



ATLANTIC COUNCIL

EURASIA TASK FORCE

# Astana on the Atlantic: Transatlantic Strategy in Central Asia and the OSCE

Eurasia Task Force Chairman, Senator Chuck Hagel



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## **Eurasia Task Force**

In the spring of 2010, the Atlantic Council launched the Eurasia Task Force with the goal 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. The Task Force seeks to shape the transatlantic debate on security in Eurasia and the future of the OSCE by publishing policy-relevant issue briefs and reports, organizing strategy sessions with senior officials and hosting public events and discussions on the future of the region.

## **About the Authors**

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# **Astana on the Atlantic:** **Transatlantic Strategy in Central Asia** **and the OSCE**

**A Report of the Eurasia Task Force**

Eurasia Task Force Chairman  
**Senator Chuck Hagel**

Report Co-Authors  
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## Foreword

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The Atlantic Council founded the Dinu Patriciu Eurasia Center in 2008 based on the premise that the success or failure of the states of the Caucasus and Central Asia would have a major impact on the future of Europe and the broader transatlantic space. To promote a vision of economic and political integration within Eurasia, the Center inaugurated the Black Sea Energy and Economic Forum in 2009. The Forum convenes government and business leaders to address the future of the region and its relationship with the transatlantic community, with a focus on energy security and economic growth.

To complement the work of the Forum, the Council established the Eurasia Task Force earlier this year to address what we perceived as a lack of a transatlantic political and security strategy toward Central Asia. Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) offered a unique opportunity to reposition the United States in Central Asia and breathe new life into what had become a paralyzed security institution. Our recent work on the OSCE furthers the Council's long-standing thought leadership on NATO and European Union issues, positioning the Council as a leader in anticipating the challenges to Euro-Atlantic security architecture. Chaired by Senator Chuck Hagel, who also serves as Chairman of the Atlantic Council Board of Directors, the Task Force project has been a joint effort of the Council's Patriciu Eurasia Center, led by Ross Wilson, and the Program on International Security, headed by Damon Wilson.

The Task Force met with a number of senior administration officials and experts in the United States before traveling to Vienna, Austria, Astana, Kazakhstan, and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on a fact-finding trip in June. Shortly after returning to the United States, the Task Force published a series of issue briefs designed to influence policy towards

the upcoming OSCE summit and the continuing political and security crisis in Kyrgyzstan.

This report calls for the Obama administration to take advantage of the upcoming OSCE summit in Astana to plant the flag of the United States in Central Asia and to advance the vision of a more robust Eurasian dimension to the OSCE. It offers recommendations for how the organization can enhance transparency and conflict resolution mechanisms in Eurasia and throughout the 56 member-states of the OSCE. In our view, Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the OSCE should augur the beginning of a shift in resources and attention within the organization from the Balkans to Eurasia. The report also provides a blueprint for a transatlantic strategy that engages Central Asia in a balanced, sustained way and advances issues of common interest to the region without abandoning important principles of U.S. diplomacy.

I am grateful to Senator Hagel for chairing this important Task Force and for the active and enthusiastic participation of its members. I am particularly appreciative of the skillful collaboration of Damon Wilson and Ross Wilson in leading the execution of this project and providing leadership on a region of the world that gains far too little attention in Washington. Without the skilled support of Associate Director Jeff Lightfoot, Assistant Director Michelle Smith and Research Associate Matt Czekaj, this project would not have been possible.

The Task Force has benefited enormously from the active involvement of several Atlantic Council Board Directors: Julie Finley, former U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE; A. Elizabeth Jones, former U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan and former Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs; and Paula Dobriansky, former Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs. William Courtney, former U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan and Georgia and

former Senior Director for the New Independent States at the National Security Council and Ambassador Erlan Idrissov of Kazakhstan have also been hugely helpful resources for the Atlantic Council throughout this project. The Atlantic Council would like to thank the various sponsors of this project and its activities, including the Government of Kazakhstan, Julie Finley, Airbus Industrie, EADS North America, the Scowcroft Group and DP Holdings SA.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fred Kempe', written in a cursive style.

**Frederick Kempe**  
President and CEO





# Introduction

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An arc of potential disorder and instability increasingly looms over Central Asia. This year's political turmoil and ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan illustrated the difficulties and dangers before the region – and that American interests confront there. Much of Central Asia is not succeeding economically or politically. Parts of it face the prospect of indigenous extremist violence and/or could become new safe havens for transnational threats emanating from Afghanistan. U.S. strategies that for years aimed to support the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and success of the new Central Asian states have come to be dominated by the exigencies of the Afghan war and an increasingly unproductive conversation on human rights and democracy. As a result, those strategies are failing, and U.S. policy is being marginalized.

