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WHY CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS SHOULD LINK UP AND WHY THE WORLD SHOULD STAND ASIDE AS THEY DO SO

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HIGHLIGHTS

Central Asia and the Caucasus will be like tall people struggling under a low ceiling. The only way to advance will be to link arms.

Fear of reprisals from Russia has delayed regional cooperation. Yet Russia will have no choice but to enter a post-imperial era.

Central Asia's presidents admitted Azerbaijan as a full member, a crucially important step. The Caspian Sea will become not an impediment but a conduit.

Formalized meetings under foreign auspices have one glaring fault: they pull the region in contradictory directions as much as they foster unity.

When the USSR collapsed, many did not expect the eight new states in former Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus to survive, let alone to thrive. Inter-ethnic tensions, radical religious movements fanned by foreigners, the lack of many laws and institutions that modern life requires, and the hangover of habits formed under nearly two centuries of Russian colonial control all augured ill for the new countries.

The years since 1991 have been difficult, with many setbacks along the way. Some challenges remain to be addressed and others scarcely acknowledged. Yet three decades after regaining independence, all eight of these new sovereignties have not only survived but have thrived, in spite of formidable challenges. This is therefore an opportune moment to pause and ask how this was achieved, what is the state of the region today, and what it might become in the future.

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BUILDING SOVEREIGNTIES

Reclaiming or creating national identity after being subservient to a foreign culture and polity was no simple matter. The first focus of the presidents who emerged after 1991 was on reclaiming what they saw as their national cultures and histories, and on establishing new national power centers. This led to curious phenomena. Ancient national histories were reclaimed or invented, statues of national heroes were raised, and half-forgotten languages and customs reclaimed from the shadows to which imperialism had consigned them. In Turkmenistan, where tribal divisions and external pressures had prevented the emergence of a single power center, the president assigned to himself the role of father of the nation.

In all the new countries, this process laid bare internal divisions that had long existed but had been swept under the carpet. Such differences led at times to armed conflict and, in Tajikistan and Georgia, to civil war. To reverse this doleful situation, the new presidents claimed for themselves authoritarian powers and used them to suppress opponents. Some of the perceived threats arose from home, but others, especially Islamic extremism, were fomented from abroad.

Thrown on the defense and scrambling to avoid chaos, the new governments adopted many policies that put them at odds with their neighbors. The definition of new national borders led to conflicts both in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Worse, the introduction of strict visa requirements, heavy duties on imports, a residual Russian military presence, and ominously militarized border regimens not only discouraged trade and development but isolated from each other peoples and cultures that had interacted intensely and productively for millennia.

It helped that the new presidents and their cohorts had all spent decades working in the same Soviet system. Not only did they share the Russian language of their rulers but they knew one another and in most cases could anticipate how the others would react to initiatives from elsewhere. While providing a degree of stability in a fundamentally unstable situation, over time this began to open a gap between the first generation of post-Soviet rulers and the rising generations in all the countries, younger men and women who emerged in the first heady days of sovereignty and who gradually began to look beyond their national borders to the world outside. Most of them shifted to their national language while many chose English to communicate internationally.



SOURCE: SHUTTERSTOCK

EMBRACING THE WORLD

To their credit, the new authoritarian rulers were well aware of these fundamental shifts and even quietly promoted them. President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan, during a visit to Washington, was asked why he did not introduce the basic reforms that so many thoughtful people thought were needed. To this, he bluntly replied that no one should expect his generation of leaders to do this, "for we were formed in a different world." Then another reporter asked if he did not fear that the thousands of Uzbek students studying abroad might bring back alien ideas that would destabilize their homeland. "Yes, it is true," he replied. "They return home more like you than like us. But they are ours, and they will enrich us with unfamiliar ideas and fresh methods." In the Caucasus, Georgians' enthusiasm for joining Europe required restraint, lest it trigger a Russian reaction.

Nor did students from the Caucasus and Central Asia need to go abroad to encounter new ideas. From Armenia and Georgia in the west to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in the east, several dozen new institutions of higher education were opened, often with international support and international teaching staffs. Several of these have already appeared in major international rankings.

