RETHINKING CENTRAL ASIA AND ITS SECURITY ISSUES

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Abstract:

During the 20 years of independence, security environment in Central Asia has been changing drastically, with changes in strategies and alliances. This region is acquiring day by day more geostrategic importance due, among other things, to the situation in Afghanistan, to their natural resources, hydrocarbons specially, and their localization among Europe and Asia, Russia and China, India and Iran. This fight for gaining the complete influence in the region is known with the term "new great game".

Keywords: Central Asia; new great game; ¬multivector diplomacy; relationship with US.

Resumen:

En estos 20 años de independencia, la situación de seguridad en Asia Central ha ido cambiando drásticamente, con los consiguientes cambios de estrategias y alianzas. Esta región adquiere cada vez más importancia geoestratégica debido, entre otras razones, a la situación en Afganistán, a sus riquezas naturales, especialmente sus hidrocarburos, y por su localización a medio camino entre Europa y Asia, entre Rusia, China, India e Irán. Esta lucha por hacerse con la influencia en la región es lo que se conoce como el "nuevo gran juego".

Palabras clave: *Asia Central, nuevo gran juego, diplomacia multivector relaciones con Estados Unidos.*

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1. Introduction

According to the American expert on Central Asia, Daniel Burghart,

> For too long, Central Asia has been defined in terms of what others sought to gain there, and to a certain degree that is still the case. What is different is that since 1991, the region has begun to define itself, both in terms of national identities that it never had before, and a regional identity that it is trying to create.[2]

Burghart's observation transcends the classical imperialism that sought to retain control over Central Asia's lands or the continuing effort of the major players in the so called new great game to exercise a kind of sphere of influence over Central Asia. It denotes foreign powers' struggle for influence or hegemony over the region while each Central Asian state struggles to assert its own destiny. But it also applies to foreign specialists and policymakers' efforts to define the region in terms of paradigms adapted from Western and especially American social science. Policymakers' perceptions may overlap with academic and expert insights but they also have their own distinct resonance and implications.

Due to the escalation of the war in Afghanistan since 2008 the stakes involved in the effort to direct Central Asia's destiny have grown. Though Ahmed Rashid may exaggerate that importance somewhat, from the standpoint of regional governments this is actually an understatement because they believe their fate is linked with that of Afghanistan.

> The consequences of state failure in any single country are unimaginable. At stake in Afghanistan is not just the future of President Hamid Karzai and the Afghan people yearning for stability, development, and education but also the entire global alliance that is trying to keep Afghanistan together. At stake are the futures of the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union, and of course America's own power and prestige. It is difficult to imagine how NATO could survive as the West's leading alliance if the Taleban are not defeated in Afghanistan or if Bin Laden remains at large indefinitely.[3]

Yet Europe clearly is tiring of Afghanistan and ready to leave without completing the mission, continuing the long-term failure of European security organizations to grasp what it takes to stabilize Afghanistan and Central Asia or to commit sufficient resources to that task.[4] Even as EU involvement in Central Asia grows, particularly to influence the future construction of gas and possibly oil pipelines, its members remain unwilling to invest seriously in regional security. But Europe's seeming retreat masks this deepening interest of the EU in realizing Burghart's point, i.e. defining the region in terms of what it offers outsiders like the EU. As a 2009 study of the EU program of action in Central Asia observes,

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[2] Burghart, Dan: "Khans, Tsars, and Emperors: The Changing Nature of Central Asia's Security Spectrum", en Edstrom, Bert (ed.) (2009): *Security and Development in Asia: New Threats and Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, Stockholm, Institute for Development and Policy, p. 123.

[3] Rashid, Ahmed (2009): *Descent Into Chaos: The US and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*, 2nd ed. London, Viking Penguin Books, p. xxxix.

[4] Bumiller, Elizabeth: "Gates Faults U.S. Allies on Afghan War," *New York Times*, 11th March of 2011, at http://www.nytimes.com.

that presence is based on self-interest and focused on gas.[5] Despite the rhetoric of the EU's normative power or responsibility in world affairs, the real interest is in security or energy access, a fact not lost on Central Asian governments. Indeed, recent accounts from Europe indicate that a considerable part of the EU's contribution to Uzbek charities and presumably to other Central Asian programs has gone essentially into the hands of corrupt elites with Brussels looking the other way.[6]

Thus the EU's rapprochement with Uzbekistan advances despite the absence of progress there on human rights.[7] Indeed, during 2005-09 when the EU shunned Uzbekistan for its appalling human rights record and the Andizhan massacre of 2005 and imposed sanctions upon it, Germany continued secretly paying it 12-15 million Euros a year to lease the base at Termez.[8] Likewise, the EU underinvested in and relatively speaking neglected both Central Asia and Afghanistan until 2007 and the consequences of excessive dependence on Russia for gas manifested themselves.[9] Nor is the EU's behavior the only confirmation of Burghart's point.

Indeed, we can go deeper into the implications of Burghart's remarks by examining Emilian Kavalski's recent analysis of Central Asia. He observes that the breakup of the Soviet Union changed the meaning of this region's independence not its geography. Central Asia's significance in world politics is a matter of contestation, debate, and struggle with immense stakes. As Kavalski notes, whereas a decade or two ago a critical question was the degree to which Central Asia would be a receiver of Western ideas and values, we now debate how fast "Asian values" will spread. And this debate coincides with the advent of the new great game which denotes not just the major powers' geopolitical perceptions relating to Central Asia but also the simultaneous proliferation of actors from within the region. Central Asia and its governments are simultaneously subjects and objects of world politics and of efforts to conceptualize those politics.[10] Nonetheless the use of this term "great game" garners opprobrium because supposedly we are no longer playing those Kiplinesque kinds of games or conducting such politics when the actual evidence that this is indeed the case is overwhelming.

So to add to the confusion we face in Central Asia we have saddled ourselves, quite deliberately with another layer of hypocrisy, obfuscation and delusion. One need only invoke the repeated statements of governments across the globe that they seek only mutually profitable partnerships with each other there. For example, Indeed, US officials like Michael McFaul, the National Security Council Senior Director on Russia, contend that the events in

[5] Dennison, Michael: "The EU and Central Asia: Commercializing the Energy Relationship", *EUCAM Working Paper*, No. 2, 2009, p. 4.

[6] Fitzpatrick, Catherine A.: "Uzbekistan: Karimova Libel Trial Delivers More Scandals; MPs Demand EU Probe", *Eurasia Insight*, 10th of June of 2011.

[7] Fitzpatrick, Catherine A.: "EU Pressing Ahead with Presence in Uzbekistan," *Eurasia Insight*, 28th of March of 2011, at http://www.eurasianet.org.

[8] Tynan, Deirdre: "Uzbekistan: Veil is Lifted on German Payments for Termez Base," *Eurasia Insight*, 24th of March of 2011, at http://www.eurasianet.org.

[9] Emerson, Michael and Boonstra, Jos (eds.) (2010): *Into Eurasia: Monitoring the EU's Central Asian Strategy*, Brussels, Centre for European Policy Studies and Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) Madrid.

[10] Kavalski, Emilian: "The Peacock and the Bear in the Heartland: Central Asia and the Shifting Patterns of India's Relations with Russia," *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, 1st of June-31st of December of 2010, XXIII, Nos. 1-2, pp. 1-20, *Open Source Center, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Central Eurasia* (Henceforth *FBIS SOV)*, 24th of March of 2011.

Kyrgyzstan could become an example of Russo-American cooperation in Central Asia. Specifically he told a press conference in 2009 that,

> I told the members of the provisional government what I've heard President Obama say many times to President Medvedev. That is to explain that the Manas Transit Center is there for a very specific purpose regarding a very specific action that we are doing in Afghanistan. We have no intention of permanent bases or military position. In particular, President Obama has said many many times, more generally about U.S.-Russian relations but specifically in regard to the transit center, that we do not define our relations with Kyrgyzstan or any other country in Central Asia in zero sum terms vis-à-vis Russia. As President Obama said publicly in Moscow when he visited there last July, and he's said privately to President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin in their meetings, the notions of spheres of influence and zero sum thinking is a 19th Century concept that has no place in the 21st Century. And if I may be very blunt, the women and men that fly through the transit center on their way to Afghanistan are fighting a struggle against terrorist extremist organizations that threaten both Russian security and Kyrgyz security. So we don't see this as an American struggle or a Russian, against Russia. We see this transit center as enhancing the security of the United States, of Russia, and Kyrgyzstan. It's a win/win/win.[11]

Obviously this proliferation of actors, the refusal to admit to what is truly happening, and the globalization of the world economy and politics all add immensely to our difficulties in comprehending the significance of how local trends in Central Asia affect us or conversely how external events influence local developments. But clearly the point is that Central Asia is vulnerable to globalization trends and global forces just as external agents are vulnerable to events in Central Asia as well as outside forces like the global economic crisis that began in 2007-08.