Positioned where the transatlantic community, the Far East and South Asia come together, Central Asia is important to U.S. national security interests: in the short term to help ensure success in Afghanistan and in the longer term to replace the dark vision of expanding instabilities – more Afghanistans – with stability, prosperity and freedom. To advance these and other interests, a new approach is needed. It should feature sustained engagement to promote an attractive, long-term vision and solutions to current problems. The Obama administration has taken important steps, including to establish comprehensive, annual bilateral consultations with each Central Asian government. Other developments provide possibilities, too.

- The U.S.-Russia “reset” and the example of modest cooperation during the Kyrgyzstan crisis have given the Obama administration room intelligently to expand its role in Central Asia without stoking Russian paranoia and countermeasures.

- Kazakhstan's 2010 chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the first former Soviet and Central Asian republic to play this role, has increased the region's interest in that organization and in transatlantic cooperation.
- By the same token, the OSCE summit in Astana has given the transatlantic community a forum for refocusing on Central Asia and taking on a more robust Eurasian dimension in its work.

Putting Central Asia at the top of the Obama administration's priorities is not realistic. The President has many, more pressing foreign and domestic concerns. But this fall's “Triple Crown” of transatlantic security summits, especially the OSCE's in Astana, Kazakhstan, can help to redefine America's role in the region. Washington should back that up with a more energetic, integrated and civilian-led policy that focuses on the region *per se* – not as a derivative of interests elsewhere; that treats our long-term interests for what they are; and that more effectively promotes changes that will foster good outcomes there and minimize the prospects for bad ones.



# What is Central Asia and Why Does it Matter?

The conventional definition of Central Asia is that it comprises the five states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. This area measures over four million square kilometers, about half the size of the lower 48 American states. But the region's geography, political economy and culture encompass an area many times larger, including at least Afghanistan, Mongolia, northwest China and Iran. In economic terms, Central Asia is also bound up with South Asia. The whole area's long-term future will be more secure, peaceful and prosperous as the core is successful and as cooperation more effectively spans its many borders.

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*Central Asia is the nexus between the dynamos of the Far East and South Asia and a broader transatlantic community that includes Russia.*

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Looked at another way, Central Asia is the nexus between the dynamos of the Far East and South Asia and a broader transatlantic community that includes Russia. The fault lines across the Eurasian landmass express themselves in the interplay of Eastern, Western and local cultures; in interethnic histories and enmities of which Americans and Europeans are barely aware; and in rivalries for influence (the "Great Game") and access to the region's energy and other natural resources. It is, perhaps, not by accident that Central Asia sits at the frontier of Afghanistan's dysfunction from which al-Qaeda could threaten the West.

But the Central Asian states are also who and what they were. The Asian steppes have been fought over since time immemorial. Before the region's conquest by Tsarist Russia in the 19th century, it was ruled by shifting khanates that operated along the ancient Silk Road. In Soviet times, it was a backwater (and gulag), but the Soviets also brought literacy, social advances, economic development and a sense of connection to European culture and politics of which the region previously knew little. Perhaps even more than in Russia, the fall of the USSR was for many Central Asians as traumatic as it was liberating. It exposed their countries to the travails of independence for the first time in modern history, brought stunning economic collapse and human costs, and upended local and regional politics in ways that created vacuums for internal and external players to fill.

Central Asia's success has mattered to the United States and the transatlantic community since independence in 1992.

- **For the previous forty-plus years, the principal threat to the American way of life and that of its allies around the world came from an aggressive Soviet Union. Ensuring against any revival of such a threat from the Eurasian landmass required helping the region's new states to stand on their own feet, realize and consolidate their independence and establish their own forms of effective governance and prosperity. The George H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations worked hard toward these ends.**

- **An unstable and uncertain Afghanistan is among the few futures one can be sure will last for some time, and Central Asia sits on its cusp.** This poses two issues. First, long supply lines and other geographic realities compel the United States to work with and through Central Asia as it prosecutes the effort to keep Afghanistan from falling back into chaos and failure. Second, the individual, institutional and socio-economic factors dragging down Afghanistan also threaten Central Asia. Put simply, the region is part of one arc of instability, and failure of its states can add to exactly the kinds of threats to peace and stability that emerged from Afghanistan.
- **At the pivot where Russia, China, South Asia and Iran come together, the Central Asians have to make accommodations with their neighbors and seek balancing relationships with outsiders to ensure their long-term independence.** This is not new. In the years after the USSR's collapse, Central Asian leaders cultivated relations with Washington as a way to balance outside domination from Moscow or elsewhere. Today, neighbor encroachments are more subtle and in many respects less threatening (e.g., Chinese energy sector investment), but the opportunity is the same for the United States.



