

# A 'Greater Central Asia Partnership' for Afghanistan and Its Neighbors

S. Frederick Starr

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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute*  
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A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center  
Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, 1619 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036  
Uppsala University, Box 514, 75120 Uppsala, Sweden  
[www.silkroadstudies.org](http://www.silkroadstudies.org)

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E-mail: [caci2@jhuadig.admin.jhu.edu](mailto:caci2@jhuadig.admin.jhu.edu)

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The Silk Road Studies Program  
Uppsala University  
Box 514, SE-75120 Uppsala  
Sweden  
Tel. +46-18-471-2217; Fax. +46-18-106397  
E-mail: [info@silkroadstudies.org](mailto:info@silkroadstudies.org)

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## **Executive Summary**

Afghanistan is approaching a turning point. Security is increasing, institutional renewal is progressing, the economy is growing, and an open political system is taking root at both local and national levels. It is no exaggeration to declare that Afghanistan is emerging as the first major victory in the international war on terrorism. But victory should mark not just an end—in this case to civil chaos – but also a beginning. To now, America has scarcely considered what further vistas victory may open, let alone how it should respond to them. This is the urgent need of the moment.

This paper proposes that progress in Afghanistan has opened a stunning new prospect that was barely perceived, if at all, when Operation Enduring Freedom was launched. This prospect is to assist in the transformation of Afghanistan and the entire region of which it is the heart into a zone of secure sovereignties sharing viable market economies, secular and relatively open systems of governance, respecting citizens' rights, and maintaining positive relations with the U.S..

The emergence of this zone, referred to herein as “Greater Central Asia,” will roll back the forces that give rise to extremism and enhance continental security. It will bring enormous benefit to all the countries and peoples of the region, and, significantly, also to major powers nearby, notably Russia, China, and India, At the same time, it directly promotes U.S. interests by serving as an attractive model for developing Muslim societies elsewhere. Thus, the emergence of Greater Central Asia will open grand vistas that defy the usual zero-sum thinking.

Many of the greatest threats to Afghanistan today are regional in character:

- ? Instability exists to the east and southeast, and could arise from countries to the west or north if evolutionary processes are thwarted there or if any single outside power expands its influence and control in the region at the expense of a reasonable balance among them. Any such instability is bound to involve global powers.
- ? Also, many of the domestic challenges facing Afghanistan, including issues of security, governance, economics, and culture, are regional in character, and not purely national.

If significant foreign and domestic challenges facing the new Afghanistan are regional in scope, so are the solutions. Only a regional approach will enable Afghanistan to take advantage of the many commonalities and complementarities that exist between it and its neighbors.

The major potential engine of positive change for Afghanistan and its immediate and more distance neighbors is the revival of regional and continental transport and trade. The arrangements that make possible such trade exist only in embryonic form today.

To minimize the threats and maximize the potential, the U.S. must adopt a strategy very different from that which guided its forces in 2002, one that is framed in terms of long-term objectives rather than immediate needs. These objectives include:

1. Advance the war against terrorism and terrorist groups, building U.S.-linked security infrastructures (including necessary U.S. basing arrangements) on a national and regional basis, basing these on perceived mutual interests, and in such a way that the U.S. can use its presence there to respond to crisis in proximate regions such as South Asia and the Middle East.
2. Enable Afghanistan and its neighbors to protect themselves against radical Islamist groups, both foreign and domestic.
3. Assure that no single state or movement, external or internal, dominates the region of which Afghanistan is a part, and those resources which are its economic base.
4. Strengthen sovereignties by continuing to develop the Afghan economy and society and by strengthening trade and other ties between Afghanistan and its neighbors in the region.
5. Foster open, participatory, and rights-based political systems that can serve as attractive models for other countries with Muslim populations.

To pursue these objectives the U.S. should:

1. Adopt a “post-post 9:11 strategy that realigns all existing programs in Afghanistan and its neighbors with long-term goals and not just with the urgent but short-term needs that dominated after 9:11.
2. Adopt a systematic region-wide approach to U.S. security and developmental programs in Afghanistan and neighboring states.
3. Establish a permanent “Greater Central Asia Partnership for Cooperation and Development” (hereafter “GCAP”), led by a senior officer of the Department of State, that will coordinate and integrate the U.S.’ bilateral and region-wide programs in diverse fields, including economic and social development, governance, trade, counter-narcotics, anti-corruption, democracy, and transparency, as well as security. The GCAP should be proposed as a U.S.



government entity but should be transformed, if the participants so desire, into an independent, multinational organization.

4. Engage Afghanistan and all regional states in GCAP activity as partners and on an *a la carte* basis.
5. Open GCAP activities to participation by other donor countries, as well to observers from other states with which the U.S. maintains normal relations.

## **I. Rationale**

### **1. Circumstances Requiring a New Phase of U.S. Policy.**

U.S. forces entered Afghanistan to destroy al Qaeda and the Taliban regime that hosted it. Defying widespread prognostications that Afghanistan is a “graveyard of outside powers,” the U.S. has largely achieved these goals. Working with the UN and other international agencies and donors, the U.S. has also made impressive progress in the area of basic rehabilitation. These have earned the gratitude of Afghanistan’s government and people and the respect of neighbors – a priceless asset. Yet the process of creating a sustainable new Afghanistan is far from complete, nor will the task be done until that country can serve as an attractive model of transformation for other low-income countries with Muslim populations.

In the same post-9:11 push, the U.S. entered into new arrangements with all the countries of the region. These arrangements directly addressed the one issue—Afghanistan—that the military doctrines of all these countries, and of Russia as well, accepted as the greatest source of danger to their state. However, all these new arrangements were explicitly linked with post-9:11 goals in Afghanistan and did not offer specific and credible further perspectives.

Because of this, and in spite of a decade of prior U.S. activity in the region, local states came to view U.S. engagement with them as *temporary*, with no longer-term relationship yet in sight. Perceptions of the shifting focus of U.S. domestic politics reinforce this perception. With no clear signal as to the U.S.’ longer-term intentions, all states in the region are hedging their bets.

The U.S. military presence in these states lacks the long-term legitimacy that is essential for it to be sustainable. Thus, President Akaev of The Kyrgyz Republic recently announced that as soon as stability was achieved in Afghanistan the U.S. base at Bishkek will close. In spite of his country’s “strategic partnership” with the U.S., President Karimov of Uzbekistan has declared that when U.S. forces depart from Afghanistan they would leave the Khanabad base as well. All regional elites are asking about the U.S.’ longer-term intentions. Several governments have begun planning on the assumption that U.S. interests will soon shift elsewhere.

A similar dilemma exists among the American electorate and its representatives in Washington. It strongly supported post-9:11 programs in Afghanistan and Central Asia and knew little of the many activities that preceded them in the latter area. Eager to reduce U.S. financial commitments abroad, some in Congress assume that U.S.

interests in the region of Afghanistan and Central Asia are limited to the achievement of negative goals—the destruction of the Taliban and al Qaeda. Content merely to “work our way back up to zero,” they do not perceive that the U.S. might have further vital interests in this region which, successfully promoted, might advance the U.S.’ core agenda as far afield as the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

These doubts, international and domestic, will not be allayed until the U.S. develops and announces a new phase of policy for Afghanistan and neighboring countries that have been positively affected by the U.S. and its international partners.

