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Continuing Issues in the New Central Asia: *Addenda* in Appreciation to *Géopolitique de la nouvelle Asie centrale*

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The dissolution of a frontier

A series of events took place between 1978 and 1992 that removed nearly every trace of a politically instituted frontier that had for several generations separated the peoples of northern Eurasia from those in south and southwest Asia.[1] The political and infrastructural conditions that established that frontier came into existence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as two imperial powers extended their influence into Eurasia, the Russians in the north, and western Europeans, mainly the British, in the Middle East and South Asia. By the late nineteenth century the separation between these two imperial orbits became more marked, especially when the boundaries of Afghanistan were drawn so as to ensure that the northern and southern imperial systems would have no contiguous borders. In the twentieth century the northern boundaries of Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, all of whose populations had once been closely linked with those of Central Eurasia, indicated a decisive separation between the southern and northern sectors of Eurasia. The divide was more sharply defined after World War I, when the Soviets, then gaining control of the northern sector, sought total control of the economy, information, and social intercourse within its own domains. Following World War II the definitiveness of the boundary between north and south was further emphasised by the American decision to build up the Shah's Iran as a defensive barricade against any Soviet ventures into the oil-rich Middle East.

The frontier was of course a political artefact, but it was objectified and enforced through separate infrastructural systems that, until mid-twentieth century, left a hiatus of underdevelopment between them, notably Afghanistan. But after World War II modernising projects in the underdeveloped hiatus area, especially in Afghanistan and Iran, began to effectively connect up the two infrastructural systems. Afghanistan began to transform its communications and transport infrastructures in the 1960s—paving highways, establishing an air transport system, and installing a network of telephone and telegraph lines—and so transformed itself into a potential corridor between the two imperial systems. Iran likewise, with American help, developed a modern system of transport and communications during the 1960s that made the country more accessible. By the

[1] I thank Paul Sharre and Sarah Kendzior for valuable comments on earlier drafts of this work.

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1970s the political suppositions about separate imperial orbits had been effectively undermined by the improved infrastructures of these two countries.

Revolutions in both countries in 1978 and 1979 effectively removed the semblance of a frontier. The Iranian Revolution replaced the pro-American Shah with an anti-American Shi'ite theocracy, emasculating American influence in the whole region—a new reality that was dramatically demonstrated in fall, 1979, when anti-American riots (including the burning of the American embassy in Islamabad) broke out all over the Middle East and South Asia owing to rumours that the United States had instigated a *coup d'état* in Mecca. At about the same time the Soviet Union was drawn into Afghanistan to protect a failing client regime, intruding into the historic frontier zone. A *coup d'état* by the Khalqi communists in April, 1978, led by Nur M. Taraki, was widely supposed to be an advantage to Moscow, but in fact it lessened Soviet influence when Taraki purged many of the KGB's best informants. His successor in fall, 1979, Hafizullah Amin, was worse, covertly seeking ties with the CIA (Time Magazine 1982). The Soviet invasion of December, 1979, which aimed to install an Afghan leader of their preference, would turn out to be a more costly venture than anyone envisioned.

In the 1980s some of us saw these developments as presaging a new configuration of political relations in Central Eurasia. The idea of a conference to examine similarities in the cultural heritages of the peoples north and south of the Soviet border originated early in the 1980s as an attempt to assess the emerging situation. By the time our conference actually took place in 1985 the signs were unmistakable that Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East were becoming ever more closely engaged. But what would be the upshot of the new cross-frontier relations? Our conference looked back to before the rise of Europe when Central, South and West Asia was the locus of much ferment and mutual influence. In the efflorescent period, the peoples and powers of a vast region between the Mediterranean Sea and Southeast Asia and between the steppe lands of Inner Asia and the coasts of the Indian Ocean were in continuous contact. They traded, intermarried, warred, and produced among the ruling classes similar ways of executing authority and similar patterns of art and architecture and similar cuisine. The weakening of the frontier between north and south that was taking place in the 1980s harbingered a return to a spatial configuration—social, economic and political—like those of the pre-modern past. If there would never again be a 'Turko-Persian Islamicate' world, the un-bifurcated region after the 1980s might at least become, as it had been before, a caldron of mutual cultural, economic, and political integration (Canfield 1991).

Many dramatic and significant events have taken place in rapid succession since 1985,[2] revealing a dramatic refiguring of power among the countries of Greater Central Asia. A decade and a half after the Soviet imperial system began

[2] To name a few: the Soviet army quit Afghanistan (1989); Nagorno-Karabakh broke away from Azerbaijan leading to war between Azerbaijan and Armenia (1988-1992); communist candidates lost in the first contested elections in the Soviet bloc states; protestors in the Baltic states, Georgia, and the Ukraine demanded independence (1988-1990); coal miners struck in Siberia, Ukraine, and Central

to crack, the various states in Central Asia, some of them very new, had developed close contact with a broadly integrating world. Moreover, the infrastructural improvements continued: highways have been expanded and improved (e.g., a highway from Kyrgyzstan to China[3]); air traffic facilities have been improved (e.g., Turkmen Airlines' inaugurated direct services between Ashgabat and Beijing in August 2005[4]), as well as rail capacity (e.g., between China and Kazakhstan [Alaomulki 2001: 8–10]); a sea port has been built by the Chinese at Gwadar, Pakistan (Starr 2005); satellite telephony has been planned for Afghanistan (National Public Radio 2003).[5] The peoples of Central Eurasia, South Asia, and the Middle East now have more direct and immediate contact than ever (Garret et al. 2000: 2, 69). It is a compression of time and space, as David Harvey would put it. The term 'Greater Central Asia' to refer to this wider region—its outer limits somewhat unclear—emphasises the breadth of the region now being linked together. Greater Central Asia is now a widely interconnected social world, a locus of international competition among a host of powers. It seems to have become, again, a caldron of cultural, economic, and political interaction—but to a different effect than anyone could have envisioned.

