

# Principles in the pipeline: managing transatlantic values and interests in Central Asia

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## The West's Central Asian dilemmas

Throughout the 1990s the Central Asian states remained a low foreign policy priority for the United States and Europe.<sup>1</sup> It was not until the next decade that the Euro-Atlantic community developed compelling security and commercial interests in the region.<sup>2</sup> After 9/11 the Central Asian states hosted coalition military bases and became important security partners for operations in Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> The rising price of oil and gas, coupled with a renewed western concern about its energy security, made the development and export of Central Asian production a much more pressing commercial and strategic priority for Brussels and Washington than it was in the 1990s. A region that was effectively ignored for over a decade has now become a vital area of transatlantic interest.

Unfortunately, this new period of transatlantic engagement has not been accompanied by positive changes in the quality of Central Asia's democratic development and internal governance.<sup>4</sup> Mired in post-Soviet legacies of patronage politics, strong presidencies with authoritarian powers, endemic corruption and widespread poverty, the Central Asian states, unlike many of their post-communist counterparts, have failed to make meaningful progress in enacting political and economic liberalization.<sup>5</sup> In fact, while pursuing these new strategic interests the

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<sup>1</sup> For background, see Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian states: discovering independence* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997); Oliver Roy, *The new Central Asia: geopolitics and the creation of nations* (London: Tauris, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Rajan Menon, 'The new Great Game in Central Asia', *Survival* 45: 2, Summer 2003, pp. 187–204. On the region's evolving security architecture, see Roy Allison, 'Regionalism, regional structures and security management in Central Asia', *International Affairs* 80: 3, May 2004, pp. 463–83.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Cooley, 'US bases and democratization in Central Asia', *Orbis* 52: 1, Winter 2008, pp. 65–90; Olga Oliker and David A. Shlapak, *US interests in Central Asia: policy priorities and military roles* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> On regional leadership failures during this new period of engagement, see Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's second chance* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Good analytical accounts of these internal challenges can be found in Kathleen Collins, *Clan politics and regime transition in Central Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and Pauline Jones Luong, ed., *The transformation of Central Asia: states and societies from Soviet rule to independence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

West's credibility as an agent of political reform has been undercut by a series of mis-steps and concessions made to Central Asia's authoritarian regimes.

Managing the balance between promoting the interests and the values of the transatlantic community has been rendered all the more difficult by the fact that its most effective mechanisms for encouraging institutional change are not available for engaging with this region. Since the Central Asian states are not, and almost certainly will never be, candidates for membership in the European Union or NATO, they do not have to enact the necessary institutional changes and conditional reforms that helped to transform their post-communist counterparts in East and Central Europe, the Balkans and the Black Sea region. The United States and Europe have not collaborated to formulate a common Central Asian strategy, nor have they advanced a strong common response to the floundering role in the region of international organizations such as the OSCE. The trend of developments has indeed taken quite the opposite direction: many western international and non-governmental organizations that have emphasized a values-based agenda have been criticized and even driven from the region by Central Asian governments that are keen to limit outside interference in their domestic affairs. Supported by Russia's resurgence and criticism of the West, the Central Asian states have recast the West's values agenda as a political threat.

This article examines the major strategic stumbling blocks that have checked the transatlantic community's efforts to promote democratic change in Central Asia. In particular, I focus on how the United States and Europe have tempered their criticism of democratic shortcomings in order to safeguard their access to strategically important fixed assets—particularly military bases and hydrocarbon pipelines—in the region. The next section of the article examines the tension that arose for the United States and Germany between maintaining access to their military bases in the region and promoting democratization within the countries hosting these bases. The following section overviews the EU's recently introduced Central Asia strategy and Brussels' struggle to balance its energy security agenda with its traditional values-based foreign policy principles. Next, I explore how the regional environment in Central Asia has become less welcoming towards the West's values agenda, while the conclusion offers some suggestions about how the transatlantic community might better manage balancing its interests and its principles in the future.

## **Dilemmas of access: playing base politics in Central Asia**

The events of 11 September 2001 immediately elevated Central Asia's strategic importance to the transatlantic community. Within a few weeks the United States had established forward bases to support Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan at Karshi-Khanabad (K2) in southern Uzbekistan and at Ganci at Manas airport in Kyrgyzstan, near the capital, Bishkek.<sup>6</sup> Manas also hosted troops from ten different coalition countries in 2002. In February 2002 the government of

<sup>6</sup> For details on how these bases were established, see Olikier and Shlapak, *US interests in Central Asia*, pp. 11–19.

Germany negotiated a separate deal with Uzbekistan to secure the use of the base at Termez, near the Afghan border, to support and supply its Afghan mission. In addition, coalition countries secured refuelling and transit rights from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to assist with OEF missions. Having hitherto lain at the margins of international security concerns, the Central Asian states were now considered a critical forward line in the new global war on terror.