## **2 Dangers That Will Arise from the Absence of a Pro-Active U.S. Policy in Afghanistan/ Central Asia.**

When Afghanistan emerged from Taliban rule the country was in ruin. In the first post-Taliban years it was enough for the U.S. and its allies to focus on Afghanistan itself. Hard work brought a new government into being, introduced a new currency, established macro-economic stability, led to the adoption of an impressive new constitution, assured safe elections that chose a president and will soon chose a parliament, set up local administrations, curtailed the powers of warlords, brought about the formation of a national army and police, and enabled arms to be collected.

Not everyone wishes this new country well, however, with the worst dangers arising from beyond Afghanistan’s borders. Forces operating illegally from Pakistan’s Northwest Frontier Province still make raids into adjacent areas of Afghanistan. Mounting instability in Pakistan’s Baluchistan province threatens to disrupt Afghanistan’s—and Central Asia’s—crucially important access to the new Chinese-built port at Gwadar. Iranian threats to repatriate by force a half-million Afghans could destabilize Afghanistan’s Northwest.

If Afghanistan faces dangers from its neighbors, those neighbors in turn remain convinced that they still face dangers from Afghanistan. All of Afghanistan’s neighbors, as well as non-neighbors like Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic, see their societies being corrupted and disfigured by the opium/heroin trade that centers on Afghanistan. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, if they conclude that the government in Kabul neglects the interests of their ethnic kin in northern Afghanistan, could still be tempted to lend them destabilizing support. The perception of intra-regional dangers greatly retards the growth of normal relations and life-giving trade, especially to the North. The absence of a sustained and pro-active U.S. approach to the region exacerbates all these fears.

At the same time, the U.S. in Afghanistan has pioneered many programs that have direct relevance to the former Soviet states of Central Asia but are not today being applied there. This is especially relevant in the area of government infrastructure and its bearing on citizens' rights but it includes other areas as well. Instead of a nuanced program adjusted to individual needs of each state, U.S. assistance has allocated its aid resources mechanistically and capriciously. Thus, impoverished Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan all get the same amount of assistance—ca, \$50 million each, but wealthy Kazakhstan receives half again as much. Per capita assistance to the former Soviet states range from \$8.40 in Kyrgyzstan down to \$2.10 for Uzbekistan, with which the U.S. signed an agreement of Strategic Partnership, less than for Turkmenistan (\$2.60), with which the U.S. has no strategic relation!

From the north comes a yet more serious potential threat to the new Afghanistan. Russia, like China, Pakistan, and India, has legitimate concerns in Greater Central Asia that the U.S. must understand and respect. Instability there, whether caused by drug trafficking, Islamic extremism, corruption, public unrest, or political breakdown, are bound to affect adversely the domestic life of all these neighboring states. It is vitally important for Washington to give them practical reasons for viewing the U.S. as an ally in the struggle against these pathologies rather than as an adversary.

Success in this effort will lead to the creation of a kind of informal concert among the above powers and Washington, enabling mutual suspicions to be aired and resolved before they become sources of tension. Such a concert will strengthen the awareness that Greater Central Asia can be stable and prosper only when all major outside powers practice a degree of prudence and self-restraint. Failure in this area will foment in the surrounding major powers a mood of aggressive chauvinism and the kind of zero-sum thinking that caused the destruction of Afghanistan a generation ago.

Russian policy towards Afghanistan and Greater Central Asia reflects both of these tendencies. To the extent that it acknowledged the U.S. presence as a force for stability in what it sees as a dangerously volatile region it has accepted America's role, and even lent it timely support. But convinced by statements from Washington that the U.S. presence in the region was limited to concerns arising from the post 9:11 crisis and would therefore be of short duration, some forces within Russia have moved actively and opportunistically to fill what they see as a looming vacuum in Central Asia. An old Russian military base in the Kyrgyz Republic (Kant) and a new one in Tajikistan have both acquired permanent legal existences.

Many in the region suspect that Russia aspires to dominate Central Asian states rather than treat them as sovereign partners. They note that Russia considers control

over the development and export of its own national resources to be essential to its sovereignty and security but does not extend this principle to others. The unreformed energy monopoly Gazprom has reestablished control over the Central Asians' transmission system for hydrocarbons and gas, while other Russian groups are systematically gaining control over the production and transmission of Central Asian electricity. Convinced that the U.S. is merely a temporary presence, some Russian officials have boldly attacked the U.S.' advocacy of free elections in the region as a threat to peace and are presenting Moscow as the reliable defender of non-democratic stability there.

Faced with these realities, and lacking a definitive signal from Washington, governments in the region are hedging their bets, or worse. In January 2005 President Akaev of the Kyrgyz Republic announced that "God and geography gave us Russia, our main strategic partner." Absent a strong U.S. presence, western models of democracy and market development will give way to models based on Russia, China, or the United Arab Emirates.

These diverse dangers from different quarters beyond Greater Central Asia can undermine the stability of the fragile new arrangements within Afghanistan. By refocusing Kabul's energies and resources on the economically unproductive issues of national security and geopolitics, they will undermine Afghanistan's viability as a developing economy and relatively open society.

### **3 Drawbacks of Current U.S. Bilateralism in Central Asia and Afghanistan.**

Let it be acknowledged that existing U.S. programs in all of the six countries under discussion have brought significant gains. It should also be noted that present policies and structures, while fundamentally bilateral, nonetheless allow a degree of cross-border coordination and integration. The presence of a Kyrgyz construction firm in Afghanistan or the proposed new Panj River bridge between Tajikistan and Afghanistan are but two of many examples of such coordination. Due credit must go to the work of capable embassies and administrators for these and other achievements.

This said, the fact remains that the absence of systematic region-wide coordination prevents all countries in the region from reaping the full benefit of existing U.S. programs. The U.S.' cross-border initiatives are few and not notably effective. Poor coordination between military and civilian initiatives outside of Afghanistan, as well as poor inter-state cooperation, deny both local recipients and the U.S. itself the full benefits that should be expected from them.

Inadequate coordination and integration of U.S. programs invites regional leaders to play upon perceived inconsistencies in U.S. policy to gain unilateral advantages over their neighbors. It tacitly allows free rein to narrowly nationalist currents within all of the regional states, without creating any regional counterweight to them. Above all, it leaves regional leaders less inclined and less able to engage in the balancing actions between major players (Russia, China, India, the U.S.) that is in their own interest.<sup>1</sup>

All this is rendered more serious because few living links tie Afghanistan and its northern neighbors. Members of the new Afghan leadership know Pakistan but not the former Soviet states to the North, while few of the elite of the five former Soviet republics have more than a superficial knowledge of Afghanistan. Unless bridges are built, the mutual isolation that existed for a century will continue, and kill prospects for further development.

Stated simply, the U.S. is doing solid work throughout the region, but the absence of a region-wide strategy and administrative architecture prevents it from identifying and building upon the natural complementarities that exist there. Equally important, it leaves governments in the region with the impression that the U.S.'s approach to Afghanistan and Central Asia as a whole is episodic rather than systematic, *ad hoc* rather than strategic. It is therefore no surprise that regional leaders outside Afghanistan might conclude that the sum of U.S. policy in Central Asia is less than the sum of its parts. They express the uncertainties to which this gives rise by taking defensive measures and entering into a variety of arrangements that have the combined effect of retarding both national and regional development.