# Economic and Political Challenges in Central Asia

**R**egional Development: **A Dog's Breakfast.** The five new states of Central Asia have moved ahead in many ways. They have largely **consolidated their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.** The doubt many had about their future in the early post-Soviet years has gone away. But progress has been uneven.

According to World Bank figures, the region's gross domestic product nearly quadrupled between 1990 and 2008. Kazakhstan's economy alone quintupled in size during that time. But **good macro figures grossly overstate the region's achievements.** Average life expectancy in the region is less than 67 years and falling. Literacy rates have dropped, while research and development, innovation and education standards lag. Steady incomes and prosperity remain elusive, particularly outside of the capitals and excluding Kazakhstan's energy sector. Despite efforts to promote growth in areas other than energy, mining and metals, the region's true economic potential lies far over the horizon.

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*The truth is that Central Asia is falling relatively behind at a time when China, India, Southeast Asia, Turkey, Brazil and others are zooming ahead.*

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The truth is that Central Asia is falling relatively behind at a time when China, India, Southeast Asia, Turkey, Brazil and others are zooming ahead. State domination of business, a lack of transparency, bureaucratic regulations and corruption are one key set of reasons. Disengagement from the world and from one another is a second. Seaborne trade accounts for 90-plus percent of world trade generally, but landlocked Eurasia can access the sea only via Russia, Iran and, in the case of limited volumes of Kazakh oil, the Caucasus and Turkey. Illustrating the Central Asians' autarkic character among themselves, a 2010 Asian Development Bank (ADB) study found that intraregional trade makes up less than five percent of Central Asia's exports and imports – as compared to 27 percent among ASEAN members, 64 percent in the EU-27, and 19 percent in Latin America. This internal fragmentation has ensured that Central Asia's markets remain small and that foreign investor interest will be minimal, except where special conditions have been created.

Addressing internal impediments to doing business that involve deregulation, de-bureaucratization and the rule of law can do much for Central Asia's economies. Opening up more import and export opportunities is also essential, and here the U.S.-led Northern Distribution Network and European-led regional transport schemes could be helpful over time. Also potentially important will be trade routes via Afghanistan and Pakistan to lucrative markets around the Indian Ocean – if security, political, border control and customs issues can be addressed. The region's countries must also dismantle barriers to trade and investment between and among them.

**Sparse Development of Pluralism and Democratic Institutions.** Central Asia's progress toward participatory

democracy has been limited. Kyrgyzstan has led by carrying out reasonably fair elections, but even there leaders have been unable to transfer power through the ballot box. Tajik President Emomali Rahmon essentially seized power in the midst of civil war, rode UN-led peace negotiations to consolidate his rule, and has largely monopolized power since. Turkmenistan's Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov succeeded to power through backroom deals after the 2006 death of the region's megalomaniac, Saparmurat Niyazov. Uzbek President Islam Karimov and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev were the Communist Party first secretaries of their respective Soviet republics and, alone among their then-peers, have ruled unchallenged since the USSR's demise.

Except in Kyrgyzstan, the space for political expression and especially opposition to the government is extremely limited, the press is state-dominated and docile, and respect for human rights and the rule of law is more the exception than the rule. The cultures of democracy and freedom have not really taken hold. Their prospects are limited. The lack of free, open societies and governance more clearly responsive to the public and accountable before the law is a serious issue that impairs the development of Central Asia.



## Regional Instabilities

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**Implications of Kyrgyzstan.** The June 2010 collapse of state authority in Kyrgyzstan's south was an alarm bell for Presidents Nazarbayev and Karimov.

They saw played out a nightmare of ethnic conflict that seemed to justify their authoritarian style of governance. Events seemed to confirm that dalliance with democracy had left the Kyrgyz state incapable of dealing with problems, nearly making the country a threat to the region itself. But the responses in Tashkent and Astana had two interesting aspects.

- **Uzbekistan opened its tightly-sealed border to allow tens of thousands of ethnic Uzbeks to flee** the depredations of fellow Kyrgyzstani citizens. It had not been obvious that Tashkent would react this way. By not simply quarantining the crisis in Kyrgyzstan, President Karimov proved to be the statesman (and won praise from regional human rights activists for perhaps the first time ever).
- **Kazakhstan's timely role as 2010 chairman-in-office of the OSCE virtually required President Nazarbayev also to act the statesman and show leadership on the Kyrgyz crisis.** Astana facilitated the departure of deposed President Bakiyev to prevent the outbreak of civil war and helped forge an OSCE consensus to provide police elements and other assets to contain and defuse the crisis.