Obviously this shift in debate cited by Kavalski reflects trends in world politics and global power perceptions if not rankings, further confirming a link between power and values in both discourse and reality. But that is not all. Kavalski elaborates further on his and Burghart's related insight to observe that given the proliferation of actors and agents operating in Central Asia,

> The simultaneity of these two dynamics reveals that the agency of external actors is distinguished not by an imperial desire for the control of territory, but by the establishment of "niches of influence". Consequently, the notion of the "new great game" comes to characterize the dynamics of processing, selection and internalization of some externally promoted ideas and not others.[12]

The link implicit in Burghart's observation is thus strengthened. Discursive and material power are inextricably entwined with the creation of valorized perceptions of Central Asia and policy postures derived from them. Thus a recent study of Kyrgyz and Kazakh counter-

[11] Press Conference with Ambassador Tatiana C. Foeller and Dr. Michael McFaul, Special Assistant to the President of the United States. Bishkek, 4th of May of 2010, at http://bishkek.usembassy.gov.
[12] *Ibid.*

terrorism legislation openly links these increasingly repressive laws in the absence of much terrorist activity to these states' perception of Russia whose laws they are clearly emulating as a "reference group" for them, i.e. a state that has created the basis for persuading these states to internalize its legislation.[13]

Russia is not the only practitioner of such policies. For instance, let us consider the remarks of the Chinese scholar S. Zhaungzhi, "SCO members share a common border. It is unimaginable for Central Asian countries to develop their economies and maintain domestic stability without support from their neighbors".[14] This is a traditionally neo-colonialist view of so called backward states and their relationship to the metropolis. But it also implicitly calls for a transfer not only of Chinese material assistance and political support, but also political norms to China without which these states cannot retain their stability.

Similarly Washington is now sponsoring the creation of a fairly extensive network of installations in northern Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan lest the local violence in these areas intensify.[15] However, the Russian expert Andrei Grozin, of the Institute of CIS Studies in Moscow spoke for many in Moscow when he observed that they expect the United States to seek to retain its earlier foothold and limit Russian influence because many officials in both Moscow and Washington see events in Central Asia as part of a big political game.[16]

2. Central Asia's Elusiveness and Russian Policy

Yet Central Asian realities continue to defy not only easy categorization but also these efforts at both cognitive and more material hegemony. These patterns of external-internal interaction are replicated daily and globally by a bewildering multiplicity of actors interested in and participating in Central Asia, making it even more difficult for us to grasp what is happening there at any but the most basic level. Nevertheless the great powers continue to attempt to impose their preferences upon the region despite local trends and their implications. Thus Russia is replicating in Tajikistan the tactics it used in 2010 to unseat an objectionable Kyrgyz regime by raising energy tariffs just at the start of the spring plowing season in order to compel Tajikistan to comply more completely with Russian policy desiderata.[17] Similarly Russian efforts to bring Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan into its economic bloc, the Eurasian Economic Community depsite the real damage it does to their economies, reflects its determintion to subject their econmies to Moscow's dictates. Andrei Grozin earlier and frankly outlined Russia's overtly exploitative approach to energy issues with Central Asian states. He told the Rosbalt news agency in 2005 that,

> For successful economic cooperation with Russia "in the nearest future Uzbekistan will need to give up the system of state capitalism, in particular, by "shaking" servicing of expensive ore mining and energy industries off state

[13] Omelicheva, Mariya Y. (2011): *Counterterrorism Policies in Central Asia*. Abingdon/ New York, Routledge.
[14] Quoted in Dwivedi, Ramakat: "China's Central Asian Policy in Recent Times," *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 4 (2006), p. 155.
[15] Tynan, D.: "Pentagon Planning for Upsurge in Violence in Northern Afghanistan, Central Asia", *Eurasia Insight*, 21st of July of 2011, at http://www.eurasianet.org.
[16] Bhadrakumar, M.K.: "China Plays It Cool on Kyrgyzstan", *Asia Times online*, 20th of April of 2010, at http://www.atimes.com.
[17] See Camm, George: "Russia Strong-Arming Tajikistan with Oil Tariffs," *Eurasia Insight*, 26th of March of 2011, at http://www.eurasianet.org. See also "Russia Increases Tariffs on Gas Exports to Tajikistan," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 24th of March of 2011, at http://www.rferl.org.

> shoulders." [Grozin] believes that if Gazprom obtains control over Uzbekistan's gas transporting system, Lukoil is granted free access to exploration and extraction of oil and Russia's expansion into the nutrition and light industry sectors of the Uzbek market takes place, then one can say that the Russian state has received what it expected from the [Russo-Uzbek treaty of November, 2005] alliance treaty.[18]

Elsewhere Grozin admitted that Russia's neo-imperial policies are in many respects against economic logic although they make excellent geopolitical sense from an imperial perspective. Thus he writes,

> The changes on the world market might force the Russian Federation to start importing uranium instead of exporting it. This may happen in the relatively near future. For this reason, the uranium of Kazakhstan and its products are of special interest for Russia, while bilateral cooperation in the atomic, space research, and other high tech applied spheres might pull all the other branches along with them. Russia does not profit financially from its relations with Kazakhstan, which have nothing to do with altruism: financial input is accepted as payment for Russia's geopolitical interests and national security. This is a long-term strategy that allows the Republic of Kazakhstan to adjust its nearly entire scientific and technical potential to Russia: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are two key Central Asian states. This strategy also applies to the military-technical sphere —Moscow sells its resources for "allied" prices not only to strengthen military and foreign policy contacts with Kazakhstan, but also tie it, for many years to come, to Russia's military-industrial complex and standards.[19]

Finally at the same time this proliferation of actors not only confirms the Russian proverb "a sacred space is never empty" but also heightens the geopoltlical rivalry in the economic and military presence of external actors here. This is not just the case where Russia and China have both consistently tried to expel the US from its bases at Manas and Karshi Khanabad in 2005-09 but also in Russia's reaction to any manifestation of foreign economic presence. Thus a recent article on Iran's presence in Tajikistan complains that Iran is raising its investment profile there that increased by 50 percent in 2010 and so could squeeze Russia out of Tajikistan.[20] Similarly, a 2007 report of the Russian-Chinese Business Council observed,

> Being a member of the SCO, China views other members of the organization as promising markets. It is China that wishes to be the engine behind the trade and economic cooperation within the framework of the SCO —China's intentions to form [a] so-called economic space within the SCO are well known. Owing to that fact, experts have been speaking about greater Chinese economic expansion in various parts of the world, including Central Asia. —Beijing has activated ties

[18] Almaty, Delovaya Nedelya internet Version, *in Russian, 25th of November of 2005,* FBIS SOV.

[19] Grozin, *Andrei: "Influence of World Centers of Power on Kazakhstan and New Geopolitical Trends in Central Asia"*, Central Asia and the Caucasus, vol. 39, no. 3 (2006), p. 45.

[20] Murtazayev, Ruslan and Vlasov, Andrey: "Iranians Advance on Tajikistan", Moscow, *Izvestiya Online*, in Russian, 2nd of March of 2011, *FBIS SOV*, at http://www.izvestia.ru.

> with all Central Asian countries and strives to comprehensively strengthen economic relations and the dependency of these countries on its market.[21]

Thus it is a revealing mark of Russia's growing weakness that in 2009 Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov actually praised Chinese investments in Central Asia for their "transparency." [22] Ryabkov further claimed that,

> We believe that our friends and partners in Central Asia are appropriately meeting the situation and solving the task facing them in the sphere of economic and social development using the opportunities that present themselves as a result of cooperation with China. Hence this can only be welcomed.[23]

Given the consistent paranoia with Moscow's elite has hitherto appeared to view any gain by China, or for that matter America, in Central Asia this is a profound change in rhetoric if not policy and a major concession to China. Not surprisingly Russian analysts constantly bemoan the decline in Russia's influence in the CIS as a whole and Central Asia in particular, claim that Russia is under siege in the CIS from America, the EU, etc., and state that Russia's control over CIS states is slipping due to its economic uncompetititveness.[24]

Central Asia's ongoing elusiveness as both an analytic and actual subject and object in international affairs compels us either as experts or as policymakers to clarify and comprehend regional developments which remain elusive and escape the gray but iron cage of theory. This does not mean that we should immediately cease all efforts to develop theoretical paradigms and approaches to Central Asia. That would be quixotic, wrongheaded, and an abdication of our intellectual responsibility.

Rather, even if we agree about the comprehensive international rivalries occurring here and the fact that local governments are largely patrimonial in nature, such analyses have not facilitated either better policy or better understanding of the region. Certainly there is very little consensus about the region in our scholarship or in our policymaking which, given the author's occupation is his most immediate professional concern. But the cognitive and practical elusiveness of Central Asia is now clear to academic observers if not policy practitioners.[25]

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[21] Moscow, *Interfax* in English, 15th of November of 2007, *FBIS SOV*, at http://www.interfax.com.
[22] *Open Source Center, OSC Feature, Russia, OSC Analysis,* "Russian Officials Laud Ties with China; Observers Express Concerns," *FBIS SOV*, 20th of July of 2009.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] Trenin, Dmitri: "From Pragmatism to Strategic Choice: Is Russia's Security Policy Finally Becoming Realistic?", in Kuchins, Andrew (ed.) (2002): *Russia After The Fall*, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for Peace. pp. 187-200.
[25] Kavalski, E.: "Coming to Terms with the Complexity of Agency in Central Asia", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (January, 2011), pp. 21-29.

