



Caucasus and Central Asia Newsletter

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Notes from the Executive Director

Sanjyot Mehendale

Central Asia seems to be slowly disappearing from the radar screen of the mass media, replaced by a focus on possible war in Iraq. However, the flurry of attention paid to the region in the September 11 aftermath has translated into a growing public awareness of and academic interest in Central Asia and the Caucasus. This increased attention is reflected on campus by a greater number of students interested in courses on the region, a rise in public and academic inquiries fielded by our program, and a push for more institutional exchanges, both nationally and internationally. And I am very pleased to report that the Caucasus and Central Asia Program (CCASP) at the University of California at Berkeley has responded to this increased attention by continuing its very active role in the advancement of research and teaching on Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Still buzzing with activity from a very busy and exciting spring 2002 semester, CCASP had a quieter but extremely productive fall 2002. As part of our continued attention to public outreach, we organized a number of public talks on a broad variety of modern and ancient topics. The main event scheduled for this spring is the third annual CCASP international conference on Central Asia and the Caucasus, "Rocks and Hard Places: Society and the Environment in Central Asia," to be held on March 14-15 on the UC Berkeley campus. The conference seeks to examine the relationships between environments and communities in Central Asia as they developed over time, as well as links between the environment – and notions of "environment" – and policies and politics in the region today. Abstracts of conference proceedings will appear in the Summer 2003 issue of the Newsletter.

In keeping with its broad geographic and interdisciplinary interest in the region, this issue of the CCASP newsletter contains articles on diverse subjects. Pauline Jones Luong focuses on the importance of regionalism and informal relationships in shaping Central Asian politics in her essay entitled "Politics in the Periphery: Why Study Central Asia?" The Caucasus is addressed in "Chechnya, the Pankisi Gorge, and US Policy," by Edward W. Walker, Executive Director of the Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies. Dr. Walker outlines the current status of the conflict in Chechnya and the crisis between Georgia and Russia over the Pankisi Gorge, and offers suggestions on how US policy makers can negotiate this unstable situation. The final article is by Osmund Bopearachchi, Director of Research, National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), Paris. Dr. Bopearachchi's paper, entitled "Preserving Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage," underscores the pressing need to record what has been lost or destroyed and to preserve and safeguard what survives of the rich archaeological and artistic remains of this struggling nation.

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Politics in the Periphery: Why Study Central Asia?

Pauline Jones-Luong

Access and Assumptions

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 9/11, the war in Afghanistan, and the installation of U.S. military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the question “Why study Central Asia” may seem merely rhetorical. Yet, Central Asia was not always in the headlines. And, in fact, until very recently, it was largely neglected by Western scholarship.

This neglect was not deliberate, of course. It was the result of severe limitations to conducting research on Central Asia during the Soviet period – for example, restrictions on travel and linguistic barriers. And, even when research funding and exchange programs were established in the late 1950s, priority was given to the study of Russia in large part because the impetus behind such programs was the need to “know thy enemy.”

As a result, there was a real dearth of empirical data on Central Asia. Thus, when the five Central Asian republics suddenly became independent states in 1991, we knew far less about them than perhaps any other part of former Soviet Union. Moreover, what we did know was based on several unverified assumptions – assumptions about the nature of Soviet policies and institutions in Central Asia and the response of Central Asian societies living under Soviet rule that served as the basis for scholarly predictions about Central Asia – both before and after the Soviet Union’s collapse.

These assumptions amounted to two polarized views. At one end of the spectrum, the effects of Soviet policies and institutions, and societal responses in Central Asia were considered to be essentially identical to those in the rest of the former Soviet Union.

National identities, for example, were widely assumed to have taken hold across the Central Asian republics to the same degree that they had throughout the former Soviet Union in response to the division of the country into fifteen main ethno-territorial units (known as union republics) and a nationalities policy that elevated the status of the titular nationalities in each of these fifteen union republics. Thus, as nationalist movements spread throughout the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s and the Soviet Union began to unravel, scholars predicted that nationalist conflict would also erupt in Central Asia and that it would cause the re-drawing of state boundaries to incorporate those members of the titular nationalities left on the other side of the border when these boundaries were initially drawn.

Yet, there were no mass nationalist uprisings in Central Asia – and no moves to redraw state boundaries. Instead, the Central Asian republics were the last to declare their independence from the Soviet Union and, after independence was literally “forced” upon them, all five Central Asian states immediately signed treaties to secure their pre-existing borders.

At the other end of the spectrum, the five Central Asian republics were deemed to be wholly different from the Slavic parts of the former Soviet Union. Central Asian societies were often portrayed as more traditional, and thus, as inherently more resistant to Soviet attempts at modernization and secularization. This view was based on the persistence of what scholars considered to be indigenous tradition in Central Asia, including art forms, customs, and dress, as well as the belief in Islam, despite the Soviet leadership’s efforts to eradicate them. Their pre-Soviet identities, beliefs, and practices were thus presumed to be virtually untransformed by Soviet rule. As a result, scholars predicted the outbreak of violent ethnic conflict in Central Asia – both before and after the Soviet Union’s collapse – either in the form of latent clan and tribal animosities rising to the surface or Islamic fundamentalism.

But in fact, warfare has not erupted between ancient clans or tribes and, until very recently, we did not witness the rise of militant Islam.

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This article is based on a talk presented at UC Berkeley on October 31, 2002.*

Initial Personal and Scholarly Impact

In sum, the limitations on conducting research during the Soviet period resulted in a set of assumptions that produced polarized images of Central Asia. And these were called into question by subsequent events – in particular, the lack of conflict based nationalism, tribal warfare, or Islamic fundamentalism. The limitations on conducting research that produced these largely unverified assumptions in the first place, however, did not end in the mid-1980s with the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev or with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, both continued to have a profound impact – on the field as a whole and on me personally.

An undergraduate student at U.C. Berkeley in the mid-1980s, I returned from a study abroad program in Leningrad wanting to write my undergraduate thesis on Central Asian politics. And I was forced to rely on very few and incomplete sources. I recall nearly going blind reading *Pravda vostoka* on micro-fiche for several hours a day, copies of which were available only from about 1959-1975. This experience alone convinced me of the need to go to graduate school to improve the amount and quality of empirical data on the region.

When I entered graduate school at Harvard in the early 1990s, the option of studying Uzbek in the U.S. still did not exist. So, I studied Turkish until I was able to find money to enroll in a summer language program in Uzbek at the University of Washington, Seattle. And then, I took a leave of absence from graduate school to go live in Uzbekistan for six months to improve and retain my Uzbek.

Most importantly, I went into the field to conduct my dissertation research in 1994 and 1995 armed with these polarized views of Central Asia. In particular, based on the predominant view that Soviet policies and institutions had the same effect in Central Asia as they did in other parts of the former Soviet Union, I actually went looking for and fully expected to find the salience of national identities in Central Asia.

I was also influenced by the two dominant theoretical paradigms at the time – “transitology” and “convergence theory.” Transitology assumed that these countries were “transitioning” away from the Soviet system toward something else, usually democracy. Convergence theory was based on the idea that formerly communist states would reject the Soviet system in favor of Western political and economic institutions – because the conventional wisdom was that we had “won.”¹

So, I went into the field expecting to find not only political struggles based on nationalism but also that these

countries were in transition *away* from Soviet-style rule and *toward* the West (i.e. democracy and the market). And these expectations largely determined my decision to focus on the design of electoral systems – both to look at the effects of identity on institutional design and to gauge the nature of the transition away from Soviet rule.

My detailed study of the design of electoral systems in Central Asia, however, led me to three surprising – and it turns out crucial – discoveries.

First, by looking below the national level, I discovered that Soviet policies and institutions in Central Asia had not served to foster nationalism, but rather, regionalism. It turned out that the political categories I thought mattered (i.e. nationalities) really didn’t – and they didn’t matter because subnational institutions had a much greater effect on identity formation than national institutions. But these institutions were not taken seriously by previous scholarship.

Second, by studying the negotiations over the design of a *formal* institution, I discovered both the importance and the nature of *informal* politics in Central Asia. The near inability to conduct fieldwork – particularly open interviews – in the region during the Soviet period meant that informal politics was under the radar screen of most scholars. But I had the opportunity to conduct multiple, face-to-face interviews with the key political actors in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, who could give me insight into what occurs behind the scenes.

Third, through studying both the *process* and *outcome* of these negotiations, I found that there was actually a great deal of continuity with the pre-existing (i.e. Soviet) system – and hence, a great deal of political stability where previous scholars had predicted conflict. The source of this continuity, moreover, was the salience of regionalism.

The Salience of Regionalism

“Regionalism” refers to political identities based on the internal administrative-territorial divisions in each Central Asian state established under Soviet rule – formerly *oblasts*. These divisions were left intact after independence – but were renamed in the local language. I classify them as regional *political identities* because they encompass the set of “beliefs, principles, and commitments” that frame an elite’s understanding of his role in politics and his political interests. In other words, rather than functioning as “imagined communities,” these identities function as “imagined constituencies.”