While border controls and other actions still demonstrate a high level of antipathy toward Kyrgyzstan's democratic aspirations, these Central Asian leaders apparently concluded that preventing a failed state in Kyrgyzstan was more important than the downsides of helping a neighbor whose political goals are different.

**Dry Tinder Elsewhere.** Kyrgyzstan is not Central Asia's only problem spot.

- **Tajikistan's** ethnic, political and other internal contradictions exploded in the early 1990s into a civil war that took years of diplomacy, led by the United Nations and supported by Russia, Iran and the United States, to get back in the box. The fighting did end, but the box is fragile. Clan and regional fissures, crippling poverty, corruption and a barely functional state are all serious problems. Leakage of narcotics and terrorists from Afghanistan, with which the country shares a poorly controlled border, adds to the difficulties. These and other factors make Tajikistan the region's second most vulnerable country.

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- **Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan** are ethnic mixtures, too. Soviet-era agricultural development policies and nuclear weapons testing made both countries heirs to staggering environmental degradation and left parts of both few options for building even a modicum of prosperity. Kazakhstan's energy wealth has made it a relative success among the USSR's successor states, but it is deeply dependent on hydrocarbon exports. Policies in Uzbekistan designed to ensure stability have seemed often to cross the line into brutal repression and are regarded by many as counterproductive, especially as long-term strategies. In both countries, oligarchic and

protected economies, a concentration of wealth, and the lack of clear, established mechanisms for leadership succession are potential sources of instability. With both Karimov and Nazarbayev now in their seventies, the last is not an abstract matter.

- **Turkmenistan**, too, enjoys great energy wealth, but President Niyazov's strategy was to rely on Russia for the sector's development and otherwise maintain an obsessive estrangement and isolation from the world. President Berdimuhamedov cracked the door open by building a gas pipeline to China and talking with Western firms about energy cooperation, but Turkmenistan remains more removed and disconnected from the world than even its remote geography might necessitate. In nearly two decades of independence, the country has done nothing to build a modern economy, society or political system.
- Nowhere is Central Asia's ethnic cocktail stronger than in the **Fergana Valley** where Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Tajiks and others live in proximity (and intermarriage) and where formerly unimportant borders drawn by Moscow are ill-demarcated, insecure and culturally problematic. This tinderbox and its proximity to an even bigger mess in Afghanistan make the Fergana well-suited for narcotics traders, terrorists and traffickers in arms and people.



## Evolution of U.S. Policy toward Central Asia

The United States was the first country to establish relations with and open embassies in all of the newly independent countries of Central Asia. Secretary of State James Baker's visits to each capital in the weeks after the USSR's fall were meant to be a lifeline to their leaders. Senior-level diplomacy continued throughout the 1990s, led by President Clinton, Vice President Gore, Secretaries of State Christopher and Albright, Deputy Secretary of State Talbott, ambassadors-at-large to the new independent states, and others.

U.S. policy emphasized supporting the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of these new countries. Large FREEDOM Support Act-funded aid programs (\$1.53 billion cumulatively between 1992 and 2008) helped modernize their governance, build market economies and civil societies, and generally transition away from Soviet ways of doing business. Energy development and multiple pipelines were one regional theme, but the United States also backed regional security cooperation (e.g., by promoting a Central Asian peacekeeping battalion) and these states' membership in the United Nations, OSCE, North Atlantic Cooperation Council, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and NATO's Partnership for Peace program that followed.

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, Washington made it a priority to secure basing and other arrangements that would support U.S. and Coalition operations in Afghanistan. The United States and its allies gained access to facilities in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Overflight availability was and remains a priority, as well.

This work did not begin in a vacuum. The U.S. Department of Defense had always been a part of senior-level American engagement in Central Asia (if only for the practical reason that including a senior Defense Department official on periodic travel to the region meant that a military airplane could support it – rather than relying on inconvenient and very time-consuming commercial airlines). A decade ago, the United States changed its regional command structure to make U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) responsible for military engagement in the region. CENTCOM commanders were fast off the bat in forging relationships and developing ties with its fledgling militaries.

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Without intending to do so, however, the United States let three things happen in its policy and position in Central Asia – or at least in the way they are perceived.

First, **the military/Afghanistan component of U.S. engagement in Central Asia overwhelmed other parts of the American agenda in the region.** This was understandable. Priority belonged to the Afghan campaign. But the American civilian component virtually by definition could not keep up or compete with the massive resources of the U.S. military. In one capital, the U.S. ambassador remarked confidentially that the embassy “had nothing to do” with in-country U.S. military activities to support Afghanistan, suggesting that standard operating procedures



(if not deliberate decisions) left some or many American embassies out of the loop on issues that had great bearing on bilateral relations. The result was dissonance, incoherency of policy and, in the case of Kyrgyzstan, arrangements whose taint of corruption now gravely undercuts American influence there.

