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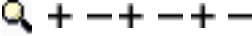
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US scheming for "Great Central Asia" Strategy



"Students and professors from Bishkek, [Kyrgyzstan](#) and Almaty, [Kazakhstan](#) can cooperate with their counterparts in Karachi and Kabul and can learn from them. Benefiting from the modern border controls mechanism, commodities can circulate legally and freely in the areas between Astana and Islamabad. The regional power grid which is supported by oil and gas resources in Kazakhstan and [Turkmenistan](#) and the water resources in [Tajikistan](#) and Kyrgyzstan can transmit electricity from Almaty to New Delhi ... " - blueprint for the "Great Central Asia" by US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher.

For historical reasons, Central Asia and South Asia have been isolated from each other and have belonged to different geopolitical plates for a long time. Now, the two regions both appear on the chessboard of the [United States](#) for its Central Asian strategy, referred to as the "Great Central Asia" strategy.

Piecing up new geopolitical plates

It has always been a consistent goal of the United States to penetrate Central Asia and then control this region. The "9/11" Incident actually gave the United States a godsend chance. The anti-terrorism war in [Afghanistan](#) has achieved for the US a significant leap in its relationship with Central Asian countries. As a result, the United States rapidly gained a foothold in Central Asia. However, the US has been so impatient that it made a policy mistake by promoting democratization in the region in such a rush. It even tried to use the "color revolution" to change the political system in Central Asian countries. Facts have proved that the "color revolution" model is not suitable for this area. The US interference in Central Asia has caused resentment by Central Asian countries, and therefore cooled down the relations between the United States and Central Asian countries. In 2005, Uzbek President Karimov "requested" that the US withdraw all its armed forces stationed in [Uzbekistan](#).

Meanwhile, Central Asian countries have reported a steady development in their cooperation with [Russia](#) and China. The operation of [Shanghai Cooperation Organization](#) (SCO) has been very impressive and successful. This has made the Americans felt like sitting on thorns. Thus, the United States attempts to "enter the SCO" as an observer and attempts to use the "GUUAM (the acronym for Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, [Azerbaijan](#) and [Moldova](#))" to smash up the SCO, both failed.

Seeing their policy being thwarted repeatedly in Central Asia, U.S. scholars and policy makers have begun to examine themselves. In the summer of 2005, Frederick Starr, chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies published an article in the US Magazine "Foreign Affairs", in which he clearly put forward the vision of the "Great Central Asia" strategy.

Starr proposed in a "Great Central Asia cooperative partnership for development" which will have the US taking the lead, the five Central Asian states and Afghanistan entering as the main members, and [India](#) and [Pakistan](#) participating in. The main idea of the proposal is to take the US control of the situation in Afghanistan as an opportunity, promote optional and flexible cooperation in security, democracy, economy, transport and energy, and, make up a new region by combining Central Asia with South Asia. The United States is to shoulder the role of a midwife to promote the rebirth of the entire region."

The US government quickly accepted this concept. In October, the US State Department reorganized its South Asia Division and included the issues of the five Central Asian states into the jurisdiction of South Asia Division. Between 25th and 26th of April, the US held a congressional hearing, focusing on the "Great Central Asia" strategy. In June, just a few days before the SCO Summit opened, the United States called together Central Asian countries for an international conference entitled "Electricity Beyond Borders" to discuss the energy cooperation between Central Asia and South Asia in Istanbul, [Turkey](#). Having come this far, the United States has got a clear strategy to take energy as a breakthrough to set its "Great Central Asia" vision into action.

Open the door of Central Asia

The five Central Asian countries have long been a part of the territory of the Soviet Union. Facing the long-time war in Afghanistan, Central Asia and South Asia have been isolated from each other for a long time in the history. The two regions have apparent differences in history, religious belief and culture. The reason why the United States is pursuing the "mandatory matching" policy is that it believes it has got two keys to open the south door of the Central Asia area. First, it has succeeded in putting the situation of Afghanistan in control. Second, it has been able to continuously expand its influence in South Asia.