In the course of my dissertation research in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, I collected data

based on multiple indicators that ultimately convinced me that regional political identities were the most salient identities in Central Asia. Here, I will discuss only three of these briefly.²

Negotiation process surrounding the design of new institutions

The process of negotiating new electoral systems in all three states bore some striking similarities: regional leaders and central leaders made up the core set of actors, shared the same set of primary interests, and utilized the same basis for evaluating their relative power. Preferences over specific aspects of the new electoral system were based on each actor's expectation of how that particular aspect would affect: 1) the overall regional balance of power vis-à-vis the center; and 2) their own region's position of strength or weakness within it. Clear divisions thus emerged between the preferred outcomes of regional leaders on the one hand and central leaders on the other, as well as among leaders representing different regions.

Elite attitudes concerning their proper role and responsibilities in politics

Multiple interviews that I conducted with 152 officials and political activists at the central, regional, and local levels across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in 1994-1995 also provided strong support for the salience of regionalism. Officials and political activists in all three countries, for example, considered their main source of political support to be their region of origin and/or the region in which they most recently held office, rather than members of their nationality, tribe, or any particular political party. Similarly, they nearly unanimously cited promoting regional interests as the primary responsibility of officials serving in both the executive and legislative branches. The officials and activists that I interviewed in each state also universally viewed Islam, tribal and national identities, as the greatest threat to stability, while they considered maintaining a regional balance necessary for stability.

Basis for the formation of political parties and social movements

Regional affiliation served as the primary basis for popular support among social movements and political parties that emerged during the first several years of independence. The so-called national parties primarily relied upon regionally-based support. The Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DDK), for example, lasted only a little over a year before it began splitting into rival

factions based on northern versus southern regional interests. In Uzbekistan, the centrally-crafted successor party to the Communist Party – the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (*Ozbekistan Halq Demokratik Partiyasi*) – reached the height of its popularity in the Ferghana, Samarkand, and Tashkent oblasts during 1992 and 1993, while the opposition received the bulk of its support from Andijon, Namangan, and Khorezm oblasts in 1991 and 1992. And the three largest political parties that emerged in Kazakhstan – the Peoples' Congress of Kazakhstan, the Socialist Party of Kazakhstan, and Social-Democratic Party – received the bulk of their support from Semipalatinsk, Almaty, and Kyzyl-Orda oblasts, respectively.

Importance and Nature of Informal Politics

In sum, studying electoral systems and conducting interviews enabled me to understand the role of regional political identities as “imagined constituencies.” This empirical research also led me to a second discovery – the importance and nature of informal politics in Central Asia.

Negotiations over electoral rules were conducted informally – not through formal institutions that produced written agreements, but through informal and covert bargaining among elites. No formal mechanism or codification of this process existed – rather, it was based on the broad understanding that this was the way political decision-making was done. More important than the formal institution itself was who was involved in the informal bargaining and that the formal institution reflected the informal understanding of the “proper” balance of power – that is between regional and central levels and among regions in each state.

Because the bargaining was taking place during the “transition” from Soviet rule, elites' bargaining strategies also were not based on formalized or objective measures of power asymmetries, but on their *perceptions* of shifts in their relative power. Hence, the outcome of these negotiations – i.e. the electoral rules – reflected these perceived shifts in relative power. Those elites who believed their power was increasing relative to the others as the transition continued, expected more and so held out for more of what they wanted and got it (i.e. they received larger distributional gains). In Uzbekistan, this included the central leaders. Thus, electoral rules in Uzbekistan are best described as “centralist;” that is, they largely reflect the preferences of central leaders for centralized control over the nomination of candidates and the supervision of elections. In Kyrgyzstan, this included the regional leaders. Thus, electoral rules in Kyrgyzstan are best described as

“populist;” that is, they essentially mirror the preferences of regional leaders for decentralized supervision of the elections and allow a greater role for regionally-based political parties in the process of nomination. Kazakhstan is a bit more complicated, and interesting, since both central and regional leaders believed that the transition was shifting the balance of power in their favor. The electoral systems in Kazakhstan, therefore, are “dualistic;” that is, reflect an evenly balanced compromise between central and regional leaders’ preferences. Conversely, those elites who believed their power was decreasing relative to the others as the transition continued were more eager to reach an agreement – even if it meant getting less of what they wanted, or their previous distributional gains.

High Degree of Continuity with the Soviet System

The insights I gained about regionalism and informal politics contributed to another important discovery: the degree to which the newly independent Central Asia states maintained continuity with the Soviet system. Contrary to expectations that they would reject the Soviet past – whether through the re-emergence of pre-Soviet tribal divisions and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the rise of nationalism, or the adoption of democratic reforms – post-Soviet elites in Central Asia seemed to embrace their Soviet heritage.

This continuity came primarily in two forms. The first is the continued salience of regionalism, which served as the primary mode of political contestation – not only in the post-Soviet period, but also during the Soviet period.

Although the negotiations over electoral systems produced *outcomes* that contain a significant degree of institutional innovation and change in comparison to the pre-existing (i.e. Soviet) electoral law, the entire *process* by which they were created reveals the degree to which these outcomes are linked to the Soviet past. This process, as aforementioned, was dominated by actors, preferences, and assessments of power asymmetries based on regionalism. But where did regionalism come from? The quest to answer this particular question led me into the National Archives in Tashkent. There I amassed evidence for what I suspected to be the case – that regionalism was created and reinforced by Soviet policies and institutions in Central Asia.

In short, Soviet policies and institutions in Central Asia created structural incentives for elites and masses alike to shift the locus of their political identities from tribe and Islam to region – and to personally invest in regional rather than national political identities – in three ways: (1) by fostering inter-regional political and economic competi-

tion at the republican level; (2) by creating an intricate system of regional patronage networks that supplanted pre-existing tribal loyalties; and (3) because these practices coincided with the cooptation and depoliticization of Islam.

The second form of continuity with the Soviet system is the fundamental lack of regime change in Central Asia. While there was some political liberalization in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in the early 1990s, for example, the Central Asian regimes have converged toward authoritarianism since the mid-1990s. The legitimation strategies for these regimes, moreover, borrows heavily from the Soviet experience – e.g. using the media to promulgate state propaganda and litter the streets with slogans, such as “Uzbekistan is a future great state” and “Navroz: the holiday of labor and spring,” and the infamous personality cult of Saparmurad Niyazov (*Turkmenbashi*) in Turkmenistan – named “president for life” at the end of 1999.

And this form of continuity is linked directly to the first form – the salience of regional political identities. As the electoral systems demonstrate, some institutional change and innovation was possible despite the persistence of regionalism because understandings of what constituted the “proper” balance of power between the center and the regions changed in light of the transition from Soviet rule – and institutions were designed to reflect this change.

Just to clarify: I am not saying that the persistence of regionalism precludes any institutional change or political liberalization, but that what it did prohibit was more fundamental institutional change or regime transition. While the central and regional elites I interviewed had different perceptions of the direction in which their relative power has shifted during the transition, they shared the perception that the transition’s impact on power relations had not been dramatic enough to warrant a unilateral change in institutions. Thus, established elites constructed institutions that deliberately reconfigured the previous division of political influence without disrupting the widely recognized basis for allocating power and privilege.

This amounted to what I call “pacted stability” – a form of elite pact-making in which the primary aim is maintaining the exclusive nature of decision-making rather than expanding the political process to accommodate new and/or previously excluded interests.

Impact on Subsequent Research

These three discoveries – 1) the salience of regional political identities, 2) the nature and importance of informal politics, and 3) the sources of regime stability in Central Asia – have had a lingering effect on my scholarship. They have led me to some crucial theoretical insights that have contin-

ued to drive my research agenda.

First and foremost, the discovery of regionalism has convinced me of the importance of getting analytical categories “right.” The first step to understanding how institutions are designed, policies are made, and whether regime transition occurs is understanding what drives politics – i.e. what is the relevant arena of competition, who are the relevant actors, what is the shared understanding of power, and what is the appropriate basis for allocating resources?

Yet, in political science, the primary modes of political contestation are often assumed based on what we know of the Western world; that is, as political parties and social movements, or some form of civil society. (So, it is not only Sovietologists who didn’t get the categories “right” in Central Asia by focusing on nationality or clan identities, but also political scientists because they assume that political parties are the key political actors in designing electoral systems.) Alternatively, based on what we know of the developing world, political scientists often assume that the mode of political contestation is between elites at the central level and “traditional” social forces in the periphery.

The primary form of political contestation in Central Asia, however, does not conform to either of these “ideal types.” Rather, politics is driven by regionalism, which is played out through informal negotiations between the central and regional levels of government over spheres of influence and the distribution of resources based on perceptions of shifts in their relative power.

Moreover, two of my current research projects on the design and effect of economic institutions suggest that these analytical categories remain equally relevant beyond electoral systems in particular and political institutions in general.