## *K2, Andijon and the US–Uzbekistan imbroglio*

Central Asian elites themselves skilfully leveraged their new-found strategic importance for domestic political gain. In Uzbekistan, President Islam Karimov used his new strategic partnership with the United States and the international community—codified by a security cooperation agreement signed in Washington in March 2002—to justify his internal consolidation of power.<sup>7</sup> The Uzbek President extended his term of office for an additional five years and declared war on terrorists and other enemies of the state. During 2002 Uzbek security services arrested and detained hundreds of suspected terrorists in an internal crackdown explicitly connected by Karimov to the campaign in neighbouring Afghanistan. In December 2002 the United Nations Special Envoy Theo van Boven issued a highly critical report on Uzbek prisons that found systemic abuse and torture of terrorist suspects.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, as part of the Bush administration's policy of 'extraordinary renditions', the United States turned over dozens of terrorist suspects to Uzbek authorities.<sup>9</sup> And according to Craig Murray, the outspoken former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, Uzbek security services deliberately misled coalition authorities by feeding false information and exaggerating Al-Qaeda's links to Uzbek groups in order to retain the engagement of the international community.<sup>10</sup> With the focus on the military operations in neighbouring Afghanistan and, after 2003, Iraq, the Uzbek government's repressive domestic policies were hardly an issue of concern for US foreign policy-makers, even though they violated Uzbek commitments made under the 2002 security accord.

Then, in the spring of 2005, two seismic political events in Central Asia forced US officials into a precarious balance between maintaining access to K2 and promoting democratic reforms. The first occurred in March 2005, when the Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev was overthrown in the so-called 'Tulip Revolution' following a contested national parliamentary election that followed on the heels of the 'colour revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine. Tashkent was alarmed by the speed at which the US policy of enacting regime change in former Soviet

<sup>7</sup> On the US–Uzbek security relationship, see Shahram Akbarzadeh, *Uzbekistan and the United States: authoritarianism, Islamism and Washington's security agenda* (New Jersey: Zed, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Theo van Boven, 'Civil and political rights, including the questions of torture and detention', Report for the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, E/CN.4/2003/68/Add.2, Feb. 2003.

<sup>9</sup> See Stephen Grey, *Ghost plane: the true story of the CIA torture program* (New York: St Martin's, 2006), pp. 170–89.

<sup>10</sup> See Craig Murray, *Murder in Samarkand* (London: Mainstream, 2006).

countries had reached Central Asia.<sup>11</sup> In fact, Karimov believed that the colour revolutions and the promotion of 'democratic values' posed as much of a transnational security threat to his regime as the region's Islamic insurgents.

The second defining event took place in Uzbekistan's eastern city of Andijon. On Friday, 13 May 2005, thousands of demonstrators gathered around Babur Square in the centre of the city. Earlier that day, a group of armed militants had staged a prison breakout at a local police station and captured a weapons depot. The militants were reportedly responding to the government's conviction and imprisonment of 23 local businessmen who were accused of having ties to the Islamic organization Akramiya. International human rights organizations and journalists maintain that the subsequent public demonstration at Babur was peaceful, while Uzbek authorities insist that Islamic militants instigated it. Whatever the truth of its origins, Uzbek security forces dealt with the protesters ruthlessly, surrounding the demonstrators in armoured vehicles and proceeding to fire into the crowd. Uzbek officials claim that 180 armed insurgents were killed during the crackdown, while international NGOs conservatively estimate the death toll at about 800, insisting that almost all were innocent civilians.<sup>12</sup>

The Uzbek government received unequivocal backing for its actions from Russia and China, but the crackdown in Andijon sent shock waves through the West. The EU called for an international investigation into the events and would later impose sanctions on the Uzbek government, while US officials, who were concerned with potentially losing access to K2, blocked a similar proposed NATO communiqué in Brussels.<sup>13</sup> Back in Washington, the US reaction was mixed. The Pentagon remained silent on the matter; after a few days' pause the State Department took the EU position and called for an international inquiry into the events at Andijon. In Congress, a bipartisan group of US senators called for a congressional investigation of whether Uzbek security forces had used US military equipment in the crackdown. Even traditional hawks put pressure on the US administration to adopt a more critical stance towards the Uzbek government. In an influential editorial, the neo-conservative magazine *Weekly Standard* questioned whether the US security relationship with the repressive Uzbek regime could be squared with the foreign policy principle of promoting democratization in Iraq and the greater Middle East.<sup>14</sup>

Uzbek authorities responded to these mounting criticisms by restricting operations and night-time flights from K2 and warning US officials in private that American access to bases was in jeopardy.<sup>15</sup> When, on 28 July, the US government publicly came out in support of a UN plan, opposed by the Uzbek government,

<sup>11</sup> For overviews of the international dimensions and dissemination of the colour revolutions, see Mark Beissinger, 'Structure and example in modular political phenomena: the diffusion of the Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions', *Perspectives on Politics* 5: 2, June 2007, pp. 259–76; Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, 'International diffusion and postcommunist electoral revolutions', *Communist and Postcommunist Studies* 39: 3, Sept. 2006, pp. 283–304.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Human Rights Watch, 'Bullets were falling like rain: the Andijon massacre, May 13, 2005', 17: 5(D), June 2005, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/uzbekistano605/uzbekistano605.pdf>, accessed 3 July 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Personal communications with NATO officials. Brussels, July 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Schwartz and William Kristol, 'Our Uzbek problem', *Weekly Standard*, 30 May 2005.

<sup>15</sup> On the sequence of events leading up to the eviction, see Alexander Cooley, 'Base politics', *Foreign Affairs* 84: 6, Nov.–Dec. 2005, pp. 79–92.