#### **4. Benefits that Will Arise from a Pro-Active and Region-Wide Policy in Afghanistan/Central Asia.**

If many of the gravest dangers to Afghanistan arise from across its borders, so do the greatest benefits that can come to this reborn land. These potential benefits, if systematically developed, are also the single most effective means of neutralizing the dangers enumerated above. The only way for the U.S. to ward off dangers to what it has so carefully nurtured in Afghanistan is to embrace fully the potential benefits. Consequently, the only way forward is for the United States to develop a new

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<sup>1</sup> Thus, Foreign Minister Tokaev of Kazakhstan has repeatedly proposed to build his country's foreign policy on precisely this kind of balancing action with respect to external powers. But the absence of developed trade routes to the south leaves Kazakhstan dependent on Russian outlets for energy and other products and hence unable to implement Tokaev's laudable concept.

strategy for Afghanistan that is not national but international and regional in character.

The creation and implementation of a new phase of policy that treats Afghanistan in the context of the Central Asian region as a whole will not be simple. Geographical delineations within some U.S. government agencies impede recognition of the emerging zone of "Greater Central Asia" of which Afghanistan is the heart. Thus, in the departments of Defense and State the five former Soviet states of Central Asia are grouped with Russia under "Eurasia," while Afghanistan is considered under the rubric "South Asia." Such arrangements make it all but impossible for U.S. agencies to perceive the many common interests among GCAP states, even as they prevent clear analysis of the most advantageous relations between GCAP countries and their many regional neighbors. With specific respect to Afghanistan, they inhibit the U.S.' ability to build regional success on national success and *vice versa*.

The development of cross-border complementarities and reciprocities between Afghanistan and its regional neighbors must be the centerpiece of any future policy of America and its international partners there. There are many reasons for this, but most trace directly to economics, e.g., to the brute fact that regional and continental trade is fated to become the single most powerful force for economic, political, and social development in Afghanistan, and hence for enhancing its security and viability as a state.

### **5 The Chief Driver of a Region-wide Policy: Transport and Trade.**

Afghanistan's economy will never flourish in isolation from its neighbors and from the larger region of which it is a part. Its twenty-four million inhabitants engage mainly in subsistence agriculture. With help, some Afghans will engage in manufacturing, which will boost GDP but will require investment in equipment and the development of skills that do not exist today. For the foreseeable future, the chief driver of economic growth in Afghanistan will be trade: trade from town to town, province to province, between Afghanistan and neighboring countries, and between distant countries that are linked by roads and railroads passing through Afghanistan.

Why trade? Because Afghanistan's geographical position places it at the crossroads between the Middle East and Asia, Europe and India, and between Northern Europe, Russia, and the Indian Ocean. Trade along these routes existed for 2,500 years until it was blocked after 1917, when the Soviet Union's southern border sliced through the region, and then by the breakdown of continental trade across Afghanistan after 1979. American action in 2001 had the unanticipated consequence of paving the way for

reopening trade channels that had enriched Afghans and other Central Asians over the millennia. The systematic development of regional and continental transport will enable Afghanistan and its neighbors to move from the economic periphery to the very center of a new but at the same time ancient world economic region, that of Greater Central Asia.

Region-wide transport will enable Afghan farmers to get their dried fruits and produce to world markets, creating an alternative to opium poppies. It will knit the country's various regions with one another, create millions of jobs, and provide major revenues to the central government in the form of tariffs and taxes.

Internationally, Afghanistan will open a "window to the sea" for all the rest of Central Asia, for vast and economically struggling parts of Siberia and the Urals, and also for China's wealthy Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

The expansion of region-wide commerce across Afghanistan will have major geopolitical consequences. First, by fostering economic progress and social stability within Afghanistan and Greater Central Asia it will help remove once and for all what both China and Russia perceive as a major security threat. It has already been noted that the resulting new patterns of trade will benefit China's "Develop the West" program and will equally benefit development in western Siberia and the southern Urals. This will effectively open a "window to the south" for both countries, but one based on local sovereignties rather than conquest or domination. This in turn will discourage whatever neo-imperial aspirations may exist, notably in Moscow. Central Asians will be able to choose whether to export their cotton, oil, gas, and manufactured goods through Russia or through the South, and will choose the cheapest alternative or mix of alternatives. Firms like Russia's state-controlled Gazprom may still play a role, but they will do so as competitors and not as monopolists. This in turn encourages modern market-oriented forces in Russia, at the expense of those who still dream of old-fashioned political hegemonies.

New routes to the South will also open vast new prospects for trade and contact with South and Southeast Asia, and open the countries of Greater Central Asia to investment from India and beyond. These links will go far towards balancing the complex political pressures to which Afghanistan and the countries of Greater Central Asia are currently subjected, and thus further strengthen their fragile sovereignties. And with respect to both Pakistan and Iran, it will open promising vistas to the pragmatic men and women who comprise the modern commercial sector in those countries, and will undercut the appeal of religious extremists.

Trade and economic development must be the centerpiece of any pro-active U.S. strategy for Afghanistan and its neighbors, but other components must be equally



important. Security, institutional development, the expansion of elections, and cultural/educational programs must all be transformed from issues pursued on a purely national basis to region-wide concerns. To acknowledge the centrality of trade in no way diminishes the importance of these other areas: it is simply the *sine qua non* for their long-term success.

## **6. Absence to Date of Other Region-Wide Structures for Multi-Faceted Development and Security.**

Thanks to recent investments by the U.S., Japan, the Asia Development Bank, Saudi Arabia, Iran, India, China, and Russia, the first crucial steps towards the renewal of regional transport have already been taken. Notwithstanding their regional impact, all of these initiatives have been carried out on a bilateral basis.

Several initiatives are more regional in character, but none is truly comprehensive in its approach, embracing the whole region of which Afghanistan is the core. Japan's impressive new "Six Plus One" program (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Japan) takes a region-wide approach to development but, for bureaucratic reasons, excludes Afghanistan. The Asia Development Bank's framework embraces the region as a whole but does not touch upon issues of security and political development. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization combines security and economic concerns but ignores political development and excludes Afghanistan. The Economic Cooperation Organization includes all the GCA countries plus Turkey and Iran, but has been largely ineffective. Russia's vigorous *demarche* to Central Asia deliberately avoids issues of political development and democratization and equally deliberately functions mainly on a bilateral basis.

NATO is active throughout the region, through Partnership for Peace in former Soviet countries and ISAF in Afghanistan, but it deals mainly on a bilateral basis and has no strategy or structure for the region as such. The U.S.' Central Command and its subordinate Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A) do treat the six countries as a single region but their writ is confined mainly to military issues.

To summarize, not one country or international agency has in place a program which 1) embraces both security and multi-sided development, and 2) treats Afghanistan and the five former Soviet states as a single region.

## **7. Strategic Objectives of the U.S. in “Greater Central Asia.”**

What, then, are the U.S.’ strategic objectives in this “Greater Central Asia” that includes Afghanistan and the five new states to its north? The following goals stand out:

1. Advance the war against terrorism and terrorist groups, building U.S.-linked security infrastructures (including basing arrangements needed to do that) on a national and regional basis and beyond;
2. Enable Afghanistan and its neighbors to protect themselves against radical Islamist groups, both foreign and domestic, and also against the narco-industry;
3. By enhancing security and long-term stability in the region, address the legitimate security concerns of the region’s neighbors, and in a way that assures that no single state or movement, external or internal, dominates the region of which Afghanistan is a part;
4. Strengthen sovereignties by continuing to develop the Afghan and other economies and societies and by strengthening trade and other ties throughout the region;
5. Foster open, participatory, and rights-based political systems that can serve as a new model for other countries with Muslim populations;
6. Enable Afghanistan and its neighbors to play an active role in the world scene as successfully developing societies enjoying increasing political and economic freedom;
7. Provide a bridge between countries of the “Greater Middle East” initiative and South and East Asia.