In my analysis of stalled economic reform in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, I find that political elites at the central and regional levels are the primary source of opposition.³ The lack of reform in the agricultural sector, for example, is best explained by persistence of actors at the central and regional levels who have a “vested interest” in maintaining the status quo because they want to maintain their monopoly control over scarce resources, which is the primary source of both their economic well-being and political power. Thus, even though the privatization of land, rational use of water, and an end to mandated crops and production quotas would be more economically efficient and help to alleviate poverty and hunger in rural areas, central ministries, regional governments, and farm chairman resist these

market-based initiatives because they would wrest their control over crop production and distribution. Uzbekistan in particular has insisted on maintaining state control over the production, pricing, and trade of its key commodity (cotton) in order to maintain the existing balance of power between the central and regional elites and the political dominance of certain regions.

In a project seeking to explain the divergent energy sector development strategies in the former Soviet Union and their implications for long-term institutional development,⁴ I find that regional actors play a similarly significant role. Take, for example, Kazakhstan’s strategic choice to privatize its energy sector to foreign investors. This presents an interesting anomaly – both because this is a rare strategy for resource-rich countries to adopt and because it lies in stark contrast to the record on privatization in Central Asia. Yet, it can be best explained in the context of regionalism. In short, Kazakhstan privatized as a way of appeasing the regional leaders, who initially opposed direct foreign investment in the energy sector. The central government desperately needed budgetary revenue, which it could only obtain by attracting foreign investors to develop its main resource – oil and gas – for export. But to do so without the cooperation of regional leaders would have amounted to political suicide. In exchange for their endorsement of privatization, therefore, regional leaders were promised not only that foreign investment would include “social contributions” to the local budget but also that they would have control over issuing licenses and regulating foreign investors’ activities.⁵

Thus, regionalism helps us understand both why there has been so little economic reform and why there has been so much reform.

Second, my discovery of the nature and importance of informal politics in Central Asia convinced me of the need to take informal politics seriously and find a way to analyze them. The tendency among political scientists is to focus on formal institutions and outcomes because they are visible, and thus, much easier to see and much easier to measure in contrast to covert politics, which can only be captured through intensive field research. To the extent that we do study informal institutions, they are treated as merely a residual category; that is, everything that is not formal is informal.

What I have been attempting to do since this important discovery, therefore, is to bring informal, covert politics into the mainstream of our analysis, to study them in their own right, and to find a systematic way to measure the existence and effects of informal institutions. This is best illustrated in my current research on local governance

and state capacity in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

The conventional wisdom is that the Central Asian states have become increasingly centralized, and that political and economic power is concentrated in the president. Yet, this view is highly problematic, both because it misses the importance of regionalism as the primary mode of political contestation and because it is based on looking exclusively at formal institutions and drawing inferences from these institutions. My recent research on the quality of local governance and state capacity in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, moreover, indicates that Central Asian states are not as centralized as they appear (and are often assumed to be), but rather, aim to strike a careful balance between the demands or claims of central versus regional elites.

The case of Kazakhstan again serves to illustrate. According to both its 1993 and 1995 constitutions, Kazakhstan is a unitary state with a highly centralized budgetary system that operates in much the same manner as the Soviet one. Yet, regional officials actually have a great deal of de facto autonomy over economic policy-making and implementation.

I was able to demonstrate this by developing a variety of indicators to separate the official delimitation of authority for economic policy-making from the actual degree of autonomy that subnational leaders are exercising unofficially (in the fiscal, administrative, and regulatory spheres), and then, collecting empirical data to determine whether a significant gap exists between the two.⁶ These data included extensive interviews with the regional administration, tax authorities, and regulatory agencies, surveys of foreign investors operating in several regions and small business owners, as well as fiscal and budgetary data. In sum, they indicated that:

- regional tax and regulatory authorities are dually subordinated to central and subnational authorities – and, when they receive directives from both the central and regional levels of government that conflict, they are more likely to fulfill the latter;
- there is a significant gap between official rates of revenue sharing and the percentage of tax revenue that regions actually keep; and
- national regulations and standards are not consistently enforced at the subnational level and licenses and permits to contractors are issued at the discretion of subnational leaders.

Finally, the discovery of continuity convinced me that we focus too much on explaining change rather than continuity

and that we need to take the politics of non-democratic regimes seriously. We should not assume that elites desire a transition away from the previous regimes or toward something else. Instead, what we need to understand is what makes these regimes so stable; that is, how authoritarian regimes sustain themselves in different contexts.

My previous research on “pacted stability” in Central Asia provides a useful starting point for this analysis.⁷ As I already mentioned, the persistence of regional political identities facilitated the maintenance of authoritarian regimes in Central Asia by enabling leaders to negotiate “pacts” to maintain the status quo form of political contestation. But what makes it distinct from the elite “pacting” that characterized the “second wave” of democratic transitions?

First, these pacts are negotiated so as to solidify elites’ exclusive role in decision-making, rather than to inaugurate political liberalization by expanding the political process to include new and/or previously excluded interests. Similar to the “pacted transitions” that characterized democratization in Latin America and Southern Europe, the purpose of these elite-level agreements is to establish mutual guarantees. Yet, unlike the pacted transitions that have occurred elsewhere, they involve an explicit pledge to maintain “rules governing the exercise of power” rather than to redefine them so as to accommodate new political interests.

Second, the elites involved in making such agreements are bargaining from a position of mutual strength rather than mutual weakness. As incumbents whose rule has not been effectively challenged, these elites are not compelled to liberalize the political process in order to establish their authority and/or to gain legitimacy. Instead, they are united in their desire to preserve the features of the preceding regime that created and reinforced their previous status.

Elite-level agreements made under these conditions, therefore, are likely to inhibit rather than facilitate democratization. “Transition from above,” therefore, is not an appropriate metaphor for the former Soviet Union.

Area Studies and Social Science Theory

The bottom line here is that out of three empirical discoveries – discoveries I made through intensive field-work and empirical research – I have been able to make a theoretical contribution to three broad bodies of literature that represent the core of political science: 1) economic order, 2) state formation, and 3) regime type.

I say this not to applaud my own work, but rather, to make a large point about the relationship between “area

studies” and theory-building in the social sciences. Not surprisingly, my own experiences have solidified my views on this subject.

First, the intensive study of a specific country or countries within a region and the goal of theory-building are inseparable. The very purpose of “area studies” is to create a dialogue between a particular region of the world and the social sciences. Neither can survive – or indeed thrive – without this dialogue. Unfortunately, a false dichotomy has been created between the two. Yet, detailed empirical knowledge is necessary both for testing existing theories and constructing new theories. Detailed empirical knowledge of specific cases is also necessary to get the analytical categories right, and therefore, to know which cases are *truly* comparable. As my work clearly shows, the very structure of politics, the mode of political contestation, is historically defined and contextually contingent. Area studies, then, can be viewed as prior to theory formation because it is crucial to concept formation – and as any Berkeley graduate student knows, good concept formation is the first step to good theory.⁸ Second, we should aim for “contextually specific” or middle-range” theory-building. This only makes sense if we accept that political units are not “natural,” but created. This limits our ability to use broad categories. Historically specific categories, in turn, limit our ability to generalize. Does this mean that we should abandon the goal of “generalizability”? Absolutely not! But we should be more “modest” in our claims; that is, we should aim to specify the boundaries that demarcate the relevant universe of cases. Let me give you just one more example from my own work. There is a geographical and temporal pattern to elite “pact-making:” the main actors are regional elites in Central Asia, but they often involve military elites in Latin America and tribal elites in Africa; and elite pacts in Central Asia and Africa have been much more covert or informal than those that initiated transition to democracy in the “second wave.” Nonetheless, we can build theories about types of elite-pacting, where and when they are likely to exist, when they are likely to lead to authoritarianism versus democratization, and what might serve to undermine them.

Why Study Central Asia

I hope by now the answer to the question “Why

study Central Asia?” is clear. I started with the observation that the region has been in the headlines for the past year. But, in fact, long before the events of 9/11 and its aftermath there were lots of important reasons to study Central Asia. What these events did was to make it painstakingly clear that we had neglected this region for much too long. But it did not make Central Asia any more important than it already was – at least as far as I am concerned.

Endnotes

1. Perhaps the most infamous example of this is Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* 16, 1989: 3-18.
2. More details can be found in Pauline Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Power, Perceptions, and Pacts*, Cambridge and NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
3. For details, see Pauline Jones Luong, *Political Obstacles to Economic Reform in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan: Strategies to Move Ahead*, World Bank Working Paper, Washington D.C..
4. This is part of a book-length collaborative project on institutional design in resource-rich states (entitled *Energizing the State*) with Erika Weinthal, Department of Political Science, Tel Aviv University.
5. For details, see: Pauline Jones Luong and Erika Weinthal, “Prelude to the Resource Curse: Explaining Energy Development Strategies in the Soviet Successor States and Beyond,” *Comparative Political Studies* 34, 4 (May 2001): 367-99.
6. For more detail, refer to Pauline Jones Luong, “Economic Decentralization in Kazakhstan: Causes and Consequences” in Pauline Jones Luong, Editor, *The Transformation of Central Asia: State-Societal Relations from Soviet Rule to Independence*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, forthcoming.
7. See *Institutional Change and Political Continuity*, Chapter eight.
8. See, for example, David Collier and James Mahoney, “Conceptual Stretching Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis,” *APSR* 87, 1993: 845-55.

