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Beyond Afghanistan NATO's partnership with Central Asia and South Caucasus: A tangled partnership?

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the Alliance's partnership policy has changed in Central Asia and South Caucasus since the 1990s and aims to clarify to what extent NATO's new partnership policy can affect its relations with these countries. NATO–Russian relations and the Afghanistan operation are evaluated as the main drivers of this process. The target date of the withdrawal of the ISAF combat mission in December 2014, set at the Lisbon Summit 2010, as well as the shifting of the focus of long-term US foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific region and the US aim of balancing China's influence in this region increase the necessity for the Alliance to redefine its future policy towards Central Asia and South Caucasus. The article claims these developments have caused the need to treat Russia more as a partner than a potential competitor in constituting the policy towards Central Asia and South Caucasus. Furthermore the article claims there is no possibility for new Alliance expansion in this part of the world in the short to medium term.

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1. Introduction

NATO's partnership policy has been one of the main components of the Alliance's response to the post-Cold War era, as well as a limited bond with the countries in Central Asia and South Caucasus, both strategically important regions in Eurasia. Partnership policy initially constituted an essentially political means of integrating and

democratizing Europe. Partnership for Peace (PfP), which is an important component of this policy, was considered as an initiative on the way to NATO membership particularly in Eastern and Central Europe. However it hasn't had that kind of influence in Central Asia and South Caucasus. This fact partly clarifies why concrete cooperation remains limited, although all five Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and three South Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) take part in PfP. Because of the low profile of this policy in this part of the world, it is clear that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan largely defines NATO relations with these countries instead. Therefore the transfer of full security responsibility from the ISAF to the Afghan National Security Forces by the end of 2014 increases the necessity for the Alliance to define its future policy towards Central Asia and South Caucasus.

Adopted at the Lisbon Summit, NATO's New Strategic Concept emphasizes the necessity of maintaining

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cooperation with countries and organizations beyond the borders so as to ensure the security of NATO members, as well as identifies “cooperative security” as one of NATO’s three essential core tasks. Partnership falls under this task. After the Lisbon decisions, allied foreign ministers endorsed a new partnership policy at their meeting in Berlin on 15th April 2011. As such NATO’s partnership policy has become one of the most important tasks of the Alliance, at least in terms of the official discourse. Allies also restated their goal of achieving cooperative security through partnership during NATO’s Chicago Summit in May in 2012. Given this increasing emphasis on partnership, a question arises as to its for what the partnership with the countries in Central Asia and South Caucasus will be.

This article examines the evolving place of the NATO in Central Asia and South Caucasus, giving an overview of the partnership activities of the countries in the region. The article aims to clarify how the Alliance’s partnership policy has changed in this region since the 1990s as well as how NATO’s new partnership policy will affect the relations with these countries. The US interests and NATO–Russian relations are evaluated as the main drivers of this process. The shifting the focus of long-term US foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific region and the US aim of balancing China’s influence has caused the need to treat Russia more as a partner than a potential competitor in constituting the policy towards Central Asia and South Caucasus. Given these developments the article also claims there is no possibility for new Alliance expansion in this part of the world in the short to medium term.

2. NATO’s presence in Central Asia and South Caucasus

There are several factors which make Central Asia and South Caucasus vital regions on the stage of world politics. Firstly, this part of the world is a powerhouse of energy resources, such as oil and natural gas. Secondly, the geopolitical location of these areas hosts the “New Silk Road”, an important trade route between China and Europe and sits on the doorstep of China and Russia. Thirdly, Afghanistan can also be regarded as a source of possible threats to neighbouring countries and other countries of the world because of its illegal drug production and trafficking, and terrorism.¹ All these and other factors have rendered the region important for the geopolitical interests of the major and regional powers and international organizations and institutions. We can say easily that these factors are exactly the same as and valid for NATO.

In the post-Cold War era, NATO’s policy towards Central Asia and South Caucasus can be examined in three periods. The first period is between 1991 and 2001, the second is between 2001 and 2010 and the third begins after the adoption of NATO’s New Strategic Concept in 2010. The Afghanistan operation is the main determinant in the forming of these periods. With the beginning of the Afghanistan operation, NATO increased its political and

military presence in the region. NATO’s involvement can be explained through its willingness to prevent any likely threat emanating from the region and to keep the region’s supply routes to Afghanistan open.

In 2003, NATO formally took over command of the ISAF in Afghanistan. Although NATO’s ISAF mission is not the first time the allies have debated the responsibilities they have to each other beyond the territorial defence of their own territories, this mission displayed very openly disagreements amongst allies over this issue. Furthermore, the ISAF initially operated in the relative safety of the capital and its environs, but then the force steadily expanded its responsibility and reached throughout Afghanistan, including into the dangerous southern part of the country. This development caused a burden sharing problem amongst allies.² The Afghanistan operation exposed the lack of consensus on the description of common threat perception among Allies. Therefore these disagreements increased the significance of the partners’ contribution to the ISAF mission. Particularly, the contribution from the partner countries in Central Asia and South Caucasus has been enormously important due to their geographical locations. The geography of Afghanistan has prompted NATO to devote greater attention to these countries, all of which have provided various forms of assistance that are critical to NATO’s ability to operate in Afghanistan: military bases, transit routes, and cooperation on border security. Ties established with these countries through the partnership policy facilitated NATO’s insertion and presence in the region.