Afghanistan is an important channel connecting Central Asia with South Asia. The Anti-

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terrorism war has won the United States full right to speak on the situation in Afghanistan. In their vision of the "Great Central Asia" strategy, Afghanistan is an important hub. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in a speech delivered in January 2006, "In short, free trade will help Afghanistan and its neighboring countries break away from economic marginalization and turn into a new economic zoneġ½ġ½center of the Great Central Asia region."

In recent years, the United States has attached great importance to its South Asian operation and has been vigorously supporting India as its strategic ally in South Asia. South Asia countries such as India and Pakistan have also been paying close attention to Central Asia. They have had steady bilateral security and economic cooperation with Central Asian countries yet still lack a comprehensive mechanism for further cooperation. For this reason, the two countries followed the SCO with interests and hoped that they could join the organization as full members as soon as possible.

The "Greater Central Asia" strategy put forward by the United States has provided both India and Pakistan with an opportunity to participate in the affairs of Central Asia. During the SCO Summit this year, India only sent its Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas to the Summit, which indicated that it is seriously considering other options provided by the United States. Earlier, India had announced that it would join the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline project which is supported by the United States.

Break Russia's dominance in Central Asia

Russia and China are graphically adjacent to each other in Central Asia area. Both countries have their own state interests in the region. The five Central Asian states have common needs for economic development, anti-terrorism and regional security with China and Russia. Under the framework of the SCO, the mutual cooperation between these countries has been enhanced. Correspondingly, the influence of China and Russia in Central Asia is rising.

Obviously, the US is not happy with this situation. The reason why it has brought up the so-called "choosing from the South" policy in Central Asia is that it is determined to use energy, transportation and infrastructure construction as bait to separate Central Asia from the post-Soviet Union dominance. By this means, it can change the external strategic focus of Central Asia from the current Russia-and-China-oriented partnership to cooperative relations with South Asian countries. It can break the long-term Russian dominance in the Central Asian area, it can split and disintegrate the cohesion of the SCO and gradually establish US dominance in the new plate of Central and South Asia.

However, in the long term, the United States may create a strategic misjudgment of other large countries by "setting up another cooking stove". It may also disrupt the existing cooperative mechanisms and put Central Asian countries into a choice dilemma. Even Richard Boucher himself also acknowledged that the implementation of the "Great Central Asia" strategy will have a negative impact on regional security, because it is likely to destroy the integrity of the entire Central Asian region and break the balance of the roles of big powers on Central Asian countries, hence leading to the emergence of polarization and confrontation within the Central Asian region.

"Greater Central Asia" strategy fragile

Magnificent as it appears, the "Greater Central Asia" strategy will still have to face some practical problems in implementation. For historical and cultural reasons, Central Asia and South Asia countries lack basic sense of identification and in-depth cooperation experience. The mutual trust between India and Pakistan is not strong enough for implementing large-scale cross-border infrastructure projects. The Energy reserve issues of Afghanistan and Central Asia are the two blind sides of the "Great Central Asia" strategy.

Afghanistan is the most critical pawn in the "Great Central Asia" strategy. Currently, the US and Afghan central government has very limited control over the situation in Afghanistan. Taliban remnants are still remaining. The warlord regimes and drug trade are still major regional security problems. According to the "Great Central Asia" strategy, most major transport infrastructure and pipelines will pass through Afghanistan. The risks are too high.

An important part of the "Great Central Asia" strategy is to export the energy from Central Asia to South Asia. However, the total energy reserves and current exploiting capacity in the Central Asian region is quite limited. A large part of it is under control of Russia. To export energy to South Asia countries will inevitably cause conflict with Russia. The reason why Kazakhstan, a large energy supplier, is not enthusiastic about this idea is that it does not want to damage its close strategic ally relations with Russia. Tajikistan's future water resources basically have been under control of the Russian Aluminum Company and UES of Russia. Regarding Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan Natural Gas Pipeline Project, the biggest problem lies in the gas reserves of Turkmenistan. According to the agreement, Turkmenistan should sell 100 billion cubic meters of natural gas to Russia every year. Starting from 2009, it will also provide 30 billion cubic meters of gas through pipelines to China. Considering Turkmenistan's current gas productivity, it already has difficulties in fulfilling its contracts with these two countries. It could probably hardly produce any more to the South.

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