AU/ACSC/025/2000-04

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

A STUDY OF CENTRAL ASIA TO IDENTIFY FUTURE THREATS TO REGIONAL STABILITY

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

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April 2000

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Preface

The original request for this research project came from CENTAF. The original scope was whittled down from the challenges threatening entire United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR) which comprises 25 countries down to the five Central Asian countries recently added to USCENTCOMs AOR. Due to the large scope of challenges in the entire AOR and due to the lack of knowledge readily available on these new independent states the report focuses on this largely unknown and interesting part of the world.

I would like to thank my faculty research advisor, Lt Col Bruce Blaisdell, for his guidance in this project, the staff in the Air University Library for their help and the outstanding resources they provided. I would also like to thank my wife Lisa and son Christopher for their patience while I worked on this project

AU/ACSC/025/2000-04

Abstract

The breakup of the former Soviet Union led to the independence of 11 states called the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). With all the positive attributes associated with this monumental event there are several challenges that threaten the security of the region. This paper will attempt to answer the question: what are the salient challenges to USCENTCOM inherent within the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Open source material provided the background information necessary to write this paper. Due to the fairly recent formation of the CIS there is not a large volume of information available on the subject matter.

The Central Asian nations have much in common. They were occupied by former Tsarist Russia, then Communist Russia, the majority of their populations are Muslim, four of the five states speak a Turkic dialect and, of course they share common borders. Blended in with these and other similarities are several differences. The natural resource within the states varies widely depending on the state. The philosophies of the leadership and the needs of various ethnic and religious groups also deserve consideration.

The United States National Military Strategy is used as a framework to view and analyze challenges in the region. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have the greatest potential to challenge U.S. interests. The causes of the challenges are discussed as well as what can be done to decrease the chance of conflict occurring.

Part 1

Introduction

"We can never know with certainty where or when the next conflict will occur, who our next adversary will be, how an enemy will fight, who will join us in a coalition, or precisely what demands will be placed on US forces."

— U.S. National Military Strategy

The Central Asian region includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. These five countries are part of the eleven Commonwealth of Independent States that became independent from the former Soviet Union in 1991. The intent of this paper is to predict what the most likely causes of instability might be in the near future.

With independence came a certain amount of stability. Russia still provided security through its armed forces and all of the primary leaders of the newly independent Central Asian states were high-ranking leaders in the previous Soviet regime in their respective countries. Although they held on to many Communist Party beliefs these leaders provide limited stability to their countries by embracing gradual change in their way of governing and on policies that affect their economies.

The leaders of these countries are walking a tightrope that must balance their fragile and changing economies, deal with ethnic unrest, and deal with external influences in the shape of foreign governments that want to influence Central Asia. These foreign entities are interested in shaping Central Asia's economies, religious profile, and style of government.

This study is limited to available open source material. It will address the most salient causes of instability in this interesting and diverse area of the world. The U.S. National Military Strategy (NMS) is the contextual framework used to analyze the inherent challenges. The categories of challenges in the NMS are Regional Dangers, Asymmetric Challenges, Transnational Dangers and Wild Cards.[1] The focus of this report is on the most likely challenges that could cause concern to USCENTCOM.

Notes

[1] National Military Strategy 1997, n.p., on-line. internet, 4 February 2000. Available from http://www.dtic.mil/jcs/core/executiv.html

Part 2

Background

"Though the transition from communism to market democracy is far from complete, the NIS have largely dismantled state controls over their economies and liberalized prices. It is in our national interest to help them build the laws, institutions and skills needed for a market democracy, to fight crime and corruption and to advance human rights and the rule of law."

— A National Security Strategy for a New Century

Central Asia

This chapter will set the stage by providing the basic background that describes the government, economy and social makeup of the Central Asian states. The Central Asian states where dominated by Tsarist and Soviet rule for over 70 years before gaining their independence in 1991. Overall, the current heads of state are former communist leaders. By continuing as heads of state these leaders have provided a lot of stability by continuing to maintain friendly relations with Russia. As the regional hegemon Russia has sent military troops to quell instability and has provided economic aid and other support. On the other hand, some of the tight restraints and controls placed on the general populace and economy has suppressed democracy and economic growth.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is the largest Central Asian country by area (1,049,150 sq. miles). It has the second largest population, 17.5 million people[1], and is the only Central Asian state that shares a