There are several reasons for why the third period starts with the New Strategic Concept which is the third and the last strategic concept that had been adopted since the end of the Cold War. The New Strategic Concept was published in a period when the effects of 2008 global financial crisis were clearly felt in the budgets of NATO countries and when the US defined its strategic priorities in Asia Pacific Region. In this new period starting after 2010, NATO decided to pull out from Afghanistan and to renew partnership policy which defines the structure of the relations of the Alliance with the countries in the region. These developments are elements which will shape NATO’s policy for this region.

While forming NATO’s policies for this region, the importance of the need to provide political and logistical support to the ISAF and the need to maintain the balance in NATO–Russia relations was recognized. During these periods NATO’s partnership policy and its tools have played a facilitating role in ensuring ties between NATO and the countries in the region. Before detailing NATO’s presence in Central Asia and South Caucasus, there are a few general points that can be made regarding the relations between NATO and Russia. The most important reason for the

¹ Mirzokhid Rakhimov, “Internal and External Dynamics of Regional Cooperation in Central Asia”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol.1, No.1, 2010, p. 96.

² For more information about the problems regarding Afghanistan operation among the allies, see. Benjamin Schreier, “The Evolution of NATO’s Strategy in Afghanistan”, Hakan Edström and Dennis Gyllensporre (eds.), *Pursuing Strategy: NATO Operations from the Gulf War to Gaddafi*, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2012, pp. 143–147; Mark Webber, “NATO: The United States, Transformation and The War in Afghanistan”, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 11, No.1, 2009, pp. 49–50.

change in NATO's policy towards the region is that the relations between NATO and Russia have constantly undergone remarkable changes since the Cold War ended. One of the most important elements which determines the degree of NATO's effectiveness in the region is the relations NATO has established with Russia. We can say that this situation will carry on in this way.

3. NATO–Russia relations

NATO enlargement and its relations with Russia are inextricably linked to each other. Prior to the decision of the first expansion of NATO's post-Cold War period in 1996, the US Secretary of Defence William Perry stated that they must create a new circle of security within which European nations may find security and stability and Russia is inside it not excluded from it.³ In fact, from that date NATO–Russia relations have been exactly in the way as described by William Perry. Through institutional arrangements such as Russia's membership in the PfP, the signing of the Founding Act and the creating the NATO–Russia Council, Moscow was connected with the process of NATO enlargement but it has not become a member of NATO. The most important reason of this is that the United States does not want to see Russia in the Alliance or against the Alliance.

In this context Russia joined PfP in 1994 to build up an individual relationship with NATO, offering practical bilateral cooperation on a wide range of issues. Russia was involved in NATO's peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and in Kosovo. However, PfP does not have the same significance for Russia as it does for Central and Eastern European countries, which had used the program to reconfigure their armed forces in line with NATO standards. Signed on 27 May 1997, the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security is a document that formalized officially a basis of the relationship between NATO–Russia Federation. Evaluating the legal characteristics of this document, this document is accepted as a legally non-binding act which does not bring any legal obligation to the parties.⁴ However, it should not be interpreted as a simple declaration. Through this document both sides have officially declared that cold war hostility between NATO and Russia has been replaced by cooperation and a mutual commitment to peaceful relations in Europe. And this document symbolized the relationship and its progression towards institutionalization.

The NATO–Russia Council (NRC) established on May 28 2002, has also played a critical role in supporting the relationship. The structure which was formed through the Founding Act and NRC not only forms the basis of mutual relations between Russia and NATO, but also is seen as politically compatible with the interests of both parties. However, there is the danger that these documents become

mere declarations in case the international conjuncture changes or the relations among the parties deteriorate. NATO's intervention in Kosovo and Russia's intervention in Georgia can be shown as examples. Although Russia was invited to the Washington Summit which took place after NATO's intervention in Kosovo in April 1999, Russia refused to participate in the summit. As a result of NATO's intervention in Kosovo, Russian Federation suspended its participation in the Founding Act and PfP, withdrew its military mission from Brussels, terminated talks on the establishment of NATO's military mission in Moscow, and ordered the NATO information representative in Russia to leave the country. Thus the Founding Act lost its functionality until the establishment of NRC in 2002 which reconstructed the relations.

After 2003 Moscow's foreign policy became more independent and assertive and relations with NATO became stretched again. This trend eventually culminated in the Georgia Crisis of August 2008. On 19 August 2008 NATO's foreign ministers declared that the implications of Russia's actions for the NATO–Russia relationship were that NATO could not continue doing “business as usual”, and military and political cooperation in NRC was suspended.⁵ Its meeting on 27 August, The North Atlantic Council condemned Russia for recognizing the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia as independent states.⁶ However, at their meeting on 3 December 2008, the NATO foreign ministers mandated the Secretary General decision to re-engage with Russia at the political level. At the same time they refrained from granting the Membership Action Plan (MAP)⁷ status to Georgia and Ukraine. It is clear that NATO was unprepared for that kind of Russian military move, and looked the other way and had no real response to this. Although there was a political commitment to eventual membership regarding these two countries given at the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, NATO's intention regarding the membership of these two countries has just remained on paper. I can say that it is highly unlikely that NATO will offer to either country a MAP in the foreseeable future. It seems clear that NATO states had not thought much about the consequences of extending the Article 5 guarantee to Georgia as part of planned membership.⁸ There is still no indication that NATO prefers membership with these states, which would be too risky given that the importance of Russia's partnership is increasing for US foreign policy.