Second, **the non-military aspects of U.S. engagement in the region languished – or at least were seen to diminish in local eyes.** Energy remained an issue with Kazakhstan, but the high-level work to prosecute it there and elsewhere – directed in the 1990s out of Vice President Gore's office and headed by a special Presidential representative on Caspian Basin energy – petered out, effectively lowering this on the scale of U.S. priorities. The Obama administration has recreated the position of regional energy envoy, but it lacks the priority it had before.

Despite a regional Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) and other initiatives, economic dialogue also languished. The TIFA was never taken particularly seriously at any level in Washington, and senior officials from U.S. economic agencies engaged little with Central Asia. Consultations on regional political matters were never satisfactory. Uzbekistan's pleas to be included in regional consultations on Afghanistan received insufficient attention. The democracy and human rights dialogue came to be seen as the periodic presentation of U.S. demands. Stripped out of a context in which regional leaders saw frequent high-level engagement by American officials that involved active, interested discussions on a variety of political, economic and security issues, the human rights/democracy agenda became an irritant that served neither to advance freedom nor to achieve progress on specific concerns.

Third, to a greater or lesser extent, **Central Asian leaders were convinced, or allowed themselves to believe, that the post-9/11 American friendship would be unconditional and open-ended.** When human rights, democracy and other issues remained irritants in our bilateral relations, disappointment followed. When the Executive Branch seemed unable to resist Congressional restrictions and punishments, usually over human rights issues, more disappointment ensued. And when U.S. engagement and interest flagged after the Iraq war began, the second-placing of Afghanistan in U.S. priorities led some Central Asians to conclude that America's commitment had little staying power. Nothing that regional leaders have seen recently has assuaged this view.

These factors collided to produce congealed and counterproductive military and human rights priorities that verge on the dysfunctional as a way for America to do its business in the region. On the one hand and largely through military channels, the United States wants bases, overflight rights and other support for the effort against al-Qaeda and its acolytes. On the other hand and largely through civilian channels, it demands democracy and human rights changes that, even though justified, are seen as politically threatening and humiliating to the political leaders whose help the United States needs and wants on the military side.

Kyrgyzstan is a case in point. In Central Asian eyes, the message behind what transpired there was that Washington would mouth the vocabulary of democracy, overlook human rights abuses and corruption in exchange for air rights at Manas, and disregard the state security function that is so much a preoccupation for Uzbek, Turkmen, Kazakh and Tajik rulers. It looked like hypocrisy, exploded in this spring and has deeply undermined U.S. interests in Central Asia.



## Eurasia and the Transatlantic Community

**T**he United States and its allies should re-forge the transatlantic relationship with, and role in, Eurasia. The rapidly growing influence of the Asia-Pacific region in international affairs and the emergence of security threats from outside the Euro-Atlantic area demand reform of the conceptual framework and institutions underpinning that role.

A “Triple Crown” of summits in November and December 2010 offers the Obama administration a unique opportunity to promote a broader, more ambitious agenda that reintegrates Eurasia. For the first time since 1999, the United States will participate in three Euro-Atlantic security summits in the same year, when the President or another senior representative will attend NATO and U.S.-EU meetings in Lisbon, and the OSCE gathering in Astana.

Bureaucrats no doubt dread the logistical nightmare of such a confluence of summit engagements. But creative policymakers should see through the scheduling and travel challenges and grasp the chance to advance a coherent vision for reform of existing institutions, strengthened Euro-Atlantic capabilities and re-engagement with Eurasia.

While the new NATO Strategic Concept approved at Lisbon and the prospect of a burgeoning U.S.-EU relationship made possible by the passage of the Lisbon Treaty are important elements of a rejuvenated transatlantic relationship, reform of the OSCE should be one as well. Washington has largely rejected President Medvedev’s call for a new European security treaty, arguing that existing institutions remain adequate for today’s needs. It will not be enough, however, to ignore Russia’s demands, which have found sympathy in some European capitals. Discussions in the OSCE context can help provide some of the answers.

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The institutionalization of the OSCE and the development of field missions, particularly in the Balkans, played an important part in managing real and potential conflicts in the 1990s. Now that security conditions there have improved, the OSCE should focus more of its activities on Central Asia. Here, too, Kyrgyzstan is a case in point. No outside actor or international organization could or would respond to the inter-ethnic crisis that gripped the country in June 2010. The Bishkek OSCE mission had respect and, despite limited capabilities, played a helpful role. Much more was and is still needed there – and perhaps elsewhere in the region.

