

EURASIA TASK FORCE

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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY PROGRAM
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Behind the Eight Ball: Deciding on an OSCE Summit

The Context

Central Asia is in turmoil and U.S. policy in the region is failing. As a result, U.S. influence is declining, as is our relevance along the arc of instability that runs through the area. Emphasis on support for our military operations in Afghanistan has distorted our relations, undermining our integrated regional approach to Afghanistan and inviting contagion to spread to its fragile northern neighbors. Indeed, focusing better on Central Asia in general and the Kyrgyzstan crisis specifically does not detract from our campaign in Afghanistan; doing so is critical to our strategy in Afghanistan. In short, regional engagement is essential to assuring success in Afghanistan – and to preventing another safehaven for terrorism just to its north.

The Issue

On July 16-17, 2010 over 40 foreign ministers of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) – minus the Secretary of State – will meet in Almaty, Kazakhstan to decide whether and when to convene the first OSCE summit in a decade. Most OSCE members have agreed to the idea of a summit. Debate continues on substance and timing. The outcome is likely to be agreement on a summit. However, the United States will either accede only at the last minute, or Washington

will block agreement, doing so in isolation. The U.S. handling of this decision risks undermining our goodwill and squandering our influence in both the OSCE and Central Asia. Indeed, U.S. actions in the short term may make Washington and the OSCE irrelevant in Eurasia at a time when we need more of both in Central Asia, not less. Furthermore, the crisis in Kyrgyzstan requires renewed U.S. engagement in the region, and the OSCE offers an opportunity to do so.

The United States must shift from a posture of seeking to mitigate negatives by going on offense to advocate a rejuvenated OSCE with enduring relevance in Central Asia and a prominent role in stabilizing Kyrgyzstan and supporting Afghanistan within the context of a comprehensive U.S. policy toward the region. If the Obama Administration adopts such a strategy, an OSCE summit becomes a compelling vehicle to advance U.S. national interests.

Behind the Eight Ball

The arguments against a summit are appealing: lack of substance; insufficient time to prepare; Kazakhstan's poor record on human rights and democracy; that the summit is a prestige project; and more compelling priorities for the President's time. But this analysis, prevalent in Washington, is myopic. It misses the point of what is happening in the

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region and the organization and fails to recognize the risk our posture poses to U.S. interests. What is lacking in U.S. policy is a strategic perspective of what is at stake and how the United States can advance an effective Eurasian security strategy.

The United States is likely to grudgingly join consensus in support of a summit, but in the meantime will spoil further our relations with Kazakhstan and put seriously at risk the human rights process that has been a Western success since 1975. The Obama administration is making the same mistake regarding its decision on a summit as the Bush administration made regarding Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the OSCE: dragging out the decision, squandering the opportunity to shape policy and generating animosities. The previous administration reluctantly agreed to Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship at the 11th hour, after nearly all other OSCE members had agreed. Washington succeeded in negotiating the "Madrid commitments," securing Kazakhstan's agreement to protect the OSCE's "human dimension" activities (e.g., election monitoring and human rights advocacy) and to make progress on such issues at home. The resulting dynamic is that U.S. policy has emphasized pressing Kazakhstan to meet these commitments. Doing so is indeed important; however Washington needs to put a similar amount of energy into working with Kazakhstan to advance a positive agenda within the OSCE. The result of our current approach: U.S.-Kazakhstan relations are the worst they have been in years and continuing U.S. neglect of the OSCE.

The policy-making process in both administrations suffers the same shortcomings: internal divisions as a result of competing priorities of actors responsible for European security, democracy and human rights and Central Asia, combined with the lack of senior-level engagement. These bureaucratic seams have meant that no decision is easier than a clear decision. Given this stove-piping, senior policy-makers with broad strategic perspectives and responsibilities are better equipped to take a decision regarding a summit.

From Defense to Offense

Washington is playing defense. It needs to go on offense. Here's how.

First, *advance a U.S. vision for European and Eurasian security* through one coherent approach to the

upcoming NATO, U.S.-European Union (EU) and OSCE summits.

