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4 ABSTRACT

This article examines U.S. policy toward the supercontinent of Eurasia from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the present. The baseline for U.S. policy was established in 1992, the prevention of a peer competitor emerging in Eurasia. The initial focus for ten years was on assistance to promote Russia's transition to becoming a market democracy while simultaneously hedging against the return of a revanchist Russia through promotion of expansion of NATO and the European Union.

The 9/11 attack in 2001 shifted the attention of the Bush Administration to the War on Terror with the United States military getting bogged down in two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Obama Administration sought to end both wars and withdraw U.S. troops with mixed success. In 2011/2012 with growing concern over China's more assertive policy in East Asia, U.S. foreign and security policy aimed to put more military, economic, and diplomatic resources toward East Asia. These efforts, however, were distracted by Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the civil war in Syria, and the emergence of ISIS.

Almost in the background over this quarter century, a far more significant phenomenon has been developing – the reconnection of Eurasia. With the rise of China, India and Russia, as well as the emergence of middle powers including Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, and others, the Eurasian supercontinent is being “rewired” economically, politically, and strategically. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has garnered the most attention, but virtually every state – large, medium, and small – are adjusting their national interests and foreign policies in a very fluid environment. To date Washington has struggled to grasp the breadth and depth of change and failed to develop its own strategy as well as allocate adequate analytical and policy tools to advance U.S. interests.

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The United States has responded quite skeptically and critically to various non-U.S.-led efforts to promote Eurasian integration without being able to offer an attractive and compelling alternative in the post-Cold War era. Russia-

led efforts such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and more recently the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) are seen in Washington as thinly veiled means to promote Russia as a regional economic, political, and/or security hegemon. For example, in December 2012, then Secretary Clinton described the Eurasian Union as an effort “to re-Sovietize the region. . .” “It's not going to be called that. It's going to be called a customs union, it will be called Eurasian Union and all of that. . . But let's make no mistake about

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it. We know what the goal is and we are trying to figure out effective ways to slow down or prevent it," (Clover, 2012). U.S. government officials actively urged future members of the EAEU, such as Kyrgyzstan, not to join.¹ The U.S. government and NATO have refused for more than 15 years to engage with the CSTO as an institution and thus legitimize it in the West.

The Bush II and Obama Administrations essentially ignored and downplayed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) since its founding in 2001. The announcement of China's Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road in late 2013 (which have subsequently been combined under the moniker Belt and Road Initiative or BRI) was essentially ignored by the Obama Administration. When the Chinese announced the founding of a new multilateral bank, the Asian Investment and Infrastructure Bank (AIIB) in 2015, the Obama Administration urged its Asian and European allies not to join and was very embarrassed when many major partners ended up joining the new venture. And now it appears from highly critical statements of the BRI from Secretary of Defense Mattis and Secretary of State Tillerson in October 2017 that the Trump Administration intends to take a much more critical posture toward the BRI.

Conversely, the United States has been supportive of Western organizations such as NATO, the OSCE, and the EU to engage more with its not so close neighbors to the East. For example, Washington strongly urged Kazakhstan during the year of its chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010 to back off the notion of a new European security framework initially promoted by then Russian President Dmitri Medvedev to focus on Afghanistan as a priority. Washington has also encouraged the Central Asian states in particular to work together institutionally without Russia and China. Interestingly, this kind of cooperation (states in the region are allergic to the word "integration" as it is seen historically as forced integration Soviet style and/or a means to diminish newly won sovereignty) may now be more possible with rapidly shifting policies of Uzbekistan.

This article will analyze U.S. efforts to promote Eurasian integration since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 to the present as well as how Washington has reacted to integration efforts led by other major powers, notably China and Russia. The narrative draws special attention to the period after 2001 since this marked a dramatic departure for U.S. policy toward Eurasia to support Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. We will conclude with an effort to examine more closely U.S. policy debates and responses to China's Brick and Road Initiative since its initial articulation in the Fall of 2013. The central argument suggests U.S. efforts while experiencing some modest success at times have been limited first by Washington's lack of strategic vision and willingness to allocate adequate diplomatic and material resources as well as growing pushback from Russia and finally what appears to be an overwhelming initiative from China designed to play out

¹ Author discussions with Kyrgyz government officials in July 2014. One official greeted the author saying "Andy, can you please ask the State Department to stop telling us not to join the EAU?"

over the Eurasian supercontinent² over the next three decades.

1. From the collapse of the Soviet Union to 9/11: The unipolar moment

With the collapse of its superpower rival, the Soviet Union, of more than 45 years in 1991, the United States stood atop the global hierarchy to an extent perhaps not seen since the acme of the Roman Empire 2000 years ago. In response to this rapid and nearly unimagined position of predominance, the George H. W. Bush Administration, in what turned out to be its final year in office, developed a new strategy document that in many ways has served as the fulcrum of U.S. foreign and security policy for the next 25 years. The key concept of the strategy called for preventing the emergence of a "peer challenger" who could challenge U.S. dominance of the international system (Cheney, 1993, p. 1; Tyler, 1992, p. 1). And just as the famous British geographer Halford Mackinder presciently articulated more than 100 years ago, given the vast mineral, economic, demographic, and military resources throughout the Eurasian supercontinent, this was the only place on the globe from where an imaginable peer competitor could emerge to challenge Washington.

At the time of the Soviet collapse, one could only imagine three potential candidates – Europe, Russia, and China – but for different reasons, neither Europe nor China appeared as either realistic or imminent threats. However, a revanchist and nationalist Russia where democratic and market reforms had failed was a possibility, admittedly or not, that U.S. policymakers had to consider. This is one reason why the United States and its European allies immediately recognized the historically arbitrary borders of the 12 non-Baltic Soviet republics as virtually sacrosanct. This left Moscow with about one-third less territory than that of the Soviet Union, one-half of the population, and 25 million ethnic Russians living outside the borders of the Russian Federation. The collapse of the USSR³ also broke down production chains developed over 70 years of Soviet rule that added to the massive economic woes of Russia and its neighbors. While Moscow maintained a nuclear deterrent of parity with that of the United States, by virtually any other index of power, the new Russian Federation was vastly weaker than the Soviet Union.

U.S. strategy toward the new states of the former Soviet Union revolved around promoting market democracies in the region, and especially promoting the sovereignty of the neighboring states around Russia. None of them had been sovereign ever before in their new borders. Several conflicts broke out in Georgia, Moldova, and the territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan intensified. The

² There are multiple definitions and conceptions of the shape-shifting term "Eurasia." For the purposes of this article, the author's focus will be the supercontinent stretching from Europe in the West to East Asia and from Russia in the North to South Asia, bracketed by the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

³ The new reformist Russian government was quite comfortable initially to not be encumbered by its neighboring republics that it viewed as likely to slow down and complicate reform in Russia. By no means should the Soviet collapse be viewed as the result of some Western "plot."

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