To be sure, this has occurred at a cost, as many traditional skills have been lost. But thanks to education and the new media, the rising generation has been exposed from an early age to ideas and tastes that are regional or international in character, rather than purely local or national.

Even though the main thrust of regional development after the collapse of the USSR occurred at the national level, there were international and region-wide initiatives from the outset. Even before the Belovezha Accords that ended the Soviet Union, the five Central Asian leaders held a summit meeting in Almaty in June 1990. This was followed in August 1991 by a meeting in Tashkent that established a regional Consultative Council. Interestingly, Azerbaijan participated in this Central Asian assemblage. Then in December 1991, the Turkmen president Saparmurad Niyazov proposed the establishment of a Central Asia Confederation, which was shelved when Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev judged it too controversial. Meanwhile, in 1993, Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov proposed to the UN General Assembly that Central Asia become a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

This in turn led to a conference in 1997 in Tashkent and then to a regional treaty, signed at Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan in 2006. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev in 1992 had proposed a "Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia." That a newly sovereign country in a heretofore neglected region of Asia should propose such a forum astonished many, yet the initiative, by convening frequent meetings, helped integrate the new states into the worldwide dialogue on peace and security. It helped that western institutions like the George C. Marshall Center at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, began training officers and analysts.

The exploitation of the oil, gas, and mineral resources of the Caucasus and Central Asia emerged as another powerful force for integrating the region with the world economy and, eventually, within itself. In 1992, Kazakhstan helped create an international consortium to build a pipeline from the Tengiz oilfield to Novorossiysk on the Black Sea, and engaged Italian and British companies to develop the Karachaganak gas field. The following year, it signed with the American firm Chevron an unprecedented forty-year agreement to develop Tengiz. Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan entered into agreements with Canadian and Chinese firms to develop its gold resources. Even though some of these deals were later modified or even cancelled, the overall thrust was to integrate the resources of Central Asia and the Caucasus with the world economy.

ADDRESSING OLD CONFLICTS

With the dawn of independence, countries of the region had to resolve old intra-regional conflicts and address new ones. Old Soviet borders left a region-wide residue of ill will between neighbors. These old tensions came to the fore with independence and called for diplomacy on the part of all parties. For example, it took years for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to address the causes of tensions on their mutual borders. And when Turkmenistan's president Niyazov proposed to Beijing to build a pipeline for Turkmen gas to China, he faced a formidable obstacle: the pipeline had to cross Uzbekistan, and Uzbek and Turkmen tribes had crossed swords for centuries. However, when presented with



SOURCE: SHUTTERSTOCK

this rare opportunity, the two sides promptly made peace and have maintained cordial relations ever since.

Over all these developments has hung constant pressure from Russia, whose leaders seem to believe that its interests are best served by fostering instability in its former domains.

Three decades after the collapse of the USSR, several of these conflicts remained unresolved. Only in 2025 did Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan strike a bargain on the delineation of their mutual border. Meanwhile, conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the territory of Karabakh resulted in two wars. Again, it was only in 2025 that the leaders of the two countries could strike a deal and even this remains tentative until related constitutional issues are resolved. Meanwhile, although their mutual relations have significantly improved, Baku and Yerevan have yet to open diplomatic relations.

Among the old conflicts that came to the surface after independence was that between the state and religious institutions. Soviet rule had suppressed many aspects of religious life among both Muslims in Central Asia and Azerbaijan and among Christians in Georgia and Armenia. Independence brought demands for greater autonomy and for contacts with co-religionists abroad, especially among Muslims. The new governments met these head-on, with legal protections for the practice of religion but the strict exclusion of religion from the political realm. At the same time, the new states honored religious traditions as historical and cultural phenomena. In most cases, religious elites and the public acquiesced in these arrangements, but tensions remained in several countries and actual conflicts lingered, especially in Tajikistan, where the government followed a hard line, and Kyrgyzstan, where the government attempted to accommodate the faithful.

THE RISE OF A REGIONWIDE CONSCIOUSNESS

To this day, the countries and regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus remain poorly linked with each other. But where air and rail services remain inadequate, individuals have used their private cars to enhance intra-regional connectivity. The proliferation of foreign license plates on the streets of all the major capitals attests to this, while scores of new hotels in all the major centers serve both regional and foreign travelers.