Of course this region does not stand alone, for, as before, it articulates with a wider world—only now it does so in more ways and with accelerating speed. Greater Central Asia is of course but a part of a much wider world, for not only are the countries of the Middle East, Central and South Asia closely involved but

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Asia (1989); the Berlin Wall was breached (1989); Lithuania declared independence (1990); the deputies of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic declared their state to be independent (1991); Gorbachev declared the end of the Soviet Union (December, 1991); Tajikistan descended into civil war (1992–1997); the Afghanistan *mujâhidîn*, exultant of their success against the Red Army, battled among themselves for Kabul, destroying much of the city (1992–1996); the Taliban appeared suddenly (1994), almost mysteriously, in Kandahar to route the fractious *mujâhidîn* from Kabul (1996); and within a few years almost gained control of the whole country (2000), alarming most of Afghanistan's neighbours; nuclear weaponry was acquired in South Asia, first by India (1974) and then by Pakistan (1980s); Osama Bin Laden formed the Al Qaeda network (1989) and organised a series of attacks on the United States, the most dramatic one on September 11, 2001; the United States in retaliation attacked and crushed the Taliban (2002), at least most of them, because they refused to give up Bin Laden; the Bush administration, preoccupied from the beginning with Saddam Hussein, redirected American military assets to Iraq (2003), downgrading the unfinished task against Osama. The American attack on Iraq provided opportunity for Islamist recruits to join the secular Saddam loyalists in fighting the Americans. A sectarian civil war seemed to be breaking out in Iraq in 2006.

3 Plans were drafted for the construction of roads, connecting the Central Asian states to South Asia via Pakistan's Karakorum highway, although the earthquake of 2005 will no doubt slow down the project.

4 'An inaugural flight of a commercial Turkmen Airlines Boeing–757 on 4 August (2005) marked the start of new direct service between Ashgabat and Beijing, *turkmenistan.ru* reported. The popularity of the new route is confirmed by the purchase of over half of the available seats several months in advance' (Anonymous 2005d).

5 An email notice from Muhammad Ghazi Jamakzai, Executive Assistant to the Minister, Ministry of Communications, 'Afghanistan and United States extend Bilateral Communications Cooperation,' indicates that 'three and half years ago we had a limited access to telephone only in a few provinces, but now we have more than one million subscribers of digital and cellular phones in all about all provinces of Afghanistan ... [and that] all 34 provinces [are connected] with the capital through phone, internet, fax and video conference ... we have already connected more than fifty districts through phone, net, fax and video conference and in every month we activate twenty districts, and hope to connect all districts till the end of this year'(contact@moc.gov.af, March, 16, 2006).

also North Africa, Southeast Asia. And of course the powers with global interest—Russia, China, the United States—are ever more intrusive.

The emerging configuration

This new Greater Central Asia—who could have imagined what it would become? As before, as always, we must grope for a way to conceive of how the world is constituted. How shall we describe the new regional configuration of Greater Central Asia early in the twenty-first century? The region is of course a moving target—only now the accelerating pace of events makes the task more daunting. Almost daily, something takes place that reminds us of the unpredictability of human affairs, there as well as elsewhere.[6] For the moment we can identify some important political issues in this spatially recognisable 'sector' of the world-wide system, presented as mere addenda to Djalili and Kellner's original and magisterial work (Djalili & Kellner 2003). In particular: (1) The race for access to the oil and gas resources; (2) the defensive measures being taken against the intrusions of outside economic and political interests; (3) the debates over the increasing availability of nuclear power; and (4) the wars that now polarise all other affairs in the region.

The race for access to the oil and gas resources of the region

According to the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources in Hannover, 71% of the world's oil resources and 69% of the world's gas resources are situated within the western portion of Greater Central Asia (Figure 1) (BGR; Kleveman 2003; Garret et al. 2000: 69–71).[7] Infrastructural improvements and the new political accessibility of Central Asia have opened the way for many international powers to race for access to these resources (Frank 1992).[8]

And it matters plenty to all of them. China, India, Pakistan and Turkey, to say nothing of the rest of the world, expect to need increasing amounts of fossil fuels. China is already the second largest consumer of oil in the world and (with a growth rate of over 8% since 1978) will surpass the United States within a few years. It has set up trade missions in every Central Asian country and has offered to help Uzbekistan develop several small oil fields (Atal 2005). Prime Minister Li Peng spent twelve days in Central Asia in 1994 encouraging plans