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to move a group of Andijon refugees who were being held in UN camps in southern Kyrgyzstan to various European countries that had agreed to grant them asylum, the Uzbek government followed through on its threat. The following day Uzbekistan invoked the termination clause in the K2 basing agreement, which gave the United States 180 days to leave. Even after US forces had departed the base remained a source of tension, with Tashkent complaining that it was owed \$23 million in back payments by the US military.<sup>16</sup> The eviction was a military and political blow to the United States, which lost not only the operational use of K2, but also the opportunity to take the initiative and leave Uzbekistan out of political principle.<sup>17</sup>

## *Manas and the political economy of maintaining access*

In neighbouring Kyrgyzstan the economic dimension has been more important for maintaining US access to bases. From the beginning, US officials considered that providing economic incentives would lock in Kyrgyzstan's cooperation with the coalition. In purely economic terms, the base itself has represented one of the biggest foreign investments in Kyrgyzstan, to the tune of around \$40–60 million per year since 2002.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, a number of private incentives kept the Akayev regime and its political allies supportive of the basing arrangement. From the outset US and coalition authorities agreed to pay international civil aviation fees to the Kyrgyz government for take-offs and landings by military aircraft—roughly \$7,000 per aircraft per take-off.<sup>19</sup> The state-controlled Manas Airport Company collected ad hoc parking fees in addition to the \$2 million annual lease paid by the United States, though these revenues were never accounted for in public. The most lucrative base-related payments were the fuel contracts. According to an investigative story in the *New York Times*, the Pentagon spent \$207 million on fuel contracts for Manas during the Akayev presidency.<sup>20</sup> Out of this total, \$87 million were spent on subcontracts awarded to Manas International Services, a private company owned by Aydar Akayev, the President's son, and \$32 million were awarded to Aalam Services, an independent fuel company owned by the President's son-in-law, Adil Toiganbayev. A later FBI investigation revealed that the Akayev clan had embezzled tens of millions of dollars of base-related revenues through a network of offshore accounts.

The collapse of the Akayev regime in March 2005 threw into question the legitimacy of these base-related contracts and the validity of the legal underpinnings

<sup>16</sup> Jim Nichol, 'Uzbekistan's closure of the airbase at Karshi-Khanabad: context and implications', Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 7 Oct. 2005.

<sup>17</sup> On the post-K2 political fallout, see Eugene Rumer, 'The US interests and role in Central Asia after K2', *Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2006; Gregory Gleason, 'The Uzbek expulsion of US forces and realignment in Central Asia', *Problems of Post-Communism*, March–April 2006.

<sup>18</sup> For the latest official estimates and breakdowns, see the statements made in Roger McDermott, 'Reflections on Manas', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 1 July 2008, [http://jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=2373192](http://jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2373192), accessed 3 July 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Author's interviews with US authorities, Bishkek, Jan. 2005.

<sup>20</sup> David Cloud, 'Pentagon's fuel deal is lesson in risks of graft-prone regions', *New York Times*, 15 Nov. 2005.

of the US military presence in Manas. Since his election in July 2005, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev has taken a tougher stance on the terms of base access, arguing that the United States lined the pockets of the Akayev regime and that base-related revenues had not helped the Kyrgyz country as a whole. Beginning in the autumn of 2005, Bakiyev demanded a hundredfold increase in rental payments from \$2 million to \$200 million, and insisted that the United States provide \$80 million in compensation to the new Kyrgyz government to make up for funds that were embezzled by the Akayev regime.<sup>21</sup> After nearly a year of negotiations, a new five-year accord was concluded in July 2006.<sup>22</sup> The Kyrgyz side insists that the agreement calls for the annual payment of \$150 million as part of a base rights package, including a \$17 million lease payment, while US officials deny that US assistance to Kyrgyzstan represents any formal quid pro quo for the base.

Internally, President Bakiyev, much like his predecessor, has moved to quash opposition and consolidate power. Bakiyev's newly formed political party, Ak Zol, routed the opposition in the December 2007 elections that were described by international observers as fundamentally flawed.<sup>23</sup> US officials, while privately critical of the election, muted their public criticism and seem to have resigned themselves to maintaining a working relationship with the Bakiyev regime. For their part, Kyrgyz officials regard the US base primarily as an important source of private revenues and openly question why other forms of US assistance, such as USAID funds or the Peace Corps programme, should be counted in the annual \$150 million base rights package.<sup>24</sup> Base-related issues and disputes dominate the US–Kyrgyz agenda. Given recent reports that US planners want to extend the size of the Manas facility (an aim officially denied by the US side), pro-democracy advocates now fear that the United States will take a much softer stance towards any anti-democratic excesses of the Bakiyev regime in order to preserve its base access.<sup>25</sup>

### *German basing dilemmas at Termez*

The tension between preserving base access and promoting democratic values has not been an exclusively American concern. Since 2002 the border city of Termez in southern Uzbekistan has been the main forward staging facility for German troops in Afghanistan. Termez hosts about 300 German soldiers who service five CH-53 Stallion helicopters and seven C-160 transport airplanes. After the fallout from Andijon, Germany was the only NATO country that Uzbekistan allowed to retain base access, while within the EU Berlin has energetically advocated that the Union should re-engage with Uzbekistan.

<sup>21</sup> See Alexander Cooley, *Base politics: democratic change and the US military overseas* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 232–6.