3. The US Example and Central Asian Thinking

It is very clear that the US' initial policymaking approach to the region stemmed from ignorance and misplaced analogies not only about Central Asia, but about Islamic countries in general. Moreover, the implicit premises of that original perception and policy still exercise a substantial influence on US thinking about Central Asia. When Central Asian states became independent in 1991-92 there was widespread apprehension and in some quarters hopes that they might follow the "Turkish model" under Turkey's tutelage lest they gravitate towards Iranian model of politicized and theocratic Islam.[26] Such thinking reflected a widespread ignorance of the region but also underlying political perceptions and aspirations that still influence Western thinking about Central Asia. For example, many of these views were based on assumptions made then by Paul Goble, the State Department's expert at the time on Soviet nationalities, e.g. Shiite and Sunnis were "pretty much alike."[27]

Furthermore at the time these perceptions led policy makers to define Central Asia geopolitically in terms of other states' interests, that were then projected on to a seemingly inert region that could not make its own security decisions. Specifically this approach saw the area in terms of the crisis *du jour* then, i.e. the rivalry between Kemalist Turkey and Iran with Kemalist Turkey being seen firmly as a Western ally. Second, the US' (and to be fair Western) approach reflected the view that Central Asia was a *tabula rasa* or to use a 19th century term that influenced Marx and Engles, a "historyless" (*Geschichteslos*) people upon whom foreign models could be imposed or transferred without any resistance. This idea that Central Asia was a passive object of others' designs and that it lacked shape or history existed alongside the implication that it was inherently prone to crisis unless firm outside authority was involved. For if Central Asia did not follow the Turkish model and the implicit idea of Western guidance, it was therefore likely to fall victim to Iran's blandishments. This view ignored Central Asia's visible lack of interest in following Iran or the Iranian tradition, except in certain respects for Tajikistan. These implicit premises affected not only foreign writing about Central Asia that invariably presents the area as being on the verge of a security precipice (and a view that this author has often accepted). They also colored local assessments.

Indeed, even Central Asian elites themselves and their foreign partners tend to believe in the inherent fragility of their structures. When Turkmen leader Saparmurat Niyazov suddenly died in December, 2006 regional reactions betrayed the widespread belief in Turkmenistan's inherent instability. Many Central Asian politicians and some, though not the majority, of analysts in Central Asia and Russia expressed genuine fears for an eruption of instability in Turkmenistan.[28] These were not isolated fears. Many analysts, including this author, had been warning for some years before Niyazov's demise that the succession in Turkmenistan or in other Central Asian states could lead to violence and/or that other Central

[26] Kramer, Heinz: "Will Central Asia Become Turkey's Sphere of Influence?", *Perceptions*, vol. 3, no. 4, at http://www.sam.gov.tr. Many of these views were based on assumptions made by Paul Goble, the State Department's expert at the time on Soviet nationalities, e.g. Shiite and Sunnis were "pretty much alike". Hoffman, David: "Iran's Drive to Rebuild Seen Posing New Challenges to West", *The Washington Post, 2nd of* February of 1992, p. Al; and Horne, A.D.: "U.S. Loses Specialist Fluent in the Nationalities", *The Washington Post, 14th of* January of 1992, p. A7.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] "Central Asia-Russia: Officials, Media Cite Concerns Over Stability Following Turkmen President's Death," OSC Report, 21st of December of 2006, *FBIS SOV*. Medetsky, Anatoly and Saradzhyan, Simon: "Niyazov Dies, Leaving no Heir," *Moscow Times*, 22nd of December of 2006, p. 1.

Asian states also face the threat of violence when they will experience successions.[29] There is also good reason to suspect that the ruling oligarchy that took over Turkmenistan in the wake of Niyazov's death also feared domestic unrest and therefore quickly moved to alleviate domestic conditions by promises of some social and economic reforms.[30]

Published regional accounts reflect a balance between hopes for of improved conditions and fears of potential risks due to internal instability and the possibility of intensified external rivalry for influence over Turkmenistan's future course.[31] For example, Shokirjon Hakimov, the leader of Tajikistan's opposition Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan, stated that, "Undoubtedly, if the forthcoming political activities in Turkmenistan concerning the designation of the country's leader take place in a civilized manner, then they will certainly have a positive influence on the development of pluralism in the region."[32] Simultaneously Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev revealed both his government's hopes and its apprehensions. Tokayev said that his government has an interest in Turkmenistan's stability. Therefore "Kazakhstan is not going to get involved in any wars for Turkmenistan."[33]

There were other more visible premises inherent in our thinking that still color the approach to Central Asia. Thus this thinking in 1991 saw Central Asia simply as a bloc distinguished by being Muslims. The nuances of Central Asian Islam and the differences between it and the rest of the Muslim world, not to mention the differences between Sunnis and Shias were unknown to policymakers and probably are still underestimated in political thinking about the region. Second, beyond the belief that the region was a single bloc was the *naïve* and again unfounded belief or tacit presumption that regional integration was not only desirable but the right way for them to go and that these governments would act as a single region. While we still decry their failure to adopt integrative regional standards, and policies, there was little understanding that these new states would act independently of each other in order to consolidate their own individual statehood under their newly empowered leaders. Likewise there was little understanding of the fact that for seventy or more years they had not been integrated but connected vertically to Moscow, which deliberately discouraged and still discourages any prospects for genuine regional economic integration in Central Asia.[34]

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[29] Blank, Stephen: "Strategic Surprise: Central Asia in 2006", *China Eurasia Forum*, vol. IV, no. 2 (May 2006), pp. 109-130 and the sources cited there. Blank, S.: "Uzbekistan: A Strategic Challenge to American Policy", *Open Society Institute*, October of 2004, at http://www.soros.org. Collins, Kathleen (2006): *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 297 and 302; Merry, E. Wayne: "The Politics of Central Asia: National in Form, Soviet in Context", in Burghart Daniel L. and Sabonis-Helf, Theresa (eds.) (2004): *In the Tracks of Tammerlane: Central Asia in the 21st Century*, Washington, D.C., National Defense University Center for Technology and National Security Policy, pp. 36-42. See also "Uzbekistan Heads towards Violent Regime Change," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1st of July of 2005, at http://www4.janes.com. Rumer, Eugene B.: "Central Asian Leadership Succession: When, Not If", *Strategic Forum*, Institute for National Security Studies, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., 2003. "Turkmenistan Faces a Crisis of Leadership-Experts," *Eurasia Insight*, 24th of May of 2006, at http://www.eurasianet.org.

[30] Kimmage, Daniel: "Turkmenistan: Presidential Campaign Reflects Latent Social Tensions," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty Features*, 19th of January of 2007, at http://www.rferl.org.

[31] "Azeri Experts Hope for Progress in Relations with Turkmenistan", Baku, *Turan News Agency*, in Russian, 21st of December of 2006, Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis.

[32] "Tajik Opposition Leader Mulls Impact of Turkmen Developments", Dushanbe, *Asia-Plus News Agency*, in Russian, 22nd of December of 2006, Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis.

[33] "Kazakhstan Not to "Get Involved in Any Wars for Turkmenistan"", Astana, *Russia & CIS General Newsline*, 29th of December of 2006, Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis.

[34] Alieva, Leila: "EU Policies and Sub-Regional Multilateralism in the Caspian Region," *The International Spectator*, vol. 49, no. 3 (September, 2009), p. 44.

Third, there was the abiding belief that the new states could become susceptible to either benevolent, i.e. Turkish, Muslim models of political organization, or to negative Iranian models without any thought given not just to their leaders' thirst for real power and statehood but also to their Soviet history and internal organization. In other words Western leaders and institutions saw a Central Asia of their own imagination not the one of historical reality. As a result they were ill-prepared to come to grips with that reality and lost valuable time in attending to the new political and strategic realities that emerged with the founding of these states. As is now clear, the transitology of the period, in keeping with the general US trend in the social sciences, opted for a trans-historical and positivistic theorizing and valorizing of concepts taken from comparative political science that had little or no relevance to the actual history or political reality of these societies.

Now we at least should know better. As Alfred Evans recently wrote,

> A growing number of studies have attempted to identify the influence of crucial differences in the historical experience of nations that were formerly under Communist rule. Pop-Eleches argues persuasively "historical legacies have to constitute the starting point for any systematic analysis of democratization in the post-Communist context." Similarly Grzegorz Ekiert contends that "historical legacies determine the available alternatives and make some institutional choices more likely" in post-Communist countries.[35]

Finally there was a fourth, and possibly the most consequential of all these misperceptions, namely a failure to understand that while Communist and incipient post-Communist states appeared to be excessively governed when the exact opposite was the case. Here Western policymakers fell victim to the ideology of the Reagan-Thatcher revolution and the "Washington consensus" that effective states had to be shrunken ones. Western writers believed that the post-Soviet states were all heirs to an overly strong state with aspirations and capabilities to control all of socio-economic life and thus "overendowed with state structures". These structures had to be overturned if not destroyed in the transition even though it soon became clear that these states were hardly all alike and that they were actually under-institutionalized. Adjustment policies that were supposed to facilitate a democratic transition only destroyed the sole means of administration and effective governance in an already undergoverned system whose resources for controlling and shaping mass socio-political behavior were already insufficient. Consequently it is no surprise that rulers fell back on clans, tribes, or other such informal associations and throughout Central Asia we saw a rise in social pathologies like widespread criminality, drug abuse, declining investment in human capital, ecological decay, etc.[36] Thus external "signifiers" of Central Asia failed to understand that,

> State-building strategies applied to post-Soviet and other countries must bear in mind that, contrary to developmentalist and functionalist theories, the state is not the political outcome of a universal process of rationalization of society, but rather the specific solution of sociopolitical crises entrenched in specific, historical,

[35] Evans, Alfred B.: "The Failure of Democratization in Russia: A Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (January, 2011), p. 47.
[36] Buisson, Antoine: "State-Building, Power-Building and Political Legitimacy: The Case of Post-Conflict Tajikistan", *China-Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2007), pp. 118-119.

international, economic, and cultural contexts as well as the result of a dual process of state building and state formation.[37]

And these contexts are invariably simultaneously internal and external, and in Central Asia, made up of a proliferating number of actors who all exercise an impact on the situation there whether by design, or omission.