## **8. What Institutional Arrangements Are Needed to Pursue These Objectives Most Effectively?**

To gain maximum benefit from complementarities among and between U.S. programs in both the military and civilian areas in this enlarged region it is *not* necessary to dismantle any existing bilateral arrangements. Rather, what is needed is a higher level coordinating body than exists at present. Such a body would play a deliberative role in the planning of U.S. initiatives for security and development and a coordinating role in their execution.

To this end, it is proposed to establish a permanent “Greater Central Asia Partnership for Cooperation and Development” (hereafter “GCAP”) that will serve as a forum for the planning, coordination, and integration of bilateral, multi-lateral, and region-wide U.S. programs in diverse fields, including security but also embracing institutional, political, economic, and social development. Through this process, GCAP will promote regional security and development in a spirit of partnership with regional states.

In addition to its formal functions, GCAP would play an important symbolic role. By its existence it would indicate that the U.S. recognizes long-term vital interests in the region that are best served by advancing security and development in the economic, political, and social realms. It would also be the first body of any kind that recognizes that peace and development across “Greater Central Asia” are best served by treating it as a regional whole, a *new world region* comprising at least six independent countries linked by important common interests and needs. Through the GCAP partnership, the U.S. would become a midwife for the birth of this new region, engaging other donors as well and the visible sponsor of programs that would render the whole greater than the sum of its parts.

### **9. Learning from Success in Afghanistan: Work *With* Governments in the Region Rather than *On* Them.**

Many elements are contributing to the progress of U.S. initiatives in Afghanistan. However, if only one factor is to be singled out, it is that from the outset the U.S. chose to define its role as providing support for the national leadership’s own programs rather than imposing its agenda on that leadership. Granted, actual practice has sometimes blurred the line between these two approaches. Yet on the level of both rhetoric and reality the operational constraints that the U.S. imposed on itself have borne valuable fruits. Without those constraints it is likely that the mission would not have succeeded.

It is therefore proposed to base the proposed arrangements on a spirit of partnership that would be manifest through regular consultation, both collective and individual, with participating states on the focus and design of their joint initiatives with the U.S.. Such consultations would include periodic meetings at the ministerial/secretarial and presidential level. To facilitate these, a small GCAP office or bureau would be established within the region itself, initially in Kabul but moving thereafter every two years to another regional capital as agreed by the participants. At

least one senior representative of each participating state would be assigned to this GCAP office.<sup>2</sup>

### **10. Is There a “Democratic Threshold” That a State Must Pass Before It Will Be Allowed to Join the GCAP?**

U.S. support for democratic currents is both a threat and an opportunity for the states of Greater Central Asia. Nowhere, including Afghanistan, have democratic institutions taken deep root. Indeed, it still is too early to expect otherwise of countries long accustomed to mixtures of Asian and Soviet-style leadership. It is therefore quite understandable that recent events in Georgia and Ukraine should have generated anxieties among leaders whose first focus has been on sovereignty and security rather than legitimacy. It is also understandable that Russia, concerned for its own domestic security, should have exploited this mood by stressing the importance of stability at any price.

If the U.S. imposes an inflexible threshold standard on states seeking to participate in GCAP or proceeds on the assumption that democratic institutions can be instantly brought into being everywhere, it will generate more hostility than change. If instead it acknowledges the differing potential for democracy among the various states yet at the same time expects each state to show steady progress in the holding of free and fair elections, it will generate a climate conducive to positive evolution. Accordingly, in evaluating elections in the region, the U.S. should focus on answering only two questions: first, “Was this election a step forward or a step backwards?” and, second, “What further improvements can be made at this stage?” In this connection, the U.S. should also expect that each participating state engage in at least one bilateral project directly affecting the areas of judicial or electoral reform or the protection of citizens’ rights and voting.

### **11. What if a Regional State Declines to Participate?**

On account of its independence stance, Turkmenistan may decline to participate in the security dimension of GCAP and probably in some programs affecting political development as well. But because GCAP will operate on an *a la carte* basis, it is likely

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<sup>2</sup> Japan’s impressive recent “Six Plus One” initiative provides a worthy model in this respect. It has already held a meeting at the presidential level among Central Asian leaders and a presidential visit from Tokyo is in the offing.

to work with GCAP in other areas in which the two countries are now cooperating. GCAP must be planned and carried through with a view to the longer term. To the extent that it is perceived in Turkmenistan as having been a positive force in difficult times it will be positioned to play a more active role there as circumstances change in the future.

Other countries may opt out of specific activities as well, as occurs already. But GCAP will provide better information than is now available on all U.S.-sponsored programs, and thus open the possibility of countries that do not participate in specific activities to reconsider their stance and engage more fully. NATO's use of *a la carte* arrangements rather than an "all or nothing" approach has had precisely this effect.

## **12 Once the GCAP is Established, How do Other Donor Countries and Agencies Coordinate Their Efforts in Afghanistan and the Region with the U.S.?**

GCAP should welcome other donor countries as members or observers. Its staff, as well as U.S. embassies, will facilitate the coordination of other countries' efforts with those of the U.S. and even their full participation in such projects. Countries that have participated in the U.S.-led coalition should be particularly encouraged to associate themselves with this initiative. Other countries with serious interests in the region, including China, India, Russia, and Turkey, should also be welcomed as participants (i.e., as fellow donors) or as observers. The existence of GCAP will not affect any existing arrangements for coordination among donors in Afghanistan, nor any existing security or region-wide economic arrangements, including those existing under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States, or any that might be created within the region by GCAP member states. But the mere existence of GCAP's consultative process will push the prevailing bilateralism towards a more region-wide approach.

## **13 Does GCAP Create a Problem for Russia? For China? If so, What Should the U.S. Do About It?**

CAO presents absolutely no threat to either Russia or China. Indeed, by using U.S. assistance to enhance economic viability and security within the region it will promote precisely the kind of long-term stability that both China and Russia

legitimately seek. It does not alter existing Russian military or economic relations in the region,<sup>3</sup> nor, as already noted, does it conflict with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. By fostering development in Central Asia it will stem the tide of illegal immigration to Russia. By promoting reliable border regimes, it will discourage separatist activities from across Xinjiang's border to the West.

GCAP must be presented to each country as a means of rationalizing and coordinating U.S. programs rather than a major expansion of America's engagement there. China, for example, should be reminded that the U.S. has already engaged a Chinese firm to reconstruct a hydroelectric dam in Afghanistan's Helmand province. Where appropriate, independently-owned Russian enterprises should also be welcomed as partners in U.S. projects across the region.

This said, it is understandable that both Russia and China might offer objections. Both would correctly conclude that the establishment of GCAP symbolizes a longer-term U.S. interest and presence in the region and a buffer to the unlimited realization of their own aspirations there. Concerns on these points can and should be allayed by a systematic and thorough exposition of the common interests that GCAP will advance. These include the promotion of economic development and alleviation of zones of extreme poverty that have so often served as seed-beds for extremist movements. They include also the strengthening of institutions of governance, especially at local levels, that are essential for overall development and order, and also the strengthening of border regimes and financial accountability that are required to stem criminality and cross-border interference. GCAP's coordinated approach to counter-narcotics coincides fully with Russian and Chinese interests. And, as noted earlier, the systematic development of infrastructures required for transport and trade will benefit Russian and Chinese enterprises at least as much, and probably more, than American firms.

