

U.S. Post-Cold War Foreign Policy in Central Asia: Offensive and Defensive Realism Considered

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Introduction

Do states seek security by maintaining the existing balance of power or by increasing their relative power? Does the structure of the international system compel major power states to pursue aggressive foreign policies or does it provide incentives for moderate and restrained foreign policy behavior? Offensive and defensive realists propose divergent answers to these questions.

Offensive, or “aggressive,” realists argue that in the anarchical international system, where security is scarce, great power states seek to maximize their relative power and influence. Stronger states in the system have the best chance at survival because the international system never guarantees security. Rational states, compelled by the competition for power, adopt offensive and aggressive strategies abroad in their pursuit of security.¹ Conversely, defensive realists contend that states seek security and only attempt to expand their influence in times of particular insecurity. Because the international system usually induces states to act defensively, states have no systemic incentive to expand. It is in their best interest to preserve the existing balance of power in the absence of a perceived security threat. In short, states expand not when they can but when they must.²

This article attempts to evaluate offensive and defensive realist hypotheses by examining the case of United States’ post-Cold War foreign policy in the five former Soviet Central Asian republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.³ U.S. foreign policy in this region provides a suitable case for analysis for offensive and defensive realist arguments. This article divides the case of U.S. foreign policy in Central Asia into U.S. behavior following Soviet withdrawal from the region and U.S. policy after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. In some respects, this is problematic because separating U.S. policy into two distinct sub-cases does not reflect the historical context in which policy is prescribed. To be sure, foreign policy is not stagnant, but rather a “moving target.” However, the events of 1989-1990 - the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union – were watershed events in international politics and allowed the U.S. unprecedented strategic freedom. Equally momentous, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks were redefining events that commenced a dramatic new era of U.S. foreign policy. Therefore, has the U.S., since 1991, asserted its influence and deployed all

its instruments of power in Central Asia in the wake of Russia's weakness? Or, has the U.S. only reacted since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks because of the strategic importance of the region for the War on Terrorism and the growing opinion that the area is a fertile ground for Islamic extremism? Offensive realists would argue, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the power vacuum that ensued in Central Asia, the United States would ambitiously exert its influence and power in the region if the benefits of doing so outweighed the costs. Defensive realists would maintain that the United States would not pursue an aggressive Central Asian foreign policy unless the region developed into a perceived security threat.

Analyzing the explanatory power of offensive and defensive realism is an important undertaking. First, although realism has asserted itself as the dominant paradigm of international relations, critics of realism contend that the post-Cold War era is an especially poor case for realist assumptions. For many, the apparent inability of realism to predict a peaceful end to the Soviet Union highlights the need for better ideas, new thinking, and alternative theoretical approaches to international politics.⁴ Neoliberal institutionalists, democratic peace theorists, constructivists, and others, often argue that realism underemphasizes the role of domestic politics and international institutions. Notwithstanding, realism "remains the *bête noire* of every nonrealist approach."⁵ At the same time, realist scholars have attempted to answer the challenge that the post-Cold War world is unsuited for realist interpretation.⁶ Continued debate across research traditions can be fruitful; but realists themselves are not of one mind, and this paper explores differences within the realist school.

Second, it is vital to establish whether contemporary realist theories are providing insight into the link between systemic imperatives and actual foreign policy behavior.⁷ As Robert Jervis notes, "The study of international politics will be impoverished if it is totally divorced from contemporary events."⁸ Academic theorists of international affairs must work to explain the "inescapable link between the abstract world of theory and the real world of policy."⁹ To be sure, this theoretical debate has implications for great power foreign policy. If defensive realists are correct, then great power states may be able to remain secure without threatening others. However, if offensive realism is accurate, doing so is unlikely and great power

policies may lead to international tension or war.¹⁰ Assessing offensive and defensive realist assumptions against post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy in Central Asia is an attempt to make a coherent connection between existing theory and actual policy behavior. Ultimately, any “good theory explains how the world *does* work, not how it *should* work.”¹¹

This paper is structured as follows. First, I briefly discuss the Central Asian case. Second, I outline the competing logic of offensive and defensive realism. Third, I discuss the international power structure that emerged after the Cold War and develop corresponding predictions of offensive and defensive realism for U.S. foreign policy in Central Asia. Fourth, I review the main elements of U.S. foreign policy in the region following the Cold War. Fifth, I explore U.S. policy in the region following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Sixth, I assess which set of generated predictions for offensive or defensive realism most closely correspond to the actual policy the U.S. pursued. Finally, I conclude with potential future research and issues that emerged in evaluating offensive and defensive realism.

Substantive Background and the Case of Central Asia

Before analyzing U.S. engagement in Central Asia, it is important to frame the position from where the U.S. embarked on its post-Cold War policy prescription in the region. Western political analysis largely ignored the region throughout the last century.¹² Ethnic and cultural diversity, geographic isolation, and Soviet rule were just some of the factors that limited understanding of the region. During the Cold War, U.S. policymakers often relegated Central Asia to the “backwaters” of the U.S. foreign policy agenda. Central Asia was somewhat of a concern to Washington when it was revealed that Moscow placed nuclear missile-launch sites in the region during the Cold War. However, misunderstanding and disinterest prevailed right up to Soviet withdrawal from the region. Few in the West “entertained a serious belief” that these territories would even become independent nations. Most analysts viewed these states as artificial creations of the Stalinist period to “dilute and divide existing populations” enabling Moscow to better control the region.¹³ Indeed, the boundaries of the Central Asian republics are largely arbitrary and do not coincide naturally with the linguistic or cultural similarities of the various subpopulations.¹⁴

Therefore, there had been almost no historical precedent established for U.S. relations with any of the Central Asian states.

While long misunderstood, many observers have historically viewed the region as one of the most important strategic geopolitical junctures in the world. For the military historian Sir Basil Liddell Hart, the 13th century Mongol empire, that reached across Eurasia, “made the empires of Rome and Alexander appear insignificant.”¹⁵ Halford Mackinder, a British geographer, believed that the “closed heart land of Euro-Asia” would become the seat of world power and referred to the region as the “Geographic Pivot of History.”¹⁶ Others recall the 19th century “Great-Game” played between the Russian and English empires at the Western extremity of the Chinese empire as evidence of the geostrategic magnitude of Central Asia.¹⁷ Even contemporary observers seem overtaken by its geopolitical and strategic potentialities. As one author notes, “It is the greatest natural fortress in the world, defended by polar ice caps, deserts, arid tableland and mountain ranges.”¹⁸ Although these interpretations have never fully materialized, the world’s gaze has again fallen upon the five former Soviet republics. Sharing borders with Russia, Turkey, China, Iran, and Afghanistan, in close proximity to India and Pakistan, and as the natural land bridge between Asia and Europe, the geopolitical issues in Central Asia are both numerous and weighty. Further deepening the complexities of the extant geopolitical milieu in the region is the host of global and regional security concerns now emanating from Central Asia: rising radical Islamic groups and terrorism, ethnic conflicts, and weapons and drug trafficking. Additionally, the area’s plethora of natural resources increase the geopolitical importance of the region.