4. The Intractable Reality of Central Asia and US Policy

Consequently Central Asia has consistently disappointed Western and other expectations of what it ought to be and how its component governments should develop. But beyond confounding foreign expectations Central Asian realities remain stubbornly elusive to analysts. As Kavalski observes, since Lord Curzon's time thinking about Central Asia has consistently verged on fantasy and hyperbole.[38] Meanwhile, Central Asia has clearly been progressively disappointed with the meagerness of Western interest and support as well as the rhetorical invocations of demands for democratic reform that in practice these governments have overlooked. Not only do we have a dialogue of the deaf we also see that Central Asia has adamantly gone its own way and disregarded Western recommendations. But in doing so Central Asia has also underscored the linkages between its domestic and foreign developments that have contributed to the processes that disappointed Western thinking.[39]

Thus despite the supposed ever-present danger of instability, Western, and especially EU involvement in a serious way with Central Asia and the entire post-Soviet political space was late, underfinanced, and remote from the pressing problems of the entire area like conflict resolution or political mentorship so as to encourage more liberalizing reforms.[40] The consequences of failing to realize the need for more sustained and deeper Western involvement across this entire geopolitical space and in Central Asia in particular have made themselves felt as NATO is now fighting in Afghanistan and the EU has belatedly tried to formulate a coherent EU strategy. Similarly it was Western neglect of the Transcaucasus that gave Moscow the opening it eventually seized first to freeze conflicts there, then to preclude any progress towards resolving them, and then ultimately towards exploiting them by force *majeure* for its own purposes. [41]

Consequently Central Asian states were in the 1990s left quite on their own by comparison to the attention and resources lavished (to little avail) on Russia. This contributed to the ensuing and now entrenched trend towards highly authoritarian states and more or less autarchic policies since leaders realized nobody in the West was watching them too seriously to threaten them for such behavior or ready to assist them substantively in dealing with the problems they perceived upon coming to power.[42] Being on their own they duly seized those

[37] *Ibid.*
[38] Kavalski, "Coming to Terms…", *op. cit.*, p. 21
[39] Akiner, Shirin: "Partnership Not Mentorship: Re-appraising the Relationship between the EU and the Central Asian States," *China Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2011), pp. 17-39.
[40] See Alieva, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-57
[41] See Blank, S.: "From Neglect to Duress: The West and the Georgian Crisis Before the 2008 War", in Cornell Svante E. and Starr, S. Frederick (eds.) (2009): *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, Armonk, M.E. Sharpe, pp. 104-121.
[42] *Ibid.;* Akiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-39; Emerson *et al.*, *op. cit.*

opportunities. Understandably as these regimes gradually consolidated themselves on the basis of authoritarian and even patrimonial forms of rule the issues of democracy (or its deficits) free elections and threats to state stability created a convergence of attitudes (or of reference groups) bringing Central Asian states to see Russia as a regional guarantor of their stability and tenure.[43]

If one adds this relative Western neglect to the historical realities of the situation confronting Central Asian leaders and their own ambitions for power, it becomes clear just how much the Western tendency to define Central Asia in ethnocentric parochial terms has come to cost Western governments and Central Asian peoples. In the policy realm, these cognitive and conceptual failures continue to stunt not just our political understanding of the region but also to ensure that Western and especially US objectives are at best only partially realized. Only quite recently have US policymakers or former policymakers like Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Evan Feigenbaum been willing to concede that many US objectives have failed to materialize.[44] This realization also finds expression in high-level US think tank reports with which Feigenbaum was involved but that represented a consensus view among experts like the recent Project 2049 study that flatly said the US is failing to realize its regional objectives in Central Asia.[45] Moreover. These cognitive and policy failures continue. The American embassy in Bishkek in 2005-10 evidently became preoccupied with keeping the criminal Bakiyev regime happy and so actively discouraged contacts with other political actors in Kyrgyz society. In so doing they repeated the mistakes of their predecessors in Iran in 1976-79. Consequently their relations with civil society "fell into disrepair".[46] Indeed, according to US officials the embassy was told in advance of the coup in April 2010 that unseated Bakiyev but failed to either report the information or act upon it.[47] Here ignorance or disregard for local reality had immediate and serious political consequences.

Meanwhile, as we all know, neither of the alternatives posed in 1991 came to pass. Central Asian states did not, as some hoped, morph into democracies or what we thought were democracies like Yeltsin's Russia, itself another example of dashed hopes and defective analysis. Instead they have all become, to one degree or another, exemplars of what analysts rightly call neo-patrimonial states.[48] This label is appropriate even if no two states are alike. This sorry history bears retelling for it strongly impresses upon us the fact that we did not

[43] Patanik, Ajay: "Russia in Central Asia: Collaborative Hegemonism", Paper Presented to the Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, New York, April, 2010.

[44] Tynan, D.: "Absent in Ashgabat: Does the US Need an Envoy in Turkmenistan?" *Eurasia Insight*, 24th of February of 2011, at http://www.eurasianet.org.

[45] Project 2049, *Strengthening Fragile Partnerships: An Agenda for the Future of U.S.-Central Asia Relations*, Washington, D.C., 2011, at http://www.project2049.net.

[46] Tynan, D.: "Kyrgyzstan: US Embassy Personnel in Bishkek Are on Hot Seat," *Eurasia Insight*, 27th of April of 2010, at http://www.eurasianet.org.

[47] Conversations with US officials, Washington D.C., May 2010.

[48] For recent examples of the debate as to what exactly this patrimonialism might signify and how it is manifested in policy see Anceschi, Luca: "Integrating Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy Making: the Cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan", *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 29, no. 2 (June, 2010), pp. 143-158. Tuncer-Kulavuz, Idil: "Political and Social Networks in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: "Clan", Regions, and Beyond," *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 27, no. 2 (June, 2009), pp. 323-334. Guilette, David: "Theories on Central Asian Factionalism: the Debate in Political Science and Its Wider Implications", *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 26, no. 3, (September, 2007), pp. 373-387. Ilkhamov, Alisher: "Neopatrimonialism, Interest Groups and Patronage Networks; the Impasses of he governance System in Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 26, no. 1 (March, 2007), pp. 65-84. Kendall-Taylor, Andrea H.: "Political Insecurity and Oil Revenue Management in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan", *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 58, no. 1 (January-February, 2011), pp. 44-57. Radnitz, Scot (2010): *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press.

know enough about the Soviet Union and certainly about the "nationality question" and even though there were academics who specialized in that area they were more often than not disregarded or valued only for answers to short-term immediate policy questions not a feeling for context and nuance. Likewise, it is clear that the revolutionary wave in 1991 outstripped the institutional, economic, or cognitive capacities of US and European leaders, to cope with their consequences and that still may be true.[49] Moreover, it is clear that since 1991 despite calls then about the "hour of Europe" that European policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia, has been timid, short-sighted, narrow-minded, unwilling to commit extensive resources and, myopic if not downright incompetent.[50] So it is no surprise that US and European policymakers are consistently surprised by developments in Central Asia like the Kyrgyz revolution of 2010 (despite much early warning) or are at pains to hide the realities of life there.[51] Moreover, this foreign policy failure intersected with domestic developments to foster lasting outcomes that bedevil both domestic and foreign efforts to move Central Asia forward.

Likewise, as noted below, experts on the region also find that an accurate characterization of the politics of the overall region remains elusive and that we have great difficulty reaching any kind of consensus as to how this neo-patrimonialism expresses itself. Do Central Asian politics work through true clans in the original sense of the word denoting familial ties of kinship? Or else do Central Asian politics express themselves through the mediating social institution of tribes, a somewhat different ethnographical formation, or through patron-client relations that may include some of the foregoing kinds of phenomena but that are expressed through political subordination above and beyond kinship ties? For example, do the patterns of political affiliation and policymaking in Central Asia resemble one or another form of kinship groups or are they like the notorious Soviet *Semeinye Kruzhki* (family circles) which were first based on purely political patronage and only then on familial ties? Are there real comparisons to be made not only among Central Asian states, but also with the Russian Federation itself which exemplifies the continuation into the present of the patron-client models of the classic Russian patrimonial autocracy and service state?[52] The

[49] As one leading US scholar complained the US government is not set up to acquire real knowledge about Central Asia.