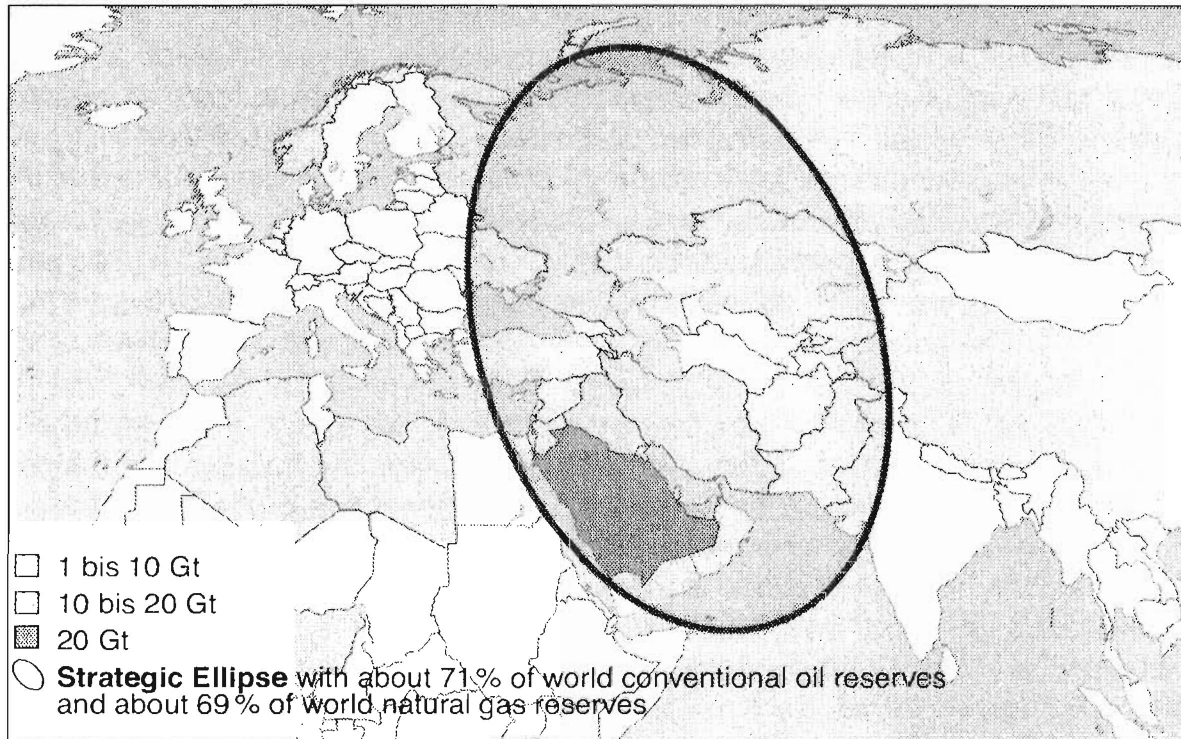
6 Bert G. Fragner reminds us that a 'region' is merely a useful concept: it enables people to 'frame an understanding of the 'self' as a collective category' (p. 342). 'Regional consciousness' is an 'onion-like concept of special unities embedded in numerous larger and wider units.' And it is 'a long-lasting but ultimately changing pattern' (p. 342). Moreover, the changes don't take place 'simultaneously at all levels.'

7 In the Caspian Sea area Iran has an estimated 12 B bbl; Azerbaijan 27 B bbl (3.6 B bbl are proven); Russia 5 B bbl; Kazakhstan 85 B bbl (10 B bbl proven); Turkmenistan 32 B bbl (1.5 B bbl proven) (source: TheDossier.ukonline.co.uk).

8 Besides the other countries mentioned here the Koreans should be mentioned as seeking a position in Central Asia: they have bought copper mines and a smelting plant in Kazakhstan (Alaomulki 2001: 8–10).

to construct oil pipelines from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The Chinese built a 998-kilometre oil pipeline from Atasu, Kazakhstan, into Xinjiang; when fully operational (2007) it will deliver up to 200 000 barrels of oil per day (Blank 2006). China's largest state-owned oil company acquired PetroKazakhstan, a Canadian firm that is one of Kazakhstan's major energy producers (Blank 2005a). In 2005 there was talk of constructing a gas pipeline all the way from Kazakhstan to Shanghai (Appelbaum 2005). China's growing thirst for oil and gas has heightened the importance of Iran, which became its second largest oil supplier, for which the Chinese reciprocate with military assistance and nuclear expertise (Djalili & Kellner 2006).

Figure 1



Source: Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources, Hannover, Germany, 2008.

India likewise has a desperate interest in Central Asian fossil fuels, for its needs are expected to rise more than three-fold by 2020. Having lost out in its bid for PetroKazakhstan, India has focused on Iran's and Turkmenistan's oil reserves. In 2005 it signed a 25-year agreement with Iran annually to obtain 5 million tons of liquefied natural gas, and it will develop two Iranian oil fields. In another deal India has acquired rights to develop a portion of Iran's North Pars gas field. The plan is, by 2010, for India to be importing about '60 million standard cubic metres of gas per day from Iran.' The two countries have been working on a 1750 mile gas pipeline that would pass through Pakistan. Also India is working on another pipeline deal that would carry natural gas from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan and Pakistan. Energy needs oblige India to reach even further out; it has negotiated to buy 5 or 6 million tons of oil from Azerbaijan beginning in

2006; and it has tried to buy crude oil from Israel's Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline as well as natural gas from Qatar (Blank 2005b).

Pakistan likewise has been establishing a position in Central Asia.[9] As soon as the former Soviet republics became independent Pakistan offered them economic assistance and credits—for instance, a loan of 55 million US dollars to Tajikistan in 1992 to build a hydro-electric power station (Lounev & Shirokov 1998: 227–228). The Turkmenistan—India pipeline also matters to Pakistan owing to the benefits of transit fees, and the gas that the country will tap for its own needs.[10] The urgent need of both Pakistan and India for gas has been a further impetus for trying all the harder to resolve their long-running quarrel over Kashmir (Atal 2005).