Chechnya, the Pankisi Gorge, and US Policy

Edward W. Walker

The following article is an edited version of a paper presented at a conference at Yale University, "Security and Insecurity in Central Asia and the Caucasus: A Regional Challenge with Global Implications," on 19-21 September 2002. The conference brought together policy makers and academic specialists working on Central Asia and the Caucasus. Presenters were asked to prepare memoranda that "highlighted policy conclusions and implications." Professor Walker was asked to focus on Chechnya and the North Caucasus.

Despite claims by Russian officials that federal forces have won the war in Chechnya, the conflict continues with no military solution in sight. Unfortunately, a political solution is also unlikely, though not inconceivable, for reasons I will discuss later. There are now some 80,000 Russian troops in the republic, and plans to reduce that figure by more than half have been suspended. Russian federal forces suffer ongoing losses, and fighting has not become significantly less intense over the past 18 months or so.

Just how badly the war is going for Moscow was highlighted dramatically by the crash of an Mi-26 transport helicopter on 19 August 2002 that left some 120 Russian servicemen and civilians dead. The crash, which occurred near the main Russian military base in Chechnya in an area the Russian military considered very secure, served as a vivid reminder to the Russian public that the war was not proceeding "according to plan," as the Soviets would have put it. Russian investigators later concluded that a Russian-made shoulder-fired missile shot down the helicopter. The fear in Moscow is that the incident represents a turning point in the war, much as the use of US-made Stinger missiles to down Soviet aircraft marked a turning point in the mujahedeen war in Afghanistan.

To date, the war in Chechnya has been shockingly destructive, particularly considering that the great bulk of the violence has taken place in an area that is just a bit larger than Connecticut and that had a population of less than one million in 1989. Moscow claims that some 14,500 Chechen fighters have been killed since 1999, when the latest round of the war broke out, and that 4,500 or so Russian servicemen have been lost. (The latter figure is disputed by, among others, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, which claims that the total is substantially greater.) Russian commentators have pointed out that the casualty rate for Russian servicemen over the past three years is even higher than the rate of Soviet losses during the Afghan conflict.

Civilian casualties are particularly difficult to estimate, but they certainly number in the tens of thousands since 1999 – and tens of thousands more were killed in the first round of the war in 1994-96. Many are dying in Russian "cleansing operations" (*zachistki*), while others are victims of rebel reprisals or are caught in the crossfire of federal-rebel fighting. Numerous officials in the pro-Russian Chechen government have been killed, and there have also been many "vendetta" killings, some of which may be politically motivated, although others seem to reflect the general disorder in the republic. Beyond the human losses, there has been massive destruction of property and infrastructure. As a result, there is no prospect of economic normalization, despite claims by Moscow that significant federal funds have been earmarked for Chechen reconstruction.

For those who manage to survive, conditions inside the republic are appalling. The *zachistki*, which are officially referred to as "*adresnye proverki*," or "document checks," are characterized by arbitrary detentions, torture, murder, and shakedowns of civilians. Constant abuse by Russian forces has alienated even those segments of the Chechen population that initially supported the Russian intervention. A great many inhabitants have also fled. Some 110,000-150,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs – they are not classified as refugees by the UN because they have not fled across an internationally recognized border) are currently living in Ingushetia in tents or other temporary facilities or are being housed by local citizens. Some have fled to other parts of the North Caucasus or elsewhere in Russia, while many have managed to relocate abroad. An estimated 150,000 have been displaced within Chechnya itself, many of whom are living in tents

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and other temporary shelters in the republic's northern districts. Russian federal officials and the pro-Russian government in Chechnya are pressuring the IDPs in and around Chechnya to return to their homes, often depriving them of support (including closings of tent camps in northern Chechnya) and misleading them about the conditions they will return to. Many of those who do return report horrific conditions and assert that they would much rather have remained in the IDP facilities.

The human rights record of the Chechen "opposition" (itself very diverse and decentralized) is also atrocious. The Chechen resistance has a history of extreme brutality towards prisoners, of kidnapping of innocents for ransom, of targeting civilians (particularly pro-Moscow Chechen "collaborators"), and of inter-factional violence. The sad truth is that a rapid withdrawal of Russian troops would almost certainly mean a return to the virtual anarchy, widespread violence, and poverty that characterized Chechnya under Dudaev in 1992-94 and Maskhadov in 1996-99.

Moscow's position on the war is that the borders that it inherited from the Soviet period have been recognized by the international community, that Chechnya is part of the Russian Federation under international law, that Chechnya does not have – and never has had – a right of secession under either Soviet or Russian law, and that the Chechen resistance has been inspired and supported by international Islamist terrorist organizations, including al-Qaeda. Its military operation in the republic is thus justified as a defense of territorial integrity, an effort to restore order to a lawless area, a means to protect Russian society from lawlessness, banditry, and terrorism perpetrated by Chechen resistance forces, and part of the campaign against international terrorism.

Of these claims, the least credible is that international terrorist organizations are playing a decisive role in the conflict. To be sure, there is clear evidence of ties between al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and other militant Islamists and some elements in the Chechen resistance, including the radical Chechen field commander Shamil Basaev and the former leader of the Chechen "Arabs," Ibn al-Khattab, who was killed earlier this year. But the role of external forces appears to be exaggerated by Moscow, and in all likelihood what support there was has diminished since the collapse of the Taliban. The important point is that the Chechen resistance is fundamentally an indigenous one, and it will continue even without significant external support from Islamists or other Chechen sympathizers abroad.

Politically, there is mounting political pressure on

Putin to bring an end to the fighting, either through a military victory or some kind of settlement. The war is increasingly unpopular, and the great majority of Russians do not believe that a military victory is likely. A poll taken in late spring 2002 indicated 62 percent support for negotiations with Chechen resistance leaders, an increase from 22 percent in 2001. Another poll published on August 29 showed that only 31 percent of respondents supported continued military actions in Chechnya, while 59 percent favored negotiations. Only five percent believed that war had been a success, or that it would be over before the end of the year, while 37 percent felt the war would not be over "even in 10-15 years." Additionally, prominent Russian public figures are beginning to come out in favor of negotiations. In July, Ivan Rybkin, one-time secretary of the Russian Security Council and a former speaker of the State Duma, published an open letter to Putin calling for negotiations with Maskhadov. More recently, Yevgenii Primakov, former Russian prime minister and one of the few Russian political figures other than Putin who still commands the respect of much of the Russian public, argued for opening talks with Chechen oppositionists who renounce terrorism and ties to international terrorist organizations.

While it realizes that the war is going badly, the Russian public is also understandably convinced that Chechnya represents a serious and ongoing security threat, and it believes that the region serves as a base for terrorist operations directed against Russia proper. It is also very unclear about just what should be done to deal with this threat.

Despite the lack of military success, Putin himself remains extremely popular – a recent poll showed 73 percent approval of the president's performance. Other politicians, and Russia's political institutions and parties in general, however, remain very unpopular. For example, a poll taken last month showed only five percent approval of Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, while a poll taken by American researchers showed that trust in the military was very low. Thus, while the war has not cost him politically in the short run, Putin and his advisors doubtless realize that in the long run the war is a political loser. With parliamentary elections due in Russia in 2003 and presidential elections in 2004, Putin therefore has considerable incentive either to begin negotiating with the resistance leaders or, like Yeltsin in the summer of 1996, to position himself to argue that an end to the violence may be in sight.

This pressure will only increase if the Russian economy suffers another major setback. The war would then prove an even greater financial burden, making a

military victory less likely. Indeed, there are already reports that the strapped Russian military is facing shortages of munitions and equipment because of cutbacks in defense spending, and the situation would only get worse should the economy go in the tank.

Putin's political problem is that he has repeatedly claimed that the war has been won – what is underway now is said to be a “mopping up” operation, a claim that very few Russians believe. Federal officials are also trying to return the republic to a semblance of “normal” civilian rule by building up the pro-Moscow Chechen administration headed by Akhmed Kadyrov. Much emphasis has been placed by Moscow on a referendum to be held in March 2003 on a new constitution for the republic. In all likelihood, however, the Chechen people, the international community, and even the Russian people will consider the referendum illegitimate. In addition, Kadyrov himself is politically vulnerable. He seems to have little support in Chechen society; he has rivals within the pro-Moscow Chechen administration; and he is increasingly at odds with the Russian military as a result of his frequent criticism of the military's cleansing operations and human rights abuses. It also appears that the Chechen police force that the Russians have built up is at least as brutal as Russian interior ministry troops toward the local population (Chechen police are increasingly involved in the *zachistki*), and even more corrupt. Russian officials also claim that many members of the Chechen police force are sympathetic to the rebels, and that they sell the resistance arms, provide them with intelligence, protect them from the Russians, and harbor them within their ranks.