[50] Alieva, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-57. Akiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-39. Emerson *et al.*, *op. cit.* And Blank, "Strategic Surprise…", *op. cit.*, pp. 104-121.

[51] Author's conversations with US analysts July 2010.

[52] On the nature of the Russian state see Bremmer, Ian (2010): *The End of the Free Market: Who Wins the War Between States and Corporations?*, New York, Portfolio Books. Hellie, Richard: "The Structure of Russian Imperial History," *History and Theory*, no. 44 (2005), pp. 88-112. Baker, Peter and Glasser, Susan (2005): *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution*, New York, Scribner's, p. 417. Rosefielde, Steven (2004): *Russia in the 21st Century: the Prodigal Superpower*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Poe, Marshall T. (2003): *The Russian Moment in World History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press. Hedlund, Stefan (2005): *Russian Path Dependence*, London, Routledge. Pain, Emil: "Will Russia Transform into a Nationalist Empire," *Russia in Global Affairs*, vol. 3, no. 2 (April-June, 2005), p. 71-80. Kotkin, Stephen: "It's Gogol Again", Paper Presented as part of the project *The Energy Dimension in Russian Global Strategy* (James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, Rice University, Houston, 2004). These are only a few of the authors who now see the vitality of the Tsarist metaphor as a means of explaining Putin's Russia. See also Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington**,** Praeger, 2004, *passim*. Pipes, Richard (1975): *Russia under the Old Regime*, New York, Scribner's. Blank, S. (2007): *Rosoboroneksport; Its Place in Russian Defense and Arms Sales Policy*, Carlisle Barracks, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College. Balzer, Harley: "Confronting the Global Economy after Communism: Russia and China Compared", Paper Presented to the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1st-5th of March of 2005. Shlapentokh Vladimir and Woods, Joshua (2007): *Contemporary Russia as a Feudal Soc*iety: *A New perspective on the Post-Soviet Era*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan. Shlapentokh, Vladimir: "Early Feudalism—The Best Parallel for Contemporary Russia", *Euro-Asia Studies*, vol. 48, no. 3 (1996), pp. 391-411. Stavrakis, Peter: "State-Building in Post-Soviet Russia: The Chicago Boys and the Decline of Administrative Capacity", *Occasional Papers of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies*, no. 254 (1993). Stavrakis, P.: "The Russian State in the Twenty-

extensive literature on clans, patrimonialism, etc. in Central Asia does not, in fact, provide an answer. Instead it raises more questions and conspicuously lacks consensus despite its high quality.[53]

This lack of understanding or consensus about Central Asia is not confined exclusively to the Western or US expert understanding of Central Asia. Indeed, and quite unfortunately, it appears to be a *deformation professionelle* of the US policymaking community that still has great difficulty in knowing, let alone understanding foreign cultures. Meanwhile, the chief spokesman for US Central Asian policy, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, Robert Blake, testified before Congress that US policy in Central Asia remains (in terms of programs and relationships) primarily bound up with the war in Afghanistan.[54] Yet since US troops are beginning to leave in 2011, and are supposed to be out of Afghanistan by 2014 except for a small training and advisory mission, and European governments have long been essentially looking for the exit, the question poses itself, can or will the United States and/or the West devise a coherent Central Asian strategy based on regional realities rather than external needs and perceptions? Previous evidence should incline us to be very skeptical about this happening.

5. Central Asia and the Arab Revolutions of 2011

These questions assume a true academic and political or policy relevance in the context of the Arab revolutions of 2011. In the context of those revolutions Tajikistan's President, Emomali Rahmon told his Palriament on April 20, 2011 that,

> Much has been said and written about the possibility of the repetition of such events in Central Asia, —"I want to reiterate that the wise people of Tajikistan, who were once the victims of such events, know the meaning of peace and stability. They are aware of the importance of peace and stability—. They have gone through civil wars; therefore, they reject military solutions to any problem.[55]

First Century", Paper Presented to the VIII Annual Strategy Conference of the U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, 22nd-24th of April of 1997. Huskey, Eugene: "The State-legal Administration and the Politics of Redundancy", *Post-Soviet Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1995), pp. 115-43.

[53] See the works cited in notes 25 and 40 and; Starr, S. Frederick: "Clans, Authoritarian Rulers, and Parliaments in Central Asia", *Silk Road Paper*, Central Asia Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, 2006. Collins, Kathleen (2006): *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 297 and 302. Merry, E. Wayne: "The Politics of Central Asia: National in Form, Soviet in Context", in Burghart. and Sabonis-Helf, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-42. "Uzbekistan Heads Towards Violent Regime Change", op. cit. Rumer, E. B., *op. cit.* "Turkmenistan Faces a Crisis of Leadership-Experts", *op. cit.* Glenn, John (1999): *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, New York, St. Martin's Press. Schatz, Edward (2004): *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of "Blood" in Kazakhstan and Beyond*, Seattle, University of Washington Press. Luong Jones, Pauline (2008): *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Power, Perceptions, and Pacts*. New York, Cambridge University Press.

[54] Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs, Committee, Subcommittee on Europe and Eurasia, Robert O. Blake, Jr. Assistant Secretary of State Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, March 10, 2011, http://www.internationalrelations.house.gov.

[55] See Tahir, Muhammad: "Governments Move to Thwart 'Arab Spring' In Central Asia", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 28th of April of 2011, at http://www.rferl.org.

Similarly Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov recently said that abundance of goods at domestic markets, especially food, and cheap prices are key indicators of progress and stability.[56] As a result governments in the region are doing their best to leave nothing to chance."[57]

Russia's anxiety about the possibility of the Arab revolutions spreading to Central Asia is now a matter of public record as it became the topic of a public discussion in the *Duma*. Members of the *Duma* and Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin called on these states to make timely reforms from above lest they be swept away like those in North Africa. Since Russia's goals are stability, without which these states cannot draw closer to Russia he recommended the formation from above of a civil society, international and inter-religious peace, responsibility of leaders for the standard of living of the population, the development of education and work with youth.[58] Clearly this is not enough and no mention is made of economic development or freedom or genuine political reform. In other words, Russia is only willing to tolerate cosmetic reforms as part of its approach to subsuming Central Asia within its own security bloc and it is doubtful that Central Asian leaders will go beyond those limits even if they approach them.

Thus in Kazakhstan, President Nursultan Nazarbayev called for an instant election rather than a palpably stage-managed referendum to give him life tenure because that latter option was too egregious a move in the current climate. Meanwhile in Uzbekistan, an already draconian state in many ways, we see a further crackdown on mobile internet media along with denials by government agencies throughout the area that revolution is possible. Indeed, Uzbekistan has taken control over cellular companies there instructing companies to report on any suspicious actions by customers and on any massive distributions of text messages through their cellular lines.[59] Azerbaijan too has attacked Facebook and Skype.[60] We also see that Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have instituted news blackouts.[61]

Yet the US reaction was belated and again plagued by a lack of information and understanding of local realities and not only in Central Asia. The examples cited here relate strongly to the possibility of this syndrome being a *deformation professionelle* of the US system.[62] In January-February 2011 President Obama castigated US intelligence agencies for poor analysis that did not anticipate events in Egypt and Tunisia, and Secretary of Defense Gates admitted that the US had failed to gauge accurately the scope and depth of China's military buildup.[63] Similarly General James Clapper testified to the House Intelligence Committee in 2011 that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was a secular and pluralist

[56] Ashgabat, *Turkmen TV Altyn Asyr Channel*, in Turkmen, 28th of April of 2011, FBIS *SOV*.
[57] See Tahir, *op. cit.*
[58] "Sokhranit' Stabilnost' v Tsentral'noi Azii- Uchastniki Parlametnariskikh Situatsii v Gosdume", 13th of April of 2011, at http://www.duma.gov.ru.
[59] Sadykov, Murat: "Uzbekistan Tightens Control Over Mobile Internet", *Eurasia Insight*, 15th of March of 2011, at http://www.eurasianet.org. Lukyanov, Fyodor: "Learning from Libya and Singapore", *Russia in Global Affairs*, 25th of January of 2011, at http://eng.globalaffairs.ru. Abu'l-Fadl, Mírzá: "Anti-Revolution Agenda: Seize the Control Over Cellular Companies", *New Eurasia*, 15th of March of 2011, at http://www.neweurasia.net. "Uzbekistan Zashchishchaeyet Seti Peredachi Dannykh ot Buntovtsikov", *Uzbekistan News*, 17th of March of 2011, at http://www.uznews.net.
[60] "Azerbaijan Puts Skype in Its Sights", *Eurasia Insight*, 4th of May of 2011, at http://www.eurasianet.org.
[61] See Tahir, *op. cit.* and Fitzpatrick, *op. cit.*
[62] Indeed one prominent expert on Central Asia complained to the author in June 2011 that the US government is not set up to obtain or gain knowledge on Central Asia
[63] Landler, Mark and Mazetti, Mark: "Obama Faces a Stark Choice on Mubarak", *New York Times*, 11th of February of 2011. Mulrine, Anna: "We Underestimated China, US Official Says after Reports of J-20 Stealth Fighter," *Christian Science Monitor*, 6th of January 6 of 2011, at http://www.csmonitor.com.

organization.[64] These long-standing failures' scope and the fact that US intelligence is not much better than a clipping service in the age of the Internet while events in the Middle East or Central Asia still confound us should give all analysts pause. This is especially warranted in the light of the past shortcomings in Washington's Central Asian policy issues and with respect to the fact that US strategy still sees the area in terms of US needs in Afghanistan, not regional dynamics. And in any case the US is about to sharply reduce its investment in Afghanistan, a move that will have commensurate repercussions in Central Asia.

