that these interests must be taken into account. It will be possible to analyse the future contours of the relations between Russia and the West through a study of Western responses to Russia's key strategic message.

US and European responses to the Georgian crisis of August 2008 focused on the question of proportionate use of force by Russia. In addition, ceasefire compliance and interpretation became an issue in EU-Russia relations, given the French Presidency's role in negotiating a ceasefire between Russia and Georgia. Perceived Russian geopolitical and geo-strategic objectives – destabilising Georgia, replacing the regime with one that is pro-Russian and controlling energy pipeline and increase European dependence on Russian gas – also shaped western responses.

Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Russia's use of military force beyond its borders in defence of "compatriots" raised security concerns in Central Asia and elsewhere in Russia's "near neighbourhood". Trade and security links and dependency on Russia were reinforced by the events in Georgia. The understanding that Russia can set the rules of the game in the post-Soviet space was challenged by both the SCO and CSTO summits in late August and early September, as no new state joined Russia in recognition of the break-away republics. Central Asian states were understood to have chosen not to take sides in a potentially new East-West geostrategic struggle.

The Georgia crisis has also highlighted the failure of EU policy in the South Caucasus, and placed a new emphasis on questions of Turkish and Ukrainian membership, a process that would facilitate the strengthening of the EU as a strategic actor in the South Caucasus and across to Central Asia. For NATO, the implications of the Georgia crisis have placed a renewed focus on its Partnership for Peace (PfP) Programme, including its utility for states in Central Asia.



# Security and Development in Central Asia: New Paradigms?

Although this Geneva Paper has noted different development scenario predictions in Central Asia, the link between security and development remains strong in the region. Numerous international organisations have adopted multi-dimensional approaches towards the development issues present in the region. There are several United Nations (UN) offices in Central Asia, including the UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UN Development Programme (UNDP). Large-scale projects such as EU Border Management Programme for Central Asia (BOMCA), involving other international entities have been undertaken. The UN has also adopted a split policy towards the region. It had opened a new UN Centre of Preventive Diplomacy in Ashgabat, which came as a result of four years of preparation, and has a mandate and work plan. In UN development policy, another concept is receiving greater attention – a “compound crisis” involving food and energy issues is especially evident in Kyrgyzstan, but also other states in the region.

Individual country-level work is carried out by the UN agencies. UNDP is running its Peace and Development programme in Kyrgyzstan, working cross-border in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It is also providing a

forum to adjudicate on issues related to sharing water and pasture lands. However, a 2008 regional meeting of the UN agencies highlighted the fact that at a national level Central Asian states do not appear ready to work together and think regionally. Bilateral relations are functioning, yet there is a low regional basis for any regional activities in Central Asia. With regard to the presence of international organisations and their activities in the region, we see public opinion varying according to which international organisation is under focus, and which activity it undertakes. On many occasions the UN, the OSCE and even the Asian Development Bank (ADB) are perceived to be tools which implement western interests and a western agenda.

Moving from a practical assessment of the role of the international organisations in the region, we should locate international organisations within the larger context of paradigm changes that take place in the international system. Before Central Asia's involuntary acquisition of its independence in 1991, international actors were largely absent from the region. Therefore, the collapse of the Soviet Union required the states of Central Asia to build their own new relations with the outside world. As those new relations were constructed in the region through the post-Cold War era, the international system went through several important paradigm shifts.

First, the structure of security relations has changed dramatically. The world order of today can be characterised as unipolar with certain limits of state power. Second, the sources of threat have become less predictable. The key question of what constitutes a threat and where it derives from are just among few ones that arise in the discussion. Thus, the world has arrived to the stage where all-inclusive security structures with varied membership are there, yet the states in these entities do not always meet the necessary conditions. Certainly, there is need for an all-inclusive approach as it is useful in identifying the source of the

threat. The underlying ideology throughout the post-Cold War era has been democratic peace, however its scope has narrowed down to the behaviour of democracies in relations to each other. The value-based system has not taken full shape yet. Third, the idea of “Europe whole and free from Vancouver to Vladivostok” had not come into reality. The aspirations behind it have not ceased altogether, but there is a need for more time and effort.





# Conclusions: A Tale of Three Themes?

Three interlocking themes have emerged through the presentations and panel discussions that are worth noting.

Firstly, the study of security politics in Central Asia benefits from the utility of comparative perspectives. The examination of energy politics in South East Asia, or locating Central Asia within a “Greater” or “Core” context, helps shed light on rising Kazakh hegemony, Turkmenistan in transition, compound crisis in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and the extent to which Tajikistan may have more shared interests with Afghanistan and Turkmenistan with Azerbaijan than these two core Central Asian states have with each other.

Secondly, the changing role of key actors in the region – particularly external states and international organisations – needs to be considered. China, Russia and the US, the EU, NATO, the SCO, the CSTO have all been discussed, as have moves from value-based to interest-based policies, strategies of containing, balancing and bandwagoning, bilateral and multilateral approaches, state-based or regional-based policies and programmes, as well as ineffective strategic signalling and growing perception gaps.