Foreign powers have contributed significantly to the rise of a regionwide consciousness across the entire Caspian region. From the first days of independence, international businesses interested in doing business with the regional countries had no choice but to meet regularly with legal and logistics experts from all the relevant countries and to help iron out differences among them.

Faced with such difficulties, it was Japan that did the most to foster communication and a regional consciousness among the five states of Central Asia, if not the Caspian region as a whole. It did so beginning in 2004, when it convened the foreign ministers of the five Central Asian states to meet with its own foreign minister. These sessions were immediately expanded to

include other officials and businessmen. Through this initiative, which was sparked by Kazakhstan's Minister of Foreign Affairs and future President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the Japanese government hoped not only to identify areas in which the region could cooperate with Japan but also, as Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Aso put it, in which the Central Asians could then work with each other. It is notable that Japan also included Afghanistan as an observer.

In 2007, South Korea launched a similar forum at the vice-ministerial level, which reached the presidential level in September 2026. In 2009, the Nakhchivan Agreement created a "Turkic Council" that later evolved into the Organization of Turkic States. The initiative came not from Ankara, whose attention was then fixed on the Middle East, but from Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who proposed it in 2006, and from Azerbaijan, which endorsed and championed it. Unique in that membership was based on ethnicity rather than geography, this group included four founding members, and extended observer status to Turkmenistan, Hungary, and even Northern Cyprus.

In 2015, the U.S. founded its own geographically based organization for Central Asia. Prompted by Kazakhstan's ambassador in Washington, Secretary of State John Kerry proposed the creation of C5 + 1 (i.e., the five Central Asian states plus the U.S.). This group held high-level discussions over the following years, rising to the presidential level only in 2023, when Joe Biden met his five counterparts in New York; in November 2025, Donald Trump hosted them at the White House. The C5 + 1 process, in turn, unleashed a flood of new interactions between American investors and Central Asian entrepreneurs and, inevitably, among the locally based entrepreneurs themselves. The European Union, for its part, had opened a dialogue with the five Central Asian states in 2013, nine years after Japan's initiative and two years before C5 + 1. Only in 2025 did Antonio Costa and Ursula von der Leyen meet the region's presidents and launch what they named a Strategic Partnership with all five states—the same year that Japan held its first summit-level meeting with Central Asia.

Taken together, this bewildering array of organizations encouraged frequent interactions among the founding presidents, which then spread to senior officials. Old rivalries and tensions among the presidents seemed to have faded and were replaced by growing cordiality and a desire to promote common interests.

TRIUMPH TO TRAGEDY: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CENTRAL ASIA UNION

It was but one step further for the regional presidents to institutionalize and regularize their frequent meetings and consultations. Back in 1994, the presidents of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan had put in place a Central Asian Union, which they described as "a single economic space," together with a Central Asian Bank for Cooperation and Development. Tajikistan, torn by civil war, joined in 1998, but Turkmenistan, citing its declared neutrality, stayed aloof. This embryonic organization included even a Council of Defense Ministers. In 1998, this entity was reconstituted as the Central Asian Economic Community, and in 2002, it was again reconstituted as the Central Asia Cooperation Organization or Central Asia Union. Momentum for creating regionwide institutions soared briefly after 2000. Building on earlier contacts and understandings, this regionwide coordinating body covered not only such core economic functions as customs, tariffs, and border regimens, but also security. This important departure was none too soon. Ever since independence, Islamic extremists had waged war in Tajikistan and posed a threat to all Central Asia.

This threat grew steadily until May 2005, when a large band of heavily armed Islamic extremists took over the Uzbek city of Andijan, leading to a bloody conflict that claimed nearly two hundred lives. This led President Karimov to harden further Uzbekistan's borders with all its Central Asian neighbors and to limit interactions that he considered peripheral to national security, including with the Central Asia Union. Meanwhile, Vladimir Putin had risen to power in Moscow and embraced the Eurasian movement's mystical and sinister vision of Russian imperial power. This ideology, with roots tracing to Russian intellectuals and ex-tsarist officers and officials in the wake of World War I, aspired to reconstitute Russia as the leader of a vast, multi-national, and anti-western empire embracing all of inner Asia. He perceived the new Central Asia Union as a threat to this project.