- Rather than view these summits as poor uses of the President's time, use them as key markers to advance one integrated U.S. policy, much as the Clinton administration did in 1999 (e.g., the "Triple Crown" strategy).
- In this context, launch a serious initiative to modernize the OSCE as a key venue to manage security from Vancouver to Vladivostok, recognizing the OSCE's value as the only place where all 56 North American, European and Eurasian states have an equal say, and ensuring a more effective response to President Medvedev's European security treaty proposal.
 - Our lack of an OSCE policy only reinforces the Russian argument for the need for new European security structures (with the "human dimension" conspicuously absent).
 - Our strategy should aim to enhance the OSCE's comparative advantage in conflict prevention and management and give greater political impetus to negotiations on conventional forces in Europe and the protracted conflicts.

Second, *develop a coherent, comprehensive U.S. Central Asia policy which embeds the summit in a clear strategy.*

- U.S. policy tends to treat the region as a function of U.S. policy on Afghanistan or Russia, sending an unhelpful message to the region.
- Washington can use the OSCE and the summit to reposition the United States in Central Asia.

Third, *use a summit to galvanize greater international support for Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan*, two of the world's immediate challenges.

- The crisis in Kyrgyzstan demands a robust response from the OSCE. The summit should showcase U.S. leadership and U.S.-Russian partnership on Kyrgyzstan and demonstrate the relevance of the OSCE in crisis response. Such an approach would underscore to the region the value of the OSCE in contrast to the other international organizations' inaction, and underscore the end of zero-sum rivalry in the region.

- U.S. strategy in Afghanistan could benefit tremendously from a more serious OSCE effort to link Afghanistan to the region and to provide Central Asia with a viable southern outlet.

Using a Summit to Advance Substantive Policy

The prospect of an OSCE summit offers the administration a chance to deliver on the President's commitment to lead within multilateral organizations working with key partners. But agreeing to a summit is more than just process and appearance. It is an opportunity to advance substantive goals:

OSCE. The United States is the most ardent defender of the OSCE's election-monitoring, conflict prevention field missions and human rights advocacy, all of which Russia and some other participating states are challenging. Yet by resisting a summit, failing to develop other dimensions of the OSCE (especially economic and environment issues in the "second basket") and sending low-level representatives to high-level meetings, we are undermining the organization. Our actions signal lack of U.S. interest and political commitment, making it easier for other members to emasculate the OSCE functions we most value.

Since its inception, the OSCE has been premised on a comprehensive approach that links hard security with human security, prosperity and the environment (long before NATO adopted this concept). Yet we are failing to match U.S. rhetoric on the importance of a comprehensive approach with practical support for the organization that originated the concept. Leading within the organization can help us better preserve what we find most valuable. A robust policy within the OSCE is also the best way to demonstrate to Moscow that we take Medvedev's security concerns seriously and are prepared to act within the OSCE to help address them. However, if we are Russia's co-conspirator in emasculating the OSCE, Russia will seek to fill the void with institutions and principles that do not advance human rights or democracy.

Eurasian Dimension of the OSCE. U.S. strategy should not focus on simply protecting what we like of the existing structure, but advancing something new: strengthening the Eurasian dimension of the OSCE. The original 1975 Helsinki summit institutionalized détente; the 1990 Paris summit secured agreement to post-Cold War rules of the road; succeeding summits in the 1990s built up OSCE

conflict management and prevention capabilities in response to carnage in the Balkans. Now, the OSCE is poised to open a new narrative that makes the organization more relevant in Central Asia.

A summit in Astana could signal the shift to an enduring, balanced approach in the region, stressing the OSCE as the institutional link between the transatlantic community and Central Asia. Our current posture, however, may result in the OSCE having an ephemeral role in the region. Furthermore, if we do not use the OSCE, the void will be filled by the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Chinese-backed Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or the Conference for Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), whose third summit Turkey hosted on June 8 and which omits any formal U.S. role. We do not need to oppose any or all of the organizations, but we should support the OSCE.

Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship should represent the pinnacle of U.S.-Kazakhstani relations. In reality, bilateral relations are worse now than prior to its OSCE chairmanship. Without letting Astana off the hook on democracy and human rights issues, we need to pick up the ball at the half-way mark of Kazakhstan's OSCE tenure and work aggressively together to build an agenda. While Kazakhstan has many serious domestic political shortcomings, it is a success within the region that deserves support and respect. Furthermore, rebuffing Astana on a summit could undermine the reformers within the government who convinced the leadership of the merits of seeking the chairmanship of the OSCE.