<sup>22</sup> For the text of the joint statement of the agreement, see [http://bishkek.usembassy.gov/july\\_14\\_joint\\_statement\\_on\\_coalition\\_airbase.html](http://bishkek.usembassy.gov/july_14_joint_statement_on_coalition_airbase.html), accessed 3 July 2008.

<sup>23</sup> See OSCE/ODIHR, 'Kyrgyz Republic: pre-term parliamentary elections, 16 December 2007', OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, Warsaw, 24 April 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Author's interviews with members of the Kyrgyz base negotiators and security officials, Bishkek, Jan. 2008.

<sup>25</sup> See 'US official denies report of expanding Kyrgyzstan air base', *Stars and Stripes*, 22 June 2008.

German leasing payments for Termez now exceed €20 million per year.<sup>26</sup> Beyond the formal lease, the German government has invested over €10 million in upgrading the runway and airport facilities and, according to a report in *Der Spiegel*, overpays for construction projects, service contracts and hotel accommodation in order to stay in the good graces of the central government and local authorities.<sup>27</sup> In addition, according to the German Foreign Ministry, Germany has trained 120 Uzbek army officers under the auspices of NATO's Partnership for Peace programme and provided the Uzbek side with military equipment.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, from 1992 to 2005 the German government was the third largest contributor of development assistance to Uzbekistan, providing nearly €240 million, while the German state aid agency GTZ continues to run a number of assistance and training projects. And when Uzbek authorities kicked out other western NGOs following the events in Andijon, German foundations such as the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung maintained their projects throughout the country.<sup>29</sup>

Critics of the German–Uzbek relationship, both within the German political system and in international human rights groups, have reserved their harshest criticism for what they perceive to be German support for Uzbekistan within the EU. They maintain that Uzbek officials are effectively blackmailing Berlin by threatening eviction from the Termez facility unless it backs Uzbekistan on EU-related matters, citing as the first instance of such support Germany's efforts to overturn the EU sanctions regime imposed by Brussels in November 2005 following the events in Andijon. Under the regime, the EU imposed an embargo on European weapons sales to Uzbekistan and restricted the grant of visas for travel in the EU for twelve members of the Uzbek government directly involved in the Andijon incident.<sup>30</sup>

From the beginning of the sanctions regime, German officials have criticized its purpose and effects. Just a few weeks after the sanctions were imposed, Berlin issued an exemption from the visa ban on humanitarian grounds to Uzbekistan's Minister of Internal Affairs, Zokirjon Almatov, the official actually responsible for planning the Andijon crackdown, so that he could receive medical treatment in Hanover. Despite a public campaign by human rights groups during Almatov's visit, he was allowed to return to Tashkent without incident. Each time the EU sanctions regime has been up for renewal, German officials have forcefully argued that the sanctions should be lifted, claiming that they serve no constructive

<sup>26</sup> Figure confirmed to the author by two sources in the German government.

<sup>27</sup> Christian Neef, 'Germany's favorite despot', *SpiegelOnline*, 2 Aug. 2006, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,429712,00.html>, accessed 3 July 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Anja Schoeller-Schletter, 'Germany takes low-key approach toward Uzbekistan', *Eurasia Insight*, 5 Sept. 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav090705.shtml>, accessed 3 July 2008.

<sup>29</sup> These included a media training project reportedly worth €1 million that one critic described as 'absurd in a country where the regime allows no independent media whatsoever'. See Marcus Bensmann, 'Andijan, Germany and Europe', *Opendemocracy*, 13 May 2008, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/node/44596/pdf>, accessed 3 July 2008.

<sup>30</sup> For details about the sanctions, see esp. Crisis Group, 'Uzbekistan: Europe's sanctions matter', *Asia Briefing* 54, 6 Nov. 2006.

purpose. In October 2007, in a decision that upset many human rights groups, EU officials adopted a compromise position that suspended the sanctions on eight of the twelve officials still subject to them (they had been lifted in respect of the other four in a review of May 2007), though this was officially conditional on Tashkent demonstrating improvements in human rights-related issues, including releasing political prisoners and allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross access to its detention centres.<sup>31</sup>

German officials have responded to criticisms of their security partnership much as their US counterparts did, arguing that, over the long term, engaging with Uzbek officials and the Uzbek military is a far more fruitful strategy for promoting reforms than publicly lecturing Tashkent about human rights.

### *Strategic access and democratic values: a precarious balance*

For the United States and Germany the operational functions of Uzbek military bases for the Afghanistan campaign were of paramount importance. What US and German planners had not counted on, however, was that their Central Asian hosts would politicize the partnership on bases for their own domestic political gain. Local politics and base politics became inextricably linked, forcing both western countries into tepid responses towards the anti-democratic practices of their hosts.<sup>32</sup> In the US case, these tensions also pitted the Pentagon and the State Department against one another in the matter of defining the exact nature of US priorities in the region.