**OSCE Summit as Part of U.S. Strategy.** The OSCE provides the institutional framework that links the transatlantic community to Eurasia. Kazakhstan’s role as OSCE chairman-in-office this year, and the upcoming summit in Astana, suggested a renewed focus by the transatlantic community on Eurasia. Instead, **Washington’s continued inattention has risked making Astana a missed opportunity for long-term repositioning in the region and to lay the groundwork for an enduring OSCE impact there.** Lack of ambition on the U.S. part, combined with Russian intransigence, risks marginalizing the OSCE where it is most needed. This should change.

The United States is the most ardent defender of OSCE election-monitoring, conflict prevention field missions and human rights advocacy, all of which Russia and other former Soviet states have challenged. The poverty of American OSCE policy reinforces Moscow's point on the need for new European security structures, which conspicuously leave out the "human dimension." By sending lower-level representatives to high-level meetings and by failing to develop the other dimensions of the OSCE (especially economic and environment issues in the "second basket") Washington is undermining it. American actions, predating the current administration, signal a lack of U.S. interest and political commitment, making it easier for other members to emasculate the OSCE functions we most value.



## Using the Summit to Advance Policy

The December OSCE summit offers the administration a chance to deliver on the President's commitment to lead within multilateral organizations while working with key partners. Breakthrough agreements are not what Astana is about, but the United States should aim to use meetings there to:

- Reaffirm the Helsinki Final Act's core principles and their importance today;
- Launch a new era of sustained U.S. diplomatic engagement in Central Asia;
- Position the OSCE as the enduring, relevant and comprehensive security organization in the region;
- Apply the reset policy to the OSCE so as to draw Moscow away from obstructionism there;
- Advance concrete initiatives to strengthen the OSCE role in conflict management, especially regarding Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan;
- Spotlight the protracted conflicts; and
- Modernize military transparency regimes in the OSCE area.

**Reaffirm Helsinki.** Astana is an opportunity to validate the OSCE as *the inclusive security community, rooted in agreed commitments, that ranges from Vancouver to Vladivostok and from Oslo to Osh*. The OSCE's power and relevance are embedded in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and reiterated in the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe. Astana provides the platform for a reaffirmation of these principles by all 56 participating States and a renewed undertaking to meet the commitments those principles reflect. These

will be important outcomes of any summit given that OSCE members would likely fail to negotiate from scratch anything resembling Helsinki in today's environment.

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**Reposition the United States in Central Asia.** This report has underscored that the American profile in Central Asia is limited. Washington's engagement is seen as transactional – one-off deals related to Afghanistan or energy and one-way demands on human rights. To be effective, the approach must be comprehensive, and the politics and symbolism of high-level engagement are critical to making this happen. The American representative at Astana should use the occasion to deliver a major policy address on Central Asia, stressing the value of current partnerships and U.S. aspirations for these partnerships in the future.

No American President has ever visited the region. Under Secretary of State William Burns is the senior-most non-military Obama administration official to go there. Few actions would more decisively replant the flag of American and transatlantic interest in Central Asia than having their leaders visit it. There is no better reason for doing so than a summit of the OSCE, the leading human rights and democracy organization in the region. U.S. agreement to the Astana summit should have reflected a decision that the President would participate. Separating the two was disingenuous and prolongs our problems in the region. In the absence of the President, Vice President Biden or Secretary Clinton should attend.

**Develop the Eurasian Dimension of the OSCE.**

American strategy should focus on strengthening the Eurasian dimension of the OSCE. The Helsinki summit institutionalized détente, the 1990 Paris summit secured agreement to post-Cold War rules of the road, and 1990s summits established conflict management and prevention capabilities in response to violence in the Balkans. Now, the OSCE can open a new chapter in Central Asia and do what such alternatives as the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Chinese-backed Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Conference for Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) cannot and, as far as U.S. interests are concerned, arguably should not do.

To enhance the OSCE's Eurasian focus, the United States should seek in Astana to:

- Agree on a political statement that speaks clearly to a new focus on Central Asia;
- Start shifting resources from the Balkans eastward to Central Asia and the South Caucasus;
- Intensify concrete Eurasia-centric initiatives on transport, counternarcotics cooperation and transparency within extractive industries; and
- Establish a network of OSCE academies designed to train professionals in the region, perhaps modeled after the OSCE Academy in Bishkek that emphasizes professional border management.

**Reap the Dividends of Russia Reset.** The administration's efforts with Russia aim to transform relations from zero-sum to win-win. While it arguably enabled Washington and Moscow to consult more closely on, for example, the crisis in Kyrgyzstan, the policy has not produced dividends within the OSCE. Washington should test the reset there and call for replacing confrontation in Vienna with cooperation. Without top-level intervention on the Russian side, destructive obstruction may remain dominant in the Kremlin's OSCE diplomacy. However, unless this message is delivered at the highest level, Moscow is unlikely to change course.