The NATO Summit in Strasbourg-Kehl in April 2009 invoked the formal revival of NRC activities at all levels. Relations were again strained in May 2009 when NATO

³ US Department of Defense, “NATO and a “Super” Partners in Europe” prepared Remarks of Secretary of Defense William J. Perry, 24 September 1996, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=927> (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

⁴ Rein Müllerson, “NATO Enlargement and the NATO–Russian Founding Act: The Interplay of Law and Politics”, *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, Vol.47, No.1, Jan. 1998, pp.197.

⁵ North Atlantic Council, “Statement”, 19 August 2008, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-108e.html> (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

⁶ North Atlantic Council, “Statement”, 27 August 2008, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_29950.htm, (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

⁷ The program NATO has used since 1999 to evaluate and provide guidance to prospective member states regarding their progress towards meeting NATO's membership expectations.

⁸ Jane Haaland Matlary, “Partnerships to the East and South: A ‘Win-Win’ Policy”, Hakan Edström et al. (eds.) *NATO: The Power of Partnerships*, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2011, p. 64.

expelled two Russia diplomats over accusations of spying and a NATO PfP exercise was conducted in Georgia from 6 May until 1 June 2009. In spite of these series of confrontations in the New Strategic Concept and Summit Declaration, adopted at the 2010 Lisbon Summit, NRC leaders reiterated the importance of NATO–Russia dialogue and partnership and emphasized the objective of cooperation towards a true strategic partnership. “The Joint Review of 21st Century Common Security Challenges” endorsed at the NRC Lisbon Summit serves as a roadmap for diversifying and deepening the cooperation. This step can be interpreted as both parties having realized that they have common security interests, such as ISAF mission (transit of NATO freight through the Russian territory), counter-terrorism, nuclear weapons issues, crisis management, and counter-narcotics.

We can say that during the Lisbon Summit, NATO wanted to see Russia on its side not on the opposite side in case of new threats. The membership of Ukraine and Georgia to the Alliance was postponed in that context by ensuring that relations were not harmed. Indeed Russia can be shown to be a “loyal opposition”, challenging NATO expansion, but prone to dialogue with NATO. Looking generally at the historical development of NATO–Russia relations, we see that the relations change depending on the international conjuncture. In this context, we can say that times of confrontation and reconciliation between NATO and Russia will continue in the future. To summarize, the course of these relations in medium and long term will continue to affect expansion process of NATO and its policy for Central Asia and Caucasus depending on the power shifts in international conjuncture.

Georgia and Ukraine have been profoundly important to NATO, both in terms of enlargement policy and as a type of litmus test of Russian intentions regarding the enlargement policy. As Matlary mentioned, the cost–benefit calculus is such that NATO’s security gain from a larger geo-political ‘footprint’ on Russia’s border is less than the obligation incurred by Article 5.⁹ It is clear that Russian military action in Georgia formed borders with NATO. Although the wording on potential Georgian membership is retained in official documents, it is really difficult to say that there is a powerful political will to continue with this process on the part of the NATO today.

4. NATO’s partnership policy in the region

NATO’s partnerships have experienced a truly historical development since the beginning of 1990’s. As Moore clearly expressed, partnership initially constituted an essentially political means of integrating and democratizing Europe.¹⁰ Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, NATO has focused more on addressing global threats which would likely stem from areas beyond the North

Atlantic area. Due to this reason NATO expected all partners to contribute to NATO’s military operations especially its Afghanistan operation. This expectation has also been the main determinant of the cooperation between NATO and its partners in Central Asia and South Caucasus.

NATO’s first partnership program, Pfp, launched in 1994, mainly paved the way for practical co-operation between NATO and the states of Central and Eastern Europe as well as those of the former Soviet Republics in the Baltics, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. All five Central Asian Republics and the states in South Caucasus have been members of Pfp since 1994, with the exception of Tajikistan, who joined only in 2002. In the enlargement process, Pfp would serve as an important instrument to foster security reform and prepare the partner countries for accession to the Alliance. In this respect it can be expressed that this program has reached one of the important goals since twelve of the Pfp countries are NATO members today.¹¹ However, for the Central Asians and the Caucasians, the situation is totally different. We can easily say that except Georgia, other countries have not been willing to become members of NATO and many of these states are still strongly oriented towards Russia. The fact that these countries haven’t expected or demanded to become members of NATO has limited the influence of NATO on the countries of the region. However the Afghanistan operation significantly increased the importance of the cooperation with these countries for NATO. At the same time this need for cooperation and the lack of willingness of the countries to become members of NATO have also diminished the Alliance’s insistence on its normative agenda which it implemented in the process of granting membership to the Eastern and Central European countries.