The political dilemmas associated with base politics in Central Asia will persist for the foreseeable future. Even if the United States does not expand at Manas, it must manage what will be a tough negotiation to extend its presence after 2010. Germany has endured much international criticism for its opposition to the EU sanctions regime, but will be put under considerable pressure again if the government of Uzbekistan does not demonstrate at least some modest improvements in the human rights situation. In an intriguing development in early 2008, US forces were allowed back into Uzbekistan through Termez on a case-by-case basis under German auspices, suggesting that US–Uzbek security cooperation is once again deepening.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the announcement that the new government of Turkmenistan, led by President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, has allowed NATO to use installations in its country to support missions into Afghanistan signals a much higher level of security cooperation between the West and Turkmenistan than was possible under his predecessor, the neutrality-obsessed Saparmurat Niyazov.<sup>34</sup> Yet the human rights situation in Turkmenistan remains of international concern and, so far, the security partnership has not precipitated significant domestic political liberalization in Turkmenistan. As with Uzbekistan, these new security ties

<sup>31</sup> Claire Soares, 'EU lifting of travel ban greeted with dismay', *Independent*, 17 Oct. 2007.

<sup>32</sup> For a comparative account of the democratic concessions made by the United States to base hosts in East Asia, southern Europe and the post-communist states, see Cooley, *Base politics*.

<sup>33</sup> See 'Uzbekistan gives US limited use of Termez base', Reuters, 5 March 2008.

<sup>34</sup> See Bruce Pannier, 'Turkmenistan: NATO finds a new partner in Central Asia', RFE/RL, 30 May 2008.

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may actually constrain the transatlantic community's future capacity to speak out forcefully on democracy-related issues.

## **Brussels engages with Central Asia: energy insecurity and human rights**

The declared priority status given by Germany to maintaining its dialogue with Uzbekistan was part of a broader effort designed to expand EU engagement with the Central Asian states. During the German presidency of the EU in the first half of 2007, the EU drafted and passed its first comprehensive Central Asia strategy paper. Introduced in May 2007, the paper set out a series of priorities for EU cooperation with the Central Asian states from 2007 to 2013, as well as the funding mechanisms for the €750 million allocated to implement them.<sup>35</sup>

### *Aspects of the EU's Central Asia strategy*

The EU strategy reflects Brussels's desire to promote both its interests and its values in the region. On the one hand, the paper emphasizes that developing Central Asia's oil and gas production will be conducive to global diversification and that the region's gas deliveries, in particular, are of 'special importance to the EU'.<sup>36</sup> The paper also calls for a regular dialogue on energy between the Central Asian states and the EU, involving technical cooperation as well as consultations over the development of new pipeline routes and transportation networks to bring Central Asian energy to market. Specifically, it calls for the development of a new Caspian Sea–Black Sea–EU energy transport corridor, in reference to the proposed Nabucco pipeline project that plans to bypass Russia as an alternative route for bringing natural gas from the Caspian to Europe.

Beyond its emphasis on energy and trade cooperation, the paper also promotes a number of the EU traditional democratic values issues for the region. It calls for improvements in democratization and the human rights situation through the creation of a standing human rights dialogue with the Central Asian governments. The strategy also calls for strengthening the rule of law, judicial reform and good governance initiatives. Finally, the values section of the strategy advocates the deepening of civil society and the nurturing of independent media in Central Asia, and calls for increasing educational contacts and exchanges between the Central Asian states and European universities.

### *Do all good things go together?*

The basic weakness in the EU strategy lies not in the merits of any of these individual goals, but in the lack of a frank assessment as to how they can be achieved simul-

<sup>35</sup> See Council of the European Union, 'The European Union and Central Asia: strategy for a new partnership', Brussels, Oct. 2007, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/librairie/PDF/EU\\_CtrlAsia\\_EN-RU.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/librairie/PDF/EU_CtrlAsia_EN-RU.pdf), accessed 3 July 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Council of the EU, 'The European Union and Central Asia', p. 19.

taneously. Specifically, conspicuously absent from the paper is an articulation of strategies for pressing forward a values agenda that may be ignored or even resisted by the Central Asian states. Even before the EU strategy was formally introduced, tensions had surfaced within Brussels over how properly to balance the outreach to Central Asian states for their energy supplies with the EU's traditional values agenda. For example, in October 2006 the European Parliament halted the implementation of a proposed EU trade deal with Turkmenistan on human rights grounds.<sup>37</sup> And during the drafting of the EU strategy, international human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch warned that a robust human rights agenda should not be compromised for the sake of pursuing commercial goals such as energy security and enhanced trade and investment.<sup>38</sup>

Since the strategy's adoption, progress towards its goals has been mixed. In the energy realm, through its bilateral programmes and the efforts of Special Representative Ambassador Pierre Morel, the EU has successfully established energy and economic dialogues with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The Turkmen government even announced at the EU–Central Asia summit in Ashgabat in April 2008 that it would be willing to supply 10 billion cubic metres of gas for the Nabucco pipeline, though it is unclear whether the regime can guarantee this production, given its other signed commitments.<sup>39</sup>

Progress in the human rights and democracy portion of the EU–Central Asia agenda, however, has been limited. Despite the change of regime in Ashgabat, EU officials have acknowledged that pushing the human rights agenda is not their first priority in dealing with Turkmenistan, while the EU–Kazakh relationship remains focused on economic issues. As scholars of the political economy of hydrocarbon states have noted, energy producers tend to develop state-dominated patrimonial institutions that are antithetical to the flourishing of democratic processes and an independent civil society.<sup>40</sup> According to the NGO Freedom House's 2008 survey of political trends in Eurasia, energy-related revenues are encouraging the consolidation of authoritarian practices in both Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, in a thinly veiled reference to the EU's engagement strategy, the report observes that 'energy needs are increasingly distorting relationships between democracies that consume hydrocarbons and the authoritarian states that produce them' and notes that 'as energy wealth has emboldened authoritarian rulers, the Euro-Atlantic democracies have seemingly lost their resolve and sense of common purpose in advancing democratic practices'.<sup>42</sup> The aftermath of the recent conflict between Russia and Georgia seems likely only further to temper EU criticism of the human rights record of these Central Asian energy producers. As Central Asian countries continue to be courted by Europe as potential alternatives to Russian

<sup>37</sup> 'EU praised on halted Turkmen deal', BBC News, 4 Oct. 2006.