Chechen society appears increasingly war-weary after years of devastating conflict. Western journalists report that many Chechens interviewed in the IDP camps say they are tired of the conflict and simply wish to return to their homes. Nor are prospects good for a decisive battlefield victory, such as the seizure of Grozny by Chechen forces at the end of the last round of the war in 1996. September 11 has meant much less sympathy for the rebels in the West, particularly among governments but also among the public. The collapse of the Taliban and intense pressure on the international Islamist movement by Washington and its allies in the war on terror has meant less material and moral support from foreign Islamists. As a result, the Chechen resistance is unlikely to force the Russians to withdraw, as in 1996. It should also be clear to resistance leaders that no Russian president will accept a fully independent Chechnya for the foreseeable future. With less outside support and a determined Russian campaign to “destroy the bandits,” together with the

brutalization of the Chechen population by the Russian military, the leadership of the resistance must realize that it risks becoming less militarily effective in the coming years. It also faces incentives to resort to more extreme methods, including suicide bombings and terrorist attacks on civilian targets.

The death of Khattab, as well as Basaev's willingness to subordinate himself to Maskhadov, means there is more unity among the leaders of the resistance than was the case when the latest war began. It is therefore conceivable that Maskhadov can speak for most elements of the resistance in discussions with Moscow. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that the Chechen leadership has toned down its militant Islamic program, at least that I am aware of.

Nevertheless, I believe that there is a window of opportunity to open serious discussions either before parliamentary elections in Russia in summer 2003 or before the presidential elections in 2004. By then, it will probably be clear that neither heavy pressure by Moscow on Georgia over Pankisi nor the decline in Western sympathy for the rebels caused by the US-led war on terrorism will end Chechen resistance. Putin is therefore likely at some point to take some initiative to at least start negotiations with Maskhadov.

Indeed, over the past year both sides have shown signs of wanting to begin a dialogue. In November 2001, the first meeting took place between representatives of Putin and Maskhadov when Viktor Kazantsev, the Russian president's representative to the Southern Federal District, and Akhmed Zakaev, a deputy premier of the rebel government, met at an airport outside Moscow. Both Kazantsev and Zakaev characterized the talks as productive. The Kremlin, however, downplayed the meeting, apparently because it felt that Chechen demands were unrealistic. In August, Ivan Rybkin met Zakaev in Zurich, reportedly with Putin's blessing. According to Rybkin, Zakaev essentially repeated the proposals that he had submitted to Kazantsev at the end of last year, proposals that Rybkin characterized as “serious” and “realistic.”

After the Zurich meeting, Rybkin and Zakaev participated in unofficial discussions from August 16 to August 19 in Liechtenstein sponsored by the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya. Also in attendance at the meeting were Aslanbek Aslakhonov, the elected representative from Chechnya to the Duma, and Ruslan Khasbulatov, an ethnic Chechen and another former leader of the Russian Duma (who was hated by the Yeltsin administration for his role in the political crisis in Moscow in December 1993). Two peace plans were reportedly

discussed at the session, a “Khasbulatov Plan” and a “Brzezinski Plan” (the latter had been outlined in an article by Brzezinski and Alexander Haig, both members of the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya, in the *Washington Post* in June). At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that the two plans would be merged into a “Liechtenstein Plan,” whereby Chechnya would remain formally part of the Russian Federation but with extensive autonomy – as in virtually all peace plans that have been proposed since war broke out in 1994. Indeed, the terms of the Khasbulatov, Brzezinski-Haig, and Liechtenstein plans are less important than the fact that the Liechtenstein meeting took place at all and that Putin and Maskhadov reportedly endorsed the attendance of Aslakhonov and Zakaev.

Even if a serious dialogue begins, however, great obstacles to a political settlement remain. Moscow’s position has been that any agreement will have to be based on the following principles: (1) the preservation of the Russian Federation’s territorial integrity, although the status of Chechnya as part of the Federation is open; (2) a “single economic space” (which presumably means no tariffs and a common currency); (3) a “single defense zone” (which presumably means no separate Chechen army, although local “militia” forces might be acceptable); and (4) federal control of border troops. In contrast, Maskhadov insists that any agreement must provide for (1) a return to the terms of the “Khasavyurt Agreement” signed by Yeltsin and Maskhadov on 12 May 1997, which essentially entailed a renunciation of the use of force by both parties; (2) Russian recognition of the legitimacy of Maskhadov and the Chechen parliament; (3) the continuity of Chechen law; and (4) an immediate cease-fire. Perhaps the critical bone of contention, however, has been the presence of Russian troops inside Chechnya to maintain internal order. Even Russian liberals are reluctant to endorse a full withdrawal because they fear this would return the republic to the lawlessness of the Dudaev era and open it up to increased infiltration by Islamist terrorists, while Maskhadov will find it extremely difficult to agree to an arrangement that allows federal forces, now so deeply implicated in human rights abuses, to remain in the republic.

The positions of the two sides are thus very distant. Above all, it is extremely unlikely that Putin will ever accept an agreement that provides for the continuity of Chechen law. Both the Chechen constitution and its laws are highly Islamicized, providing for the implementation of Sharia, and they clearly violate the Russian constitution. And it will be politically difficult, to say the least,

for Putin to agree to anything that requires an amendment to the Russian Constitution.

Let me turn now to the Pankisi Gorge and the tense relationship between Russia and Georgia. Approximately 20 kilometers long, the Gorge is located in a remote, inaccessible, and poor region in the mountains of Georgia near the border with Russia/Chechnya. A majority of the local population is comprised of some 7,000–8,000 Kists (essentially ethnic Chechens). In addition, an estimated 4,000–5,000 Chechen refugees have fled to the region, most since the beginning of the 1999 war. Since the Soviet collapse, Pankisi has been essentially beyond the writ of the central Georgian government (as is true of all highland areas in Georgia), and it has acquired a reputation for widespread criminal activities, particularly smuggling operations into Chechnya and Russia proper.

It is clear that Chechen rebels have used the region as a staging area to mount operations against Russian federal forces in Chechnya. The rebel field-commander, Ruslan Gelaev, and his fighters have been based in Pankisi. The region has also been used to evacuate wounded and rest exhausted fighters, as well as a point of entry for volunteer fighters (some Islamist, some not), weapons, supplies, and money into Chechnya. Chechen refugees in Pankisi are also reported to have sheltered rebel fighters on occasion, in accordance with Chechen traditions, and refugees have arrived with arms and have taken part episodically in Chechen resistance activities. It appears, however, that most Kists do not support the rebels. Indeed, they have repeatedly complained about “criminal activities” in the region and reportedly support efforts by Tbilisi to “restore order” there.

It is also important to appreciate that most external material support for the resistance makes its way in Chechnya across the more accessible borders of Ingushetia and Dagestan (the upper Pankisi is blanketed by snows approximately half the year). Moreover, most weapons and supplies used by the resistance appear to be purchased, stolen, or captured from Russian forces (including some based in Georgia).

After years of implausible denials, Shevardnadze finally admitted in late 2001 that Chechen fighters were based in the region. By summer 2002, Georgian officials put the number of Chechen fighters in the region between 150 and 800, depending on the intensity of the fighting in Chechnya, and emphasized that these fighters were driven into the region by Russian forces and had not been invited by the Georgian government. Georgian officials also indicated that as many as 100 non-Chechen *jihaddists*

were based in Pankisi. That number is very likely exaggerated, however. The estimate may have been influenced by the desire of Georgian officials to justify the American-funded Train and Equip Program announced earlier this year (see below).

US intelligence is apparently convinced that there are (or at least were until recently) non-Chechen Islamists in the Pankisi region, some of whom have ties to al-Qaeda. In February, the American charge d'affaires in Tbilisi, Philip Remler, announced that the US believed that Islamic radicals fleeing Afghanistan were moving into the region. Georgian officials also confirmed rumors that US intelligence intercepted a telephone call from Afghanistan to Georgia in the midst of the terrorist attacks of September 11.

Shortly after Remler made his statement, the US announced a \$64 million Train and Equip Program that has sent some 100 US Special Operations instructors to Georgia to improve the effectiveness of elite Georgian troops. The primary objective is to allow Tbilisi to dispatch troops to Pankisi, to reduce criminal activity in the region; to capture, kill, or expel any *jihadists* who may still be there; and to drive any Chechen rebels from the region, thereby keeping them from using it as a staging area. It is hoped that this will prevent a further deterioration in Georgian-Russian relations and convince Moscow that it does not need to bomb Georgian territory or to send ground troops into the region.

As for Moscow, it has claimed that hundreds of Chechen rebels and "terrorists" are based in Pankisi, that Georgia has failed to deny Chechen rebels access to its territory, and that Georgia is unable or unwilling to control its border. The FSB has also claimed that some of those responsible for the September 1999 apartment bombings in Moscow have taken refuge in Georgia. Moscow is insisting that Georgia extradite some 17 Chechen rebels captured in Pankisi in early August, which Georgia has refused to do, saying it will instead prosecute them under Georgian law for entering their territory illegally.