These issues should be addressed through regular briefings by U.S. officials. Further concerns arising from such meetings should be addressed in an appropriate manner. Direct participation by both countries in GCAP, whether as observers or donor-participants, should be welcomed. This should lay to rest their worst fears and at the same time indicate clearly that neither Russia nor China, like the U.S. itself, should enjoy a free hand in Central Asia/Afghanistan. Above all, in its dealing with Russia and China GCAP should identify and build upon areas of common good.

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<sup>3</sup> In this context, it is worth noting that Russia has at least begun to come to terms with current U.S. redeployment plans in the region. "Bush Redeployment Plans: A Threat to Russia," *CDPP*, LVI, No.33, 15 September 2004, pp.1-5.

#### **14. What Relation Should Exist Between GCAP and India and Turkey?**

Unlike Russia, China, and Iran, India and Turkey are not direct neighbors to any GCAP member. At the same time, India and Turkey both enjoy unique historical relationships to Central Asia.

Over two thousand years, India's entire northwest extending to Agra and beyond fell under the control of powerful rulers coming down from Central Asia—including Mahmud of Ghazni, Tamerlane, and the Moghuls. Its culture has been decisively affected by Central Asia, while never having itself been a conqueror in the region. Today, a booming India is ready for trade and investment involving Afghanistan and its neighbors to the north. India has already emerged as a serious donor in Afghanistan and is extending its involvement elsewhere in Greater Central Asia. Inevitably, such links will require the amelioration of the painful relationship between India and Pakistan, which GCAP will promote by its very existence. As the engine of regional trade promotes the improvement of Indian-Pakistani relations, India will become yet another major power with serious interests in Greater Central Asia.

Turkey was similarly ruled, but also settled by populations of Central Asian descent, and shares strong linguistic and cultural ties. While its level of attention to the region has varied over the past decade, the process of Turkey's accession to the European Union will in the long term increase Turkey's attractiveness to Central Asia and its potential to play an important economic role in the region. Turkey is already for the second time assuming command of ISAF in Afghanistan, indicating its engagement in the region and its military capacity, which is key to NATO's future role in the region.

As such, both India and Turkey would be natural participants in the informal "concert" of neighboring states and the U.S. discussed above, and another element in the balance of outside powers (including the U.S.) that will become the unofficial guarantor of sovereignty, peace, and stability in the region. For these reasons, India and Turkey should be welcomed as observers or donor-participants in GCAP.

#### **15. Special Challenges: Uzbekistan.**

Criticism by certain NGOs and some U.S. government agencies of Uzbekistan's record in the area of human rights, whatever their justification, will raise a caution flag in the U.S.. These concerns cannot be ignored, but they must be addressed in the context of certain positive developments that have gone largely unreported.

Uzbekistan's unilateral decisions to invite international experts to review charges of improper treatment of prisoners, its cooperation with recent U.S. initiatives in the training of local government officials and police, and the modest progress it achieved in its recent parliamentary elections, all conflict with the pessimists' views about Uzbek intransigence in the area of human rights. Rather than dwelling solely on the negative, GCAP should identify successful bilateral programs in this area, such as those pioneered by Freedom House, and build on them.

There may be reservations from the Uzbek side as well. The government of Uzbekistan may welcome GCAP as evidence of the U.S.' longer-term commitment to the region. At the same time, it has come to view itself as a front-line state *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan. It will need help in understanding that the U.S. is not proposing to demote Uzbekistan in its overall relations, and still less to designate Afghanistan or any other of Uzbekistan's neighbors as front-line states *vis-à-vis* potential instabilities in Uzbekistan.

To address these issues, Washington must make clear to Uzbekistan that the U.S., through its bilateral relations and through GCAP, is proposing merely to give substance to the commitments enumerated in the July 2002 "Declaration of Strategic Partnership and Cooperation" with Uzbekistan." The U.S. should leave Uzbekistan in no doubt that its commitment to the region, and to Uzbekistan itself, is for the long-term and will prevail over any short-term perturbations that might arise. Bringing Uzbekistan up to a reasonable level of U.S. aid per capita and using the new funds to mount programs in areas of Uzbek concern will also go a long way towards giving credibility to this assertion.

There is every reason to expect that Uzbekistan will be a strong and reliable partner in GCAP. Uzbekistan's March 2005 anti-terror agreement with Pakistan, its current cooperation with Japan to extend its rail system to the Afghan border, its involvement with the 2400 km. transport corridor across Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean, and its consideration of a free trade zone with the Kyrgyz Republic all indicate the extent to which it already frames policy on a region-wide basis similar to that proposed for GCAP.

## **16. Special Challenges: Pakistan.**

How should Pakistan be involved with GCAP? The arguments against its participation are well-known, and will doubtless be recited in some quarters. At the same time, Pakistan's cooperation in important aspects of the War on Terrorism and its inevitably important role in determining Afghanistan's fate argue for its inclusion.



Beyond this, Pakistan's new port in Gwadar, its participation in the regional highway connecting Gwadar with Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, its extension of preferential trade status to Afghanistan and plans for a free trade regime with its neighbor, as well as its active planning for a trans-Afghan gas pipeline to Turkmenistan, all reflect the reality that Pakistan is already engaging in the kinds of activities that GCAP will promote.

The U.S. already provides substantial aid to Pakistan, NATO is considering the construction of a logistics hub at Karachi, and Pakistan participates actively with the U.S. and Afghanistan in the Tripartite Commission. All this, along with strong economic growth swelling the ranks of the pragmatic elements in Pakistani society and burgeoning Pakistani investments in Afghanistan, would seem to make Pakistan a natural member of GCAP. It should be welcomed as such. Pakistan's full participation in GCAP will symbolize the return of the Indus valley to the central place in region-wide economic and cultural interaction that it occupied for three millennia prior to the closing of its access to the west and north.

### **17. Special Challenges: Iran.**

Since Iran does not receive U.S. assistance it is not relevant to GCAP's main concerns. Independent of this, Iran's continuing status as a Shiite theocracy and its actions in areas as diverse as terrorism, nuclear arms and human rights, would preclude its participation in GCAP. However, Iran, like Pakistan, is a powerful force for good or ill in Afghanistan and, increasingly, across the whole of Greater Central Asia. It already figures centrally in the expanding transport network, and the opening of a new Arian Bank office in Kabul will doubtless increase Iranian investment in Afghanistan itself. And on the other side, issues of Afghan drugs will not be resolved without Iranian involvement.

Taking a longer view, it should be borne in mind that GCAP's regional strategy will provide incentives for moderate forces with Iran. Rather than categorically excluding Iran, then, GCAP might hold out the long-term possibility of Iran becoming an observer. Should it ever earn U.S. recognition, it might then become a member. It must be remembered that Persia has always looked more to the northeast and east than to the Arab west. Iran's positive involvement in GCAP will eventually reinstitute that reality. Indeed, Iran's Khorasan region and its southeast, like those areas of Pakistan adjoining Afghanistan, have always fallen within the orbit of Central Asian life and culture. Once change occurs in Tehran, GCAP could and should embrace these age-old realities.