The gorilla in the room as all these deals take place is Russia. Russia is still the major fuel source for Europe and the potential major fuel source for the Far East. Already Russia is responsible for most of Europe's gas, oil and uranium. It is the largest producer of gas in the world and the second largest producer of oil. Its strategic control of gas was underlined on January 1, 2006, when Russia halted gas supplies to Ukraine for refusing to pay a price suddenly raised from $50 per 1000 cubic metres to $230. Russian owned (51%) Gazprom is the world's largest gas company in output and reserves; in market capital it is the third largest company in the world; and because its shares have more than tripled in the past 12 months, Gazprom could overtake ExxonMobil and General Electric and become the world's largest company. Its gas output in 2005 was, in energy yield, equivalent to Saudi Arabia's daily output of oil. And the company is aggressive: it is investing in Western distributors and hiring prominent European figures like Gerhard Schroeder and the officials of European energy companies (E.ON and BASF).

The key market for now is Europe but China's dramatic growth augurs for its becoming another consumer of Russian energy, eventually to rival Europe's demand. Which has given Russia leverage in disputes with the Europeans. Gazprom has hinted that disputes with the Europeans could oblige it to give more attention to China. So Russia is already the gas lifeline for Europe and could soon be for China and the rest of the Far East.

This places Russia in a position to ignore Euro-American carping about human rights and democracy: Russia has $170 billion in foreign reserves (banking 95% of its oil profits above $27 a barrel), and a huge budget surplus; and its annual gross domestic product is growing annually at 7%.

The fear of being swallowed up again by Russian hegemony has induced some of Russia's closest neighbours to seek closer links with Europe. GUUAM (Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) a consortium of countries

[9] For Pakistan Afghanistan is a critical territory of access to the wealth of Inner Asia, but it may have substantial oil and natural gas reserves of its own, which could make it even more strategic for Pakistan (Kliment 2006).

[10] The 1760-kilometre Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, inaugurated in May 2005, was constructed to supply the needs of western countries. Eventually able to carry as much a 75 million tons of oil a year, it is projected to bring to Azerbaijan as much as $160 billion in revenue by 2030, a dramatic infusion of wealth that could transform the Caucasus (Abbasov & Ismailova 2005; Howden & Thornton 2005).

poised to gain from the energy wealth of the Caspian Sea, was founded in 1997 ostensibly to 'favour economic multilateral cooperation', but in reality to seek the protection of the European Union and NATO. Recognising their agendas, Russia has made it clear that such moves will cost them, imposing restrictions on imports of milk and meat from Ukraine, of wine from Georgia and Moldova, and of mineral water from Georgia; and according to some of these countries Russia is supporting troublesome separatist movements. The looming influence of Russia has induced President Karimov of Uzbekistan to pull out of the organisation (now it is GUAM), a move that will likely spare him recriminations for doubling the price of gas in October, 2006 (Gazprom, which pipes it westward, will pass the cost on to its European consumers) (Escobar 2006; Baigin 2006).

Anti-western defensive reactions by regional leaders

The collapse of the Soviet Union catapulted the local functionaries of the Soviet empire into positions of state leadership. As the power holders in the former Soviet Central Asian states worked to secure their positions, their respective elites aligned in respect to them, some as dependents, others as rivals. Most of them were thrust into roles for which they were little prepared, and with no popular mandate. As they were trying to secure their positions, organisations based in the West were offering to help in the development of their countries. The new access of European and American development organisations to the former Soviet Central Asian states enabled them to ensconce themselves there by offering improvements that might attract western capital. The organisations were eager to help the ruling elites establish institutions that would foster more open societies—that is, societies in which public institutions could be established and western capital be invested securely (Reiter & Hazda 2004; Fuller 1994: 42).[11] The Agency for International Development, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and privately funded agencies like the Soros Foundation and Christian service organisations actively worked to reform education, train officials in governance, encourage private investment, accommodate internal migration, share knowledge of health care, train specialists in mass media, and (in one case) foster a single regional currency. They also pushed for an independent media and protection of human rights (Reiter & Hazda 2004; Fuller 1994: 42).[12]

[11] Even before the September 2001 attack American agencies were actively encouraging the Central Asian governments to foster market-favouring economic policies so as to attract western capital. After the attack, however, it became immediately evident that, as Secretary of State Colin Powell put it before House International Relations Committee in February 2002, the United States 'will have a continuing interest and presence in Central Asia of a kind that we could not have dreamed of before' (Wishnick 2002). Owing to the war with the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, the Americans established military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan after September 2001, and as long as the fighting in Afghanistan continues they will have a vital interest the region. Indeed, discussions were underway in summer 2005 about making a long-term economic and political commitment to Central Asia (Starr 2005; Torbakov 2005b). They would be frustrated by events in Uzbekistan.

[12] The United Nations Millennium Development Goals for 2015, for instance—to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower

The leverage of these organisations was the promise of capital investment. Waiting for signs of stability and security were huge amounts of capital that could foster industrial growth and (presumably) economic prosperity. This prospect induced some Central Asian leaders in the 1990s to allow some of the social changes to take place. Some even established stock exchanges that linked their assets and economies into the world financial network. Stock valuations became important, even to leaders who distrusted western capitalism. Moreover, deals with the American military after the attacks of September 11, 2001, allowing use of air bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, were welcomed as sources of revenue.[13]

The leaders of the ex-Soviet Central Asian states tolerated the NGOs and the American military as long as their influence seemed benign, but the growing prospect of more effective public participation induced several of them to backtrack. The entailments of the new ties with western capitalism in fact threatened their statuses. An economy open to western capital, an independent press, protection of equal rights for women and minorities, and of human rights in general—these innovations required more popular participation than any of the leaders of the former Soviet Central Asian states could bear, for not one of them held power by popular consent. In truth, they had no interest in innovative social projects that could undermine their regimes (Khatchatrian 2005).