6. History and Identity as Shapers of Central Asian Politics and Governance

In other words the royal road to a proper understanding of Central Asia, though it be filled with detours, obstacles, and forks in the road that may lead us astray is through the grasp of these states' history and specificity, not the abstract theorizing that has taken hold of Western social sciences today with harmful consequences not just for the social sciences but also for the victims of misguided policy experiments across the globe. One of the most grievous shortcomings in our analysis of recent and contemporary events in Central Asia is our refusal to study history, both our own, and that of other peoples. For example, the anxieties and hopes of 1991 found in the discussion and the international political repercussions that would follow from adopting either an Iranian or Turkish course at the time revived echoes of the century old debate and discussion between Pan-Turkic and Pan-Islamic trends in Turkey, the Soviet Union, and the Middle East.[65] This debate, or more precisely, the invocation of these competing models suggested that the ideas and tensions that had animated the Pan-Turkic versus Pan-Islamic debate of the early twentieth century might still have relevance to the vastly changed contemporary international environment.

But we also should have known that every attempt at Pan-Turkism, Pan-Islamism, Pan-Arabism, etc. has foundered on the rock of nationalism whereby Muslim peoples, whether they be Volga Tatars, Arabs, or Central Asians, once bitten by the nationalist bug, prefer that to any of these siren calls. This history is well established and most scholars working on Central Asia know well that these states have never been hotbeds of Islamicism like Iran. Yet the willingness to believe that such movements have immediate relevance in Central Asia has hamstrung policy and played into the repressive policies followed by regime dictators. Indeed, these rulers have become, if anything even more insistent upon defining all opposition to their policies as being Islamic and terrorist in nature and in expanding the reach of their counterterrorism policies and definitions to ensnare ever-larger numbers of potential dissidents, not just Islamic groups.[66] So while this threat has been regularly invoked for a generation and scores of writers either allude to or actually claim to analyze the "revival of Islam" in these countries we still lack adequate tools for analyzing how many people actually are observant rather than professing Muslims and what that means in any concrete political sense. And *a fortiori*, we have no reliable index as to the real extent of political opposition, subterranean or overt in these states.

[64] Statement for the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community for the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. 10th of February of 2011, at http://www.dni.gov.

[65] Zenkovsky, Serge A. (1967): *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Bennigsen Alexandre and Lemercier-Quelquejay, Chantal (1960): *Les Mouvements Nationaux chez Les Musulmans De Russie*. Paris, Mouton.

[66] Omelicheva, M., *op. cit.*

To make these points is not to say that these domestic and foreign debates over the various Pan movements and Central Asia's future trajectory then simply began from where those debates had been brutally terminated. Rather it shows that those ideas still had some vitality to them albeit in drastically altered circumstances and in wholly new combinations. Indeed, the Al-Qaeda model of the revived Caliphate echoes not just Anti-Kemalist thinking 80-90 years ago but also Pan-Islamism, another child of the early 20th century. Though these rhetorics have mutated into something new while preserving elements of the older ideas; their resonance in the Muslim world has never spread beyond small groups of radicals or intellectuals. Neither have governments, even those who sponsored such movements, successfully realized these plans.

Indeed, and as should have been expected the Central Asian states opted for neither course. Instead each one has steadily pursued a course of political action and rhetoric that maximizes or at least tries to maximize the national independence and sense of state nationalism of each government. They have tried to act as genuine states whether or not they can sustain that reputation even as their politics are shot through examples of politicians simultaneously invoking this new statehood while identifying with particular regions or with clans or tribes.[67] We see these trends in their economics, cultural policies, and diplomacy. Indeed, this striving for individual autonomy and independence as states, often a competitive striving as is most visible in Uzbekistan's continuing troubled relations with all of its neighbors, represents a major cause of the lack of significant regional cooperation and often policies that postulate one or another Central Asian government as a major if not the major threat to the interests of its neighbors. We also see continuing manifestations of ethnic animosity, most glaringly in the 2010 riots in Osh.

All of these states except Kyrgyzstan are ruled by one or another form of autocracy ranging from relatively mild in the Kazakh case to sheer frightfulness in the Uzbek and Turkmen cases. Kyrgyzstan's exception to this condition is nothing to cheer about however. Indeed Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are in daily danger of state failure. Kyrgyz leaders openly invoke this danger and the signs of this real danger in Tajikistan are unmistakable. Not surprisingly these two states have lost the attribute described by Weber as essential to denoting a state's real authority, namely the monopoly of legitimate violence. Tajikistan has long since outsourced its security to others, mainly Russia.[68] And Kyrgyzstan confirms Martin Van Creveld's observation that when this monopoly of the legitimate use of force is wrested from the state's hands the distinction between war and crime breaks down.[69]

Similarly it becomes clear that since 2004 warnings that Uzbekistan is or is about to become a failing state abound. Some respected analysts believe that it really is a failing or potentially failing state.[70] Certainly we cannot be too optimistic about the chances for its

[67] See the works cited in notes 25, 40, and 44.

[68] Matveeva, Anna: "EU Stakes in Central Asia", *Chaillot Paper*, no. 91, Paris, Institute of Security Studies of the European Union, 2006, pp. 7-33. Matveeva, A.: "Tajikistan: Evolution of the Security Sector and the War on Terror" in Ebnoether, Anna H.; Ernst, Major; Felberhauer, M. and Malek, Martin (eds.) (2005): *Facing the Terrorist Challenge –Central Asia's Role in International Co-Operation*. Vienna/Geneva, Bureau for Security Policy of the Austrian Ministry of Defense, National Defense Academy, Vienna/Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces in Cooperation with PIP-Consortium of Defence Academies and Security Studies Institutes, pp. 133-153.

[69] Cited in Kaplan, Robert D. (2001): *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War*, New York, Random House, Vintage Books, pp. 48-49.

[70] Quinn-Judge, Paul: "Conventional Security Risks To Central Asia: A Summary Overview," Paper Presented to the Conference "Energy, Environment, and the Future of Security in Central Asia, Understanding the Security Implications of Critical Energy and Environmental Issues", Rome, 15th-16th of October of 2009.

stability in the inevitable event of a succession to Islam Karimov and that contingency could push the state over the edge as some, including this author have long argued.[71] We have already seen how Central Asian leaders themselves rated Niyazov's Turkmenistan's chances for stability. Moreover, Central Asian states' anti-terrorist legislation's expansion despite the few actual manifestations of the terrorist virus attests to these leaders' own sense of their inherent insecurity.[72]

7. The Primacy of Internal Security and Multivector Foreign Policies

Indeed, by their behavior Central Asian leaders unanimously demonstrate their acceptance of the paradigm or trope of much Western and Central Asian writing that these states, no matter how they have differently evolved, constantly exist in an inherently precarious and dangerous condition. Although Central Asian claim that they have had largely stable governments for twenty years and resent the implication that they have to learn governance from the West, in fact the paradigm of ongoing potential instability has much validity to it especially as their behavior confirms it. Therefore they are constantly beleaguered by threats and risk collapse, state failure, foreign intervention, Islamic terrorism, etc. Thus the primary focus on security and state-building has been domestic. These countries simultaneously face the exigencies of both state-building i.e. assuring internal security and defense against external threats without sufficient means or time or resources to compete successfully with other more established states. Not surprisingly their primary concern becomes internal security and their continuation in power, hence the proliferation of multiple military forces, intelligence, and police forces in these countries, often enjoying more resources than do their regular armies, and their governments' recourse to rent-seeking, authoritarian, and clientilistic policies.[73]

These facts possess signfiicant relevance for any discussion of security, particularly in the Third World, including Central Asia, where the security environment is one of 'reversed anarchy' as described by Mikhail Alexiev and Bjorn Moeller. Alexiev, quoting Moeller, observes that,

> While in modernity the inside of a state was supposed to be orderly, thanks to the workings of the state as a Hobbesian "Leviathan", the outside remained anarchic. For many states in the third World, the opposite seems closer to reality —with fairly orderly relations to the outside in the form of diplomatic representations, but total anarchy within.[74]

[71] Blank, S.: "Uzbekistan: A Strategic Challenge to American Policy", *op. cit.*
[72] Omelicheva, *op. cit.*
[73] Ayoob, Mohammad: "From Regional System to Regional Society: Exploring Key Variables in the Construction of Regional Order", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 53, no. 3 (1999), pp. 247-260. Ayoob, M.: "Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations: The Case for Subaltern Realism", *International Studies Review*, vol. 4, no.3 (2002), pp. 127-148 and the works cited therein.
[74] As quoted in Alekseev, Mikhail: "Regionalism of Russia's Foreign Policy in the 1990s: A Case of "Reversed Anarchy"", *Donald W. Treadgold Papers*, University of Washington, Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, No. 37 (2003), p. 12.

