



# Executive Summary

Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press



## CENTRAL ASIA'S SHRINKING CONNECTIVITY GAP: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. STRATEGY

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This monograph focuses on the poorly explored but increasingly relevant issue of integration of Central Asia into the global economy and related implications for the U.S. regional and global strategy. What trends have been shrinking Central and South Asia's connectivity gap? What role have aspiring and traditional great powers played in this process? How can the United States exploit arising opportunities to advance its foreign policy toward Central Asia and the world? What longer-term policy options are available for Washington, DC, in Central Asia, and what power arrangements can the United States promote to shape a smoother course and peaceful outcome of the shrinking connectivity gap being filled by partners and perceived challengers, such as Russia, China, India, the European Union (EU), Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan? What military, political, and economic instruments does Washington need to employ to boost its regional strategy?

Answers to these questions are important, not least because they shed light on the U.S. global standing and its ability to shape global connectivity processes as a major pillar of world stability. The United States is witnessing a transformation of Central Asia—a critical yet highly understudied and misunderstood area of the world, which is seeing growing influence of China, India, and Russia. The agendas of these actors, as well as the United States, Japan, the EU, Turkey, and Iran, among others, have enabled Central and South Asian countries to shrink their connectivity gaps dramatically in the last 2 decades, aiding the U.S. grand strategy of advancing global connectivity. However, they could also potentially undermine a multidirectional connectivity and limit development choices for regional countries, generating challenges

and opportunities for the United States, whose global influence is receding rapidly.

The U.S. future global and regional role and capabilities will depend on how well Washington adjusts its grand strategy in response to current and projected economic and geopolitical trends in the new era. The rise of China, India, and the resurgence of Russia—all capable of challenging regional orders—calls for an engaged, long-term, and concerted U.S. global and, more importantly regional strategy in Central Asia, which figures prominently in grand strategies of the major powers. The U.S. strategy should solidify its military role without provoking militarization in the greater region; advance the external and internal integration of Central and South Asia by cooperating with established and emerging powers, as well as significantly boost its own regional economic role and presence; cooperate and, where necessary, compete with other actors to ensure that the regional countries have more choices of cooperation as they seek linkages with the global economy; address intra- and interstate conflicts in Central and South Asia that could threaten or reverse their connectivity; and leverage desires and necessities of local countries in expanding the U.S. long-term regional role and presence.

As the United States calibrates its ends and means, its assessment of the importance of Central and South Asia for its strategy will hinge on security trends in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Whether Central Asia will become a major pillar of U.S. grand strategy given the rise of China and India, as well as the resurgence of Russia, remains unclear. But its goals of supporting sovereignty, democratization, and inter-regional links in Central and South Asia offer some hope that Washington will continue to support the region's global

connectivity in the era of rising powers, ideally by pursuing a more engaged, long-term, and substantive regional strategy.

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