It was a clash over human rights abuses in 2005 in Uzbekistan that soured relations with the Americans and the NGOs. It would bring an abrupt end to Uzbekistan's deal with the Americans. President Karimov had already been shaken by the apparent American and NGO encouragement of the 'coloured' revolutions that overturned dictatorial regimes in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. The final straw was a dispute about the shooting of hundreds of people in Andijan, Fergana, by government troops on May 13, 2005. Reliable sources describe the victims as unarmed civilians protesting local abuses of power, whereas the Uzbek government claims that the demonstrators were armed Islamists bent on rebellion. After the attack, hundreds of Uzbeks fled into Kyrgyzstan and the Americans helped four hundred of them to find temporary asylum in Romania (another 1000 remained in Kyrgyzstan). Also, the Americans, along with the Europeans, insisted that there be an independent inquiry. In a pique, President Karimov demanded that the Americans quit the Karshi-Khanabad air base by July 2005. To emphasise his demand, he attacked the Americans through his state media, claiming they were trying to 'colonise' Uzbekistan with Islamic radicals so that they could 'carry out terrorist attacks', His decision was no doubt welcomed if not encouraged by the Russians, who had for some time been courting the Uzbeks to agree to a mutual security pact (which would be signed the next November) (Blagov 2005). President Karimov also turned

women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and ensure environmental sustainability—directly contradict social practices in Central Asia.

[13] Even in Iran, where the government has resolutely opposed western influence, officials expressed alarm in October 2005 over the precipitous fall of Iranian stock prices after the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution citing Iran for violating its nuclear obligations (Fathi 2005).

against the NGOs, especially those that had received funds from public or private entities in the United States and/or European Union. First to go was the Open Society Assistance Foundation (Soros); then the Internews Network, a California-based media-development organisation. He expelled virtually all the active NGOs in Fergana. By the fall of the year hundreds of local NGOs were being told to 'voluntarily apply for self-liquidation' under threat of 'serious trouble', including possible arrest and imprisonment (Anonymous 2005b).

In Kyrgyzstan President Kurmanbek Bakiyev took a similar turn. Before being elected he had supported constitutional checks and balances on the presidency, and indeed, the revolution of March 24, 2005, that forced out the previous president, Askar Akayev, was largely driven by the popular supposition that new constitutional controls on the presidency would soon be established. But after Bakiyev was elected by a huge margin he showed no interest in constitutional reform. Rather, he stressed the need for 'iron discipline' at a time when, as he put it, there were many dangers to the country (Anonymous 2005c). From very early it was clear that he took the American presence in his country as a threat: shortly after his election he publicly intimated that he might follow Karimov's lead and close the United States military base in Kyrgyzstan (Anonymous 2005a; Atal 2005; Blank 2005b).

The media in the former Soviet Central Asian states have been particularly affected by the anti-Western trend. Most of those governments have forced their media into subservience. In Kazakhstan the media system had been highly professional in the early 1990s, but it 'throttled backwards' as press freedoms were curtailed. In Kyrgyzstan gains in the media were being cut back in 2005. The media in Uzbekistan was brought under complete control in 2005 after a period of an appearance of independence: one Uzbek newspaper that had at one time stood up to the government later became a government mouthpiece (Lyons 2005).[14] Turkmenistan maintained such a tight rein on all public affairs that no open discussion about such issues was possible (Roberts & Koenig 2004; Uretz 2005a; Uretz 2005b; Corso 2005; Kenny 2005).[15]

Besides resisting the intrusive presence of Americans within their own borders, many states in the region have developed alliances and pacts for mutual support and protection. Because Xinjiang, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, have similar problems with opposition groups, most of them Islamist, they have begun to work together in resolving long-standing problems, like border disputes and trade relations, and in linking up infrastructural projects; they are now even sharing intelligence.[16]

[14] Sarah Kendzior has pointed out (personal communication) that the media in Uzbekistan was never really independent: when Ruslan Sharipov reported on human rights abuses he was imprisoned and tortured (Human Rights Watch 2004).

[15] Ismailova and Abbasov (2005) describe a situation in which a journalist was mysteriously killed in Uzbekistan; '[m]ore than five months after the death of journalist Elmar Huseynov, the editor's widow and members of a public watchdog group formed to monitor the state investigation into Huseynov's death claim that the government is deliberately dragging its feet on solving the case.'

[16] Other states have sought a military place in Central Asia: India already has a military base along with a medical centre in Tajikistan, established soon after September 11 (Atal 2005).