<sup>38</sup> See e.g. Human Rights Watch, 'The EU Central Asia strategy: an essential opportunity for human rights', 12 April 2007, <http://hrw.org/backgrounder/eca/eu0407/>, accessed 3 July 2008.

<sup>39</sup> 'Deal helps EU ease reliance on Russian gas', *Financial Times*, 14 April 2008.

<sup>40</sup> See esp. Michael Ross, 'Does oil hinder democracy?', *World Politics* 53: 3, 2001, pp. 325–61.

<sup>41</sup> Christopher Walker and Jeanette Goehring, 'Petro-authoritarianism and Eurasia's new divides', in *Nations in Transit 2008* (Washington DC: FreedomHouse, 2008), pp. 25–35.

<sup>42</sup> Walker and Goehring, 'Petro-authoritarianism and Eurasia's new divides', p. 25.

energy, the democracy promotion aspect of the EU–Central Asia dialogue is likely to be downplayed by all sides.

Beyond these net energy producers, EU engagement with Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has been less pronounced. Relations with Uzbekistan continue to be a tricky question that divides members of the EU, while Tajikistan is well beyond the orbit of Brussels's immediate interest.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps of greatest concern is the political situation in Kyrgyzstan, once a relatively open state within the Central Asian context, which is now showing increasing authoritarian tendencies under the regime of Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Despite an ambitious set of initiatives, the EU's instruments of engagement are limited compared to those that it can wield over accession countries or even countries that can be engaged through the European Neighbourhood Policy. Without a credible and clearly articulated set of incentives to comply with the values side of the EU strategy, there is little desire within the Central Asian states to engage with Brussels seriously over issues of democratic governance and human rights.

### **The changing international context: Central Asia's turn from the West**

The transatlantic community's struggle to balance its interests and values in Central Asia has become even more challenging in recent years as the regional political environment has shifted. Western organizations have lost influence as the Central Asian states have turned to Russia, China and their own regional mechanisms in pursuit of collaboration and cooperation. These new partners and instruments do not share the transatlantic community's broader values agenda and help to reinforce authoritarian practices in the Central Asian states under the mantra of guarding sovereignty.

### *Russia's resurgence and the backlash against the West*

Most importantly, Russia has reasserted itself as a key player in the region by upgrading its commercial, energy and security ties with the Central Asian states.<sup>44</sup> Russia maintains military bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and has sought to improve ties among members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The Russian military and the internal security service, the FSB, have forged close ties with their Central Asian counterparts. In terms of energy links, Gazprom moved quickly to lock both Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan into new production agreements for the Russian distribution network, offering significantly higher prices to ward off potential suitors from outside the region. Just as Russia has taken care in developing its bilateral ties and energy partnerships with European consumers, so it has anticipated Europe's calls for energy diversification and is doing its utmost

<sup>43</sup> Though the transatlantic community's policy to Tajikistan seems to have been subject to the same trade-offs since 9/11: see Shahram Akbarzadeh, 'Geopolitics versus democracy in Tajikistan', *Demokratizatsiya* 14: 4, Fall 2006, pp. 563–78.

<sup>44</sup> See the comprehensive overview in Roy Allison, 'Strategic reassertion in Russia's Central Asia policy', *International Affairs* 80: 2, March 2004, pp. 277–93.

to ensure that it maintains control of the major arteries of distribution of Central Asia's oil and gas.

The Russian–Georgian conflict of August 2008 further highlighted some of the dilemmas of energy security faced by the EU in its dealings with Moscow. Europe was divided over how strongly to respond to Russia over its military actions in Georgia and its recognition of the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The conflict also drew attention to the political risk that surrounds the design and completion of alternative pipelines for Central Asian gas that might traverse Georgia. The Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline was actually shut down a few days before the conflict by a Kurdish attack on a pipeline section in Turkey, while the Baku–Supsa oil pipeline and South Caucasus gas pipelines were also closed, emphasizing to international investors and Central Asian producers alike the vulnerability of the Georgian corridor to regional instability. Russia's planned deployment of over 7,000 Russian troops in Georgia's breakaway territories will also serve as a warning of the enduring political risk associated with the Georgian transit corridor.

Beyond its energy politics, Russia has also contested the spread of transatlantic democratic institutions, criticizing this as undue western geopolitical encroachment within the former Soviet space.<sup>45</sup> Russia's pushback against the democracy promotion agenda of the West that produced the colour revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan has found supportive allies in the Central Asian regimes.