**Enhance Crisis Management.** The OSCE has failed to meet the Istanbul summit expectations regarding crisis management, including a role in peacekeeping operations. Yet the Russia-Georgia war, sporadic shooting between Armenian and Azeri forces and the outbreak of violence in Kyrgyzstan point to a clear need. The chairman-in-office

should be empowered to dispatch special representatives, fact-finding and/or mediation teams at the onset of a crisis. The administration's proposal for a roster of civilian experts upon whom the OSCE and its field missions could call is a valuable contribution to the Astana agenda.

- **Kyrgyzstan.** The OSCE is a leading voice with a track record and profile in Kyrgyzstan. It can help more there on behalf of political, economic and human security without being hostile to Russian interests. The July 2010 Almaty ministerial proposal for an OSCE police mission was too small – and was vetoed in Kyrgyzstan anyway. Astana should revive that effort under a new formula, perhaps with a different name and without political bravado.
- **Afghanistan.** Astana wants to work with Washington to make Afghanistan, formally an OSCE partner, a focus of the summit. Russian objections have blocked OSCE efforts to undertake activities there. But Moscow has remained open to the OSCE doing things for and with Afghanistan, particularly in border management and counternarcotics that could, if effective, help stem the flow of drugs and extremists north. We should seek to nail down such a role that would also advance the vision of an Afghanistan embedded in a broader, more stable region and reinforce progress in that country. Separately, U.S. participation at Astana provides an opportunity to ensure continued support for the Northern Distribution Network that delivers critical supplies to Coalition forces in Afghanistan.

**Promote Settlements in Protracted Conflicts.**

Resolutions of protracted conflicts in Moldova (Transnistria) and Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) will require a change in political will in Moscow. Nonetheless, the United States and Europe should continue to promote the demilitarization and internationalization of these conflicts through the OSCE and the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office for Protracted Conflicts. Recent German initiatives on Transnistria and the prospect of a strengthened democratic government in Chisinau offer the prospect of progress. OSCE participation in the 5+2 talks on Transnistria and its continued on-the-ground role in Moldova remain important. In Georgia, transatlantic efforts should do nothing to legitimize the presence of Russian forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Washington should test the scope of the reset with Moscow by attempting to negotiate formulas that would make possible the OSCE mission's return to Georgia, especially South Ossetia. While the Minsk Group continues to facilitate negotiations between

Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, the United States should seek support for an OSCE presence to reduce tensions along the line of contact and for preparation of a larger, post-settlement presence, perhaps as the umbrella for the small international military role envisioned at the Istanbul summit.

**Increased Military Transparency.** Istanbul also marked the launch of the Vienna Document which aimed to increase military transparency and predictability in the OSCE area through exchanges of military information and notification and observation of military activities. Unlike the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, the Vienna Document applies to all OSCE members, but is not legally binding. Despite a low profile and modest ambitions, it has contributed to confidence in Europe and Eurasia. The administration should use Astana to update the Vienna Document, reduce thresholds and increase quotas for inspection teams. Recognizing that the prospects for salvaging the CFE regime are limited now, Washington should also seek agreement to negotiate a major enhancement of the Document in 2011. It might earn the title “Astana Accords.” It could fill the void left after Russia suspended its application of CFE in 2007.

### **Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE).**

While the CFE negotiations take place outside formal OSCE structures, Astana provides a key milestone for Obama administration efforts to salvage the Adapted CFE regime. Moscow pulled out of CFE, among other reasons, to underscore a frustration that the regime unfairly restricts its forces on Russian territory (in the so-called “flanks”) and does not include all NATO allies. Washington has attempted to bring it back into CFE with a proposal centered around five key principles:

- Participation by all NATO allies, to bring 36 total nations into the CFE regime;
- Maximum transparency;
- Restraints and limits without constraining Russia to specific flank limits;
- Safeguarding the principle of host-nation consent; and
- Respect of the existing regime for the period of negotiations required to develop a new one.

Astana could produce agreement on a framework statement of key elements. Unfortunately and presumably because its forces remain in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria,

Moscow has been unwilling to re-embrace the concept of host-nation consent that played so prominently at the Istanbul summit.

The first rule in Astana must be to do no harm. To the extent that Russia’s interest in CFE is to seek tacit legitimization of its forces that lack host-nation consent, it must not be accommodated. Any agreement that Moscow is violating on day one would have no credibility. At the same time, any agreement that allows Russians to cite one understanding and NATO allies another will not contribute to security either. In the end, the Vienna Document’s transparency focus will likely offer the best prospect for confidence-building related to conventional forces.