Leaders of the various states have formed several organisations to deal with regional problems. Iran has been a key actor in this process. Owing to the pressures placed on it by the United Nations and the United States Iran has focused its attention eastward, forming closer ties with China, Russia, India and the Central Asian states (Djalili & Kellner 2006). This was a stated policy after the election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad to the Presidency of the country (Atal 2005). And it is evident in the new emphasis of the state on closer ties with their South Asian and eastern neighbours. Iran took the initiative in the founding of the Economic Cooperative Organisation in 1988, to encourage closer trade with neighbouring countries, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In 1996 the heads of state of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan originally formed 'the Shanghai Five', renaming it the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2001 when Uzbekistan joined them. Established at first to resolve long-standing border disputes, the organisation grew in importance as, after 1998, it began to address common problems, especially with oppositional groups such as: for Russia, nationalist insurgents in Chechnya; for Uzbekistan, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan; and for China, the Uighur Islamic separatists of Xinjiang (Wolfe 2004). Member states now work to improve security, expand trade, encourage mutual assistance, and control illegal activities such as religious extremism, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and illegal migration (Blank 2005a). Another cooperative organisation that includes some of the Greater Central Asian states is the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) (Karim 2005). Originally formed in 1985, it included Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka; Afghanistan was admitted in 2005. Nations that have been granted 'observer' status are China, Japan, South Korea, United States, and European Union. SAARC connects and overlaps with the SCO in some ways: India and Pakistan (members of SAARC) are official observers at SCO meetings. China, a member of SCO, is an observer in SAARC, as is Iran—and all three countries could eventually become full members. Iran, an observer at SCO, wants to join SAARC. Both organisations recognise 'terrorism' as a major issue (Atal 2005).

And besides the agendas mentioned, these organisations have a common interest in opposing the American presence in Central Asia. In July 2005, the very month the Americans were forced to leave the Karshi-Khanabad air base in Uzbekistan, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation formally demanded that the US-led coalition forces set a time for withdrawing from all Central Asian bases in the region (Blank 2006).

The Russians and Chinese have formed an anti-American alliance of their own, which they have invited India to join; the objective is to ensure dominance in the region. At the same time they are competing for strategic bases. Because of the oil and gas pipelines that connect into Xinjiang, as well as others being contemplated, China has eyed some key bases: they immediately denied reports that they were exploring the possibility of establishing a military base in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 (Blank 2005a), but did not deny reports that they were seeking

access to Uzbekistan's Karshi-Khanabad base after the Americans were forced to abandon it in July 2005. Chinese overtures of that site were, however, upstaged by a security pact that Russia signed with Uzbekistan on November 14, 2005, granting access to Uzbekistan's military facilities (Blank 2005a; Torbakov 2005a). Competition over military bases in Central Asia did not, in any case, deter China and Russia from participating in joint military games in August 2005 (Weir 2005).

The defensive reactions of the Asian states, and the development of cooperative organisations posed against western political, economic and cultural influences, especially those of the United States, are bringing the states of the former Soviet Union, South Asia, and the Middle East, even of the Far East, into closer alliance. As the infrastructural improvements continue and as the states of Greater Central Asia gain in wealth and influence, could these nations collectively become a viable bloc of opposition to the world's one superpower?

The advance of nuclear power in the region

As these states were firming up their positions in Central Asia some of them were acquiring nuclear weapons, and others seem to be on the way to acquiring them. India tested a nuclear device in 1974, prompting Pakistan to race to catch up, which they did in about 1982. When both nations conducted underground tests in 1998 the world worried that South Asia had become a nuclear tinderbox. But so far, the mutual destruction capability of the two sides has worked to maintain a degree of military stability, even though Pakistan has considerably less total capability. That the two nations have not fought an all-out war since 1971 may reassure the world that a nuclear war between them is unlikely. But the reach of these two powers in Asia extends beyond South Asia (Jones 2003). Despite their attempts, the Kashmir dispute continues to fester, and in 2006 the attacks of several suicide bombers in Mumbai heightened tensions because certain Pakistan-based Islamist organisations (Lashkar-e Taiba) were accused.

In 2005–2006 new worries about nuclear weaponry were prompted by Iran's resumption of nuclear enrichment activities. Iran had formerly had a nuclear programme in the time of the Shah but it was believed to have been terminated by the revolutionary government in 1979. Apparently it was resumed in the 1980s, according to a report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 2003, prompting the United Nations to ask Iran to 'suspend its enrichment and reprocessing activities in exchange for promises of assistance from Germany, France, and the UK.' But in the fall of 2005 the IAEA again found Iran noncompliant with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and in February the UN forwarded a recommendation to the Security Council to ask Iran to cease its enrichment and reprocessing activities. In response Iranian officials defiantly announced that they had enriched uranium to 3.5%. Iran plans to construct seven nuclear power plants by 2025, arguing that domestic needs require it. Despite the UN fears, the Iranian government has repeatedly stated that its nuclear programme is for peaceful uses and has denounced nuclear weaponry as 'inhuman, immoral, illegal and against

our basic principles' (Squassoni 2006). The Bush administration remained alarmed and the tension between the two countries in 2006 exacerbated problems in the Middle East. It was feared that when Iran (declared by George W. Bush as part of the 'axis of evil') joined the company of nuclear powered states it would pass nuclear knowledge on to rogue organisations like Al Qaeda.