Russian planes have repeatedly entered Georgian airspace and on occasion bombed Georgian territory in the Pankisi region. While Russia has half-heartedly denied these incursions, they have been confirmed by OCSE observers. The most serious incident occurred on 23 August 2002, when Russian military jets crossed the border and bombed a village, killing one Georgian citizen and wounding seven others. While ostensibly intended to destroy Chechen "bandits" and "terrorists," the bombings have targeted local villages and have been militarily pointless. They therefore appear to be aimed at pressuring Georgia and, indirectly, Washington, to deny Chechen rebels access to Pankisi, and

they serve as an implicit threat that Russia may send ground troops into the Pankisi if Georgia refuses to crack down. It is, however, very unlikely that Russia actually will send ground troops across the border, above all because doing so will have little effect on the Chechen resistance. The approaching winter snows will also soon make a ground operation by Russian troops in the region impossible until the spring, making any incursion launched in the next several weeks necessarily of very short duration.

Nevertheless, in early September Moscow began ratcheting up its pressure on Tbilisi. In a statement on the anniversary of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Putin used language very similar to that used by the Bush administration to justify US operations in Afghanistan and a possible US military campaign against Iraq in obvious reference to Pankisi, stating: "One of the reasons interfering with the effective struggle against terrorism is that in certain parts of the world territorial enclaves remain outside the control of the national governments which—for a variety of reasons—cannot or do not want to confront the terrorist threat." Russia, he affirmed, would take "adequate measures" to defend itself regarding Pankisi. This was followed by a letter from Putin to Kofi Annan, the permanent members of the UN Security Council, and the OSCE, in which he asserted: "If the Georgian leadership does not take concrete actions to destroy the terrorists, and bandit incursions continue from its territory, Russia will take adequate measures to counteract the terrorist threat, in strict accordance with international law."

Moscow's emphasis on Pankisi is apparently driven by three considerations: (1) first and foremost, the need to find a scapegoat for the Russian military's failure to achieve the long-promised victory in Chechnya; (2) the fact that Pankisi gives Moscow leverage over Shevardnadze on the many points of dispute in Georgian-Russian relations; and (3) political leverage over the United States, which finds it very difficult to oppose Russian military action in Pankisi on principle when it is justified on the same grounds as US actions in Afghanistan and the threatened action against Iraq.

Georgians, for their part, have a tendency to blame Russia for all that has gone wrong in their country since independence, particularly the secessionist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They are therefore extremely sensitive to perceived bullying by Moscow and are highly defensive about the need to protect Georgian sovereignty. They suspect that Russia's pressure over Pankisi is simply another effort by Moscow to dismember their state and humiliate them. Georgian officials also hope that Russian violations of their sovereignty will win them

sympathy in the West and secure greater support from Western governments, above all Washington. In addition, they hope that the conflict in Chechnya and Pankisi will provide them with added leverage in negotiations with Moscow over Russia's remaining military bases in Georgia, as well as in their efforts to persuade Moscow to cease support for the secessionist governments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Tbilisi has responded to Russia's mounting pressure over Pankisi by attempting, with US support, to reestablish central writ in the region. On 25 August, some 1,000-1,500 Georgian interior ministry troops, police officers, and special forces moved into Pankisi to "cleanse the area of all criminals and terrorists." Two days earlier, apparently in an effort to avoid armed clashes with Chechen rebels, Shevardnadze warned all male Chechens who were not Georgian citizens to leave the Pankisi region. Georgian officials claim that the operation has resulted in the arrest of some half dozen "criminals" and at least one non-Chechen suspected of being a "terrorist."

There have, however, been no reports of armed clashes between Georgian troops and Chechen resistance fighters. It seems instead that whatever Chechen fighters were in the area have blended into the refugee population, taken to the forests, or left. Indeed, there have been reports of Chechen rebels moving into South Ossetia and even Abkhazia. Georgian troops have set up checkpoints in villages in Pankisi and have begun registering refugees and issuing new identity cards. They have also stated that they will try to collect all weapons in the area. Meanwhile, Chechen resistance leaders have claimed that they welcome the operation because Russia will no longer have an excuse to bomb Chechen refugees and Kist villages on Georgian territory, or to blame Georgia for the Russian military's inability to achieve victory by force of arms.

What, then, are US interests in this conflict? In the short term, of course, the US needs a cooperative Russia in its war on terrorism. Washington therefore does not want Chechnya or a military clash between Russia and Georgia to derail the improvement in US-Russian relations that has taken place since 9/11. In the longer term, our most profound interest in the former Soviet space is a stabilized, democratized, and prosperous Russia that identifies itself as part of the West. The Chechen conflict is the single most important factor standing in the way of a normalized political life in Russia. Moreover, US interests are also served by a stabilized, democratized, prosperous, and sovereign Georgia, as well as by the development of Caspian oil and gas reserves and their successful delivery

to international markets. All these goals will be facilitated by a settlement of the Chechen conflict.

The US has recognized the borders that the Russian Federation inherited from the Soviet past, and it cannot and will not sanction the unilateral secession of Chechnya. Nevertheless, it will not, and should not, object to Chechen independence in the unlikely event that it is negotiated and sanctioned by Moscow. Beyond that, the US has no stake in any particular outcome of the Chechen conflict. Overwhelmingly, its primary interest is that the conflict come to an end. It also has a humanitarian interest in seeing the violence cease and the misery of the Chechen people alleviated. Finally, it has an interest in ensuring that other states, including Russia, respect human rights and not use excessive and indiscriminate force in defense of territorial integrity. Given that a military solution to the conflict is unlikely, US interests are therefore served by negotiations between Moscow and the Chechen resistance that lead to a political settlement. It is important to appreciate, however, that Washington's leverage over Russia on Chechnya is very limited, particularly given the Bush administration's plans regarding Iraq, as is its influence over Chechen resistance leaders. Washington does, however, have considerably more leverage over Tbilisi.

With respect to the Pankisi situation, the US wants good relations with both Georgia and Russia. It therefore has an interest in seeing Russian-Georgian relations improve. At the same time, Washington wants any Islamists in Pankisi or Chechnya with ties to international terrorist organizations to be captured or killed, and international terrorists denied access to the region. Given its support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity not only of Georgia but of all Soviet successor states, the US also wants to persuade Moscow to stop bombing Georgia and not to send ground troops into Pankisi. It would, and should, object very vigorously if Russian troops go into Pankisi with what appears to be an intention to stay. In short, US interests are best served by a successful Georgian operation to secure Pankisi and Moscow's forbearance in attacking the region, which is exactly what the Train and Equip Program is designed to effect.

In light of these interests, I make the following recommendations.

First, Washington should stop objecting to Russian military incursions into Georgia on the grounds that Moscow has no right to violate Georgia's sovereignty. Instead, it should object on grounds of practical politics and efficacy. The US has repeatedly taken the position that, when overriding security interests are at stake (including but not limited to self-defense in response to attack), it has

the right to violate the sovereignty of other states. The fact is that Russia faces an obvious and immediate security threat in and around Chechnya, including the Pankisi region. Even Georgian officials have admitted that Chechen rebels and some non-Chechen *ihadists* have been based in Pankisi. Telling Russia to respect the sovereignty of Georgia after US military operations in Afghanistan and the NATO campaign against Serbia, and as the US makes preparations to invade Iraq, appears strikingly hypocritical and only provokes greater cynicism towards the US in Moscow policy circles. It also has the perverse effect of increasing the political capital that Putin accrues by taking an aggressive position on the issue. I should add, however, that is also hypocritical for Russia to insist that the US receive Security Council endorsement for any attack on Iraq, but then claim that it has a unilateral right to take military action against Georgia without Security Council approval.

Instead, US officials should state repeatedly and argue vigorously that any Russian incursion into Pankisi would be militarily pointless and politically counterproductive. Not only would such an incursion risk alienating local Kists, it would make it politically more difficult for the Georgian government to move against Chechen rebels because of intensified anti-Russian sentiments among the Georgian people and political elite. It would also strengthen anti-Russian feelings in the West. Finally, more incursions would reinforce fears in other parts of the former Soviet Union (e.g., the Baltics, Azerbaijan, Ukraine) of Russian irredentism and imperialist aspirations.

Second, the US Train and Equip Program should continue. To the extent possible, Moscow should be encouraged to support Tbilisi's efforts to secure the region. At the same time, US officials should point out that the Georgians will not be able to seal the border completely or deny the Chechen opposition all access to Georgian territory, just as Russia is unable to secure its borders or prevent supplies and funding making their way into Chechnya from Ingushetia and Dagestan. Every effort should also be made to reassure Moscow that the program is designed to help Russia with its security problems in Pankisi and not to help Georgian troops retake Abkhazia or South Ossetia, or otherwise threaten Russian interests. US officials should also make clear to their Georgian counterparts that any effort to resolve the Abkhaz or South Ossetian problems by force at this time will be viewed extremely unfavorably and would jeopardize US economic and military support. Shevardnadze and other Georgian officials should also be encouraged to tone down their anti-Russian rhetoric, to the extent pos-

sible given Georgian public sentiments. In general, this seems to have been happening already, although Shevardnadze and other Georgian officials continue to make provocative and unhelpful public statements. For example, Shevardnadze recently made the very implausible, and gratuitous, suggestion that Moscow had deliberately driven Chechen rebels into Georgian territory in order to give Russia an excuse to seize Georgian territory.