## **18. What is the Cost of These New Arrangements Affecting Afghanistan and Central Asia?**

Initially, the new arrangements are seen as a way of more effectively delivering existing programs rather than of expanding those programs or creating new ones. New expenses would therefore be limited to whatever is required to effect better coordination and integration.

The price tag for the 2004-2005 phase of the U.S.' Afghanistan program "Accelerating Success" is about \$ 2.4 billion, with a further \$10 billion per year devoted to the military. The high figure for the military will decline sharply as the Afghan National Army expands its functions. Meanwhile, the total value of U.S. non-military assistance to Kazakhstan is \$74.2 million, the Kyrgyz Republic \$50.7 million, Tajikistan \$50.6 million, Turkmenistan \$11.4 million and Uzbekistan \$50.8 million, for a total of \$2.67 billion of non-military assistance to the states of "Greater Central Asia."

Over time, new initiatives will doubtless be conceived and mounted, as might well be the case under present bilateral arrangements. But the coordinated approach will render such initiatives more efficient, more comprehensible in terms of the U.S.' core objectives, and hence more defensible politically. Assuming the eventual (but definitely not immediate) reduction of U.S. military assistance to Afghanistan by a third and the maintenance of present levels of non-military support to Kabul, one could double non-military assistance to all the other countries of the region and still garner a total cost reduction of 30%. Most of the new money would go to expanding mutually beneficial trade and other links with Afghanistan.

To put the present cost of assistance to Afghanistan and the U.S.' total expenditures in the region in perspective, it should be noted that the best estimate of the cost of U.S. assistance to Taiwan during the peak year (1955) is \$2.6 billion and the cost of aid to South Korea in that country's peak year (1956) was \$4.5 billion.<sup>4</sup> Stated in *per capita* terms, U.S. non-military aid *per capita* for Taiwan in the peak year was \$333 and for South Korea \$201, as compared with a mere \$147 for Afghanistan (pop. 17.6 million) and less than fifty cents *per capita* for the rest of Central Asia.

## **19. What Are the Likely Risks of These Arrangements?**

GCAP is not an exercise in aid for its own sake but a tool for achieving America's strategic objectives in the region (see above). What, then, are the likely risks and

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<sup>4</sup> Both figures are adjusted for inflation, and derive from research by Mr. Sam Brannan, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington.

prospects for success? Can this Greater Central Asia come to serve as a model for other predominantly Muslim regions, and a showcase of America's intention to foster development and freedom?

The risks involving GCAP regional states are minimal, provided that the U.S. introduces the new arrangements in the context of a longer, multifaceted engagement that includes economic and social dimensions. There is a spreading awareness that U.S. assistance in state-building in Afghanistan is already responsible for notable achievements there, and that it has been pursued with due concern for local sensibilities and concerns for stability. As President Bush has implied in his references to a "Marshall Plan for Afghanistan" (notably, in his 2002 speech at the Virginia Military Academy) success will require a regional approach. GCAP would indicate America's commitment to region-building as well as its long-term support for the sovereignty of each state in the region.

The greater risk would arise from perceptions in Russia and China regarding U.S. intentions post-Operation Enduring Freedom. Although both have assented to U.S. involvement on a region-wide basis in connection with the War on Terrorism, both are bound to express dissatisfaction with a longer-term U.S. military presence in the region. At worst, such displeasure could affect important U.S. bilateral relations with these two important states.

However, such opposition need not prevent the full implementation of both civilian and security dimensions of the GCAP program. Both acknowledge that the turnaround in Afghanistan remains very incomplete and hence fragile. Both acknowledge, too, that existing U.S. military and civilian relationships in GCAP countries are compatible with their own military and civil commitments there. The main challenges are 1) to translate into practical reality the affirmation that China, Russia and the U.S. have common interests in Greater Central Asia that are advanced by GCAP's existence 2) to lead with economic and social programs in such a way as to make participating states true partners who will defend their engagement with the U.S. on that basis, 2) to assure that all the proposed security arrangements serve the national interests of participating states and not only those of the U.S., and that they do so in a manner that poses no danger to neighboring powers 3) to assure Russia and China also that the GCAP is not directed against anyone and, indeed, that it promotes regional stability.

Current sensitivities in GCAP states, as well as in Moscow and Beijing, suggest that the greatest risks arise not from the proposed security arrangements but from the possibility that the U.S. might recklessly use its power in the region to foment democratic revolutions there. Yet the actual reforms to be pursued through GCAP

deal above all with good governance – especially by the powerful and largely unreformed ministries of internal affairs – and other major pre-requisites for responsive government in an open society rather than with electoral or party reforms as such. In the end, the U.S.’ initiative is simply to help governments in GCAP countries do in a practical way what they already affirm in principle.

Prospects for success in this endeavor are excellent. Traditions of moderate Islam are intact in the region, and hostility towards radical Islamism is widespread, in spite of some isolated gains. All the region’s governments are either secular or, in the case of Afghanistan, constrained by the careful enumeration of citizens’ rights against the state. The Asia Development Bank reports that overall economic growth in the region is the fastest in Asia, while the International Monetary Fund projects Afghanistan’s GDP to grow by 8%. Moreover, it is doubtful that any other world region presents more positive public attitudes towards the U.S. and lower levels of hostility than Afghanistan and the new states of Central Asia. In Secretary Rumsfeld’s words, the U.S., in this region, is “wanted, welcomed, and needed.” By enhancing security, improving governance, and fostering economic growth through trade that will involve India, China, and Russia, the U.S. is merely lending its support to developments that all countries involved claim to be striving for anyway.

## **II. Main Components of the Proposed Strategy**

### **1. Security**

To assure U.S. partners, existing War on Terrorism commitments must continue until a post-Operation Enduring Freedom follow-on structure and new options are solidly in place. These commitments include completion of the development of the Afghan National Army and disarmament programs in that country, as well as basing rights and Partnership for Peace initiatives elsewhere in the region.<sup>5</sup>

Follow-on efforts in Afghanistan and throughout the GCAP region should focus on fragile border areas and border security, with the State Department's Export and Related Border Security (EXBS) programs working in cooperation with the Department of Defense's Defense Threat Reduction Agency. Such efforts should also include officer training through a developed Afghan National Army staff college in Kabul (already being developed by France), and Joint Combined Exchange Training. Regional programs should focus on strengthening border security and counter-terrorist capabilities, interoperability, support for training non-commissioned officers, and multi-agency and multilateral emergency response.

One method of implementing these efforts would be through Foreign Internal Defense (FID) activities using both Title 10 DOD operations and maintenance funds, and Title 22 DOD security assistance funds. FID activities are the bread and butter of U.S. Special Operations Forces but other U.S. military forces could perform these missions if properly prepared. Further activities might include security assistance activities through Mobile Training Teams and emergency response seminars and exercises carried out through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. National Guard.

The entire defense establishments of the GCAP must be the beneficiaries of such activities, not only the ground, air, and naval/coastal forces but also border guards, internal troops of the ministries of internal affairs, national guards, units of the various ministries of emergency situations, and troops of the national security services as well. Finally, close cooperation between the U.S. departments of State, Homeland Security, and Justice is required to assure that police, customs, and anti-

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<sup>5</sup> Several points herein are drawn from Lt. Col. Jon E. Chicky's pioneering and thoughtful paper, "A Military Strategy for Central Asia," USAWC Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, 2004.

drug units receive training and assistance. Such cooperation should include centralized funding and authority, based either on the INL or the EUR ACE model.