The wars

If there is a distinguishing feature of Greater Central Asia, it is its wars: notably in the Middle East, Iraq, and Afghanistan—and besides those conflicts the bitter war in Chechnya is only barely settled, and the issues in Kashmir seem irresolvable. No discussion of affairs in Greater Central Asia can ignore these wars while at the same time assessments of them are various and will continue indefinitely. An adequate explication of them, showing the circumstances in which each war took form and persisted, exceeds my ability to say much beyond the obvious.[17]

These hostilities resemble each other even though they are spatially separate and animated by particular and local disputes. They are all, in some sense, civil wars (the American 'preemptive attack' on Iraq in 2003 has become, in 2006, a many-sided war, most of the sides being local).[18] Also, in these wars state supported armies are confronting guerilla fighters. And the wars are marked by extraordinary brutality: the abuse of civilians, torture, beheadings, mutilations. And in each war the guerilla fighters are using suicide bombing as an instrument of warfare. That is, suicide bombing—to emphasise the point—is not an occasional act of a few (as in London and Madrid) but a finely tuned system for producing a continuous flow of deployable human killing machines. Even though suicide bombing is renounced by Muslims generally, and has no sanction in Islamic dogma—except (I have heard) in Wahhabism[19]—the frequency of suicide attacks reveals that a substantial group of militants is systematically producing these bombers in the name of Islam.[20] Even though most of the productive process is carried out in secret, some of its properties can be surmised. To become an instrument of war on this scale, suicide bombing has to be conceived and formulated, discussed and promoted. It has to be planned; people have to be informed and organised. Funds have to be provided. Buildings built or rented; teachers trained; explosives and equipment bought and distributed; prospective 'martyrs' photographed and interviewed on tape; their pictures and videos

[17] Anyone who comments on these wars risks being accused of bias, if not in specific statements then in the topics selected. To clarify my orientation I direct the reader to a web site that expresses in various ways my biases (http://rcanfield.blogspot.com/).

[18] In Afghanistan the American attack against the Taliban was essentially completed when some of the best American assets were withdrawn in preparation for the Iraq attack; however, by 2006 a new wave of Taliban had become more active, apparently owing to developments within Pakistan.

[19] Wahhabism says that suicide is acceptable if in the process one is able to kill an unbeliever.

[20] A statement by Qari Mohammed Yusuf Ahmadi, speaking on behalf of the Taliban of southern Afghanistan has said, 'We're getting stronger in every province and in every district and every village. We don't have helicopters and jet fighters. But we're giving America and its allies a tough time with roadside bombs, suicide attacks and ambushes. Our Muslim brothers in Iraq are using the same tactics' (Krane 2006).

copied, circulated, and promoted. Children have to be socialised over a period of years—that is, fed, housed, clothed, trained. Officials have to turn a blind eye; neighbours have to remain silent. All this in the interest of producing individuals who are ready to blow themselves up as a religious service.[21] Although secluded in production, its products are shatteringly public. The rising number of incidents suggests that the pipeline is now in place: suicide bombers are being produced on schedule for each of these wars, with little hindrance (Gall 2006).

In these wars the guerilla fighters regard themselves as defenders of Islam. They deploy Islamic ideals as grounds for waging war even though in each case the issues are local; a similar moral rhetoric is used where particular issues vary. The rhetorical use of Islamic categories to represent political interests is of course not new, but in these cases they are being used to a new effect. In the past, leaders of Middle Eastern states have resisted the hegemonic pressures of western Europe and America by appealing to such ideologies as fascism (in the 1930s), and Soviet-style socialism (after World War II). But in the late 1970s Islamic terms became the political vehicle by which rebellious groups expressed their grievances against repressive administrations. The Iranian Revolution, informed by Islamic ideals and led by an Islamic scholar, although a Shi'ite movement, inspired politically minded Sunni Muslims who were desirous of overthrowing their own repressive regimes to join the *mujâhidîn* struggle against the Soviet-sponsored communists in Afghanistan. After the demise of the Soviet Union, political and military contests broke out all along the empire's former frontiers, in which the familiar 'certainties' of the past—East versus West, capitalism versus communism—had no relevance. In those struggles Islamic values served well to represent the shared concerns of those who objected to the repressive administrations of the Middle Eastern and Central Asian regimes. In the post-Soviet era, groups opposed to repressive governments and their Western sponsors have expressed their opposition by appealing to Islamic values.

Of course, within the polarity of war, all sides take their cause to be a consequential moral struggle. George W. Bush justifies American involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan as a struggle against 'Islamo-fascists'; Richard Cheney has said that 'the war on terror is a battle for the future of civilisation'; and Richard Rumsfeld's Pentagon has described the American cause (to select a typical statement) as 'a global war against violent extremists who use terrorism as their weapon of choice and who seek to destroy our free way of life.' Osama Bin Laden, for his part, has said that 'the global war' is an attack 'by their civilisation against our civilisation' and a 'crusader-Zionist war against Muslims' (Reynolds 2006). Militant Islamists have even picked up the language of Samuel P. Huntington (Huntington 1996).[22] For instance, Hafiz Saeed, founder of the militant Islamist group, Lashkar-i Taiba (believed to have close ties with Al Qaeda) has said, 'We believe

[21] Here I am presuming that the incentives of suicide bombers are religious even though it is not sanctioned by most Muslims. If the incentive is nationalistic, surely such behaviour demonstrates the arguments of those who claim that nationalism is a kind of religion.