Security, Anarchy, and the Logic of Offensive and Defensive Realism

All realists believe the primary goals of states are survival and security. Moreover, realist theory contends that the existence of states in an international system lacking a central authority to govern international relations renders the security of each state problematic. Therefore, states are inherently engaged in an ongoing competition with one another. While students across the realist tradition commonly assume this “realist *problematique*,” there exists considerable disagreement on how states actually behave. As a result, nuanced debates have emerged both amongst and within classical, neoclassical, and structural

realist schools. Offensive and defensive realism have become notable examples of the diversity emerging within the realist research program. Stemming from Kenneth Waltz's neorealist theory, the delineation of offensive and defensive realism has become increasingly prominent within the realist tradition in recent years.¹⁹ Although evolving from the same "research tradition," placing these theories opposite one another as "theoretical competitors" is warranted because "they generate different predictions and policy prescriptions."²⁰

Offensive Realism

Offensive realism echoes classical realism's prognosis about power and pessimism, but adheres to neorealism's structural logic. Like defensive realism, offensive realism attempts to illustrate how great powers behave in order to survive in an anarchical international system. However, this is where offensive and defensive realism begin to diverge. Offensive realists contend that great power states seek as much power as they can acquire and ultimately covet a hegemonic position in the international system. As John Mearsheimer writes:

Offensive realists...believe that status quo powers are rarely found in world politics, because the international system creates powerful incentives for states to look for opportunities to gain power at the expense of rivals...A state's ultimate goal is to be the hegemon of the system.²¹

For neorealists of any distinction, the international system is a "brutal arena...of relentless security competition"²² where identifying and countering security threats becomes "a way of life."²³ Again, however, the offensive realist posits that the absence of security in the international system and the indeterminate nature of survival propel states to take part in "influence-maximizing"²⁴ behavior. The more powerful and influencing a state is, the better the chance it has to survive. Rational states will attempt to maximize power because of the omnipresent prospect that another state will use force to harm it.²⁵ Therefore, the anarchic system and the uncertainty it breeds forces states to maximize their power at all times, thus creating "powerful incentives for aggression."²⁶ With hegemonic goals, major power states will seize opportunities to expand their relative power, even if this results in disrupting the status quo and a benign security environment.

While states do seek to optimize their security through the maximization of relative power and influence, offensive realists do not argue that states heedlessly expand. States are fundamentally insecure and ever searching for opportunities to increase power at the expense of rivals; however, they do not act out of blind ambition. To be more precise, offensive realism views states as rational and accordingly they attempt to maximize their power and influence when the calculation of costs and benefits in doing so is favorable. Fareed Zakaria notes the cost-benefit calculus that states employ, arguing that states do not expand in a “mad frenzy” but in a rational manner. States maximize their power and influence in places and at times that minimize costs and risks, in areas that are weaker than they, and when their power is on the rise.²⁷

It is necessary to discuss a divide that has occurred between some offensive realists regarding hegemony. Often times misinterpreted and thus misrepresented, Mearsheimer’s brand of offensive realism dictates that the “pinnacle of power” for a great power state is regional hegemony and that once this is achieved a state will become a status quo power. While a rising great power pursues expansionistic policies abroad, once it becomes a regional hegemon, it merely strives to preserve its current position. As Mearsheimer maintains, there never has been a global hegemon because great power states ultimately cannot project power across oceans onto the territory of a rival great power. In this vein, Boulding explained that the “loss of strength gradient” diminishes capabilities in distant regions.²⁸ Once a great power achieves regional hegemony, it attempts to prevent other great powers in other regions from becoming a regional hegemon. The optimum scenario is for a regional hegemon to be the sole regional hegemon in the international system. Thus, “states that achieve regional hegemony seek to prevent great powers in other regions from duplicating their feat.”²⁹ If a regional hegemon is “confronted by a peer competitor...it would go to considerable lengths to weaken and maybe even destroy its distant rival.”³⁰

Mearsheimer’s departure from the core tenet of offensive realism, that a great power expands at the expense of rivals to maximize security, concerning a regional hegemon, is problematic. If indeed, “the best defense is a good offense,”³¹ why does the “best defense become a good defense” for a regional hegemon? Furthermore, these interim periods, where a regional hegemon is only concerned with

maintenance, are short lived. As Glenn Snyder comments on Mearsheimer's offensive realism, "There may be occasional lulls before then because of a lack of opportunity to expand, but the desire for power remains and will be reactivated when circumstances permit."³² Along these lines, Layne suggests that a hegemon can never become complacent and must continue to maximize its relative power. As Layne writes:

Even if a state attains hegemony, however, its quest to maximize its relative power does not stop, and it cannot relax its guard. Hegemons cannot be status quo powers, because they want to maintain their predominance, and they fear the emergence of new rivals who could challenge their preeminence...When it comes to relative power, a hegemon can never afford to relax its efforts to maintain its margin over others.³³

In fact, Schweller suggests that the stronger a state becomes, "the more influence it wants and the more willing and able it will be to fight to further its interests."³⁴ Moreover, power maximization will make the task of balancing against aspiring regional hegemons in other regions less problematic.

The security dilemma largely reinforces the logic that a regional hegemon cannot rest its efforts for more relative power and influence in the international system. This core concept of realist theory presupposes that an increase in one state's security can make other states less secure because of the anarchic nature of world politics. The opaqueness of states' intentions and relative capabilities in anarchy breeds anxiety, suspicion, and fear. Therefore, a regional hegemon can never be clear about the intentions of other great power states. To maintain its position as a hegemon, a great power state must continually pursue aims that challenge potential rivals. Simply put, hegemons must "expand their power or die."³⁵

Defensive Realism

While both offensive and defensive realists accept the premise that security is the *a priori* goal of states in international anarchy, "they have opposite views about the most effective way to achieve it."³⁶ Treated in Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*, defensive realism does not assume that great powers are inherently aggressive because of their desire to maximize power. Instead, defensive realism argues that states, above all, aim to survive and preserve what they already have. States are "defensive positionalists."³⁷ That is, they follow a policy aimed at the status quo, described by Morgenthau as a policy aiming to maintain "the distribution of power as it exists at a particular moment in history."³⁸ In

this vein, Waltz writes, “The first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system.”³⁹ Defensive positionalism maintains that the international system persuades states to endeavor to prevent power losses. Whereas offensive realists argue that “offensive action often contributes to security; ‘defensive realism’ contends that it does not.”⁴⁰ Defensive realists dismiss the notion that the security dilemma will always lead to powerful international tension. In fact, defensive realists argue that “most states will find security plentiful”⁴¹ and therefore states can make restrained attempts to secure themselves.⁴² Once a great power state has balanced against a dangerous rival and achieved a reasonable degree of security, there is no further requirement for power accumulation.⁴³

A key assumption of defensive realism is that rational states only attempt to maximize power and influence under certain conditions. Identifying these conditions has emerged as a “sticking-point” in the development of defensive realism. Zakaria argues that defensive realism predicts that states will pursue expansionistic foreign policies “when central decision-makers perceive an increase in threats.”⁴⁴ However, Lynn-Jones purports that this is a misrepresentation of the defensive realist hypothesis and instead “states attempt to expand *when* expansion increases their security.”⁴⁵ The potential for expansionistic policies is much wider for Lynn-Jones and also theoretically more problematic. Indeed, the premise that states expand whenever expansion may increase their security is extremely difficult to falsify and intuitively counters the foundations of defensive realism that states pursue minimal security. For this reason, this article adheres closer to Zakaria’s interpretation of defensive realism. Thus, defensive realism incorporates a more conditional view of how to enhance security through aggressive behavior than does offensive realism.⁴⁶ The primary motive for states to act aggressively is a perceived security threat. Defensive realism explains state behavior as a reaction to external threats instead of the more “proactive” maximizing effort that offensive realism argues. Defensive realists do not argue that revisionist states are absent in the international system. Indeed, they acknowledge that states throughout the world are subject to similar international pressures and at times must pursue “expansionistic behavior in the hopes of staving off the dangers of living in an anarchic environment.”⁴⁷ However, this expansion is security-driven and not simply based on greed. Misperception or “domestic political pathologies” that can be

“rooted out” by the spread of democracy, economic interdependence, and international institutions explain other instances of power-maximization and over-expansion.⁴⁸ In general, however, defensive realists would not predict that a great power state would upset the status quo and a benign security environment for its own advantage.