4.1. The contribution of the NATO partners in Central Asia and South Caucasus to Afghanistan operation

To reiterate an important point, the geography of Afghanistan has prompted NATO to devote greater attention to the countries in Central Asia and South Caucasus, all of which have provided various forms of assistance that are critical to NATO’s ability to operate in Afghanistan, including military bases, transit routes, and cooperation on border security. Ties established with these countries through the partnership policy facilitated NATO’s presence in the region. In this context NATO created a wide range of practical mechanisms and activities to promote cooperation with the countries in the region, including the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP), the Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAPs) and Planning and Review Process (PARP). IPCP offers a wide range of partnership activities including defence reform, civil–

⁹ Matlary, “Partnerships to the East and South”, p.68.

¹⁰ Rebecca R. Moore, “Partnership Goes Global: The Role of Nonmember, Non-European Union States in the Evolution of NATO”. Gülnur Aybet and Rebecca Moore (eds.), *NATO in Search of a Vision*, Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2010, 232–233.

¹¹ Pfp was employed to prepare the twelve nations incorporated as full members between 1999 and 2009: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Following states are still members of Pfp: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia Federation, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

military relations, education and training, military-to-military cooperation and exercises, civil emergency planning and disaster-preparedness, as well as cooperation on science and environmental issues. IPAPs and PARP are more complex programmes, which require a higher level of cooperation with NATO, but allow access to a wider range of partnership activities.¹²

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks caused the US to focus intensely on tackling the global threats with “war on terror” and “preemptive war” discourses. Ideas adopted especially by the US such as “the perception of threat to NATO must undergo a change of perspective” and “threats coming outside the Transatlantic region must be prevented before they are turned into attacks” were also reflected in NATO’s partnership policy. As mentioned above, the role of NATO’s partnerships also shifted according to the new needs. The existing partnership programs (PfP and Mediterranean Dialogue (MD)) were supported by the mechanisms to improve interoperability in NATO-led operations, and a new partnership program (Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)) was prepared for regions from which threats may emerge. Some of the mechanisms were IPAP, Partnership Action Plan Against Terrorism (PAP-T), and Partnership Action Plan on Defence Institution Building (PAP-DIB).

At the 2002 Prague Summit, NATO launched the IPAP to deepen the cooperation between NATO and PfP countries. IPAP is an inclusive document, envisaging conducting reforms in a wide variety of areas, such as defence, security, science, and civil emergency planning and requiring joint and highly coordinated efforts of the governments of the partner countries to implement the reforms efficiently. Partners who expressed a desire for closer cooperation with NATO, but were not assumed ready for participation in the MAP would be eligible for an IPAP. With regard to Eurasia, IPAP was really well received among the partners. Georgia (2004), Azerbaijan and Armenia (2005), and Kazakhstan (2006) were the countries to approve their IPAPs.¹³ Most countries consider that the program can help them reform their defence sectors.

One of the mechanisms in question is PAP-T which was also adopted in 2002 Prague Summit. The plan is a framework through which Allies and Partner countries work to improve cooperation in the fight against terrorism, in a variety of areas, including political consultations and information sharing, civil-emergency planning, force planning, air defence and airspace management, border control, arms control, non-proliferation, and training exercises related to terrorism. In terms of state-building and the regionalization of Central Asia, this plan is NATO’s way of focussing on defence and security sector reform which are especially relevant.¹⁴ One of NATO’s key tools in this regard

is the PARP. PARP aims to provide a structured basis for identifying partner forces and capabilities that could be available to the Alliance for multinational training, exercises and operations. Partners whose cooperation with NATO is more advanced participate in this mechanism in which some of their security forces also undergo defence review procedures similar to those of NATO Allies themselves, in order to prepare them to participate in international peacekeeping operations. Today, with the exception of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, other Central Asian Republics and the states in South Caucasus participate in the PARP process.

The other mechanism is the PAP-DIB, launched at Istanbul in 2004. With the rising of NATO’s involvement in Afghanistan, the importance of the Caucasus and Central Asia unsurprisingly grew and this plan targeted specifically these regions. Both plans aimed to enhance political dialogue and practical cooperation with partners on a range of international and domestic issues, including terrorism, democratization, and partner participation in NATO-led operations. At the Istanbul Summit allied leaders also decided to appoint a Special Representative for the Region and to send a Liaison Officer to the Region.