Proceeding carefully, he first asked to be allowed to attend as an observer. The Central Asians cautiously asked the major powers East and West for their views on the matter. All replied that it was purely up to the Central Asians. Having found no support for a more firm stance, the leaders admitted Russia as an observer. Then Putin asked to become a full member and again the Central Asians consulted with China, Europe, the US,

etc. All repeated the diplomatic line that this, too, was solely up to the Central Asians.

Once he became a member of the Central Asia Union, Putin began forming his own Eurasian Economic Community, into which he finally merged the Central Asia Union in 2005. Russian neo-imperialism had won the day.

In both its notable success and forced demise, the Central Asia Union left an important legacy. It culminated a sustained process of interaction among the new sovereignties that began as the Soviet Union collapsed and deepened steadily thereafter. Its existence stands as testimony to the importance of institutionalizing cooperation at the regional level, and for leadership in that process at the presidential level. While it did not come close to matching the achievements of ASEAN or any other of the world's regional collaborations, it demonstrated the practical possibility of region-wide institutions in Central Asia and pointed the way to its future as a self-governing world region.

BRIDGING THE CASPIAN

In spite of their differences of history, language, and faith, peoples on both sides of the Caspian Sea have interacted for centuries. Even though the USSR strictly differentiated the two regions in many spheres, communications and travel between them flourished during the final Soviet decades. When late Soviet leaders resorted to fomenting tension in the USSR's South, they did so within the Caucasus region—i.e., between Armenia and Azerbaijan—rather than between the Caucasus and Central Asia. The sad story of relations between these two proud countries repeats the oft-told history of diverse people who had long coexisted on the same territory descending into conflict with the rise of nationalism. And as often occurs elsewhere, outsiders—in this case Soviet officials, specifically Mikhail Gorbachev—manipulated the hostility for their own benefit.

Today the two governments are on the verge of setting aside or resolving the issues that have divided them for two generations. Whether or not they succeed, broader developments in economics and geopolitics are raising the price both countries must pay for the continuation of their mutual hostility and steadily nudging Armenia and Azerbaijan together.

Meanwhile, the same economic and geopolitical factors that may foster cooperation between Armenia and Azerbaijan are bridging the Caspian Sea. Both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are urgently seeking more direct access to European markets for their oil and gas, a goal that is best attained by building pipelines beneath the Caspian. And both European and Chinese manufacturers are seeking an alternative land route across the heart of Asia in the event that the existing railroads and roads through Russia and Iran are too slow or costly, or are closed, as recently happened. This has generated demand in both East and West for a trans-Caspian transport corridor for energy and goods, which is fast becoming a reality.

Developments in civilian air transport and the exchange of information are further erasing the Caspian Sea as a barrier to region-wide development. Air traffic between the national airports of Central Asia and the Caucasus has soared. Meanwhile, satellite systems now bridge the Caspian, creating a growing single information space. This fulfills the dream of the nuclear physicist Roald Sagdeev, a Moscow-born Tatar raised in Kazan, who first proposed what he called a "Silksat" a generation ago.

The importance of these developments is amplified by what can only be considered geopolitical shifts. Putin's war on Ukraine has drawn Moscow's attention away from Central Asia, while Moscow's failure to champion Armenia against Azerbaijan has encouraged Yerevan to renew its frayed relations in the Caucasus and with Turkey and Europe, and to create de novo ties with Central Asia. Manifesting these striking developments has been a series of unprecedented visits in both directions by the leaders of all three countries of the Caucasus and the presidents of all five states of Central Asia.

THE WAY FORWARD

When Putin moved to close down the nascent Central Asia Union, he administered a shock to the Central Asians' regional aspirations but failed to kill them. However, the regional cause advanced further only after another decade had passed and only after a crucial change in leadership in Tashkent.