States recognize from history that expansionistic tendencies can often be detrimental. Strategic overstretch has repeatedly been the cause of great power states waning throughout history.⁴⁹ Moreover, states most often balance against an expansionistic great power, instead of bandwagoning with them.⁵⁰ Benjamin Frankel summarizes the defensive realist perspective on the illogic of hegemonic pursuits:

Lessons drawn from the historical record would teach states that attempts at hegemony always face balancing, that aggression always meets resistance, and that the costs of expansion eventually exceed its benefits...The cumulative effect of these repeated lessons, according to defensive realists, leads states to recognize that the best course is the pursuit of moderate aims and minimal security.⁵¹

Therefore, defensive realists contend, “anything beyond a moderate, incremental foreign policy is unnecessary and counterproductive.”⁵² Similarly, Van Evera argues, “Realists who claim that the structure of international power rewards belligerent policies are wrong. In fact the structure of international power provides more disincentives than incentives for aggression.”⁵³ This logic diverges from offensive realism, which maintains that while expansionistic powers indeed learn from past mistakes they will subsequently pursue expansion in a manner and in places that draws the least attention from other great powers.⁵⁴

Offense-defense theory is a key component of defensive realist logic.⁵⁵ This concept asserts that military power favors either offense or defense. For instance, if defensive measures are more advantageous than offensive ones, states will have little incentive to go beyond protecting what they already possess. On the other hand, if offensive measures offer more utility, states will be enticed to use forceful measures to gain power. As Zakaria writes, “When the defense has the advantage (technologically and geographically), states are more likely to feel secure and hence behave calmly. When the offense has the advantage, states will feel threatened and become aggressive. Expansion thus results from insecurity.”⁵⁶ However, defensive realists posit that, within the offense-defense balance, defensive measures are much more likely. The repeated “punishments” of offensive behavior aforementioned by

Frankel, and states' realization that security is plentiful, render a natural inclination for defensive behavior. Thus, states forgo the pursuit of aggressive strategies.

Predicting Post-Cold War Security Policy in a 'Unipolar Moment'

Before generating corresponding predictions of offensive and defensive realism for U.S. foreign policy in Central Asia, it is necessary to describe the international system following the Cold War and collapse of communism. It is critical to understand America's place in the post-Cold War international system before generating and evaluating theoretical predictions. Indeed, the United States' position in the international system defined its strategic situation and played a prominent role in its policy prescription. For more than four decades, bipolarity had shaped U.S. foreign policy.

Emergence of Unipolarity

The abrupt disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar international system, prompted many commentators to investigate the emerging international power structure. Charles Krauthammer made perhaps the most prominent statement regarding the new international structure in a now famous 1991 *Foreign Affairs* article. Krauthammer argued, in contrast to some observers, the world would not be replaced by a multipolar system, but rather a unipolar one: "The most striking feature of the post-Cold War world is its unipolarity...Now is the unipolar moment."⁵⁷ Unipolarity refers to a structure where "one state's capabilities are too great to be counterbalanced."⁵⁸

Support for America's "unipolar moment" found a welcoming home amongst policymakers and academics who utilized traditional realist measurements of power. United States' military expenditures, its overwhelming nuclear capability, unrivaled air and sea power, development and application of information and communication technologies, economic expansion, diplomatic management, and overall power-projection ability all pointed to a post-Cold War world of unrivaled strategic preponderance.⁵⁹ Even Paul Kennedy, who discussed "imperial overstretch" and U.S. relative decline, recently recanted his earlier projections :

Nothing has ever existed like this disparity of power; nothing...Napoleon's France and Philip II's Spain had powerful foes and were part of a multipolar system. Charlemagne's empire was merely western European in its reach. The Roman Empire stretched farther

afield, but there was another great empire in Persia, and a larger one in China. There is, therefore, no comparison.⁶⁰

Discussion of unipolarity quickly gave way to proclamations that the “unipolar moment” would promptly be ushered aside in favor of a bipolar or multipolar system. Layne, for instance, argues that the “unipolar moment” is nothing more than “a geopolitical interlude.”⁶¹ Similarly, Kupchan believes that the U.S. “should prepare for the inevitable decline of its preponderance.”⁶² While the debate on the longevity of unipolarity continues, some contend that unipolarity is a myth. Mearsheimer, for example, argues that the international system is multipolar. He clearly appreciates U.S. military and economic power, but contends that China and Russia’s nuclear capabilities, ability to “contest and thwart a U.S. invasion of their homeland,” and “limited power-projection capability,” challenge the notion of unipolarity. Furthermore, Mearsheimer believes that the U.S. is a regional hegemon that cannot overcome the difficulty of projecting power across large bodies of water and is stymied in any pursuit of global hegemony.⁶³ However, the expectation that a state must be able to achieve all its goals everywhere is “not a standard for unipolarity but for divinity.”⁶⁴ Altogether, it appears unpersuasive to label the post-Cold War era as anything other than a unipolar international system. It is clear that U.S. strategic dominance in the world the last decade has been unrivaled and Henry Kissinger was correct in the observation that the U.S. “seemed to tower over the international stage.”⁶⁵

The resounding shift from a bipolar structure significantly altered the framework that had long-guided U.S. foreign policy. While policy debates were multifaceted during the Cold War, the foundational values and basic premises that steered U.S. foreign policy were generally agreed upon: a bipolar world, a zero-sum game with the Soviet Union, containment of communism, promotion of liberal economic values, and U.S. leadership in the world.⁶⁶ Moreover, fascism, World War II, and the Cold War presented a succession of international challenges to U.S. foreign policy. With the end of the Soviet military threat and communism, the U.S. confronted a world where there was no longer a discernible peril to its national security. The lack of recognizable security or ideological threats to the U.S., in the Cold War's aftermath, largely allowed for the "unipolar moment." As Robert Art notes, “America’s nuclear deterrent cannot be

threatened through conventional means, and no nation would launch a conventional attack on a nuclear-armed United States...In the post-Cold War era, therefore, the United States has only to worry about the spread of nuclear weapons to crazy statesmen and ruthless terrorists.”⁶⁷ Similarly, John Lewis Gaddis noted in 1991 that, “For the First time in over half a century, no single great power, or coalition of powers, poses a ‘clear and present’ danger to the national security of the United States.”⁶⁸ America’s northern and southern neighbors were largely benevolent and weak and no state had the ability to cross the Atlantic or Pacific oceans to realistically threaten the United States. Furthermore, no rival country could conquer and dominate Europe or East Asia. These changes however, did not suddenly make the world a less threatening place.

Developing Predictions for Offensive and Defensive Realism

Because “unipolarity grants the United States unprecedented freedom in its choice of foreign policy,”⁶⁹ a critical question for this article emerges. What predictions do the logic of offensive and defensive realism lead us to for U.S. policy in Central Asia following the Cold War? Formulating *a priori* offensive and defensive realist predictions about U.S. foreign policy behavior is necessary to evaluate the performance of these theories during this period in Central Asia. Offensive and defensive realism would predict divergent U.S. strategies in Central Asia in light of America’s post-Cold War position in the international system.

Utilizing both Layne’s and Mearsheimer’s versions of offensive realism, we can make a number of predictions for U.S. post-Cold War strategy in Central Asia. First, there should be an indication that the U.S. attempted to aggressively and proactively expand its influence and power in the region. Even though the U.S. has achieved unrivaled preponderance, it ought to have looked for unilateral advantages to capitalize on its preponderance soon after the Cold War ended. Second, the U.S. should have taken advantage of the perceived power vacuum that emerged in Central Asia because of Soviet withdrawal. This assumption is based on the argument that a state will look for opportunities to maximize power in places that minimize costs and risks. Third, evidence should point to policies constructed with the goal of preventing the emergence of rival hegemonies in the region. Especially noteworthy would be evidence that

indicated that the U.S. was following a strategy that attempted to thwart a rising China, Russia, and Iran.⁷⁰ Succinctly, the United States should have demonstrated an inclination to increase power and influence in Central Asia following the end of the Cold War; such efforts would not have commenced solely as a response to the 2001 terrorist attacks.

However, if defensive realism were a more accurate theory of great power behavior, we would expect U.S. strategy to contradict these predictions. Broadly, U.S. expansion into Central Asia would have to be predicated on the existence of a threat. Without a discernible security threat emanating from Central Asia, defensive realism would predict that the U.S. would not pursue an aggressive Central Asian foreign policy. First, the U.S. should have pursued policies that attempted to preserve its current position in the international system through moderate foreign policies in Central Asia. The U.S. should not have attempted to maximize power in the absence of a direct threat to its national security in the region. Second, the U.S. should not have carried through with any policy that upset a benign security environment. United States' policy must show a general inclination for the status quo. Third, we should expect the U.S. to have engaged in aggressive security policies only if there was a clear perception of a security threat somewhere in the international system. More specifically, the U.S. should only have engaged Central Asia after September 11 to mount the War on Terrorism from the region. Fourth, it is likely that we would witness U.S. signaling of benign intentions even if it was reacting to an emerging security threat. It would be imperative that other rival competitors, such as Russia, China, and Iran, not perceive U.S. policy in the region to be expansionistic or part of a larger strategy aimed at containment.