Third, regarding Chechnya, the US should make every effort to avoid any suggestion (such as the recent statement by the US ambassador to Moscow, Alexander Vershbow implying that Maskhadov is a terrorist) that it believes the conflict is fundamentally a problem of international terrorism and thus a legitimate part of the war on terror. Maskhadov may or may not be supporting terrorism (the evidence is not entirely clear, at least to me). But as long as he is alive, he is the rebel leader with whom Moscow will have to deal, just Arafat is the Palestinian leader with whom Israel has to deal, regardless of how much he is loathed by the Israelis. The US should instead continue to take the position that, while some elements in the Chechen opposition have had ties to international terrorism, and while it welcomes Russian efforts to target *ihadists* in the region, the Chechen conflict is fundamentally an indigenous one that is rooted in popular opposition to Russian military occupation and to the current campaign of brutality being carried out by the Russian military. The US should also continue to repeat endlessly that it supports the territorial integrity of Russia but that it believes a military solution is impossible and that a political settlement, whatever it entails, is very much in the interest of the Russian Federation and the Russian people. It should not, however, take a position on the terms of any agreement. Nor should it offer to help mediate the conflict. Doing so would only irritate the Russians and reinforce the belief of many Russians that the US is intent upon humbling Russia by encouraging Chechen secession.

Fourth, with respect to the human rights situation in Chechnya, the US should continue to emphasize that while Russia has the right to use force to defend its territorial integrity, it does not have a right to use indiscriminate and disproportionate force, or to violate the rules of war by targeting civilians or resorting to arbitrary detentions, torture, and murder. The key point is that means and ends matter. The United States had a right to send troops into Afghanistan after 9/11 – it did not, however, have the right to indiscriminately or deliberately kill Afghan civilians or to torture or summarily execute supporters of the Taliban or al-Qaeda. If it had done so, it would have deservedly lost the support of the Afghan people, the international com-

munity, and the American public. Accordingly, the US should press Putin, both in public and in private, to demand that the Russian military change its methods of operation in Chechnya. It should also encourage Russian officials to arrest and prosecute soldiers who commit human rights violations. Washington should also insist, however, that the Chechen opposition sever all ties to international terrorist organizations, respect human rights, and refrain from terrorism.

Political support and financing from Washington for humanitarian assistance provided in and around Chechnya by the UNHCR and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross, should also continue. Washington should continue to emphasize the multilateral quality of this assistance and downplay its own role in the program because of Russian sensibilities regarding US interference in its internal affairs. The US, its allies, and the international humanitarian assistance community should also keep pressing Russia vigorously not to force IDPs in Ingushetia or within Chechnya to return to their homes against their wills, and they should publicize and condemn any violations in this regard. Human rights organizations should be encouraged to expand their operations in and around Chechnya so that they are better able to report on human violations and alleviate the sufferings of civilians. And the State Department should not pull its punches regarding Russian (and Chechen) human rights abuses in its annual human rights report.

Fifth, the US should continue to encourage the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to take the lead role (rather than Washington itself) in pressing Moscow to modify its military practices in Chechnya, to enter into negotiations with the Chechen opposition, and to seek a political solution to the conflict. Again, direct pressure from Washington would likely backfire. If the opportunity arises, and Moscow seems amenable, the US should support the dispatching of another OSCE mission to the republic. That seems unlikely, however, because of Russian objections to the OSCE's earlier role and the belief that, unlike PACE, the OSCE is unduly influenced by the US. The US should, however, respond favorably to Georgia's request that the OSCE observer force in the Pankisi region be enhanced if it is warranted by conditions on the ground in Pankisi. Washington should also encourage its European allies to continue to bring up Russian human rights violations in Chechnya both in public and in private with Russian officials. The message should be that Russia will never be considered fully part of Europe or a "normal"

country as long as the Chechen conflict continues at its current level of intensity and in the face of ongoing brutality by the Russian military.

Finally, the US should do nothing to discourage, and should quietly encourage, second-track diplomacy such as the Liechtenstein initiative. However, it should also be very careful not to taint these efforts in the minds of Russian officials by any overt support. And it should take no position on the details of any peace plans that emerge from these efforts.

Update

On 23-26 October 2002, a little more than a month after this paper was presented in New Haven, a major hostage-taking incident took place in Moscow in which some 900 people were held captive at the Nord-Ost House of Culture by 40-50 Chechen terrorists. Russian troops stormed the theater on October 26, using a gas that is a reportedly a derivative of fentanyl, possibly with the addition other chemicals, to stun the terrorists. While it rendered the terrorists unconscious, the gas also killed as many as 200 hostages (although the final toll is still very much in dispute in Moscow). All of the hostage-takers were also killed, most of them apparently shot by Russian special forces, apparently in an effort to prevent them from killing hostages or from detonating any of the explosives they had dispersed around the building or had secured to their bodies. The incident was traumatic for Muscovites in particular, reminding them that they are vulnerable to "spectacular martyrdom acts" by Chechen terrorists. There has also been an outcry in the Russian press over the failure of federal officials to prepare adequately for treating the hostages after the theater was stormed. A second major terrorist attack occurred on 27 December when three suicide bombers detonated two car bombs that destroyed headquarters of the pro-Moscow government in Grozny. The explosions killed over 80 and injured another 150, including the republic's deputy prime minister. Nord-Ost and the bombing of the government building in Grozny have led to a modest increase in public support in Russia for prosecuting the Chechen war even more vigorously. They have also made a political settlement even less likely in the short term, particularly in light of Moscow's efforts to have Maskhadov's government designated a terrorist organization by Washington and other capitals, as well as its attempts to have Zakaev extradited first from Denmark and then from Britain to Russia for prosecution. Nevertheless, in the longer term they increase political pressure on Putin to take some kind of initiative, military or (hopefully) political, that holds out hope for a resolution to the war by the time parliamentary and presidential elections are held in Russia in 2003 and 2004, respectively.

Preserving Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage

Osmund Bopearachchi

The civilized world woke up from a long sleep to see clouds of smoke rising above the Buddha statues in Bamiyan. The threat so often dismissed as inconsequential became a ghastly reality in early March 2001. The Taliban, those notorious students of Islam who had terrorized Afghanistan for five long years with the blessing of certain countries, had to blow up the colossal statues of Buddha dating back to the fifth and sixth century for the world to take an interest in a long forgotten and abandoned country. The destruction of the Buddhas marks neither the beginning nor the end of a long history.

The destruction of the Afghan patrimony is no longer a problem that concerns the Afghan people alone, who over the years have suffered the devastation of a civil war caused both by international policies and disputes between rival factions. When the Taliban came to power in 1996, the building housing the Kabul Museum had already been destroyed and ancient sites such as Ai Khanoum, Hadda, Tepe Shotor, Bactres and Tepe Marandjan, explored by French and Afghan archeologists, had already been ransacked. The short version of the story will serve to remind us that the fall of the Taliban regime may not mark the end of the destruction of the Afghan legacy. The pillaging took place before, during and after the Taliban regime. Today the destruction of ancient sites has reached its apogee.

My contribution here is partly based on the UNESCO reports of Carla Grissmann, (consultant for the Society for the Conservation of the Afghan Cultural Heritage), on books and articles by Emmanuel de Roux, Roland Pierre Paringaux and Philippe Flandrin. Flandrin provided me with the essentials of the political situation of Afghanistan after the fall of the pro-Soviet regime. When I traveled to Afghanistan last August, I was able to see a number of ancient sites for myself, including Bamiyan, Tepe Marandjan, Begram and of course the Museum at the heart of our discussion, the Kabul Museum.

I would like to thank Mr. Omara Khan Maçoudi, Curator of the Kabul Museum, and Mr. Abdul Wasi Firousi, President of the Archeology Institute of Kabul. I would also like to thank two devoted archeologists, Safar Paiman and Nader Rassouli. I am very grateful to Mr. Christian Manhart, UNESCO and ACTED for their collaboration. I would however add that I am solely responsible for the content of this article. I venture to express my own views on these burning issues based on my ten years' experience doing fieldwork on Afghanistan's vulnerable heritage.

The present article will focus primarily on the Kabul Museum, since there are almost no museums left outside the capital. Except for the Herat Museum where a few items remain in storerooms, all other museums, such as Hadda, Jalalabad, Pul-e-Khumribb and Mazar-e-Sharif, have been thoroughly looted and pillaged over the past ten years.

The history of the Kabul Museum begins in 1919. A selection of manuscripts, royal insignia, art works and antique arms collected by the royal family was exhibited at the Bagh-e-Bala palace, the palace of the Moon of Abdurrahman Khan. Some years later the exhibition moved to the royal palace at the center of the capital. In 1931, the collections were moved to a building located near Dar ul-Aman that would become the Kabul Museum. Since that time, the collection has been augmented by art works unearthed by the French Archeological Delegation in Afghanistan and later by Italian and Japanese experts. In time, the Kabul Museum became one of the most beautiful and richest museums in Central Asia and North West India.