Kyrgyzstan. The OSCE is a leading voice in Kyrgyzstan, with a track record and profile in the country. The institution could help prevent a slide into anarchy that some fear could make Kyrgyzstan a failed state. However, current proposals for OSCE involvement with the police and on the border, while helpful, are minimal and marginal. This crisis and the prospect of a summit nearby offer the chance to be bold, stave off state failure, give the OSCE relevance in the region and help democracy take hold. It is in the U.S. national interest to help the provisional government of Kyrgyzstan restore rule of law and governance to ensure the country cannot become a safe haven for extremists and terrorists.

Enhancing the OSCE role in Kyrgyzstan also offers an opportunity to back long-term stability through democratic

development in a way that is not seen as hostile to Russia. In fact, the atmosphere created by the administration's "reset" policy argues for a major joint U.S.-Russian initiative to stabilize Kyrgyzstan in which the OSCE would be an important element. Such an initiative could help concretize our rhetoric forsaking zero-sum games in the region and transform U.S.-Russian stalemate into partnership within the OSCE.

Central Asia. The United States is AWOL in the region. In many cases, we have talented teams on the ground, yet we are playing on the margins. No American president has ever visited the region; Under Secretary of State Burns is the most senior non-military official to visit in the Obama administration. Our inaction and absence risk making us irrelevant at a time when the region is in as great a danger as at any time since the Soviet Union's collapse – dangers amplified if Afghanistan fails to turn a corner.

Actors in the region perceive U.S. engagement as dominated by military interests (Afghanistan) and energy (extraction). But to be seen as reliable partners, we need a comprehensive, not transactional, approach. The skewing of our relations in favor of military needs in Afghanistan, energy extraction and human rights makes us an undesirable partner. A summit offers a key building block to redevelop a coherent, multifaceted U.S. policy toward the region.

Afghanistan. The Kazakhs are keen to work with the United States to make Afghanistan, an OSCE partner, a major focus of any OSCE summit. While the OSCE will always be a marginal player in Afghanistan, an OSCE summit offers the opportunity to advance the vision of embedding Afghanistan in a broader, more stable region. Practical proposals within the OSCE for greater border security cooperation are key to stemming the flow of narcotics and extremists north, and the United States could use the momentum of a summit to overcome residual opposition to a stronger OSCE role in support of Afghanistan. Emphasizing support for Afghanistan at an OSCE summit in the region would also reinforce a narrative of progress at the end of this year.

The South. U.S. policy has consistently emphasized the sovereignty, independence and success of the Central Asian republics. One of the most effective means to support this policy – and one of the great contributions the United States could make to Central Asia – would be to

help open a southern corridor. The combination of Central Asia with the South Asia bureau at the State Department reflects little more than a wiring diagram at present. Linking the region to the subcontinent will require stability in Afghanistan and progress between India and Pakistan, two difficult prospects. Nonetheless, integrating the regions would bring vast economic benefits and provide Central Asia strategic alternatives to Russia, China and Iran. A summit in Astana could endorse a framework vision for this increasing integration.

Next Steps

1. Agree on a summit. Without backing off our human rights and democracy priorities, offer U.S. support for a summit in Astana this year linked to other OSCE participating states' agreement to a substantive agenda as outlined above. As fallback positions, the United States could support an OSCE summit this year, but in Madrid, or an OSCE summit next year, but in Astana. Initiate a substantive dialogue with the Kazakhs to change the dynamic from a negative spiral in which our goal is to mitigate damage to an upward climb in which we aim to advance new policy at a summit working together.
2. Send Secretary Clinton to the OSCE informal ministerial in Astana in July. If she is unable to attend for compelling reasons, send Deputy Secretary Steinberg, not an assistant secretary.
3. Develop and lay out a U.S. policy for European and Eurasian security using the NATO, U.S.-EU and OSCE summits as an integrated whole.
4. Articulate a U.S. policy for Central Asia in a major speech this fall. In this context, upgrade our institutionalized comprehensive dialogues with each country.
5. Don't back off democracy and human rights. USG interlocutors should continue to raise these issues in meetings with the Kazakh government, particularly pressing for amnesty for Kazakhstan's leading political dissident, Yevgeny Zhovtis. Any official visitors to Kazakhstan should include meetings with opposition and civil society in their programs. Given the tradition of civil society engagement with the OSCE, Washington should ensure the summit includes a major role for NGOs. Similarly, the

administration should protect FREEDOM Support Act funding in Central Asia. As we advocate human rights, we must develop more vigorously other elements of our relations. Ensuring balance in our relations makes regional interlocutors more receptive to our human rights message.