U.S. Post-Cold War Policy in Central Asia

Misunderstanding and unfamiliarity hampered early strategies of the Bush I and Clinton administrations toward Central Asia. The Bush I administration did open embassies in all five of the former Soviet republics and showed some awareness that the region could become strategically important to U.S. interests. Still, early post-Cold War U.S. policy in the region appeared oriented toward preserving the status quo.

There was some concern amongst U.S. policymakers that a rival competitor may fill the power vacuum left by Soviet withdrawal. Washington looked optimistically to Turkey to become a reliable proxy in the regional vacuum. Additionally, U.S. officials were concerned with the prospect of “loose nukes” and eliminating nuclear weapons based in Kazakhstan.⁷¹ However, other than supporting Turkish influence in the region and a number of nuclear threat reduction initiatives, the U.S. was largely ambivalent toward the former Soviet republics. Even when it became increasingly clear that Turkey was unwilling and unable to be a U.S. proxy in the region, administration officials were content with the region falling back under a Russian sphere of influence. Because of the chaotic reform process and the possibility of Central Asian states collapsing, Russian influence in the region was touted as beneficial.⁷² Indeed, the U.S. remained mute concerning a number of treaties on defense integration between Russia and Central Asian states between 1992-1995. During an early 1994 visit to Russia, President Clinton went as far to compare Russia’s interests in the “near abroad” to U.S. interests in Central America. The cost of heavily engaging the region seemed to outweigh the benefits and the logic of policies oriented toward maintaining the status quo dominated.

By mid-1994 however, Washington’s “hands-off” approach toward Central Asia began to transform for a number of reasons. The 1994 Charter on Democratic Partnership between the U.S. and Kazakhstan, which supported the “inviolability of Kazakh borders,” and outlined cooperation on defense and security issues in the region, signified the commencement of a renewed interest.⁷³ First, the U.S. design of Ankara establishing its preeminence in the region failed miserably.⁷⁴ Because of Turkey’s economic woes, its apparent distaste for the role of regional power, and perhaps even historical memory of the Ottoman and Russian empires contesting for power a century earlier, Washington ceased relying on Ankara to moderate the region. Second, contracts between U.S. oil companies and the Kazakhstan government in 1993 provided an impetus for the development of a more coherent policy in a potential oil and natural gas frontier. Third, U.S.-Russian relations were deteriorating as Russia struggled with democratic and economic reforms. Finally, other countries, such as Russia, Iran, and China, were attempting to take a more proactive role in the region.

The second Clinton administration, alongside U.S. oil companies, began to intensify efforts to inhibit Russia's long dominance over the region's natural resources. Clearly, the fundamental driver of this new vigor was the prospect to tap new energy resources outside of the Persian Gulf. Moreover, the envisioned "new Silk Road," connecting China, Russia, Eurasia, and Western Europe, would require an extensive network of pipelines, railroads, highways, and communication infrastructures. These necessities would provide numerous opportunities for U.S. corporations. Still, the role that energy resources played in the development of U.S. policy in Central Asia should not be overemphasized. Nor was U.S. involvement in the region solely focused on promoting the broad goals of economic and political stability. U.S. officials were becoming more aware of clear strategic reasons for engagement. In this vein, a leaked 1992 Pentagon document reflected Washington's aim:

Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union. This is a dominant consideration...and requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power...Our strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor.⁷⁵

The Central Asian security vacuum presented the U.S. with an opportunity to enhance its own influence in the region at the expense of rising competitors. The region's proximity to Russia, Iran, China, Turkey, India, and Pakistan and serving as the natural land bridge between Asia and Europe prompted a host of players to begin vying at various levels for influence in the region. Many commentators began to compare the emerging milieu as a renewal of Kipling's "Great Game" that had been played by the Russian and British empires during the nineteenth century. While this characterization is somewhat alarmist, geostrategic considerations were not absent in Washington's foreign policy development. Furthermore, the contention, that Caspian oil was simply a vital national security issue that warranted defense, was specious.

First, considerable developmental challenges, its geographical remoteness, and Soviet legacies, posed significant obstacles to developing the regions energy resources.⁷⁶ Moreover, not only were the geographic and logistical hurdles to tapping Central Asia's oil resources extensive, but estimates of oil

and gas reserves in the region were in fact quite modest. Throughout the late 1990's, U.S. officials repeatedly cited the U.S. Department of State's claim that the Caspian region housed approximately 200 billion barrels of oil reserves.⁷⁷ However, oil company and U.S. officials quickly became more sober in their expectations. Indeed, two authors report that in interviews conducted between April 1997 and October 1998 with geologists from various U.S. oil companies, such as Amoco, Pennzoil, and Texaco, estimates tended to be below 100 billion barrels.⁷⁸ Furthermore, actual proven reserves in the region were somewhere between 15 and 30 billion barrels (approximately 3% of the world's proven oil reserves), or roughly equitable to the proven reserves found in Norway or Libya. In comparison, the Middle East harbors more than 600 billion barrels of proven reserves, accounting for approximately 55% of the world's total.⁷⁹ To be sure, at less than 3% of the world's proven oil reserves (a fraction of the Gulf's reserve), the Caspian region's energy resources does not represent a vital U.S. interest. Overzealous claims about the region's oil potential often attempted to validate U.S. engagement in the region. In fact, U.S. oil endeavors in other regions of the world would have been more economically sound and expedient. It appears that the economic/oil rationale for U.S. policy in the region "intended to serve as justification for policies adopted with other objectives in mind (such as containment of Iran and weakening Russian influence.)"⁸⁰

In the mid-1990's, Russia altered its Western-oriented policy when NATO expansion became a reality and Western aid was less than the country expected. U.S. officials were watching Russia's attempts to strengthen relationships with former Soviet states. Russia attempted to maintain the considerable influence it still garnered in the region. As it did in the Caucasus, Russia engaged in various conflict resolution efforts in Central Asia on a number of occasions. Moreover, Russia still has forward deployed troops in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and particularly Tajikistan where Russian troops guard the Afghanistan border. Civil war in Tajikistan was also a primary concern of Russian officials, as they feared such destabilization could spillover into Russian territory. Since 1999, Russia's 201st Army division and border troops along the Tajik-Afghan border have participated in a number of joint antiterrorist exercises, coined Commonwealth Southern Shield, with troops from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and

Kyrgyzstan.⁸¹ Additionally, there was concern over Beijing's expanding role in the region. Washington could no longer ignore China's increased trade, political engagement, and energy interests in Central Asia, especially in light of Russia's waning power.⁸² As one author notes, "China is already becoming an important source of trade and investment, particularly in Central Asia. Should Russia be shaken by prolonged disunity, China would assume a more active political and military role in Central Asia."⁸³ China's efforts were already being demonstrated by the 1996 formation of the Beijing-led Shanghai Cooperative Organization. The group consisted of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan before Uzbekistan's inclusion in 2001. Initially, the arrangement sought to demilitarize China's borders with other members. Annual summits of the organization commenced in 1998 and issue areas have broadened to economic integration and regional terrorist threats.