As for the contribution of the countries in Central Asia to the Afghanistan operation, we can say that although none of the Central Asian states has contributed troops to ISAF, all have in varying degrees contributed to NATO’s need to secure supply routes for the ISAF mission. Apart from the American base in Manas/Kyrgyzstan, NATO member states have three other military bases in the region geared to supplying operations in Afghanistan: Germany in Termez/Uzbekistan, France in Dusanbe/Tajikistan and the US at Kuliab/Tajikistan. NATO’s agency in Central Asia aims to keep the lines of communication open with the local governments by involving them as much as possible in activities such as common planning, joint exercises, and information exchanges. NATO offers educational facilities, with some Central Asian officers trained at the NATO Defense College, the NATO School, and PfP Training and Education Centers (PTCs).¹⁵

Looking at partners in Central Asia, we can easily say that Kazakhstan is the most advanced state of Central Asia in terms of cooperation with NATO. Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian country to have agreed to an IPAP with the Alliance, in early 2006 and, as a member of NATO’s PARP, has a wide array of partnership projects. It takes part in an Action Plan against Terrorism, which provides for the exchange of information with NATO members. It has got used to cooperating periodically with the Alliance and usually holds NATO activities such as the annual military exercise. One of the PTCs located in Kazakhstan. Astana has also created a peacekeeping force called KAZBRIG (Kazakh Brigade) that collaborates with NATO under a UN mandate. Notably, Kazakhstan volunteered to host the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) Security Forum in June 2009.

¹² See, NATO, “Partnership Tools”, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_80925.htm?, (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

¹³ Developed on a two-year basis, these plans include a wide range of objectives and targets for reforms on political issues as well as security and defence issues. See, NATO, “Individual Partnership Action Plan”, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49290.htm, (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

¹⁴ Simon J. Smith and Emilian Kavalski, “NATO’s Partnership with Central Asia”, *The New Central Asia: The Regional Impact of International Actors*, Emilian Kavalski (ed.), Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2010, p.38.

¹⁵ There are currently 24 PTCs recognized by NATO. For more information see, Naval Postgraduate School, “PfP Training and Education Center”, <http://www.nps.edu/About/USPTC/PfP/PfPCenters.html>, (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

This was the first time that the forum, which focused on Afghanistan, energy security and Central Asian security, had been held outside Europe.¹⁶ The third phase of the IPAP was approved in August 2012 and reportedly involves continued training for the peacekeeping battalion KAZBAT (Kazakh battalion) and the KAZBRIG including at the PfP Training Center at the Military Institute of the Army in Almaty. However, this cooperation does not prevent Kazakhstan from being an ally of Moscow and Beijing, or from showing its support for most of the Russian proposals for strengthened integration. Indeed, this fact is valid for all partners in Central Asia. At this point it should be expressed that Kazakhstan has been very capable of extracting exactly what it wants from all the major actors such as Russia, China and the US in the region, while at the same time not upsetting any of them in a way that would risk ongoing relations.¹⁷

The other states of the region have less cooperation with NATO. Uzbekistan sharply reduced its participation in PfP after NATO raised concerns that Uzbek security forces had used excessive and disproportionate force in Andijan (however, it continued to permit Germany to use a base near Termez). After President Karimov had attended the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008, the Government of Uzbekistan and NATO partly resumed their cooperation. The US and NATO have been permitted to use the Navoi airport (located between Samarkand and Bukhara in east-central Uzbekistan) for transporting nonlethal supplies to Afghanistan.¹⁸ Yet it is obvious that the cooperation between NATO and Uzbekistan still remains very limited.

Since PfP accession, Kyrgyzstan has participated in a number of PfP exercises, with a special focus on command and control, civil-emergency planning and civil–military cooperation. Kyrgyzstan joined the PARP in 2007. Bishkek has set aside units for PfP operations, which have been especially active in counter terrorism through the PAP-T. Kyrgyzstan has hosted NATO at the Manas airbase (called the Manas Transit Center since 2009) which became operational in December 2001 and serves as the “premier air mobility hub” for operations in Afghanistan.

Turkmenistan joined the IPCP, within this programme, Turkmenistan chose not to participate in military activities, in line with its position of “neutrality”. Although Turkmenistan’s commitment to neutrality limits deeper cooperation, there has been some cooperation in the fields of civil emergency planning, scientific, and environmental affairs. However, its long border with Afghanistan has given Turkmenistan an incentive to work with the Alliance on border security issues. The other country is Tajikistan for which border security is of primary concern. Tajikistan is the last Central Asian state to become a member of PfP in 2002. In 2004 a transit agreement to support the operations of NATO and ISAF in Afghanistan was signed. In this

regard the permission to use their railways and roads was given. Tajikistan has shown growing interest in recent years in slowly but steadily enhancing its cooperation with NATO.¹⁹ At a length of roughly 1300 km, the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan has long been difficult to control. Both countries are extremely mountainous, and the rugged, porous border is hard to patrol extensively, particularly given the limited security resources available to Kabul and Dushanbe. Therefore, Tajikistan’s cooperation with NATO focuses on border security.

As for partners in South Caucasus, all three states are members of the PfP and PARP, and all have agreed to contribute or are already contributing troops to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. But the integration of each country into Euro-Atlantic practices has been more or less limited to joint military exercises and support for security-sector programs.

Azerbaijan, which contributed forces to KFOR from 1999 to 2008 has supported the ISAF mission from the beginning. Azerbaijan also maintains an IPAP with NATO and participates in the Partnership Action Plan on Terrorism (PAP-T). Armenia has contributed troops to KFOR since 2004 and has contributed troops to ISAF since 2009. Armenia is also an IPAP participant. The most recent NATO–Armenia IPAP was agreed in November 2011. The main spheres of cooperation under this plan are security, defence and military issues, public information, science, environment, democratic reforms, and so on. Although the troop contributions of these states are relatively small, both continue to work through PARP towards interoperability with NATO forces and cooperate with NATO in developing crisis management and civil emergency response capabilities.