Similarly, Amitav Acharya observes that,

> Unlike in the West, national security concepts in Asia are strongly influenced by concerns for regime survival. Hence, security policies in Asia are not so much about protection against external military threats, but against internal challenges. Moreover, the overwhelming proportion of conflicts in Asia fall into the intra-state category, meaning they reflect the structural weaknesses of the state, including a fundamental disjunction between its territorial and ethnic boundaries. Many of these conflicts have been shown to have a spillover potential; hence the question of outside interference is an ever-present factor behind their escalation and containment. Against this backdrop, the principle of non-interference becomes vital to the security predicament of states. And a concept of security that challenges the unquestioned primacy of the state and its right to remain free from any form of external interference arouses suspicion and controversy.[75]

Indeed, for these states, and arguably even for Russia, internal police forces enjoy greater state resources than do the regular armies, this being a key indicator of the primacy of internal security as a factor in defining the term national security.[76] Even though these states acknowledge themselves to face external threats of terrorism and narcotics trafficking from Afghanistan that then corrupts and corrodes the socio-political fabric in their countries, those threats are second to the preservation of the *status quo* as we have seen above. Similarly close examination of both Indian and Chinese policies in Central Asia suggests very strongly that these policies are in the final analysis derivatives of those regimes' concern over their own internal security and stability.[77]

As many have noted it is this security problem compounded of many elements that drives each Central Asian state, in its own way, to pursue what Kazakhstan calls multivector foreign policies that balance between and among the great powers. Uzbekistan's moves in 2009-10, driven by its apprehensions about Russian goals and intentions epitomizes this particular trend and highlights how these rivalries give opportunities to great powers to counter each other, in this case for Washington to counter Moscow. As of early 2010 it appeared that Moscow's policies had clearly diminished its position in both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and antagonized both governments, giving both Beijing and Washington new profitable opportunities. Uzbekistan recently announced that its share of the gas pipeline running from Turkmenistan to China (discussed below) would be ready in August 2010, sooner than expected, allowing it to ship 10BCM annually to China, another blow to Russia's efforts to monopolize Central Asian gas and oil exports.[78] The Northern Distribution Network (NDN), the landline from Riga, Latvia through Russia to Central Asia and Afghanistan, which is working successfully, is expected to create substantial economic opportunities for

[75] Acharya, Amitav: "Human Security and Asian Regionalism: A Strategy of Localization", in Acharya, A. and Goh, Evelyn (eds.) (2007): *Reassessing Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific: Competition, Congruence, and Transformation*, Cambridge, MIT Press, p. 241.

[76] Cooper, Julian: "The Funding of the Power Agencies of the Russian State", *Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*, no. 6-7 (2007), at http://www.pipss.org.

[77] Kavalski, *FBIS SOV*, 24th of March of 2011. Blank, S.: "Xinjiang and Chinese Security", *Global Economic Review*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2003), pp. 121-148.

[78] "Uzbekistan to Sell 10BnCu.M of Gas to China Annually," Mashad, *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran External Service, in Uzbek*, 7th of March of 2010, *FBIS SOV*. "Uzbekistan: Tashkent to Export Gas to China," *Eurasia Insight*, 14th of May of 2009, at http://www.eurasianet.org. "Uzbekistan to Deliver Natural Gas to China," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 6th of November of 2009, at http://www.rferl.org.

Uzbekistan. Meanwhile discussions about military-technical cooperation with the US have taken place according to foreign observers.[79]

> Because Uzbekistan has recently repeatedly demonstrated its rejection of the various post-Soviet political and economic groupings, the Americans decided that they could offer it as a replacement their own increased presence which not long ago (at least until the Andijon events) had been going on quite successfully. This is exactly why the United States proposed to expand cooperation with Tashkent this year in a range of areas — economic projects, political cooperation, and various ways of interaction on settling the crisis in Afghanistan. The seriousness of such plans has been underlined with increased official contacts.[80]

Russia's failure to satisfy Uzbek aspirations lies behind Uzbekistan's moves towards the United States and China. Uzbekistan closely watches Russian policy and deems its relations with NATO and the US as being crucial to its well-known and repeatedly demonstrated counter-balancing strategy.

> Russian attempts to secure a stake in the regional water system, as in the case of the failed or stalled negotiations over Tajikistan's Rogun and Kyrgyzstan's Kambarata-1 hydropower stations, have seriously concerned Tashkent. The latter also opposes Russia's plans to set up a new military base in southern Kyrgyzstan, fearing that it might encourage militarization and nationalistic confrontations in the region. The planned base would operate under the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Rapid Reaction Forces agreement adopted on June 14, 2009, which Tashkent chose to avoid based on its fear of Russian involvement in the region plagued by water and border conflicts, especially between Uzbekistan and its neighbors. Thus the base might help Moscow keep Tashkent within its "sphere of influence," given Uzbekistan's history of unpredictable policies toward major powers and the possibility of any US military presence in the country as well as curbing Islamic radicalism and terrorism on its southern frontiers.[81]

In that context, President Karimov's action plan of January 2010 to put bilateral ties on a more productive and serious and the recent tour of Central Asia by US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke demonstrate the US-Uzbekistan rapprochement. That action plan states that Uzbekistan will "insist on high-level participation in the political consultations from the American side —experts from the State Department, National Security Council, and other US government agencies" though as of this writing no specific plans have beeen announced.[82] Holbrooke stressed that he regards the real security theat in Central Asia as coming from Al-Qaeda rather than the Taliban and indicated his desire to strengthen cooperation with

[79] Sigov, Yuri: "Pragmatism, Interest in Afghanistan Said Behind Thaw in US-Uzbek Ties," Almaty, *Delovaya Nedelya*, in Russian, 21st of February of 2010, Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis
[80] *Ibid*. The author is referring, of course, to the Andijon uprising of 2005.
[81] Muzalevsky, Roman: "Holbrooke's Visit Highlights US-Uzbek Regional Dilemmas and Opportunities", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 8th of March of 2010, at http://www.eurasianet.org.
[82] *Ibid*.

Uzbekistan over security.[83] Although Holbrooke did not obtain a base in Uzbekistan, he may not have sought one as the discussions with Kyrgyzstan about Batken and renewing the US lease at Manas may have sufficed for US purposes. But he also expressed US desires to improve relations with Tajikistan because of its centrality to conflict resolution in Afghanistan and discussed both water and energy issues with the Tajik government. This is the first public evidence of US interest in the contentious water issues that divide Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan from Uzbekistan. Meanwhile Kazakhstan also indicated a desire to upgrade ties with the US and has already begun the foreign ministerial dialogues alluded to above.[84] More recently it has become clear that the US military intends to leave behind an upgraded defense infrastructure in Central Asia by building military training centers in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, Karatog, Tajikistan and a canine training facility and helicopter hangar near Almaty, Kazakhstan.[85]

Despite their efforts to gain great power patronage it remains true that if Central Asian states cannot defend themselves militarily against these threats that have arisen due to a previous failure to provide security, they go under as classical thinking about hard security would predict. Yet despite these similar or even shared reactions and apprehensions about regional security, there was no attempt to effectuate a regional cooperation mechanism in Central Asia. Not unlike their Arab "cousins", these states have consistently opted for a nationalist rather than integrationist approach to the Islamic world even when confronted by a convergent assessment of threats. Instead, it is quite likely that these states see their neighbors, in particular Uzbekistan, as their greatest external security threat.

8. Inter-State Rivalry in Central Asia

Kirill Nourzhanov's 2009 analysis of Central Asian threat perceptions highlights existing threats within the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and builds on other writers' previous insights. Nourzhanov notes the need to break away from a Western-derived threat paradigm that sees everything in terms of the great power rivalry commonly called the new great game and the main internal threat to regimes, namely insurgency.[86] While these threats surely exist, they hardly comprise the only challenges to Central Asian security. Thus he writes that,

> Conventional security problems rooted in border disputes, competition over water and mineral resources, ubiquitous enclaves and ethinic minorities, generate conflict potential in the region and are perceived as existential threats by the majority of the local population. One of the very few comprehensive studies available on the subject arrived at the following conclusions. 1) relations among the countries of Central Asia are far from showing mutual understanding on the whole range of economic issues; 2) the most acute contradictions are linked to

[83] "US Warns of Increased Al-Qaeda Threat in Central Asia," *Daily Times*, 21st of February of 2010, at http://www.dailytimes.com.

[84] "Central Asia: Holbrooke Makes Stealth Tour on Afghan Support," *Eurasia Insight*, 22nd of February of 2010, at http://www.eurasianet.org. "Kyrgyzstan: Holbrooke Reveals Manas Base Renewal Discussions Underway," *Eurasia* Insight, 3rd of March of 2010, at http://www.eurasianet.org. Akhmadov, Erkin: "Richard Holbrooke Visits Central Asia," *Central Asia Caucasus Analyst*, 3rd of March of 2010, at http://www.cacianalyst.org.

[85] "The Pentagon Spreading Wealth in Central Asia," *Eurasia Insight*, 29th of June of 2010, at http://www.eurasianet.org.

[86] Nourzhanov, Kirill: "Changing Security Threat Perceptions in Central Asia", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2009), p. 94.