Lastly, the impact of two very different types of crises located not within but on the periphery of Central Asia and their impact on secu-

rity politics in the region has been noted. Afghanistan constitutes a “creeping crisis”, Georgia a “sudden on-set crisis”, but both generate societal, political, economic and even military (causing changing threat assessments) tremor in the region, with unexpected second- and third-order consequences for all states in the region, as well as shape the development agendas of external and internal actors.



Closing Remarks by Ambassador Dr. Fred Tanner (Director, GCSP) and Dr. Tim Epkenhans (Director, OSCE Academy)

This seminar has created a solid reference point that allows us to chart change and continuity in Central Asian security politics in 2009 with greater accuracy, having identified, analysed and assessed key trends and dynamics in 2008. In addition to our current approach, it is our agreed intention to give greater focus to the role of China, India, Pakistan and Iran within the region, and emphasise practitioners’ perspectives on the panels.

# Map of Central Asia



(Source: [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/cis\\_central\\_asia\\_pol\\_95.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/cis_central_asia_pol_95.jpg) )

# Programme

**Sunday, 21 September 2008**

**Arrival of Participants**

**18h00**                      **Welcome Reception**

**Monday, 22 September 2008**

**09h00 - 09h20**            **Welcome and Introduction to the Seminar**  
Amb. Dr. Fred TANNER, Director, Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP)  
Mr. Lilian DARIJ, Deputy Head of Mission, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Centre, Bishkek

**09h30 - 10h45**            **New Problems, Perspectives, and Paradigms?**  
Chair: Amb. Muratbek IMANALIEV, Director, Institute for Public Policy (IPP), Bishkek  
"Towards the New Paradigm of International Relations: Implications of Central Asian Geopolitics" : Dr. Farkhod TOLIPOV, Associate Professor at the National University of Uzbekistan, Tashkent  
"Perceptions of Security in Central Asia" : Dr. Tim EPKENHANS, Director, OSCE Academy, Bishkek

11h00 - 12h15

### **The Afghan Factor in Central Asian Security Politics**

Chair : Dr. Tim EPKENHANS, Director, OSCE Academy, Bishkek  
" Military-Strategic Situation in Afghanistan and Security of Central Asia " : Dr. Murat LAUMULIN, Senior Research Associate, Kazakh Institute of Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty  
" NATO, Afghanistan and an Exit Strategy: Implications for Regional Security Politics " : Dr. Graeme P. HERD, Co-Director, International Training Course (ITC-23), GCSP

14h00 - 15h00

### **Change and Continuity in Energy Geopolitics**

Chair : Mr. D. Ben REED, US Executive Deputy Director, Outreach Programs Directorate, George C. Marshall European Center for European Security Studies (GCMC), Garmisch-Partenkirchen  
" Energy Security in Southeast Asia " : Dr. Alvin CHEW, Research Fellow, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

15h15 - 17h00

### **Dynamics of Regional Cooperation**

Chair : Dr. Sergei LOUSIANIN, Professor of the Oriental Studies Chair, Moscow State University for International Relations (MGIMO), Moscow  
" Central Asian Perspectives on the SCO " : Amb. Muratbek IMANALIEV, Director, IPP, Bishkek  
" SCO and CSTO : Changing Utility for State Actors? " : Dr. Pal DUNAY, Director, ITC-23, GCSP

## **Tuesday 23 September 2008**

09h00 -10h15

### **US Central Asia Policy After Bush**

Chair : Amb. Dr. Fred TANNER, Director, GCSP  
" The Limits of Change: Policy Option for the 'Post-Bush Era' Leadership in Central Asia and Afghanistan " : Dr. Roger KANGAS, Professor in Central Asian Studies, Near East South Asia Center (NESAC), National Defense University, Washington D.C  
" The New America and Old Central Asia " : Dr. Farkhod TOLIPOV, Associate Professor at the National University of Uzbekistan, Tashkent

10h45 -12h00

**Russia and Central Asia After Georgia?**

Chair: Ms. Violetta YAN, Deputy Director, OSCE Academy, Bishkek

“ Russian-Chinese Security Parameters and the SCO ” : Dr. Sergei LOUSIANIN, Professor of the Oriental Studies Chair, MGIMO, Moscow

“ Western Responses to the Georgia Crisis: Implications for Central Asia ” : Dr. Graeme P. HERD, Co-Director, ITC-23, GCSP

13h45 -15h00

**Security and Development in Central Asia: New Paradigms?**

Chair: Dr. Roger KANGAS, Professor in Central Asian Studies, NESU, National Defense University, Washington D.C.

“ Paradigm Shifts and the Role of International Organisations ” : Dr. Pal DUNAY, Director, ITC-23, GCSP

“ UN Perspectives on New Paradigms ” : Mr. John LEWIS, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Peace and Development Adviser, Bishkek

15h30 - 17h00

**Concluding Remarks and Next Steps**

Dr. Graeme P. HERD, Co-Director, ITC-23, GCSP

Dr. Tim EPKENHANS, Director, OSCE Academy, Bishkek

19h00

***Concluding Informal Dinner***

*Rapporteur*

Ms. Selbi HANOVA, GCSP-OSCE Academy “ Central Asia Scholarship holder 2008-2009 ” and 23rd International Training Course in Security Policy (ITC) and 3rd Masters in Advanced Studies in International and European Security participant, GCSP, Geneva

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