The death in 2016 of Uzbekistan's first president, Islam Karimov, marked the end of an era for the region as a whole and the start of a new one. Often criticized for imposing an excessively rigid rule at home and closing off his borders to neighbors, Karimov nonetheless

successfully built domestic peace, imposed stabilizing institutions, and successfully confronted Islamic extremism. He was succeeded by his long-term prime minister, Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Mirziyoyev lost no time in opening the borders, lifting the most onerous controls, and opening the economy to foreign investors.

He also quickly established cordial relations with his counterparts across Central Asia. Some, like the presidents of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, had long focused mainly on domestic affairs. Kyrgyzstan's president had been in office for only five years. But all three of these had concluded that stronger regional links would best serve their own countries. Kazakhstan's long-serving first president Nazarbayev had long supported regional collaboration and, though mindful of contrary pressure from Russia, had stood by every effort to institutionalize it. Mirziyoyev, long preoccupied with domestic issues, benefited from the steady counsel of his experienced and adroit minister of foreign affairs Abdulaziz Kamilov, who had held office for years and knew intimately the tangled history of regional collaboration in Central Asia.

Thanks in part to Kamilov, Mirziyoyev well understood both the possibilities before him and the danger he would face. The buoyant mood he himself had created at home emboldened him to act decisively. With this background, in 2017 he proposed to the United Nations General Assembly the creation of a new regional consultative body. He prudently described it as "flexible and sovereignty-respecting," in other words, what regional presidents had been proposing for a quarter century. The UN nodded it through and the next year the five presidents convened the first "Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia."

Nor was their resolve accidental. Early in 2014, Ukrainians had thrown out their Russian-backed president. Within weeks, the Russian army had seized Crimea and, through a referendum judged illegitimate, annexed it to the Russian state. Back in 2005, the Central Asians had buckled before Putin's threat to their sovereignty. This time, keenly aware of their earlier experience, the presidents acted decisively and together.

They began at once to convene on a regular basis. Even though this intra-regional process of consultation and joint action is still in its infancy, its importance cannot be overstated. This is best understood by comparing it to the annual meetings of Central Asian



SOURCE: SHUTTERSTOCK

leaders under foreign auspices that had been occurring annually since Japan launched its "Central Asia Plus Japan" in 2004.

For all their virtues, all these formalized annual meetings had one glaring fault: they all exert a powerful and contradictory centrifugal pressure on the regional presidents and the region as a whole. For all their good intentions, they pull the region in contradictory directions as much as they foster unity. It is for this reason that the launching of the new intraregional meetings and structures is so important. While they certainly don't oppose the existing arrangements with foreign powers, they provide the only venue where Central Asian officials meet purely among themselves, without outside participants or observers.

Piling victory on victory, the Central Asian presidents first invited Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev to their Consultative Meeting of Heads of State in Dushanbe in 2023. Aliyev attended again in Astana in August 2024 and in Tashkent in 2025, and later joined his Central Asian counterparts at an informal summit in Cholpon-Ata in July 2026 and at the Consultative Meeting in Awaza, Turkmenistan, on October 8, 2026. It was at Tashkent, however, that the presidents admitted Azerbaijan as a full member. This marked a crucially important step in the process of recognizing and institutionalizing the trans-Caspian region as a whole, including both Central Asia and the Caucasus. As this advanced, the Caspian Sea came to be seen not as an impediment to their interaction but as a conduit for mutual interaction.

Notwithstanding these achievements, much remains to be done before the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus region exist as a region and are recognized as such. Obviously, the first urgent task is for Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve their differences. While Azerbaijan has already begun the process of linking with Central Asia, Armenia will have little chance of doing so until the conflict is resolved. Nor will it be easy for Georgia, in spite of its role in the trans-Caucasus transport project promoted by Washington and in spite of the fact that it has downgraded its expectations vis-à-vis Europe.

Beyond this, even within just Central Asia, the process of coordination remains woefully under-institutionalized. It is well and good for the presidents to meet and even for senior officials to convene, but if there are no secretariats to follow up, the best initiatives will be stillborn. The presidents realize this. But when they convened in Cholpon-Ata in Kyrgyzstan in 2022, they identified two dozen areas where coordination and interaction were needed but there was absolutely no follow-up. Yet it will be a simple matter to set up offices for the areas that are called for, to spread them among the various capitals, and to coordinate them through the internet, and automatic translation obviates the need for a single regional language.