Despite their authoritarian tendencies, throughout the 1990s most of the Central Asian states tolerated a range of western democracy promotion programmes and NGO initiatives, if only to keep themselves in good odour with the international community.<sup>46</sup> But the 'democratic revolutions' of 2003–2005 showed the Central Asian regimes in stark terms that the western democracy agenda posed a fundamental threat to their survival. As a result, these states since have clamped down on the activities of international human rights organizations and international foundations operating in the region. Along with Russia, they also have grown increasingly hostile to the election observation missions conducted by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).<sup>47</sup> At the OSCE's 2007 summit, Russia, supported by all of the Central Asian states, as well as Belarus and Armenia, introduced a draft proposal to curtail the election monitoring activities of the ODIHR. The proposal included limiting the size of monitoring missions to 50, allowing the host state to veto the head of mission, and obliging the ODIHR to submit its preliminary findings to the host for initial collaborative review prior

<sup>45</sup> For different perspectives on Russia's resurgence and its implications for the West, see Roy Allison, Margot Light and Stephen White, *Putin's Russia and the enlarged Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell/Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2006); Edward Lucas, *The new Cold War: Putin's Russia and the threat to the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Dmitri Trenin, 'Russia redefines itself and its relations with the West', *Washington Quarterly* 30: 2, 2007, pp. 95–105; Celeste Wallander, *Russia: the domestic sources of a less-than-grand strategy* (Seattle, WA: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> See Edward Schatz, 'Access by accident: legitimacy claims and democracy promotion in Central Asia', *International Political Science Review* 27: 3, 2006, pp. 263–84.

<sup>47</sup> On Russia's pushback against the OSCE/ODIHR, see Rick Fawn, 'Battle over the box: international election observation missions, political competition and retrenchment in the post-Soviet space', *International Affairs* 82: 6, Nov. 2006, pp. 1133–53.

## *Principles in the pipeline*

to their public release.<sup>48</sup> As the Central Asian states push with increasing confidence to curtail the OSCE's and ODIHR's activities across the region, they have found little sustained resistance from the Euro-Atlantic community.

## *The rise of the SCO: international cooperation without transatlantic values*

The Central Asian states are also establishing regional mechanisms as alternatives to western-dominated international organizations in the provision of cooperation and public goods. The rise of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a case in point. Composed of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the SCO is developing into a potentially major instrument for fostering regional cooperation and long-overdue integration.

Although analysts in the West tend to focus on the SCO's security activities and training missions, especially the question of whether the SCO is turning into an anti-NATO military bloc within Eurasia, the organization has made greater strides in fostering regional cooperative initiatives in the economic sphere.<sup>49</sup> The group has launched initiatives to develop regional road links, power grids, telecommunications networks and other infrastructural development projects. The member countries' state development banks have formed a consortium, to complement a business council, with the aim of establishing a regional development bank to fund Central Asian development projects. Traditional international financial institutions such as the World Bank and European Bank of Reconstruction and Development are being left out of this planning, their insistence on domestic conditionality, good governance clauses and other requirements being deemed politically intrusive and unwelcome by Central Asian regimes.<sup>50</sup> In short, the SCO now promises to deliver the regional public goods necessary for Central Asia's economic integration without the political agenda of liberalization advocated by most international organizations.

## *Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship in 2010: a natural experiment*

Against this background of backlash against Euro-Atlantic influence, the election of Kazakhstan to the chair of the OSCE for 2010 provides an interesting test case of the effects of the relative power of competing international influences in Central Asia and their political values.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Major proposed changes are summarized in Vladimir Socor, 'Russia forcing OSCE out of election observation role,' 31 Oct. 2007, [http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=2372548](http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2372548), accessed 3 July 2008.

<sup>49</sup> For broader overviews, see Alyson Bailes et al., *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, SIPRI Policy Paper 17 (Stockholm, SIPRI, 2007); Alexander Luzkin, 'The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: what next?', *Russia in Global Affairs* 5: 3, July–Sept. 2007, pp. 140–56.

<sup>50</sup> See Alexander Cooley, 'The rise of the SCO in Central Asia: western foreign policy reactions', paper delivered to the Social Research Center, American University in Central Asia, Bishkek, 18 Jan. 2008.

<sup>51</sup> On the politics of competing international normative influences in the region, see Fiona Adamson, 'Global liberalism versus political Islam: competing ideological frameworks in international politics', *International Studies Review* 7: 4, Dec. 2005, pp. 547–69; Edward Schatz, 'Anti-Americanism and America's role in Central Asia', paper prepared for the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, 4 April 2008.

Though President Nazarbayev had set his sights on securing the OSCE chair for some time, Kazakhstan's election in November 2007 in Madrid was the result of a lengthy process and bargaining between its supporters (especially Russia and Germany) and its opponents (most notably the UK and the United States). Ultimately, sceptical members of the transatlantic community accepted the move subject to Astana's fulfilling certain conditions and obligations, including improving domestic media freedoms and strengthening civil society, as well as protecting the integrity of the ODIHR.<sup>52</sup>

International human rights groups have argued that in awarding the chair to Kazakhstan, the West has rewarded the democratic backsliding of the Nazarbayev regime and offered the authoritarian leader a global image boost. Western supporters of the move hope that, in assuming responsibility for the organization's goals and values, Kazakhstan will itself oppose some of the Russian initiatives designed to delegitimize and weaken the organization, especially its proposals to undermine the independence of the ODIHR. Ultimately, how Kazakhstan as the OSCE chair navigates this tightrope between the competing agendas of Russia and the West will demonstrate much about the extent of the transatlantic community's influence over the international orientation and values of the Central Asian states.