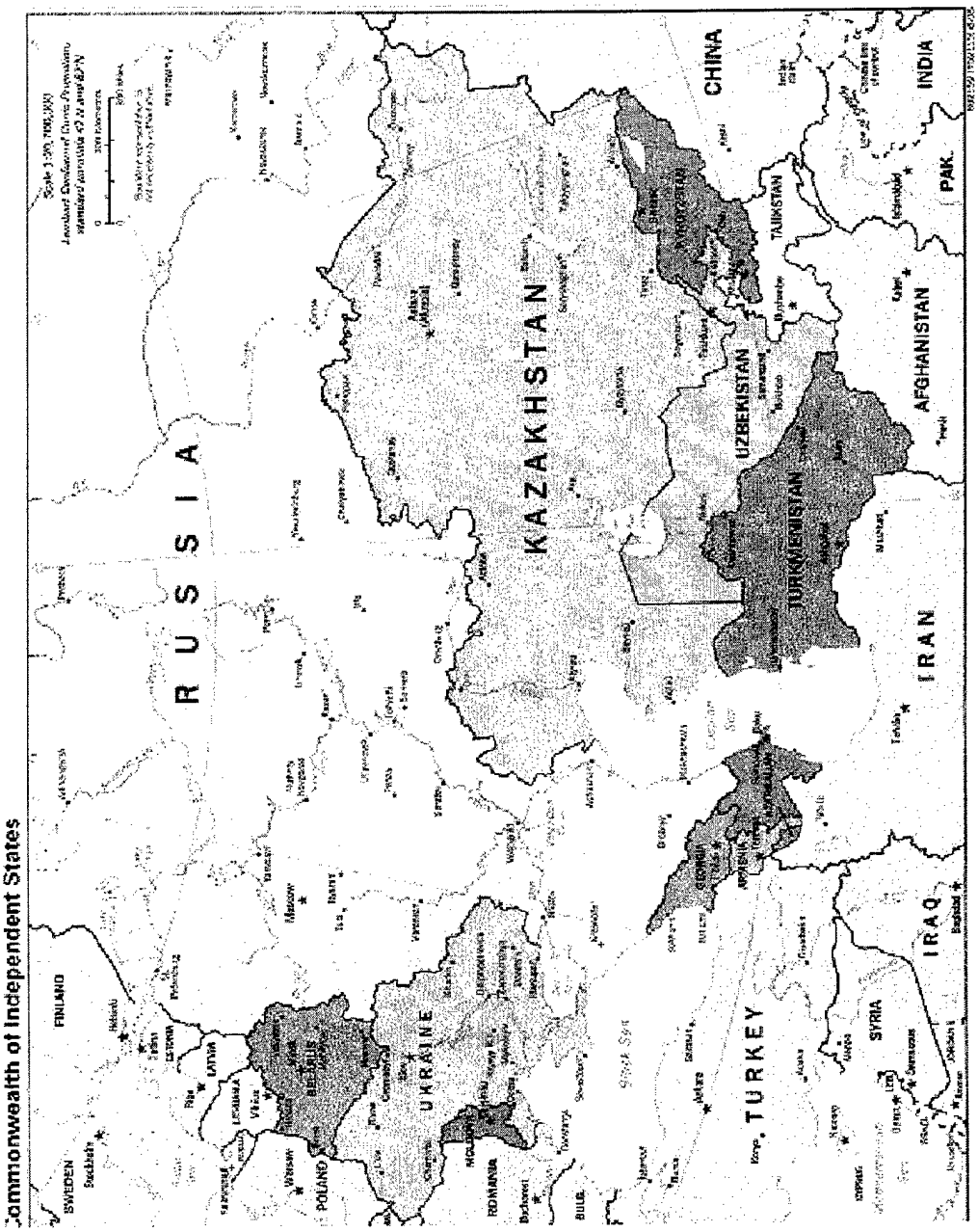

Figure 1 Commonwealth of Independent States

common border with Russia, a significant fact since a large population of ethnic Russians live in the northern regions of Kazakhstan along the Russian border. The population is 42% ethnic Kazakh, 37% Russian 6% German and 6% Ukrainian[2]. The official language is Kazakh, a Turkic tongue. Most Kazakhs are Sunni Muslim. This is the only Central Asian state in which Muslims are not a majority.

Kazakhstan is rich in natural resources particularly energy resources. It possesses the world's largest gold mine, is abundant in cotton, oil, and natural gas and Due to its vast energy resources other nations have set their sights on developing them.[3] Improving the economy and the quality of life for his people are President Nazarbayev greatest challenges.

Perhaps his second greatest challenge is the ethnic strife between ethnic Kazakhs and ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan. When the Soviet Union ruled Kazakhstan, the ethnic Russians enjoyed favoritism given by the ruling communist elites. Now the shoe is on the other foot. Some ethnic Russians favor secession . The thought of secession perturbs Nazarbayev. Despite this threat Russia and Kazakhstan have a relatively harmonious relationship.

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is much smaller than its neighbor Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan is the fourth largest Central Asian state with 5 million people and 76,000 square miles of land. The official language is Kyrgyz, a south Turkic tongue. Ethnic Kyrgyz comprise 53% of the population, Russians 22%, and the bulk of the remaining population is comprised of Uzbeks and Tajiks. The overwhelming majority of the population (70%) is Muslim.[4] Askar Akayev is the executive president. He leads Central Asia with perhaps the most democratic agenda of all. "He embarked almost immediately on a program of radical economic reform, including privatization, and democratic liberalization that has made Kyrgyzstan the only Central Asian nation that now

enjoys a free press."[5] Kyrgyzstan has the most liberal democracy in Central Asia. Since Islam is not as influential in this state this does not cause a lot of strife among the general populace. Perhaps a more rapid economic concessions would also please the population.