Among the countries in the South Caucasus, Georgia’s relationship with NATO is by far the most advanced. Tbilisi inaugurated its first IPAP with NATO in 2004. Georgia has contributed actively to NATO-led operations. According to the latest figures, Georgia is the largest non-NATO contributor to ISAF overall, currently ranking 7th out of 50 participating nations.²⁰ In 2006 Tbilisi gained an Intensified Dialogue on membership and at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, Georgia was promised MAP status. As mentioned above, in terms of NATO–Georgia relations this summit was a real turning point. Relations between Georgia and NATO are the most complex among the Alliance’s partnerships. Georgian ambitions were always the most clearly declared within the three South Caucasian countries.²¹ It is necessary to note that despite re-iterating promises towards Georgia,²² there is no real political progress in its membership.

¹⁹ For more information, see. NATO, “NATO’s Relations with Tajikistan”, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50312.htm, (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

²⁰ ISAF: Key Facts and Figures, 19 Feb. 2013, <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.pdf>, (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

²¹ The aspiration to become part of Transatlantic security community and its strategic significance is declared in the “National Security Concept of Georgia”, see. National Security Council of Georgia, “National Security Concept of Georgia”, <http://www.nsc.gov.ge/files/files/National%20Security%20Concept.pdf>, (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

²² RIA NOVOSTI, “US Backs Georgia’s NATO, EU Ambition”, 02.05.2013, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20130502/180944966.html>, (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

¹⁶ Rebecca Moore, *NATO’s Partners in Afghanistan: Impact and Purpose*, UNISCI Discussion Papers, No:22 (January/Enero 2010) p.100.

¹⁷ Roger N. McDermott, “Kazakhstan’s Partnership with NATO: Strengths, Limits and Prognosis”, *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Volume 5, No. 1, 2007, p.19.

¹⁸ Jim Nichol, *Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, CRS Report for Congress No 7-5700, 2013, p. 54.

Analysing generally the cooperation between NATO and the countries in Central Asia and South Caucasus, it is obvious that NATO has aimed with all the above mentioned mechanisms to reach interoperability. However, it is difficult to say that this aim was completely reached. Not all NATO's partnership activities have been successful in achieving the interoperability at which they were aimed. The cooperation was highly concentrated on the Afghanistan operation. Although some states have embraced PFP more than others in the region, with the exception of Georgia, none of them has close to the levels of reform enacted by the Central and East European countries. Although there are certain multilateral dimensions to NATO's engagement with the region, the US and NATO relations with the countries in Central Asia are largely bilateral.²³

At this point, given that ISAF's mission will end by the end of 2014, a question arises concerning how relations between NATO and these countries, which are practically limited to the Afghanistan operation, will endure. In this case, another question is how NATO's new partnership policy will affect the relations with these partners.

5. NATO's new partnership policy

In the New Strategic Concept, the necessity of maintaining cooperation with countries and organizations beyond the borders so as to ensure the security of NATO members was emphasized. According to the document, NATO is to offer its partners "more political engagement with the Alliance, and a substantial role in shaping strategy and decisions on NATO-led operations to which they contribute." Indeed, the likely reform of NATO's partnerships policy had been expected for a while because the existing tools and frameworks were outdated and had not corresponded to the new needs.²⁴ In this regard, we can say that the New Strategic Concept gave an impetus to realize this need. Before adopting the New Strategic Concept, Allied leaders had also decided to establish a Political and Partnerships Committee (PPC) to be the centre for implementation of the reform in April 2010.²⁵ Within this framework, NATO Foreign Ministers endorsed the new partnership policy developed and agreed upon with partners in the NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting which took place in Berlin on April 14–15 2011. In the meeting, two documents called the "Berlin Package" were issued, with the aim of deepening and broadening NATO's existing partnerships. Berlin Package also identifies emerging security challenges as a strategic objective of the Alliance's partnership, namely terrorism, cyber attacks, problems related energy security

(including maritime security) and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. NATO's new partnership policy was actualised within these two documents.

What does the new policy offer? Briefly, NATO's new partnership policy is based on the following points. First, NATO's partnership policy is to become more efficient and flexible. Second, the management of the partnerships is to be thoroughly streamlined by introducing a single set of partnership instruments. Third, the force contributions of partners on NATO missions are to be clarified and reshaped.²⁶ We shall review the policy in detail. With this policy, while preserving the institutional partnership programs (PFP, MD, ICI), all partners are offered access to the whole spectrum of partnership activities NATO offers. This means that no new institutional structure was set forth that would include the countries supporting NATO operations as global partners.²⁷ However, all partnership tools made available by NATO to institutional partners have been practically opened up to all countries that would like to cooperate with NATO on any matter, within the scope of this new policy. It should also be interpreted that this new policy is a reflection of an intention to render more functional those NATO partnerships established based on geographical borders. With this new policy, the legal framework has been established within NATO to enable the establishment of relations with countries located in different regions of the world to work together with NATO. In this regard, this policy is an expression of the will of a regional defence organization to become a global security organization.