### *Strategic Partnership Agreements*

Once these programs are underway, the U.S. must negotiate new arrangements for access, including maintaining a substantial but rotating long-term presence in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan (Khanabad) that can sustain long- or short-term deployments as needed, and smaller “places, not bases” forward operating sites with quick strike capabilities elsewhere in the region. Such arrangements should be enshrined in “Strategic Partnership” agreements, beginning with Afghanistan. A strong and mutually acceptable security agreement with Afghanistan would be the necessary basis for analogous agreements with Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz Republic and other states. These might fall short of iron-clad defense commitments but in their extent and duration would address some of the local states’ main concerns.

From the U.S. perspective, the overall relationship, including aid, would be contingent on acceptance of the goal of civilian rule and of military institutions that are appropriate to a democratic political order. This calls for steady U.S. promotion of “culture change” within the military of the regional states and the engagement of the armed forces in relevant aspects of nation building.

This activity should in turn build support among other NATO members for a longer-term, broader based, and more comprehensive NATO presence in Afghanistan and other GCAP states, and, eventually, for the creation of a joint NATO expeditionary force to project power into other theaters as needed.

The above program requires that the departments of Defense and State conduct public and private diplomatic efforts to explain U.S. force presence in Greater Central Asia post-Operation Enduring Freedom. They require, further, for CENTCOM, the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staffs to establish a clearinghouse program to coordinate U.S. and NATO Partnership for Peace activities throughout the region, and for facilitating U.S./NATO military-to-military activities with Russian forces in the region.

## **2. Governance**

No aspect of U.S. policy in Afghanistan presents more innovations than its efforts to rebuild governance there. In the former Soviet states the U.S. has focused one-sidedly on civil society organizations, neglecting the unreformed ministries of internal affairs

that are responsible for most of the worst abuses of civil rights.<sup>6</sup> In Afghanistan, by contrast, it has strengthened and modernized governance in all of the country's thirty-four provinces and 360 districts, thus creating an enabling environment for civil society and citizens' rights. GCAP should build on this experience through the following programs for other member states:

1. Inter-ministerial meetings of GCAP members in all relevant fields, especially Internal Affairs.
2. Replicate in other participating countries those programs of civil service testing and screening that are now underway in Afghanistan.
3. Civil service and police reform and training, preferably through the creation of civil service academies of the sort already being built in Kabul.
4. Extend existing anti-corruption efforts in Tajikistan to other GCAP participants, including Afghanistan.
5. Work with regional governments—beginning with Afghanistan itself—to increase civil service salaries, the *sine qua non* of any workable anti-corruption effort.

### **3 Democratization**

The development of parliamentary institutions and political parties, as well as the rule of law and free speech, is a high priority throughout the GCAP region. The challenge is to spread the understanding that democracy enhances stability and security rather than undermining it. This can be achieved only by treating democratization as a developmental process with numerous prerequisites, many of which are subject to constructive interventions. Progress will depend mainly on local initiatives by member states, which in turn will arise in the course of interaction and dialogue. Programs such as the following will further the cause of democratization:

1. Joint conferences on electoral procedures, including legislation governing the work of electoral commissions, the mechanics of voting, the advantages and processes for switching the basis of voting to party lists, etc.
2. Inter-parliamentary conferences for committee heads and members to consider common issues, especially in the area of parliamentary processes, the rule of law, and free speech.

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<sup>6</sup> As of summer 2004 the U.S. has begun working with Uzbekistan's Ministry of internal Affairs.

3. Joint meetings of electoral commissions and U.S. counterparts to consider common issues.
4. Foster contacts between national political parties and parties in the U.S.
5. Establish regular links between GCAP parliaments and the U.S. Congress.
6. Promote similar intra-regional and international contacts in the judiciary, and in the area of free speech and the media.

#### **4. Economics**

Social stability, openness, and institutional trust all thrive best in a steadily growing economy. An expanding economy is necessary also to support critical public investments in areas as diverse as education and police. Afghanistan and nearly all of its neighbors in Greater Central Asia are all experiencing strong economic growth. Key measures for reinforcing this trend include the following:

1. In Afghanistan, tax reform, including elimination of nuisance taxes and the successive introduction of simple flat-rate taxes on production and consumption, property, and income.<sup>7</sup> Taxes on the import of machinery and raw materials should be suspended and an eight-year tax holiday declared for foreign direct investment.
2. Use fast-track aid to the public sector to rebuild the tax system and put it on a fair basis.
3. Initiate efforts to enable Afghanistan and other countries of Greater Central Asia to gain access to loans from the Export-Import Bank and thereby expand and subsidize U.S. investment in key sectors of GCAP economies.
4. Strong U.S. support for the entry of Afghanistan and other non-member GCAP states into the World Trade Organization, providing assistance on reforms needed to achieve it.
5. Coordinate policies and initiatives to facilitate investments from the U.S. and other countries (including GCAP states) that cross borders within the GCAP. The establishment of regional GCAP banking should be a priority.
6. Targeted waivers of U.S. import duties, especially on key agricultural products from Afghanistan.

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<sup>7</sup> Afghanistan-American Chamber of Commerce, *Reflections and Recommendations on Tax Policy*, Washington, 25 January 2005.



7. Identify and address instances where NGOs are competing directly with the private sector and thereby retarding its development.
8. Development initiatives directed towards main pockets of poverty throughout GCAP states, including the southeastern zone of Afghanistan, the Panjshir valley, both Afghan and Tajik Badakhshan, and Baluchistan in Pakistan. Mountain regions warrant special attention as they have been the main incubators of extremism and violence.

## **5. Transportation and Trade**

The establishment (or re-establishment) of Greater Central Asia as a major world economic zone with Afghanistan at its heart will arise above all from the reopening of region-wide transport and trade. Since the prosperity generated by such trade is also the best guarantor of social stability, this project is also critical to the strengthening of regional security. Many efforts to coordinate transport and trade regimens are already in place. The main thrust of U.S. policy should be to assure that programs it sponsors are coordinated with one another and with those of other countries and organizations on a region-wide basis. Such programs should:

1. Coordinate U.S. initiatives in the areas of highway infrastructure, border regimens, and the development of region-wide businesses, with corresponding initiatives by other donor countries and multi-national development institutions.
2. A first priority should be the completion of current multi-lateral projects to reopen trans-Afghanistan highway corridors.
3. The next priority should be to expand these routes, first, to secondary markets within Afghanistan; second, to the rest of Greater Central Asia; and, third, to adjoining centers of economic life in every direction.
4. Moving beyond highways, the focus should be, first, on railroads and then on regional airlines.
5. In the transport of energy, focus first on gas and oil and only then on hydroelectric energy.

## **6. Agriculture**

In Afghanistan and all the other prospective GCAP countries agriculture is the main source of employment. Social stability therefore requires a viable agricultural sector. Without improvements in farmers' incomes progress in the war on narcotics is

inconceivable. This calls for attention to the entire process of agricultural production and marketing and close coordination with other sectors, including banking and transport.