Furthermore, U.S. policymakers were concerned with the reemergence of Islamic practices throughout many states in Central Asia and feared a larger Islamic revival. Some believed that Iran harbored desire to "turn Central Asia into its strategic rear, viewing the Islamic states of Central Asia as potential spheres of influence."⁸⁴ The concern over the threat of political Islam was not a minor aspect of U.S. interest in the region and related to the more specific goal of containing Iran.⁸⁵ Attention also turned to militant rebel groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). In the summer of 1999, IMU launched insurgencies in Central Asia and kidnapped both Japanese and U.S. citizens. In 1999 and 2000, IMU squads launched attacks from Tajikistan into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan including killing sixteen people in Tashkent in February 1999. IMU has avowed to replace the governments of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan with "a unitary Fergana Valley Caliphate."⁸⁶ The State Department placed the IMU on its list of terrorist organizations in September 2000. Other groups, such as Hizb-ut-Tahir (HuT), share similar goals with IMU and have amassed a significant following with alienated segments of the Uzbek, Tajik, and Kyrgyz populations.⁸⁷

The increased threat of rival competitor influence in the region figured heavily into the U.S. geostrategic calculus. Washington was especially cognizant of Russian interests in the region and officials began pursuing a strategy to "roll back" Russian influence. As one author notes:

Most observers, and even some official U.S. statements, view the totality of U.S. regional engagement as intended to further the goal of breaking Russia's monopoly, to demonstrate the U.S. power projection capability, to help tie the region to the West through Partnership for Peace program, to enhance local military capabilities for self-defense, to prevent military reliance on Moscow, to exclude Russia from conflict resolution – its main means of asserting its power – and cement a local presence to defend our energy interests.⁸⁸

“Pipeline politics” became a significant tool of U.S. efforts in the region, especially its support for the Baku-Ceyhan route. Washington's support for Caspian oil routes through Turkey, while bypassing Iran and Russia, upheld the strategic goal of inhibiting these state's ability to project power and influence into the region. It was well known that running the pipeline through Iran, which already had an existing pipeline system, was economically more sound.⁸⁹ In fact, oil and gas companies estimated that the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline would cost \$3.7-\$4 billion, almost twice that of a route that went through Iran.⁹⁰

While Washington attempted to minimize the influence of Russia and Iran through “pipeline politics,” it was also strengthening its influence in the region through the development of military and security ties. Sustained bilateral and multilateral engagement in Central Asia became a significant aspect of U.S. military strategy for U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM).⁹¹ A number of military hardware transfers occurred in the 1990's. For example, the U.S. transferred 16 military transport vehicles to Uzbekistan's security forces and supplied coast guard vessels to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.⁹² By 1994, every Central Asian state, excluding Tajikistan, signed onto NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) cooperative security framework. Between 1994 and 1997, PfP activities in Central Asia increased steadily. PfP was an effective instrument to encourage regional governments to develop ties with Western institutions. U.S. security ties in the region were deepening:

Clearly, U.S. regional military involvement is growing. General John Sheehan, USMC, Commander-in Chief of US Atlantic Command (ACOM) and NATO's SACLANT (Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic), announced the USA's willingness to take part in regional peace support operations involving Central Asian forces under UN authorization, further extending the US offer of security cooperation to those states.⁹³

Numerous joint military exercises involving soldiers from the U.S. and various Central Asian states took place throughout the decade.⁹⁴ Especially noteworthy has been a series of annual *Centrasbat* exercises. Exhibiting U.S. power projection capabilities, these series of exercises involved airlifting U.S. and

Central Asian state troops from the U.S. mainland and parachuting them into Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The world's press and even some NATO officials were under the impression that *Centrasbat* exercises were a PfP program and therefore a NATO sponsored operation. However, *Centrasbat* was a U.S. led initiative independent of PfP and NATO. Indeed, Central Asian participation in PfP activities actually showed a decline after 1998 and military officials from the region have vocalized their preference for more direct bilateral agreements with the United States.⁹⁵ Soon after *Centrasbat* 1997, Kazakhstan and the United States signed the U.S. Defense Cooperation Agreement to build institutional structures for regional stability. Such efforts directly challenged similar agreements reached by Russia and Tajikistan.⁹⁶ The increased cooperation between the U.S. military and Central Asian states reflected a growing U.S. security guarantee to the region. Furthermore, joint military exercises were critical in a U.S. strategy to utilize Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as "listening posts and bulwarks against Russian and Iranian expansion."⁹⁷ U.S. CENTCOM assumed responsibility for all U.S. military activities and operations in Central Asia in 1999.

Predictably, Russia uneasiness with the expanding U.S. role in Central Asia was increasingly resembling its resentment over NATO expansion into Eastern Europe. Western offers of partnership to Central Asian states with NATO through PfP provided "direct evidence that the West was willing to challenge Russia's *droit de regard* in the region and its jealous claim to be the sole legitimate external security actor."⁹⁸ Russian President Boris Yeltsin candidly complained in 1997 that the U.S. was "declaring that [the region] is in their zone of interest. Our interest is weakening, but the Americans are beginning to penetrate this zone."⁹⁹ S. Frederick Star, chairman of the Central Asia Institute, summed up Russia's distress: "There's growing anxiety about the waning of the Russian presence in a part of the world they considered their back yard for 150 years."¹⁰⁰ Russian policymakers openly protested that the concomitant U.S. penetration into Central Asia and NATO expansion into Eastern Europe and perceived these policies as part of a U.S. strategy to undermine Russian influence in its near abroad. U.S. encirclement threatened the Eurasian ideal still held by many Russians to restore the territorial integrity of the old Soviet empire. As a prominent Russian political scientist argued, "Russia should declare to the

world community that the entire geopolitical space of the former USSR is a sphere of its vital interest.”¹⁰¹ Russia attempted to counter Western penetration by establishing a strategic alliance with Iran, formally bringing together the governments of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan through the “Group of Four,” and conflict resolution efforts, especially in Tajikistan.¹⁰² To be sure, Russian interests in the region transcend feelings of national entitlement and involve significant strategic concerns. Central Asia is a corridor for drug trafficking into Russia from Afghanistan, Islamic fundamentalism troubles Moscow, and the region is a key area for Russia to monitor potential missile launches from China.¹⁰³

However, Russia’s “imperial hangover” and efforts to garner more influence throughout Central Asia were largely ineffectual. Many of the cooperative defense agreements made by Russia with Central Asian states were dysfunctional by 1995 and Russia’s economic decline has done little to entice regional governments to turn away from the West. Indeed, as one author wrote in 1998, “Russia has lost its dominant position [in Central Asia] and has no chance of regaining it...By the time Russia regains any strength, the Central Asian states will already have secured a considerably more diverse set of external relations with Asian and Western countries.”¹⁰⁴ While Russia’s loss of influence was primarily due to its own frailties, early post-Cold War U.S. policy in the region capitalized on these weaknesses and served to increase U.S. influence and power in the region.

The United States and Post-September 11 Central Asia

The attacks of September 11 reaffirmed the geo-strategic value of Central Asia, and the U.S. has since substantially increased engagement in the region. In many ways, Central Asia became the front-line in America’s War on Terrorism. The perception of the region as a legitimate security threat also grew considerably. Policymakers believe that a number of states in the region are potentially fertile for Islamic extremist groups and continued terrorist threats. As two analysts, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, note:

It is now all too clear that the United States needs a new strategy in dealing with Central Asia – one that takes into account how terrorism in Central Asia reacts with terrorism in Russia, China, South Asia, and the Middle East. The United States must do more to ensure that regional and internal tensions in Central Asia do not create new terrorist movements that link together to become global threats.¹⁰⁵

Increased U.S. presence in the region is a response to a direct and significant threat to U.S. national security.