Regional leaders do not need to reinvent the wheel, for in every part of the world there exist well-organized regional organizations from which they can learn: ASEAN, the Baltic Council, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, as well as the Association of Caribbean States, the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), and the European Union. Some of the lessons of these groups will be positive, others negative, but all will prove instructive.

One might well ask what has so delayed the cause of cooperation and coordination in Central Asia and the Caucasus? There is one obvious cause and one less obvious. The obvious reason is fear of reprisals from Russia. Bitter experience has proven these to be justified, at least in the past. For now, Russia is staggering under the domestic effects of its war against Ukraine. Moreover, the long-term consequences of the war in many areas—finance, industry, energy, science, demography, and public health—are profound and inevitable. Russia will have no choice but to enter a post-imperial era and for a generation will lack both the will and the resources needed to successfully dominate its neighbors.

The less obvious cause for the governments' cautious approach to coordination is fear that it will lead to calls for a region-wide elective parliament. They recall their own countries' bitter experience with the Supreme Council (Soviet) of the USSR and its councils in each republic, and they have watched the EU's parliament with deep skepticism. All of them are so focused on working out acceptable relations with their own new parliaments that they have no intention of complicating their lives further by the addition of a regional parliament.

For these and other reasons, society across both Central Asia and the Caucasus has forged ahead of the governments with respect to regionalism. Region-wide initiatives in travel, communications, business, higher education, sports, tourism and other fields are proliferating and creating a reality that their governments



SOURCE: SHUTTERSTOCK

cannot ignore. That younger men and women dominate these initiatives makes the need for governmental action all the more compelling.

As governments calibrate when and how they will create regional structures to coordinate activities in a range of areas, their officials will do well to consider the cost of their not acting. For however much they are thriving today, the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus will eventually find themselves in the position of tall people struggling under a low ceiling. The only way they can advance further and keep pace with developments worldwide will be to link arms. This does not require them to sacrifice what they have achieved through hard work since independence. Rather, they should view the result as a kind of second story atop their existing sovereignties and identities, supplementing rather than supplanting what they have become since 1991.

As they do so, they can be sure of one thing: with few exceptions, the international community will welcome a locally and regionally based movement for regional cooperation and coordination. Foreign partners will look with favor on a region that is better able to manage its internal differences and conflicts. International investors will seize on the expansion of potential markets and the greater ease of doing business everywhere. Meanwhile, senior officials in both Central Asia and the Caucasus will hail the fact that both foreign businessmen and foreign politicians will all find it hard to play their regional partners against each other.

The developments sketched out here cannot and will not come into being immediately. Several challenging issues must be addressed along the way, both by the regional governments and their friends abroad. And there are bound to be setbacks, as indeed there have been during the years since 1991, even though the record as a whole has been one of steady progress. Let it also be noted that many matters within Central Asia and the Caucasus that demand serious treatment have not yet even been mentioned, even though they must eventually be addressed if greater coordination and institutionalization is to be achieved and the benefits arising from them reaped.

Finally, let us ask what should the new region be called: Greater Central Asia, the Caspian Region, the Caspian Heartlands, or some other name yet to be derived? Happily, this question, like so many others, can and should be left solely to the countries themselves. That is the path forward.

CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS INSTITUTE POLICY BRIEF

ABOUT THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS INSTITUTE

The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute (CACI) was founded in 1997 to respond to the increasing need for information, research and analysis on the vast territory of Central Eurasia stretching from Turkey to Western China, encompassing eight former Soviet republics as well as Afghanistan, Mongolia, and the North Caucasus.

The Institute's aim has been to help bring greater attention to these regions among officials and policymakers. In 2005, CACI established a Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center with the Stockholm-based Silk Road Studies Program, which was created in 2002 to advance similar objectives in Europe. CACI is led by its founding Chairman, S. Frederick Starr, and Director Svante E. Cornell. More details on the activities of CACI and the Joint Center are available at its dedicated website, www.silkroadstudies.org. The Institute formally affiliated with the American Foreign Policy Council in March 2017.

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