## Conclusions and policy recommendations

The waning influence of the transatlantic community in Central Asia stands in sharp contrast with the successful integration of many other post-communist countries into Euro-Atlantic structures. Without the instruments of EU or NATO membership conditionality, the transatlantic community has struggled to establish effective mechanisms to promote domestic institutional reform and Central Asia's international integration. As a result, both the United States and the EU have found it difficult simultaneously to promote their strategic interests in the areas of security and energy cooperation and also to remain effective advocates for transatlantic democratic values and the human rights agenda. As demonstrated by the recent Georgia–Russia conflict, the resurgence of Russia as a player in its 'near abroad', explicitly in opposition to the geopolitical encroachment of the West, has further eroded transatlantic unity.

From the perspectives of Washington and Brussels, how can the transatlantic community more effectively manage the balance between projecting its values and safeguarding its interests in the region? One response to the West's 'values versus interests' dilemma would be simply to jettison the values component altogether. After all, Central Asia would hardly be the first region in which western countries have turned a blind eye to internal political problems in order to maintain a foreign military base or safeguard a lucrative economic contract. What is different about Central Asia, however, is that its communist history and strategic location near Afghanistan and the Middle East have turned it into a region where the normative influence and engagement of the West is supposed to have a positive transforma-

<sup>52</sup> See Bruce Pannier, 'Kazakhstan to assume OSCE chairmanship in 2010', RFE/RL, 1 Dec. 2007.

tive impact. Moreover, it is precisely the values component that differentiates the transatlantic community's engagement with Central Asia from the support offered by other regional players, most notably Russia and China. With growing dismay, the region's civil society activists and reformers have noted the West's mis-steps, compromises and willingness to back off from its original commitments to democratic reform.

Although there is no magical way to resolve these 'values versus interests' dilemmas definitively, policy-makers in Brussels and Washington can recast some of the more counterproductive assumptions that seem to have been internalized about the international politics of Central Asia. First, the transatlantic community would do well to avoid thinking of its engagement with the region in terms of geopolitical competition. All too often, US and European analysts have referred to security or energy politics in Central Asia as a replay of the Great Game, or competition among Great Powers to assert influence over the region. But such metaphors are misleading, both because they promote false conceptions of zero-sum games in the region and because they assume that somehow Central Asian regimes are passive political pawns that are naively susceptible to this *realpolitik* practised by outside actors. Also, projections of geopolitical competition empower the Central Asian regimes effectively to play the West off against other regional powers.

Western policy-makers should remain mindful that all of the Central Asian states are now practising a variant of multivector diplomacy. Their ties to Russia and China are close and cannot but remain so over the long term. At the same time, however, none of the Central Asian states want to become client states that simply embrace Moscow's or Beijing's directives. For example, on the heels of the Georgia conflict in August 2008, the Central Asian countries refused to back Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and, through the SCO annual declaration in Dushanbe, reaffirmed their commitment to the principle of territorial integrity. The Central Asian states must manage their relationship with Russia, and developing thicker ties to the West will inevitably remain an important part of this outreach strategy. Unfortunately, the credibility of the United States and the EU has diminished over the last few years as Central Asian states have concluded that, because of the presence on their territory of strategically important bases and energy pipelines, they can effectively secure this engagement without implementing the values part of the transatlantic agenda.

Second, the transatlantic community should avoid compartmentalizing or segmenting its relations with the Central Asian states. In an age of electronic media and global information outlets, it has become nearly impossible to keep a particular bilateral relationship or strategic issue quiet or hidden. For example, US officials in Kyrgyzstan do not have an aggressive public relations strategy about the Manas base, in part because they do not want to draw attention to the issue. Yet, at the same time, a constant stream of base-related news stories, many of them deliberately sensationalist and simply wrong, are disseminated through the internet with a negative effect on public opinion about base-related issues. US officials learned from their experience with Uzbekistan the damaging disjunction

between claiming to pursue a foreign policy based on democratic values in settings such as Iraq and Afghanistan and supporting the repressive policies of a security partner, particularly one in the same neighbourhood. Accusations of foreign policy hypocrisy do not just damage the Euro-Atlantic community's credibility, they also support one of the main memes coming from Beijing and Moscow: that the West operates double standards.

Finally, Central Asia offers an important target for more institutionalized transatlantic cooperation. Washington and Brussels face similar dilemmas and priorities when dealing with the region and could benefit from more coordinated planning of their assistance projects and initiatives. The transatlantic community also needs to defend and promote, in a concerted fashion, the activities of international organizations operating in the region, such as the OSCE, whose longstanding activities and legitimacy are now being challenged. A renewed transatlantic commitment to focus jointly on the problems of the Central Asian and Caspian region will require some new thinking and, possibly, new policy instruments beyond the partnership programmes developed by the EU and NATO. But without greater Euro-Atlantic unity and strength of purpose, the capacity to influence institutional reform in the region positively will be diminished, as the Central Asian states will cut deals with individual western states. Ultimately, a more coordinated and reinvigorated transatlantic community will be better positioned to promote both its interests and its democratic values throughout this changing and now critically important part of the world.