While Central Asia was a slowly growing interest of a number of regional and world powers throughout the 1990's, the events of September 11 catapulted Central Asia into the heart of world politics. In just a few weeks, the states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and to some degree Turkmenistan, took center-stage on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. These states consisted of the northern constituent of a persistent campaign against terrorists based in Afghanistan. Moreover, the terrorist attacks gave the U.S. an excellent opportunity to continue to reformulate the balance of power in the region. During Secretary of State Colin Powell's trip to Uzbekistan in December 2001, Powell stated that the U.S. is interested in a "deepening and widening" relationship "that will endure long after the crisis is over."¹⁰⁶ Perhaps Powell's most telling statements were delivered before the House International Relation's Committee on February 6, 2002, where he insisted that, "America will have a continuing interest and presence in Central Asia of a kind that we could not have dreamed of before."¹⁰⁷ In a early 2002 trip through the former Soviet republics, U.S. Senate majority leader Tom Daschle echoed Powell's remarks, stating to Uzbek officials that the U.S. presence "is not simply in the immediate term."¹⁰⁸

All five Central Asian states publicly denounced the attacks against the U.S., and in general responded affirmatively to requests to cooperate in the U.S. War on Terrorism. As a key staging point for military and humanitarian campaigns in Afghanistan, a number of Central Asian states took the opportunity to further develop strategic alliances with Washington. U.S. military deployments in the region have been accelerating since September 11. Tajikistan agreed with some reluctance to give the U.S. access to their airspace for humanitarian purposes. Uzbekistan allowed the U.S. to station over one thousand troops of the Army's 10th Mountain Division, airplanes, and helicopters at an air base in Khanabad.¹⁰⁹ In January 2002, three thousand U.S. troops arrived in Kyrgyzstan to supplement troops in Uzbekistan. The U.S. received military authority to use the Kyrgyz base at Manas airport in Bishkek for combat operations.¹¹⁰

Washington also signed agreements to use bases in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and talks are ongoing with Kazakhstan to develop similar preparations.

Initially, regional powers refrained from vocalizing the growing contempt over U.S. presence, fearing they would appear unsympathetic to the War on Terrorism. Russian president Vladimir Putin was especially keen on being seen as an active participant and supporter of anti-terrorist operations. Furthermore, there was a definite convergence of interests, as it is was beneficial to Russia that the Taliban be removed and a more stable and less-threatening regime be put in place. However, along with public support came considerable concern that the U.S. has utilized the post-September 11 environment to further its role and influence in Central Asia. Many observers, especially in Russia and China, believe that recent U.S. policy is simply a “modified version” of Kissinger’s and Brzezinski’s Cold War’s containment strategy.¹¹¹ Moscow, unsurprisingly, believes that U.S. counterterrorism efforts are part of a larger strategy to drain Russian power in its “soft underbelly.” Indeed, some Duma members have charged President Putin with “losing Central Asia” and not doing enough to resist “U.S. imperialism.”¹¹² A report by the Russian news agency, RIA, noted that many Russians view the U.S. presence as “a tragic event signifying...the end of centuries-long Russian influence in Central Asia.”¹¹³ Some Russian newspapers likened the growing discontent with U.S. presence in Central Asia as a potential catalyst for a new Cold War.¹¹⁴ Commenting on U.S. bases in Central Asia, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov averred in February 2002, “these bases are there on a temporary basis, and only until the end of the anti-terrorist operation.”¹¹⁵ Other Russian leaders have demanded that Russia counterbalance U.S. efforts in the region. As recent as June 2003, Russia announced that it will be opening a Russian air base at Kyrgyzstan’s Kant airfield and deploying two air groups comprised of five Su-25 attack-fighters to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.¹¹⁶

Similarly, Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji also expressed concern, as China borders Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the east, and suspects the U.S. of attempting to curtail Chinese influence in the region. Indeed, the deployment of U.S. troops to Central Asia emasculated one of China’s most substantial foreign policy initiatives in years, the Shanghai Cooperative Organization, as it now “pales in the face of

the U.S. diplomatic juggernaut in the region.”¹¹⁷ Some observers see U.S. policy as a strategic attempt to encircle China. U.S. involvement in Central Asia is often discussed in conjunction with Washington’s other policy initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region, such as alliance strengthening with Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.¹¹⁸

Evaluating U.S. Policy: So Who Wins?

Commentary on post-Cold War U.S. policy in Central Asia usually follows two paths that to some extent reflect aspects of offensive and defensive realism. One path of explanation coincides with the argument that the U.S. only “discovered” Central Asia following September 11 and increased U.S. involvement in the region is solely attributable to the War on Terrorism. It is argued that an isolationist United States has only limited interest in Central Asia and has no desire to become involved in longer-term commitments associated with “nation-building.” The other interpretation reasons that the U.S. is determined to build upon the ties it has developed in War on Terrorism. Using the War on Terrorism as an “excuse” to augment its power in the region, the U.S. is most concerned with geopolitical imperatives involving the containment of Russia, China, and Iran.¹¹⁹

Indeed, it appears that U.S. policy in the region has reflected a vacillation between these two extremes, and has at times reflected offensive realist predictions, and at other times defensive realist tenets. Early U.S. security policy in Central Asia corresponded with defensive realism. Washington had few ambitions in the region beyond nuclear disarmament and counter-proliferation and appeared satisfied with Turkey playing the role as arbiter and patron in Central Asia. Without a clear national interest to protect, Washington was willing to stand aside and let other regional powers supervise the complex region. Policymakers were content with maintaining the status quo and had no inclination to pursue influence-maximization policies in the region. However, as oil interests grew and a number of regional security threats emerged, U.S. involvement in Central Asia grew considerably. This interpretation of increased U.S. engagement in the region is reconcilable with defensive realism, however, it is suspect. Oil resources in Central Asia never represented a significant a “vital national interest” to the United States and cannot explain the totality of U.S. engagement in the region. To be sure, the U.S. quickly realized that the

region's oil promise was far less than previously touted by the U.S. Department of Energy.¹²⁰ Nor did Central Asia represent or harbor any significant threats to U.S. national security once nuclear disarmament occurred. Regional security threats of drug trafficking, organized crime, and terrorism, were limited in nature and, at the time, did not figure prominently into the national security calculus. The states of Central Asia posed no real peril to the security interests of the United States in the post-Cold War world.

Furthermore, as aforementioned, it is a common misperception that the U.S. only began to lay the groundwork for an expanded role in Central Asia following September 11.¹²¹ While U.S. efforts in the region certainly intensified in this period, the ease in which the U.S. moved into Central Asia at this time were predicated upon ongoing influence maximization efforts throughout the 1990's. The United States would have been unable to act as swiftly and as self-assuredly in Central Asia had the region truly been relegated to the "backwaters" of the U.S. foreign policy agenda following the Cold War. Central Asia was a U.S. strategic priority long before the Twin Towers and Pentagon were attacked. Deepening military and security relationships with Central Asian states represented an effort to facilitate power projection and garner influence in the region at the expense of rival competitors. The prospect of another power gaining a substantial "foothold" in the heartland of Eurasia did not escape U.S. policymakers. The U.S. could not ignore the potential competition for regional dominance between Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran. By projecting its own power into Russia's adjacent regions, the U.S. was inhibiting Russia's ability to project power in its perceived sphere of influence. Even in the face of considerable Russian outcry about U.S. encirclement of Russian borders, the United States did little to alleviate Russian fears of neocontainment beyond repetitively avowing that Central Asia was a "win-win" situation for all parties in the region.¹²² U.S. policymakers were apathetic to Russian concern over growing U.S. involvement in the region. Coupling U.S. forays into Central Asia with NATO expansion into Eastern Europe and potentially into the Baltics, cries of encirclement by Russia are genuine. Indeed, even Walt, a defensive realist, attributes "America's deteriorating relationship with Russia" in some part to "U.S. indifference to Russian interests" in Central Asia.¹²³ Similar objections from Beijing also do not appear completely rhetorical.

Countering Chinese ambitions in Central Asia, deepening alliance formation in East Asia, and development of Theater Missile Defense with Japan, could be construed as a strategy to contain a “rising China.”

In short, offensive realism better explains U.S. post-Cold War foreign policy in Central Asia. While the U.S. seeks no colonial empire in Central Asia, it did seek increased power and influence in the region for most of the decade following the Cold War. Although the U.S. was not overly ambitious in its post-Cold War Central Asia policy, the U.S. looked for opportunities to expand its influence in the power vacuum left in Central Asia after Soviet disintegration. After initial preoccupation with oil, U.S. policymakers pursued strategies that attempted to prevent the emergence of rival competitors in the region. Central to this was the U.S. pursuit of influence in the region at the expense of Russia. By developing ties with many Central Asian governments following the Cold War, the U.S. moved into the area relatively easily after September 11 and now finds itself wielding significant power in the region. Moreover, the U.S. appears intent on continuing its power maximization efforts through the War on Terrorism in Afghanistan. To be sure, if Secretary of State Powell’s remarks that the U.S. will have a continued presence in Central Asia beyond anything “dreamed of before,” then U.S. behavior will further validate the predictions made for offensive realism.