# Recommendations for U.S. Policy towards Central Asia

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**G**iven the stakes for U.S. and transatlantic interests in Central Asia, the United States needs to rebalance, reposition and readjust.

- **Dialogue:** Washington needs to make **senior-level engagement** with Central Asia a priority. It should be **frequent, comprehensive and coordinated** among the civilian and military parts of the U.S. government, and the civilian component should be preeminent. In two decades of the region's independence, no U.S. president has visited it; the time has come for one to do so. The senior U.S. participant at Astana and our representative to the OSCE should visit other Central Asian capitals as part of the trip. High-level engagement should not be regarded as a favor or reward for good behavior, but rather as an investment and a mechanism for better embedding what Washington wants to talk about in a broader context that more visibly includes the interests of Central Asians and their leaders.
- **Freedom: Issues of democracy and human rights should remain priorities** with the Central Asians. These issues were part of the bargain when Secretary Baker agreed to establish relations with them in 1992. The region's governments have signed onto human rights obligations in their own constitutions, at the UN, the OSCE and elsewhere. Incorporating these matters in the more effective dialogue advocated above will make the conversation about them more constructive. While specific, public demands on human rights cases are sometimes necessary, private dialogue, if pursued with perseverance, will also help to open up space for pluralism and respect for fundamental human rights.
- **Governance:** Kyrgyzstan was a reminder that lofty democratic ideals are not good enough if the state is dysfunctional. Washington should do more, including as part of its dialogue on freedom and democracy issues, to emphasize **effective governance, sound public administration and the rule of law**, including through its remaining assistance programs in the region.
- **Economic Development:** Washington should focus its remaining economic assistance resources in Central Asia on regional trade and investment. As with the Marshall Plan in very different circumstances, this effort now should stress and really *require* economic cooperation and coordination on trade policy, business facilitation, customs simplification, transport and other basic infrastructure issues and the like. A rule of commercial law component would also be useful. Working perhaps with the World Bank, the United States should help to bring about regular meetings of all five Central Asian leaders to develop policies on common priorities, including water, regional trade, health and education. Besides the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Asian Development Bank are also logical partners for such work.
- **Regional Cooperation:** U.S. and transatlantic diplomacy should emphasize other cooperation and integration themes. The OSCE is particularly fertile territory for work on regional ties. The United States should support cooperation on border management, collaboration on narcotics trafficking and terrorism issues, and the like.

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*The Great Game is over but the remaining challenges of the region are no game.*

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- **Neighbors:** The United States should look for ways to work collegially with Russia, China, India and other neighbors in promoting Central Asian prosperity, stability and progress. The Great Game is over but the remaining challenges of the region are no game. The most useful collaboration might be done by diplomats in capitals, where the OSCE, international financial institutions and UN offices are effective places for sharing information and making common cause.
- **Rebalance:** Washington and its ambassadors in the field need to pay more attention to the interplay of all the diverse aspects of U.S. relations with the Central Asian countries. They should ensure there is appropriate balance, and that well-intentioned and often well-justified Defense Department and military initiatives are consistent with overall U.S. priorities and coordinated with U.S. chiefs of mission.
- **Thinking about Transitions:** As the unexpected death of Turkmenistan's Niyazov in 2006 and overthrow of Kyrgyzstan's Bakiyev in 2010 powerfully demonstrated, stability at the top of Central Asia's governments can be illusory. The presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are both in their seventies, and their countries lack demonstrated succession arrangements. Given that leadership changes have implications, the United States should be positioning its diplomacy for change.
- **OSCE.** The OSCE is the only institution that links the United States and Europe to Central Asia. The OSCE's comprehensive approach that combines political, economic and human security is well-suited to address the challenges facing the region. However, suspicion of the organization and Russian intransigence have limited its effectiveness in Central Asia. Therefore, transatlantic strategy should aim to bolster the OSCE by insisting on Russia as a collaborator and developing practical projects in all three baskets. A transatlantic strategy that sidelines the organization will, over time, undermine the quality and sustainability of the effort.

## CONCLUSION

Over the last decade, Europe and the United States ignored Eurasia. To the extent we paid attention, much of the interest was derivative, especially of priorities in Afghanistan. Now is the time to rebalance that focus. Replanting a sound American flag in Central Asia will significantly advance U.S. foreign policy priorities, relate our interests to a new, stronger and more secure transatlantic architecture in which the OSCE has a renewed role, and be helpful for the region's internal development. The Eurasian arc of instability is not inevitability, and effective U.S. and transatlantic action can help foster a bright future for the region.







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