With this new policy, NATO's specialized programmes, IPAP and PARP, which were previously limited to PFP countries, is now open to all partners. All partners with which NATO has an individual programme of cooperation have access to a new Partnership Cooperation Menu, which comprises some 1600 activities, ranging from training in maritime operational planning to crisis response operations and courses on arms control, non-proliferation and terrorism. With this single pool of activities, the different approval procedures for the various work plans disappear. Furthermore, the Individual Partnership and Cooperation programme (IPCP) is regarded as only one generic partnership document for all partners – in particular those which are not part of any partnership frameworks. IPCPs are two-year programmes which are drawn up from the

²³ For similar approaches see Smith and Kavalski, "NATO's Partnership", pp. 30–31; Rebecca Moore, "NATO's Partners in Afghanistan", p.100.

²⁴ More information about the need for reform of NATO's Partnership Policy, see Ron Asmus, "Rethinking NATO Partnerships for the 21st Century". *NATO Review*, 2008, <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2008/03/ART4/EN/index.htm>, (Accessed on 20.06.2013); Stephan Frühling and Benjamin Schreier, "Creating the Next Generation of NATO Partnerships", *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 155, No.1, February/March 2010, pp. 52–57.

²⁵ For more information about the PPC see, NATO, "Political and Partnerships Committee (PPC)", http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-DB81B0BC-339C89C0/natolive/topics_79430.htm, (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

²⁶ Heidi Reisinger, "Rearranging Family Life and a Large Circle of Friends: Reforming NATO's Partnership Programmes", Research Paper, NATO Defense College, Rome, No.72, January 2012, p.4.

²⁷ Global partners or "partners across the globe" are the term to refer the countries which are not part of NATO's other partnership frameworks but contribute to allied missions, such as Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand. These states have pledged troops and have committed financial contributions to the NATO-led operations – especially to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) – even at a time when some important NATO members were unwilling to do this. The increasing value of these countries to NATO is also reflected in changing terminology to describe them. These states had formerly been referred to as "contact countries" however after the Riga Summit in 2006, they were also named "partners across the globe" or often simply as "global partners". After the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Mongolia were included in this classification.

extensive Partnership and Cooperation Menu, according to each country's specific interests and needs.

IPCPs were included in the scope of this new policy in order to enable relations between NATO and all partners to be improved more elastically on a case by case basis. Since no country's name is directly stated in the "Berlin Package", it is understood that these mechanisms are open to all countries that would like to work together with NATO as its global partner. In fact, it can be said that with such an attitude, the decision makers of NATO are aiming to prevent the relations to be developed with global partners from being perceived by any country – especially China – as an implicit or explicit threat. On NATO's official website, it is stated that mechanisms set forth in the new policy of partnership might include China, India Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Colombia or Brazil as well.²⁸ After the adoption of NATO's New Partnership Policy, on 19 March 2012, on 4 June 2012, on 20 September, on 24 September 2012 and on 21 February 2013 Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme accords were signed respectively with Mongolia, New Zealand, South Korea, Iraq and Australia. These accords focus on promoting political dialogue and practical cooperation on a number of joint priority areas, including response to terrorism, multinational peace support operations and science for peace and security. Other than Iraq, all countries that signed partnership accords with NATO and considered as global partners either have a border with China or are Asia Pacific countries. However, in this case, more concrete statements on NATO's official website than "such relations are open to China as well" will be needed in order to prevent China from perceiving the possible partnership accords between NATO and these countries as a blocking movement against themselves.

The Summit in Chicago in May 2012 was to be the first major event based on the new partnership policy. In accordance with the new partnership policy, the usual ISAF format was extended to include the Central Asian republics, Russia and Pakistan. It was the first time that these countries participated in an ISAF meeting since they are not troop contributing nations. However it was recognized that when discussing issues such as post-2014 Afghanistan, and transit of troops and equipment from Afghanistan, these countries would play a central role and need to be engaged in a discussion on the future of NATO's engagement in Afghanistan. Most of the Central Asian governments gave permission in 2012 for the egress of supplies and troops from Afghanistan in line with U.S. and NATO plans to draw down military operations in Afghanistan by late 2014.²⁹

There are a few important points that can be made regarding the likely implications of the new partnership policy. First, it is obvious that NATO's new partnership policy has been transformed from a supply to a demand orientation. In other words, NATO tends to see it as the responsibility of the partner to make partnership effective. The effects of the financial crisis are one of the most

important reasons causing this transformation. Given the history of the partnership relations between NATO and the countries in the Central Asia and South Caucasus, it is no doubt that NATO had the leading role in the establishment and development of the relations – NATO–Georgia relations may be the exception of this determination. Reminding ourselves that even while NATO was playing a more active or leading role in the relations, the relations were not meeting their original objectives, we can say NATO's new tendency is an indicator that the partnership relations with the countries which try to balance security cooperation with NATO with that of Russia (the Collective Security Treaty Organisation) and Russia–China (the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) will remain in the low-profile.