Concluding Remarks and Challenges to Scholarship

The case of post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy in Central Asia has shed some light on utilizing offensive and defensive realism as theories of foreign policy. However, determining the explanatory power of offensive and defensive realism in U.S. policy in Central Asia will be furthered once a critical question is answered. It will be necessary to examine U.S. behavior in the region as Operation Enduring Freedom continues to subside in Afghanistan. Succinctly, is U.S. presence in Central Asia a temporary phenomenon that corresponds to the War on Terrorism, or is a part of a longer term grand strategic goal to usurp the ambitions of other great powers in the region? If U.S. military presence continues and even increases in Central Asia long after Operation Enduring Freedom concludes, then it would appear that the U.S. took advantage of a sizable opportunity to increase its influence and power in Central Asia.

Alternatively, if the U.S. gradually removes forces from the region after the main components of the war in Afghanistan are over, then U.S. deployments in Central Asia were part of a security maximization effort.

Analyzing U.S. post-Cold War foreign policy in Central Asia has revealed a number of critical observations about offensive and defensive realism that warrant further discussion. First, offensive realism leaves itself open to criticism with its vague caveat that states will only pursue aggressive foreign policies when the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs. This “escape clause” makes offensive realism difficult to falsify. To be sure, it is undemanding to explain away instances where great power states have not acted aggressively by finding costs that appear too great for a state to attempt to expand its influence. Furthermore, many historical examples given for aggressive behavior seem rife with costs, yet a state still pursued an expansionistic foreign policy.

Second, defensive realism also is difficult to falsify because of the imprecision that involves identifying a security threat to a great power state. If states only pursue aggressive foreign policies when a perceived security threat arises, then the very nature of the international system would incline states to continually respond to security threats that may be direct or simply on the horizon. Moreover, there has been little analysis by defensive realists on the nexus between security threats and vital national interests. Broadening conceptualizations of security that include human security and economic interests have made identifying direct threats to a nation’s security more difficult.¹²⁴ Therefore, it remains unclear how a state will behave as security concerns move away from a strict militaristic approach to security. For instance, would defensive realism expect the U.S. to pursue aggressive policies toward African nations in response to a growing AIDS epidemic that has long-term security implications for the U.S.? These concerns undoubtedly are linked to the realist conundrum of unit actors, other than the state, wielding more and more power in the international system.

Third, concerning offensive realism, it is necessary that more clarity be given to the role that military capabilities and technological advancement play in foreign policy strategy. Alastair Ian Johnston argues that offensive realism would make the general prediction that a state will increase its military spending.¹²⁵

While this often may be the case, it is unclear how technological and strategic advancements will fit into offensive realist expectations. Indeed, the new mantra for the U.S. military has been to do with few what used to take many. Small elite fighting units and a digitized battlefield may actually cost less and require fewer personnel, but make power projection more feasible. In this vein, Mearsheimer's argument that a regional hegemon will be unable to achieve global hegemony on the account of oceans is unpersuasive. This argument does not appreciate military advancements in technology to a great enough degree. In an era where the U.S. military is seeking "full spectrum dominance" over land, air, sea, and now space and cyberspace, oceans seem to increasingly be a geographical constraint of the past. The information and communication revolution has substantially reduced the safety-screen that geographic separation once provided. As one author notes, "the revolution in military affairs' has carried the American war machine still further, into hitherto unimagined terrain."¹²⁶

¹ Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven Miller, "Preface," in *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security*, eds. Sean Lynn-Jones, Michael Brown, and Steven Miller (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), xi.

² Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origin's of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

³ Central Asia is most often understood as the region comprised of the five former Soviet "stans." These states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have been independent states since the early 1990's. Traditionally, Central Asia has also extended to western China and Afghanistan; however, this essay does not take this broader geographical definition and Central Asia refers only to the newly independent states.

⁴ For example, John Lewis Gaddis, "International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War," *International Security* 17 (Winter 1992/93), p. 5-58; Charles W. Kegley, Jr., "The Neoidealist Moment in International Studies? Realist Myths and the New International Realities," *International Studies Quarterly* 37 (June 1993), p. 131-147; Richard Ned Lebow, "The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism," *International Organization* 48 (Spring 1994), pp. 249-277; John Gerrard Ruggie, "The False Premise of Realism," in *Theories of War and Peace*, eds. Michael E. Brown, et. al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), p. 415; Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁵ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Seeking Security under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security* 25 (Winter 2000), p. 131.

⁶ See Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25 (Summer 2000), pp. 5-41; William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War," *International Security* 19 (Winter 1994).

⁷ Waltz contends that structural theories of international politics cannot be used as theories of foreign policy. He emphasizes that structural theories explain international outcomes, not individual state's foreign policies. For Waltz, theories of international politics explain why states similarly placed in the system behave similarly despite their differences. Conversely, a theory of foreign policy explains why states similarly placed in the system do not behave similarly. However, in accordance with the arguments advanced by Colin Elman, among others, I believe that structural realist theories can be applied to the analysis of individual state behavior. The structure of the international system provides incentives and constraints for individual states to pursue different behaviors. For writings on this issue, see: Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979); "Reductionist and Systemic Theories," in *Neorealism and its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press,

1986), pp. 47-69; “International Politics is Not Foreign Policy,” *Security Studies* 6 (autumn 1996), pp.54-56; “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No.2 (Fall 1993), p. 45; Colin Elman “Horses for Courses,” *Security Studies* 6 (Autumn 1996), pp. 7-53; “A Response to Kenneth Waltz,” *Security Studies* 6 (autumn 1996), pp. 58-61; Eric Labs, “Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims,” *Security Studies* 6 (Summer 1997), p. 5.

⁸ Robert Jervis, “Realism and the Study of World Politics,” in *International Organization* 52 (Autumn 1998), 991.

⁹ Stephen M. Walt, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories,” *Foreign Policy* (Summer 1998), p. 29.

¹⁰ Sean M. Lynn-Jones, “Realism and America’s Rise,” *International Security* (Fall 1998), p. 159.

¹¹ Fareed Zakaria, “Realism and Domestic Politics,” in *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security*, p.479

¹² By Caspian region, this article refers to the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and the Caucus states of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.

¹³ Martha Brill Olcott, “Nation Building in Central Asia,” in *National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. Roman Szporluk (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 210-211.

¹⁴ Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner, “Introduction,” in *The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and its Borderlands*,” eds. Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 6.

¹⁵ Quoted in Karl E. Mayer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Washington: Counterpoint, 1999), p. 565.

¹⁶ In Scott Jones, “Introduction,” in *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, ed. Gary Bertsch, Cassady Craft, Scott Jones, and Michael Beck (New York: Routledge, 2000), p.1.

¹⁷ See, Editorial, “England and Russia in Central Asia,” *American Journal of International Law* 3 (Jan. 1909), p.170.

¹⁸ Milan Hauner, *What is Asia to Us? Russia’s Asia’s Heartland, Yesterday and Today* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

¹⁹ For some examples of authors that accept the demarcation between “offensive” or “aggressive” realism and “defensive” realism, see Benjamin Frankel, “Restating the Realist Case: An Introduction,” *Security Studies* 5 (Spring 1996); Eric Labs, “Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims”; Andrew Kydd, “Sheep in Sheeps Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Eachother,” *Security Studies* 7 (Autumn 1997); Stephen Walt, “International Relations: One World Many Theories,” *Foreign Policy* 110 (Spring 1998).

²⁰ See Stephen G. Brooks, “Dueling Realisms,” in *International Organization* 51 (Summer 1997), p. 458; Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy,” p. 134.

²¹ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p.21.

²² Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19 (1994), p. 10.

²³ Kenneth Waltz, “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory” in *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*, eds. Robert Rotberg and Theodore Rabb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 43.

²⁴ Zakaria uses this term to “avoid the pitfalls of the vague concept of power” and “power-maximization” in “Realism and Domestic Politics,” p. 479.