[22] There have been many critiques of Huntington, for example: http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-476/_nr-624/i.html?PHPSESSID=5869.

in Huntington's clash of civilisations, and our jihad will continue until Islam becomes the dominant religion' (quoted in Abbas 2005: 212) Other Islamist leaders in Pakistan similarly represent their cause as monumental.[23] The President of Indonesia has worried that a radicalisation of the Muslim world could lead to 'that ultimate nightmare: a clash of civilisations' (Atran 2006).[24] Even the government of Iran has found Huntington instructive. In 1998 the Islamic Revolutionary Guard bought a thousand copies of Huntington's book for its members: among them Mahmud Ahmadinejad, now president of the Islamic Republic, and Yahya Safavi, now commander in chief of the Guards. The rhetoric of these two powerful leaders now reflects a certain reading of Huntington's thesis: for them the United States is a fading empire, in its 'last throes', soon to be replaced by an Islamic country. Geopolitical dominance in the Middle East, says Ahmadinejad, is 'the incontestable right of the Iranian nation.' General Safavi has said Iran's mission is to create 'a multipolar world in which Iran plays a leadership role' for Islam. Ahmadinejad has declared that Iran's foreign policy is to produce 'a government for the whole world' under the leadership of 'the Mahdi', referring to the Absent Imam of the Shi'ites (Taheri 2005).

Strategic choices and moral struggles by individuals and local groups

Our attempt to trace the general characteristics and trends in a region so broad and diverse as Greater Central Asia should not obscure an appreciation of how these characteristics and trends are appropriated by individuals and groups in specific settings. Great regions and social trends actually exist in only tentative and circumstantial ways. For most people, regional changes are experienced incrementally and locally in the form of changing profiles of opportunity. Individuals and groups recognise changes in their contexts through the foreclosure and emergence of specific possibilities. People act from particular positions, with their own parochial interests and agendas in mind. The definitions that people make of situations and events as they unfold are always circumstantially driven—and all the more so where changes are abrupt, as they have been in this region. When the certainties of the past lose their salience people make agreements tentatively, and sometimes foreclose them abruptly. They form alliances and dissolve them as economic or political opportunities change.[25] Alessandro Monsutti reports, for example, that among the Hazaras in central Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s, during periods of warfare, neighbours and kinsmen, 'diversif[ied] their affiliations,' owing to 'the physical violence and the endemic

[23] A Pakistani diplomat has said, 'MMA [Muttahida Majlis-e Amal or United Council of Action] talks in Talibanic tones when it is out in its constituencies but to the rest of the world they are trying to make out like they're Jimmy Carter' (Anonymous 2002).

[24] Representations of war as a civilisational enterprise conceal the practical and immediate reasons for why individuals and groups lay aside their differences to join in common cause. This is what I emphasise in this discussion.

[25] Barth (1993) speaks of people's 'concerns' as the animating force of their behaviour; this is the sense in which I have used the term 'defining issues that preoccupy'.

insecurity.' Rather than committing to one side or another in a conflict, they placed relatives on both sides so that in any case after the battle they would have someone on a 'winning' side who could protect the rest (Monsutti 2008 in this volume). Stacey Closson describes similar strategic behaviour among corrupt officials in Georgia:

> [M]embers of the networks took advantage of situations as they arose, forming alliances for an operation, and then disbanding again after it was competed. Most of the time was spent in a quasi-state of conflict, in an effort to secure resources. The networks may have been disorderly and internally combustible, but they acted within a set of unwritten, yet understood, rules, the most important of which was secrecy and the sharing of spoils (Closson 2005: 21).

In so far as trends exist they appear as changing patterns of opportunity that must be addressed 'as they arise.'

Conclusion

In the 1980s some of us were trying to envision a world without the boundary that bifurcated Central Asia from South Asia and Middle East. We thought the pre-modern configuration of political and cultural relations in the wider region of Greater Central Asia might reassert itself as the mechanisms of separation broke down. A new configuration of relations seemed to be in the offing. In describing Turko-Persia as an ecumene we meant to emphasise that for many generations it was, in the Greek sense of the term, a 'world', a region within which, for those within it, all issues of importance took place, and all events outside it were of relative indifference. In that earlier period, before the rise of Europe, the peoples of Central and South Asia and the Middle East had interacted in various ways—through trade, sometimes in war, sometimes through borrowing ideas and customs, even by competing for artists and craftsmen. The term Turko-Persia seemed to describe that pre-modern social and cultural world. We wondered whether, as the Soviet Central Asian and southern and western sectors of Asia became more accessible to each other, a similar pattern of regional interaction might take form.

Of course the world did not stand still. The circumstances we have described here—the race for access to fossil fuel resources, the defensive reactions of state leaders against the advance of world capitalism and American hegemony, the advance of nuclear power to increase the strategic importance of the region, and the wars in which local bodies of Muslims are pitted against the military might of modern states—these have arisen from the emerging circumstances of the last few decades and in turn are creating new matrices of opportunity.

But the intensification of issues in the region and the broadening of connections among these peoples have been accompanied by another development of even wider scale, further affecting the new 'regional consciousness'.[26] The new

[26] This is Fragner's term (2001: 343).

'world' in which these peoples are situated is becoming ever more inclusive. With ever accelerating speed these people are being integrated into (to use the current cliché) the global system.

In many respects the broad region we have called Greater Central Asia has sustained a series of major shocks, spawning reactions of many sorts among the local populations, only some of them discussed here. But generally there has been such a dust up, such a radical shift in the alignments of power, that in many places ordinary human beings are suffering, terrorised, dislocated, and deprived of familiar conventions of social interaction. Did anyone foresee how much conflict, confusion, grief would be experienced as the frontier collapsed? Our region is now deeply wrenched by conflicts that seem intractable, insoluble. We can only hope that the contradictions created by the changes of the last few decades will somehow be resolved. In any case, what that resolution will look like in another two decades resides well beyond our horizon.

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