Current funding for rural development in Afghanistan (\$82 million, including for irrigation) and the former Soviet states is inadequate. These funds can be augmented by tapping those U.S. anti-drug funds earmarked for “transitional initiatives” in “fragile states.” The following programs would be of particular value:

1. Afghan poppy growers can now tap private loans that help them bridge the difficult period between planting and harvest. Farmers growing legal crops cannot. Agricultural credit banks are therefore essential, not only there but throughout Greater Central Asia. These should be developed on a commercial basis.
2. Without storage facilities, farmers are forced to dump their crops on the market precisely when prices are at their lowest. Storage capacities developed on a cooperative basis provide a quick boost to rural incomes. Support should be focused on storage infrastructure and also on training for storage managers.
3. Prior to the Soviet invasion Afghanistan was the world’s largest exporter of dried fruits. Current tariffs in consumer countries prevent this trade from reviving. An important task of GCAP should be to promote tariff reduction for selected agricultural products from participating state.
4. Afghanistan, as a riparian state of the Amu Darya, must be fully integrated into future arrangements on water issues, along with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Such coordination is essential if regional potentials in agriculture and the generation of hydro-electric power are to be achieved.

## **7. Narcotics**

Narcotics produced in Afghanistan and Greater Central Asia support extremist currents, warlordism, and general corruption. This industry is the inevitable response to world demand, especially from Europe. The Bonn agreements recognized the gravity of the issue without acknowledging that it is demand driven, let alone affirming that those countries that generate the greatest demand for Afghan narcotics might also bear practical and moral responsibility for alleviating its consequences in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan’s Counter Narcotics Commission and the international community have brought about a reduction in poppy planting in 2005. However, by driving up prices, this “achievement” could cause the spread of poppy production beyond Afghanistan’s

borders, if not its resurgence in Afghanistan itself. Any permanent solution requires the reduction of demand in Europe. Short of that, moral and practical considerations require that European countries and the EU step up and provide a level of support for anti-narcotics programs in Greater Central Asia on a level comparable to U.S. support for such programs in Colombia.

Britain has doubled its support to \$100 million but this remains inadequate. Other European countries offer mere pittance. The U.S. still provides four times more for this purpose than all Europe combined.<sup>8</sup> Omar Zakhilwal, advisor to the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, is right when he says that “you can’t beat a 2-3 billion dollar industry with this kind of money.” The U.S. should strongly encourage European partners to meet this challenge.

Besides this fundamental need, the following measures are called for:

1. Within the U.S. government, responsibilities in this area are currently doled out among agencies as diverse as USAID, DOD, DOJ, DEA, and DHS with no adequate coordinating mechanism, let alone on a region-wide GCAP basis. Therefore, the first priority must be to gain necessary legislative support for the establishment of a single inter-agency coordinator for U.S. counter-narcotics programs in Afghanistan and Greater Central Asia, with consolidated, region-wide responsibility to define goals, timetables, and benchmarks, and to design and execute programs to achieve them. This officer would link with the bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) in Washington and would work with and through similar officers in other U.S. embassies in the region. As noted above, needed initiatives include the strengthening of overall governance, law enforcement assistance, and the enhancement of trade and agriculture, notably the provision of short-term loans.
2. Continue the present focus on the identification and arrest of dealers rather than growers, strengthening this activity throughout Greater Central Asia.
3. There must be a credible threat of eradication but actual work in this area should be left to local governments (Afghanistan’s Central Poppy Eradication Force now numbers 10,000), with U.S. and international forces providing training and in-field support only.
4. Identify and prosecute international figures and organizations that dominate the heroin trade nationally and regionally and claim most of its profits.

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<sup>8</sup> As noted earlier, the U.S. should finance its contribution by tapping funds for “transitional initiatives” and alternative agriculture earmarked for “fragile economies.”

5. Extend throughout the region laws on trade-based money laundering now in place in Kazakhstan.
6. Acknowledge the importance of alternative employment of poppy farmers in public works projects (USAID canal clearing; World Food program's food for work) and the army, and plan recruitment for both with this reality in mind.
7. Targeted road and infrastructure projects to reach into main poppy growing regions, to facilitate the marketing of alternative crops. Such projects would be timed so that main construction work would coincide with poppy growing and harvesting cycles.

## **8. Religion, Culture and Education**

It is not enough for the U.S. to pursue a broadened program in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Local publics must also understand the underlying intentions of those programs and, beyond that, the fundamental American values that inform those intentions. An awareness of these matters is essential if citizens of Afghanistan and Greater Central Asia are to become effective advocates of their region as a model of development for other parts of the Islamic world. This creates an important role in American policy for initiatives in public diplomacy, education, and the media:

1. Public diplomacy should begin with the extension of the network of "American corners" that now exists in half a dozen locales in Afghanistan to all the major and secondary cities of the Greater Central Asian countries. Further initiatives should include subsidies for selected translations and publications, as well as for independent media and publishing houses. In the same spirit, U.S. embassies should sponsor region-wide meetings of students who have studied in the U.S., and of other groups with a special relationships to America. A related activity might be to convene periodic meetings of Regional Strategic Studies Institutes.
2. With five million students in school, Afghanistan desperately needs teachers at all levels. Other countries of Greater Central Asia have large cadres of teachers but many of those educated in Soviet times need extensive retraining. The \$250 million already dedicated to Afghan education should be focused on teacher training and curriculum reform. Central Asian graduates of western universities and other qualified persons from the GCAP region, as well as from the U.S. and other donor countries, should be engaged in this effort. Communication among all regional universities should be fostered through joint meetings, while similar links should be set up in the area of secondary

education and vocational training. Library of Congress exchange programs in which Uzbekistan now participates should be extended to the entire region.

3. Although impressive gains have been made in the development of Afghan media, they still function in near-total isolation. No region-wide news or information services exist, nor do region-wide links in radio, TV, or the press. Coordinated efforts to redress these problems should be mounted, drawing on U.S. expertise and also independent media elsewhere in Greater Central Asia, and links should be forged between these region-wide information providers and U.S. media. A region-wide media training center should be created, and existing programs to foster internet access maintained.

### **III. Key Actions**

#### **1 Legislative**

The initiatives proposed above require congressional support. To that end, the key agencies (State, Defense, Homeland Security, Commerce, etc.) must develop an inter-agency legislative strategy and then create joint briefing teams to explain the GCAP concept to key members of both houses of Congress and their staffs. Such briefings should cover both the relationship between the proposed GCAP initiative and U.S. goals and values and the main operational steps required to implement that concept.

#### **2 Administrative-Organizational**

1. Expand writ of Presidential Envoy in Kabul to include coordination of GCAP-related activities of regional embassies.
2. After gaining necessary legislative approval, appoint Assistant Secretary of State for Greater Central Asia, modifying existing administrative-territorial boundaries accordingly.
3. Expand the responsibility of the Department of Defense's top official in Afghanistan to include coordination of all region-wide DOD activities under the GCAP.
4. Establish a senior law enforcement and counter-narcotics coordinator in Kabul with inter-agency responsibility for programs throughout the GCAP region.
5. Establish regular meetings of U.S. ambassadors to GCAP countries.

#### **3 Diplomatic**

1. Conclude a Strategic Partnership agreement with Afghanistan, adding GCAP components. Initiate conversations with other prospective GCAP states, developing framework documents (Strategic Partnerships, etc.) as necessary, and establishing .GCAP council.
2. Brief relevant U.S. audiences and NATO partners on GCAP, then China, India, Japan, Russia, and Turkey on mission and limitations of longer-term U.S. military presence in GCAP, and on proposed GCAP framework organization.
3. Arrange visit of President or Secretary of State to region to launch GCAP and assure members of annual visit by Secretary of State.