²⁵ John Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War,” in *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security*, p.85.

²⁶ Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future,” p. 85.

²⁷ Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origin’s of America’s World Role*.

²⁸ See Kenneth Boulding, *Conflict an Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 230-232.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 41.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 42.

³¹ Ibid, p. 36.

³² Glenn H. Snyder, “Mearsheimer’s World – Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security,” *International Security* 27 (Summer 2002), p. 158.

³³ Christopher Layne, “US Hegemony and the Perpetuation of NATO,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 23 (September 2000), p. 65.

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- ⁴⁷ Colin Dueck, “The Sources of American Expansion,” *Security Studies* 11 (Autumn 2001), p. 180.
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- ⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 382.
- ⁶⁴ Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment Revisited,” *The National Interest* (Winter 2002/03), p. 6.
- ⁶⁵ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 805.
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- ⁶⁷ Robert J. Art, “A Defensible Defense,” *International Security* 15 (Spring 1991), pp. 23-24.
- ⁶⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, “Toward the Post-Cold War World,” *Foreign Affairs* 70 (Spring 1991), p. 102.
- ⁶⁹ David A. Lake, “Ulysses’s Triumph: American Power and the New World Order,” *Security Studies* 8 (Summer 1999), p. 49.
- ⁷⁰ These predictions for offensive realism are consistent with the version of offensive realism that contends that a great power state cannot become complacent when it achieves regional hegemony. Mearsheimer’s brand of offensive realism would support these predictions only if the U.S. perceived the rise of a regional hegemon elsewhere in the world. Additionally, prediction number one is similar to that developed by Christopher Layne concerning U.S. support for NATO expansion. See “US Hegemony and the Perpetuation of NATO,” p. 66.
- ⁷¹ In December 1993, Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev and U.S. Vice president Al Gore signed a cooperative threat reduction agreement to dismantle missiles and silos in Kazakhstan. The U.S. was also involved in assisting Kazakhstan shut down its Aktau reactor and remove nuclear materials from the country.

- ⁷² See Paul Quinn-Judge, "US is said to favor a Russian sphere," *The Boston Globe* (January 14, 1994), p. 1.
- ⁷³ Roy Allison, "The Military and Political Security Landscape in Russia and the South," in *Russia, The Caucasus, and Central Asia: The 21st Century Security Environment*, eds. Rajon Menon et. al. (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), p. 33.
- ⁷⁴ See Alan Cowell, "Turkey Loses its Allure as a Patron in Central Asian Nations," *The New York Times* (August 4, 1993), p. A3; James Dorsey, "Uzbekistan seeks role as balance to Russia," *The Washington Times* (June 26, 1996), p. A12; Charles William Maynes, "Maerica Discovers Central Asia," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2003), p. 124.
- ⁷⁵ "Excerpts from the Pentagon's Plan: 'Prevent the Emergence of a New Rival'," *The New York Times* (March 8, 1992), p. 14.
- ⁷⁶ See Olcott, "The Caspian's False promise," *Foreign Policy* 111 (Summer 1998).
- ⁷⁷ See State Department Report to Congress (April 1997).
- ⁷⁸ See Amy Myers Jaffe and Robert A. Manning, "The Myth of the Caspian 'Great Game': The Real Geopolitics of Energy," *Survival* 40 (Winter 1998-99), p. 114.
- ⁷⁹ See footnote number 14 in Jaffe and Manning, p. 128.
- ⁸⁰ Neil MacFarlane, *Western Engagement in the Caucasus and Central Asia* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1999), p. 20.
- ⁸¹ See "Central Asia," *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* (April 26, 2000); "Bishkek," *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* (July 17, 2002).
- ⁸² For a discussion of China's growing energy interests in Central Asia, see Yitzhak Shicor, "From Horse to Horsepower: Energy in China's Relations with Central Asia," *Pacifica Review* 13 (February 2001), pp. 91-105.
- ⁸³ Rajan Menon, "The Security Environment in the South Caucasus and Central Asia," *Russia, The Caucasus, and Central Asia: The 21st Century Security Environment*, p. 21.
- ⁸⁴ Ariel Cohen, "U.S. Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* 1132 (July 24, 1997).
- ⁸⁵ See Paul Starobin, "Foreign Policy: The New Great Game," *The National Journal* 12 (March 1999).
- ⁸⁶ Alec Rasizade, "Washington and the 'great game,'" *Contemporary Review* 280 (May 2002), p. 257.
- ⁸⁷ See for a discussion, Svante Cornell and Regine Spector, "Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists," *The Washington Quarterly* 25 (winter 2002); Uran Botobekov, "Spreading the Ideas of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir in South Kyrgyzstan," in *Islam in the Post-Soviet Newly Independent States: The View from Within*, eds. Alexei Malashenko and Martha Brill Olcott (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2001).
- ⁸⁸ Stephen Blank, "American Grand Strategy and the Transcaspian Region," *World Affairs* 163 (Fall 2000), p. 68.
- ⁸⁹ See Martin Walker, "Bush's Choice: Athens or Sparta," *World Policy Journal* (Summer 2001), p. 6.
- ⁹⁰ Bruce Kuniholm, "The Geopolitics of the Caspian Basin," *The Middle East Journal* 54 (Autumn 2000), p.546.
- ⁹¹ Blank, "The Future of Transcaspian Security," Strategic Studies Institute (August 2002), p. 14.
- ⁹² Kenley Butler, "U.S. Military Cooperation with Central Asian States," NIS Nonproliferation Program, Monterey Institute of International Studies (September 17, 2001), Online, [avail: http://cns.miiis.edu](http://cns.miiis.edu).
- ⁹³ Stephen Blank, "The United States and Central Asia," p. 139.
- ⁹⁴ For example, in September 1997, soldiers from the U.S., Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and numerous other nations participated in military exercises in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. In August 1995, June 1997, March 2000, and May 2000, the U.S. and various Central Asian States participated in "Cooperative Nugget" and "Cooperative Osprey" exercises in Louisiana, Colorado, and Germany.
- ⁹⁵ See Robin Bhatti and Rachel Bronson, "NATO's Mixed Signals in the Caucasus and Central Asia," *Survival* 42 (Autumn 2000), pp. 131-133.
- ⁹⁶ Allison, "The Military and Political Security Landscape in Russia and the South," p.39.
- ⁹⁷ Ann Myers Jaffe and Robert A. Manning, "The Myth of the Caspian 'Great Game,'" *Survival* 40 (Winter 1998), p. 119.
- ⁹⁸ Roland Dannreuther, "Can Russia Sustain its Dominance in Central Asia," *Security Dialogue* 32 (June 2001), p. 248.
- ⁹⁹ "Yeltsin voices concern at "growing U.S. interest" in North Caucasus," *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* (August 20, 1997).
- ¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Dan Morgan and David Ottaway, "In Russia's Backyard," *The Washington Post* (September 22, 1997), p. A01.
- ¹⁰¹ Andranik Migranyan, quoted in Ambrosio, p. 51.
- ¹⁰² See Dannreuther, p. 249.

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- ¹¹² See Scott Peterson, "The American Empire," *Christian Science Monitor* (march 20, 2002), p. D01.
- ¹¹³ Quoted in John Murray, "US abetting unsavory new client state in Uzbekistan," *The Irish Times* (February 16, 2002), p. 12.
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- ¹¹⁸ See Lyuba Pronina, "Ivanov: U.S. Will Leave Central Asia," *The Moscow Times* (February 13, 2002).
- ¹¹⁹ For a good outline of the opposing view points see, S. Frederick Starr, "The United States, Afghanistan, and Central Asia," *NIASnytt* 3 (2002), pp. 9-11.
- ¹²⁰ See Dannreuther, p. 250-251.
- ¹²¹ See for example Andrew J. Bacevich, "Steppes to Empire," *The National Interest* (Summer 2002), pp. 39-53.
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- ¹²⁵ See Alastair Iain Johnston, "Realism(s) and Chinese Security Policy in the Post-Cold War Period," in *Unipolar Politics*, p. 278.
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