The first years of the jihad were disastrous for Afghanistan. The country was destroyed systematically by the bombing. In 1989, the Museum curator, Nadjibullah, feared for the collection and decided to divide it between three different locations: the Central Treasury Bank, the Ministry of Information and Culture, and the storerooms of the Museum itself. The twenty thousand objects of gold and silver exhumed by Russian archaeologist Viktor Sarianidi from the six tombs of Tillya-Tepe, were found in coffers stored at the central Treasury Bank.

In April 1992, after fourteen years of war, the Mujahiddin took over Kabul. Skirmishes between rival factions began in spring 1993. The Kabul Museum was on the front line and was totally destroyed. The location

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of the museum, three miles from the city center and opposite the Royal Palace (which housed the Ministry of Defense), worked against it. Rockets demolished the roof of the building, and the collection exhibited on the first floor was destroyed.

The nearby Institute of Archaeologists was also severely damaged. More than four thousand objects deposited in the storerooms of the Museum were stolen.

When the area was cut off by the fighting and the Museum staff unable to reach Dar ul-Aman, the looters took everything humanly possible. Missing items include ivories from Bagram, bronze statues, Buddha statues, and thousands of coins. A good part of the collection was sold out of the destruction. In Philippe Flandrin's apt description:

Three quarters of the collections that have been found were removed without any iconoclastic intent. The pillaging of the Museum follows the same surgical rules as the looting of castles. It is carried out with method and order, under the guidance of professional thieves who take care to salvage, along with the valuables, the corresponding catalogues and inventories that identify the stolen items. (*Afghanistan. Les trésors sataniques*, p.43)

A powerful Minister under the government of Bénazir Bhutto reportedly bought more than half of all the Bagram ivories. In Peshawar and London, I personally saw thousands of coins and statues stolen from the Kabul Museum, as well as the foot of a cult statue unearthed in Ai Khanoum by the French archeologists in the seventies.

Events of 1993 marked the beginning of a period of anarchy. The civil war between rival factions since the collapse of the communist government in 1992 and the retreat of its Soviet allies opened the way for systematic looting of ancient sites. Sites like Ai Khanoum, Hadda, Bagram and Bactres today have been riddled with holes.

The monastery and the Buddha Stupa of Tepe Shotor in Hadda near Jalalabad, explored by Afghan archeologists, have been constantly looted. The site is now completely stripped of all the statues left in situ. The archeological site of Hadda was first damaged by the war and then completely ransacked. The city of Bactria, excavated clandestinely since 1995, disclosed crenellated columns similar to the Greek columns found in Ai Khanoum. In Dolatabad near Balkh, in northern Afghanistan, tombs dating back the Bronze Age were looted, and the objects appeared at Peshawar bazaars as early as 1993. These misdeeds have destroyed, not only the work of generations of archeologists, numismatists, and ethnographers, but also the historical memory of an entire people.

An object of art, once removed from its archaeological context, loses more than half its historical value. If its origins are unknown, a work of art is a mere object without a soul. For this reason, I have struggled to learn, if possible, the origins of pieces from clandestine excavations before they appear in auction catalogues. However, whether this work is done or not, it is impossible to divert them from their final destinations – sale catalogs, where these objects are listed with impunity. I have seen thousand of these catalogues of clandestinely exhumed objects in Bazaars in Peshawar.

It is in this unfortunate situation that one of the largest deposits of coins known in the history of currencies was discovered by chance at some time between 1992 and 1995, in Mir Zakah, located on Afghan territory in Pakhtia province, near the Pakistan border. No one is able to tell how exactly the treasure was discovered. We only know that it was found at the bottom of a well. These Afghan clandestine excavators, at the price of disputes that cost several lives, had their hands on a real gold mine. Based on my inquiries and my calculations, this coin deposit contained more than four tons of minted metal, in other words close to five hundred and fifty thousand coins, mostly silver and bronze, and three hundred fifty kilograms of gold pieces. During my visits to bazaars in Peshawar in Pakistan in February 1994, I was able to hurriedly examine six bags containing three hundred kilograms of minted metal, that is, about thirty eight thousand pieces from the treasure of Mir Zakah.

In 1996, under President Rabbani, the antiquities that had escaped lootings were transferred to the Kabul Hotel downtown. The Taliban, having seized power on September 27, 1996, disapproved of transfer and decided to send the objects back to the Museum.

In 2000, there was a period of what could be called a sort of crisis of conscience on the part of Taliban leaders regarding their cultural heritage. Thanks to the efforts of two great women, Carla Grissmann and Nancy Dupree, the Minister of Culture of the Taliban Government reopened the Museum on August 17, 2000, a symbolic day of independence, after an initial delay. The objects exhibited included the inscriptions of Surkh Kotal and of Rabatak brought back from Pul-e-Khumri, the statue of Kanishka, and an ethnographic collection from Nuristan. The superb terra cotta bodhisattva from Tepe Marandjan was displayed to celebrate the occasion. That day was also marked by a scandalous public gesture by Mullah Khari Faiz ur-Rahman, who slapped the bodhisattva in the face because he was smiling too much. From that day on, things went from bad to worse, and the Museum was

closed again six days later without explanation.

The two camps within the Taliban government engaged in a political battle, one side advocating a softening of Taliban rule and the other arguing for tightening it. The extremists won the battle. The culmination of this insanity led to Mullah Omar ordering his compatriots to destroy their own cultural heritage.

Yet another truth lies behind the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan. In the course of human history, the destruction of a nation's cultural treasures has always been the consequence of religious fanaticism, political ideology, or mere ignorance. Yet, never before had the madness reached such enormity.

The destruction of the collections that had escaped the lootings began long before the Buddhas were dynamited in early March. Already on February 4, a line of cars stopped before the Museum. Carrying hammers and axes, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Culture with his adjunct, and the notorious Mullah Khari Faiz ur-Rahamn who slapped the bodhisattva, ordered the opening of the storeroom. According to a staff member who witnessed the whole scene: "As they entered the storeroom, they snarled in excitement and started to smash everything while chanting 'Allah o Akbar'" (Philippe Flandrin, *Afghanistan. Les trésors sataniques*, p.211).

The head of Durga, exhumed in Tepe Sardar, escaped the wreckage thanks to the astonishing cleverness of M. Maçoudi and his colleagues. To enraged members of the Taliban arriving the following day to complete the destruction, they gave a collection of sixty copies of Greco-buddhic statues made before the war to be used by archaeology students in Kabul. The fuming "students" continued their destroying spree in the storerooms of the Ministry of Culture and Information, where they found the coffers brought there by Nadjibullah in 1989. According to the Curator of the Kabul Museum, they broke two thousand seven hundred and fifty statues. If today the princely couple of Fundukistan and the sublime paintings of the Kakrak grottos near Bamiyan remain intact, it is thanks to the deadly game played by the curators of the Museum against the Islamic students. They deserve our sincere admiration.

As a period of reconstruction begins in Afghanistan, it is time to reflect on Afghanistan's vulnerable legacy. The looting of ancient sites has not stopped; Aï Khanoum, Bactres and Hadda are being ransacked as we speak. I have assisted, with a sense of powerlessness, as a bulldozer wiped out the site of Khar-Khaneh where French archaeologists had found a Hindu temple and a statue of Surya.

Let us return to the Kabul Museum. A resolution adopted last June at a conference organized by UNESCO at Afghan request, calls for the reconstruction of the Kabul Museum. One member of the European Union pledged, before international representatives, a substantial investment in this reconstruction. Unfortunately, the money has not yet been transferred. In the meantime, the Museum curators continue to restore the broken statues with makeshift tools. I am among those who think a new museum should be constructed in a central location. We have seen the damage caused by isolation.

What remains to fill the rooms of a new museum? I think that we can reconstitute at least thirty percent of the former collections. We need to include the works of art that remain intact at the Ministry of Culture and the 2,750 statues broken by the Taliban, if they can be restored. The percentage could even be higher if we can rescue the twenty thousand objects in gold and silver taken from the six tombs of Tillya-Tepe kept at the Central Bank. To put an end to rumors that General Massud appropriated these pieces in 1996, Mr. Wasi Firousi, President of the Archaeologist Institute, guaranteed that he saw them in 1999 at the vaults of the Central Bank. No one knows what happened to the treasure, today a taboo subject. Some said the Taliban have taken millions of Afghanis from the Central Bank.

Fortunately, a significant part of the collection stolen from the Kabul Museum was distributed abroad. Various items were bought by collectors with more or less good intentions. Some of them acquired the objects not knowing their origins and are willing to return the items to the Museum. But only UNESCO and the international community can determine when the restitution should take place. Thus, the road will be long and painstaking.

Peace in Afghanistan remains very fragile, as the recent violence reminds us. The struggle against the destruction of Afghanistan's cultural heritage is intrinsically linked to the political and economic stability of the country. Today Afghanistan needs food, doctors, and schools to fight against famine, ignorance, and misery.

Perhaps we should leave the Buddha statues as they now are to show how far religious fanaticism, ignorance and intolerance can go. We will not permit the forces of evil to destroy human dignity. We will not be able to save or restore what has been destroyed, but we can at least fight to preserve what remains. We will not allow political and economic interests to befoul the sovereignty of the Afghan state. The cultural heritage of humanity is at stake, not solely that of an oft-forgotten and abandoned country.

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