> land and water use; and 3) these contradictions have historical roots and are objectively difficult to resolve, hence they are liable to be actualized in the near future in a violent form.[87]

Border problems, mainly between Uzbekistan and all of its neighbors, have long impeded and today continue to retard the development of both regional security and prosperity.[88] Indeed, it is not too far to say that given the antagonism between Uzbekistan and its neighbors, especially Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, hostile relations and even the use of force is never far from a possibility.[89] Nourzhanov is not alone in calling for this new approach to regional security. As S. Frederick Starr noted,

> On the other hand this perspective on Central Asian security or the second alternative of seeing it in the context of local governments' internal stability is arguably incomplete. Anyone studying security issues in Central Asia quickly recognizes that environmental factors —the use and control of land, water, energy, and other raw materials, and the reclamation of polluted lands— play an extremely important role in that region's security and political agendas.[90]

Similarly the International Crisis Group likewise concluded that the international community must urgently approach the issues of border delimitiation with more urgency than before.[91] Anyone looking at Central Asian security can readily see that tensions over borders, particularly between Uzbekistan and its neighbors, generate constant inter-state tensions in Central Asia.[92]

Consequenlty a regional arms race has taken root in Central Asia. In 2007 alone military spending in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan rose by 48%.[93] As Nourzhanov further notes,

> The bulk of the money would be spent on heavy weapons, fixed-wing planes, and navy vessels which is hard to explain by the demnads of a fight against terrorism alone. Remarkably the danger of intra-regional armed conflict is not seriously analyzed in any official document. The current Military Doctrine of Kazakhstan (2000) which talks about the tantalizingly abstract 'probability of diminshed regional security as a result of excessive increase in qualitative and quantitative military might by certain states', may be regarded as a very partial exception that

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[87] *Ibid*.
[88] Umetov, Chingiz: "Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan: Border Hassles Abound", *Transitions Online*, 4th of May of 2009, at at http://www.tol.cz.
[89] By June 2009 Uzbekistan had again closed its borders with Kyrgyzstan and the later was digging trenches along that border while relations with Tajikistan were hardly better.
[90] Starr, S. Frederick (1999): *The Security Environment of Central Asia*.The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, Emirates Lecture Series, Abu Dhabi, UAE, p. 4. See also Allison, Roy and Jonson, Lena (2001): *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, London/Washington, Institute of International Affairs and Brookings Institution Press, is an exception in this regard
[91] Nourzhanov, *op. cit.*, p. 94
[92] Umetov, *op. cit.*
[93] Nourzhanov, *op. cit.*, p. 95

proves the rule.[94]

Much evidence corroborates this last point. For example, Kazakhstan has increased defense spending by 800% in 2000-07.[95] And the state defense order is expected to double in 2009.[96] Indeed, the trend towads militarization was already evident by 2003.[97]

9. Identities and Political Behavior

Can we explain or at least to begin to understand the sources of our confusion? If we look at the evidence of twenty years of political behavior by these states we find some interesting and even possibly confounding phenomena. Scholars working on Central Asia have found that Islamic identity has been in some cases nationalized or maybe even secularized.[98] They have also found that in their political behavior elites often behave principally (whatever they might say) as members of a kinship group —be it clan or tribe— or more generically as parts of a patron-client network that may or not be based primarily on kinship ties.[99] Yet all of them have attempted very seriously to inculcate, albeit by different means and emphases, a durable sense of national statehood. Local governments have resorted to well-tested political instruments, language policy, political spectacles, overall cultural and educational policies whose roots lie actually in nineteenth century Europe, including the Tsarist Empire. [100] Since these states actually became independent in 1991, well before there was a strong mass consciousness, it is clear that in order to create real states these "nationalizing" policies became pervasive, especially in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.[101] Those policies eloquently testify to the lack of a truly consolidated national or state consciousness among Central Asian peoples before 1991. And the fact of their continuation and ongoing battles over the language of the civil service, broadcasting, and other media suggests that this campaign to create real state and national consciousness is far from over.[102]

These concurrent manifestations of political behavior, often by the same people, oblige us to ask if since 1991 we see a continuation, even as a transformation occurs, of the phenomena cited years ago Alexandre Bennigsen. Bennigsen and his daughter Marie Broxup observed that Muslims in the Soviet Union displayed multiple identities as supranational Muslim believers, subnational members of a kinship group, e.g. clan or tribe, and a national identity as members of an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, e.g. the Kazakh ASSR.[103]

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[94] *Ibid.*
[95] Almaty, *Interfax-Kazakhstan Online*, in Russian, 23rd of January of 2009, *FBIS SOV*.
[96] Almaty, *Kazakhstan Today Online*, in Russian, 24th of February of 2009, *FBIS SOV*.
[97] Blank, Stephen: "Central Asia's Strategic Revolution", *Regional Power Plays in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, *NBR Analysis*: National Bureau of Research, Asia, Seattle, Washington, 2003, pp. 51-76.
[98] Ro'I, Yaacov: "The Soviet and Russian Context of he Development of Nationalism in Soviet Central Asia", *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Sovietique*, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, January-March, 1991, pp. 123-142.
[99] See the sources in notes 26, 41, 45, 10.
[100] Adams, Laura L. (2010): *The Spectacular State: Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan*, Durham, Duke University Press. Olcott, Martha (2005): *Central Asia's Second Chance*, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, are but two of many examples of these studies.
[101] *Ibid.*
[102] Peyrouse, Sebastien: "The Russian Minority in Central Asia: Migration, Politics, and Language", *Institute for Advanced Russian Studies Occasional Paper*, no. 297 (2008).
[103] Bennigsen, Alexandre and Broxup, Marie (1984): *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State*, New York, St. Martin's Press, pp. 136-139.

Admittedly since then these identities have been dramatically transformed in the crucible of socialism and post-Soviet developments. Consequently the content of these multiple identities have changed dramatically and the weight assigned by Bennigsen and Broxup to any one of these multiple identities has equally undoubtedly evolved. Nevertheless the evidence of political behavior cited here, in other scholarly studies, and in some cases of surveys strongly suggests the continuation of what Bennigsen called these multiple and "tactical" identities as an ongoing factor in Central Asian politics.

This phenomenon may serve as one clue to the difficulties we have encountered in understanding Central Asian politics and sociopolitical transformations. For example, despite over thirty years of scholarly reporting and journalistic assessment that interest in Islam and identification is rising, and with it the danger of a fundamentalist Islamic takeover of one or more countries that all Central Asian states remain in imminent danger or precariousness, the facts are different. No state has failed though two are precariously perched there. Kazakhstan appears to be stronger than ever and in Uzbekistan, even though this author among others warned about the dangers of a failing state, as long as the Karimov regime stays in power it evidently will not disintegrate. Similarly we really cannot say with any authority to what degree the population in any country identifies with one or another brand of Islam, what that means (especially in a political context), and to what degree the threat of Islamic fundamentalism is real or not. Although every Central Asian government constantly invokes that threat and says it is rising and dismisses any and all opposition as being Islamic fundamentalist in nature regardless of the actual facts of any particular situation, neither we nor they have reliable insight into the veracity of these assertions.

Similarly from a policymaker's standpoint we have little idea of whether or not the Arab revolutions of 2011 can or will soon be replicated in Central Asia. While government leaders are clearly afraid, we have no means of judging to what extent these fears have tangible basis in reality behind them or are the natural reaction of autocrats to any nearby manifestation of democratic or popular rule. We also have no way of knowing whether an elite coup, succession crisis, or popular revolt is likely, let alone in the cards.

Is it too much, therefore, to suggest that this phenomenon of multiple and tactical identities if one of the specific factors of Central Asian socio-political life that has continued and continues to veil from us, and possibly from the leadership in these countries, the full extent of socio-political if not other cleavages among the population? I raise this question not because I have an answer but rather because it poses an unanswered quandary to all of us who follow Central Asia on a regular basis. Clearly there are shortcomings to the analytical tools we have utilized and to our cognitive presuppositions about Central Asia. Those defects affect both the intellectual enterprise of experts seeking to understand the region and the need for policymakers in the West, who have committed troops and treasure to the area to grasp socio-political and strategic trends here.

10. Conclusion

We do not invoke Bennigsen and Broxup's findings as a panacea or even necessarily as the answer at least in part to the question of how and why we have continually gotten this area so wrong. Instead our error lies in Burghart's and Kavalski's insights that we have tried to appropriate Central Asia for what it can do for us rather than what it is to and for the people who live there. Despite the insights and utility of the long traditions of Western social science,

it is clear that they do not lead us into the realm of improved understanding of these societies beyond a certain point. Instead, and this is not surprising to any Foucauldian, they are themselves part of the power relations from which they spring and can and have been used in external struggles for influence there.

While not panaceas, Bennigsen and Broxup's insights and those arising out of the closer study of these societies' history and culture may help analysts and policymakers who must grapple with an area of rising importance in world politics. We might be able to develop sounder and less ethnocentric assessments of Central Asia's needs, wants, and how it is evolving as well as the limits of what is politically practicable and beneficial. As the combination of internal pathologies (not too strong a word here) and internal and external challenges become ever more important not just to the region but to international politics and security as a whole developing a better understanding of Central Asia is an urgent task. If we repeat the mistakes of the past and under-invest in the necessary resources to gain and advance that understanding we will not get a second, let alone a third chance to get it right. And the consequences of that failure will not be confined to Central Asia.