Second, we can say that with its new partnership policy, NATO focuses more on developing its relations with states which are described as global partners, but who are excluded from its institutional partnership. In fact, this is directly related to both the change in international conjuncture and the Asia Pacific trend in US foreign policy which occurs in compliance with this change.

The reason for the US policy towards Asia-Pacific is not only that it seeks to maintain and develop its security and economic relationships with long-standing allies and partners, but also to confront its most powerful rival and competitor, China.³⁰ International public opinion was reminded of this point that the US's interests have been connected to the developments in the Asia Pacific region since the decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan by 2014.³¹ The approach in question is exactly reflected in the new US Defense Strategic Review entitled "Sustaining United States Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defined", issued in January 2012. This paper emphasizes the shifting American strategic focus to the Asia Pacific region.³²

³⁰ For more information about US policy towards Asia-Pacific see, Xiaosong Tang, "The Future Role of the United States in the Asia-Pacific Region: Dead End or Crossroads?" *Australian Journal of International Affairs* Vol. 66, No. 5, November 2012, pp. 592–605; Frank Hoffman, "Forward Partnership: A Sustainable American Strategy", *Orbis*, Winter 2013, pp. 38–40.

³¹ A major theme in US policy towards Asia Pacific was the strengthening of its military deployments and partnerships in the region. Following the agreement between the US and Australia signed on November 17 2011, Obama stated that his goal is to ensure that "the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping Asia Pacific and its future". See, The White House, Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament, 17 November 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>, (Accessed on 20.07.2013). In a November 2011 article for Foreign Policy, US former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described the 21st century as America's Pacific century. More information, see, Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century", *Foreign Policy*, November 2011, pp. 56–63.

³² In its own words: "US economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia, creating a mix of evolving challenges and opportunities. Accordingly, while the US military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance towards the Asia Pacific region." See, *US Department of Defense (2012). Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*. Washington: US Department of Defense http://www.whatthefolly.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf, (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

²⁸ NATO, "Partnerships: A Cooperative Approach to Security", http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_84336.htm, (Accessed on 20.07.2013).

²⁹ Nichol, *Central Asia*, p. 66.

At this point the power shift from Europe to Asia must be highlighted. The world is becoming more Asia-centric. With the growth of its air and naval power, China is trying to redefine the correlation of forces in Asia. At the same time because of its ongoing fiscal crisis, at least in the meaning of the unique actor, European Union is getting weaker and addition to this situation, the shifting of US strategic focus to Asia Pacific provides a chance for a new Russian sphere of influence to emerge in Central and Eastern Europe. We can say that in this balance where there are many unknown variables, Russia, which is a “loyal opposition” of NATO – at least compared to China –, will pay attention to keeping its relations at a sustainable level. In that case, Russia’s reaction will attract more attention compared to the past in the relations developed with Central Asia and South Caucasus countries. In that context, it is clear that the possibility of NATO enlargement which includes any of these countries is low.

6. Conclusions

The tension between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, the world financial-economic crisis, the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan and the shifting of US strategic focus to Asia Pacific have caused the need to re-describe NATO’s policy towards Central Asia and South Caucasus. At the same time, NATO is already perceived by some of these countries in a different way than the way it was in the first part of 2000. One of the reasons of this case is the change of perception and role of Russia in the region. Russia Federation’s role in the countries of the Central Asia and South Caucasus has greatly evolved since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. At first, because of the financial shortages and other problems, Moscow did not have the ability to pursue an active foreign policy with those countries. The election of Vladimir Putin in 1999 is accepted as the “return” of Russia to its “near abroad,” which has become increasingly notable. The tension between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 is but one

example that illustrates Moscow’s eagerness to maintain an active presence in the region at any cost. Russia’s willingness to expand its power in the “near abroad” has clearly held back NATO’s efforts in the region, because it cannot compete with Moscow’s influence.³³ The development has also illustrated that the disagreements on the policy towards the region among NATO allies. It is still not clear to all members what NATO’s interests are in the region, especially considering the low level of engagement on the partners’ side. In both regions, the countries are cautious to maintain a balance between their cooperation with the West and Russia.

Taking into account Russia’s effect on the countries in the region, we can say that NATO will shun advances, such as a new NATO enlargement in the region which would disturb Russia a great deal. US policy for balancing China in the region also requires not disturbing its relations with Russia. Legitimate reasons to justify NATO’s and naturally America’s presence in the region after Afghanistan are border security and the fight against terrorism. Cooperation between NATO and the countries in the region will carry on in these matters. This will make it possible for the regional countries to reach certain standards while at the same time NATO will be able to sustain its presence in the region by means of partnership policy. After adopting the new partnership policy, the developments mentioned above, notify our determination.

To summarize, regional security in Central Asia and South Caucasus depends on a very sensitive balance. We can say that in such an atmosphere, NATO will pursue a policy which is based on a gradual peace approach predicated on advances by small steps which will not disturb Russia.

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³³ Vivien Pertusot, “NATO Partnerships: Shaking Hands or Shaking the System?”, *Focus stratégique*, No. 31, May 2011, p. 29.