Practicalities

A leading reason to oppose an OSCE summit is the complication of adding another summit to an already-heavy Presidential schedule; therefore, logistics matter. The administration has several options.

Recommended Option: To maximize the leverage of President Obama's participation in a summit to advance U.S. policy, add an OSCE summit in Astana to the schedule during the President's trip to Europe in November for the NATO and U.S.-EU summits.

Alternative 1: Schedule an OSCE summit and add Astana as a stop to the President's India trip. *Rationale:* Would reinforce U.S. policy of giving Central Asia a viable southern option and minimize a difficult travel schedule during the Europe trip.

Alternative 2: Schedule the OSCE summit to follow the NATO summit in Lisbon, but shift the venue to Madrid. *Rationale:* Spain held the OSCE chairmanship during which Kazakhstan was selected as chairman; King Juan Carlos and President Nazarbayev enjoy a close friendship; Spain backs a summit; close proximity to Lisbon; President Obama is due to pay a bilateral visit to Spain after declining to schedule a U.S.-EU summit during its EU Presidency.

Alternative 3: Move venue of OSCE summit to Vienna. *Rationale:* As the headquarters of the OSCE, Vienna is a natural location. However, the only venues large enough to host a summit may already be booked for the remainder of the year.

Alternative 4: Agree to Kazakhstan's proposal for an OSCE summit, but schedule it for 2012 or 2013 in Astana. *Rationale:* Provides more time to prepare substance.

The Unviable Alternatives:

- Do not oppose a summit, but send Secretary Clinton to represent the United States. President Obama's absence among 40+ world leaders would

signal a lack of priority and undermine our ability to advance new U.S. policy initiatives or to defend the OSCE's human dimension. This alternative does more harm than good.

- Delay any summit decision for 1-2 years while more substance is developed and hold the event outside of Kazakhstan. Waiting out the Kazakh chairmanship means no summit in the near term; after snubbing Astana, Russia (and Kazakhstan) may veto any summit during Lithuania's 2011 chair and perhaps thereafter undermining any future effort to protect and enhance the OSCE.

The Risk

The greatest downside of moving ahead with an OSCE summit is that it could lead the government of Kazakhstan to believe that U.S. pressure to improve human rights is hollow. If Astana faces little penalty from failing to meet its Madrid commitments, it could conclude that it can act domestically without consequence. Yet the power of the OSCE is that it is premised on the concept that security between states is not assured if people within a state lack security. Applying a blunt approach to advancing human rights in Central Asia would stand in stark contrast to administration approaches to Russia and China, and underscore our lack of consistency. Nonetheless, if the President were to attend an OSCE summit in Kazakhstan, he would understandably face criticism from human rights and democracy advocates disappointed in Astana's lack of progress. A separate civil society meeting would be an important element of any program, similar to the President's program in Moscow. Human rights activists with whom the delegation met in Astana thought a visit to Kazakhstan by a U.S. President could be used to advance, not undermine, their issues if they were addressed in official bilateral meetings and if their community was included separately in the program.

In the final analysis, U.S. decision-makers must decide whether we advance our human rights and democracy message in Kazakhstan by neglecting and weakening the OSCE, arguably the most effective intergovernmental institution for advancing human rights and democratic norms, and foregoing the opportunity to make the OSCE a more relevant Eurasian security institution.

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Eurasia as Part of Transatlantic Security

In the spring of 2010, the Atlantic Council launched a task force on “Eurasia as Part of Transatlantic Security” with the task of developing a coherent, effective U.S. strategy toward Eurasia. Chaired by Atlantic Council Chairman Senator **Chuck Hagel**, who as a U.S. Senator visited all five Central Asian republics, the project draws on experts from the Atlantic Council network with deep experience in Eurasia, transatlantic security and OSCE matters. To inform the task force’s policy recommendations, Atlantic Council President and CEO **Frederick Kempe** led a delegation consisting of Ambassador Ross Wilson, Damon Wilson, Boyko Nitzov and Jeff Lightfoot to Vienna, Austria, Astana, Kazakhstan and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in June to meet with government representatives, OSCE officials and members of civil society. This project seeks to shape the transatlantic debate on security in Eurasia and the future of the OSCE by publishing policy-relevant issue briefs, organizing strategy sessions with senior officials and issuing a task force report.

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