Kyrgyzstan's economy is agriculturally based. The staples are livestock, grain, sugar beets, and tobacco. Western investors are interested in developing its energy resources. It has the potential for hydroelectric power, and has limited amounts of coal, oil, gas, and uranium.

One of the major challenges to the government is the growing illegal drug trade. Afghani and Pakistani drug lords use Kyrgyzstan as a conduit for the opium trade. With its limited resources and training the government is not able to control the drug trade. Ethnic tensions exist between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks in the Osh and Jalalabad areas. In 1990 there were violent clashes between these groups. Russian troops intervened to end the violence.

Tajikistan

Tajikistan is the fourth largest state in Central Asia, population wise (6.8 million) and the smallest state in land area with 55,251 square miles. Ethnic Tajiks make up 64.9% of the population, ethnic Uzbeks 25%, ethnic Russians 3.5% and others 6.6%. Muslims comprise 85% of the population, where 80% are Sunnis and 5% are Shiite.[6] The official language is Tajik, which is the only Central Asian tongue that is not a Turkic tongue. It is similar to Farsi. This enables Iran to foster relationships with Tajikistan. President Imamoli Rakhmonov has ruled the country as an authoritarian neocommunist. He still has lightly veiled communist tendencies. This government has faced the greatest challenge of the five Central Asian states in that it has fought a bloody civil war for most of its independence.

A coalition of "Islamic-democratic opponents" challenged the regime, which led to the ousting of the first president. Tens of thousands of people on both sides were killed and

thousands more fled to avoid the bloodshed. After years of disagreement the two factions finally signed a peace agreement in 1997 which allowed the opposition to be integrated into the government and other concessions. Russian troops remain in country as a show of Moscow's resolve. The relationship between the two groups is still fragile and could erupt again.

Other challenges in Tajikistan are its terrible economy, which is the worst in Central Asia. Its economy is based on a primitive barter system. Cotton and silk production, and sheep herding form the basis of the economy. Mining, textiles, and carpet weaving are the few industries.[7] Even though the current economy is not good there is potential to develop the large quantities of uranium, gold, silver, oil, natural gas, and hydroelectric power. Unfortunately, the unstable environment caused by the fragile peace between the government and the opposition has scared away potential foreign investors. Tajikistan has a long list of destabilizing attributes that should and do concern the international community.

Turkmenistan

The smallest in population (4.7 million) and third largest in land area (188,456 sq. miles), Turkmenistan is 73% ethnic Turkmen, 9.8% ethnic Russians, 9.0 % ethnic Uzbeks and, 7.0 % other ethnic groups. Ethnically it is the most homogenous Central Asian state. A people of strong tribal and regional ties 87% are Muslim, 11% are Eastern Orthodox and 2% belong to other religious affiliations.[8] Islam is not a strong political force. The official language is Turkmen, a southern Turkic tongue.

President Saparmurad Niyazov rules Turkmenistan with an iron fist. He labeled himself "Turkmenbashi", which means Father of all Turkmen. The form of government is transparently labeled a democracy. "...In theory it is a multiparty democracy, however power has remained with the former communist regime under the strict authoritarian leadership of Turkmenbashi."[9]

Although Turkmenistan "was the least industrialized member of the former Soviet Union, it has considerable oil and natural gas reserves and remains a major producer of cotton.."[10] There are foreign governments that want to 'help' develop its vast energy reserves. The U.S., Turkey, Iran and Russia are the main suitors. There are several routes energy pipelines can be routed and foreign policy is a major factor in this area. Disputes over sovereignty of oil and gas reserves in the middle of the Caspian involve the other Caspian Sea states.

Its largest border is with more powerful Iran. Although the spread of the Iranian revolutionary form of Islam is a concern to the government Turkmenistan deals with the Iranians peacefully to maintain stability.

Uzbekistan

By far, Uzbekistan has the largest population (24.9 million) in Central Asia. It is also the third largest in land area (172,740 sq. miles). Uzbekistan's population breaks down to 74.3% Uzbeks, 14.2% Russians, 4.4%Tajiks, and 7.1% other ethnic groups. Uzbekistan has a large diaspora in Tajikistan. Islam is the major religion (88% of the population) while the Russian population is predominantly Eastern Orthodox.[11] The official language is Uzbek.

Islam Karimov is the presidential dictator. Although he has been criticized by "...Western advocates of democratic reform, Karimov's repressive tactics have made Uzbekistan one of the most politically and ethnically stable Central Asian states. Uzbekistan's society lives below the poverty level and has one of the highest birthrates in the world. On the positive side, food is plentiful and cheap and lessens the citizens' dissatisfaction.

As noted above there are many challenges and opportunities in this part of the world. The indigenous leaders will have to balance several issues as they progress towards democracy and market economies. Containing ethnic and religious unrest, developing energy resources and

walking the political tightrope between competing nations are the most salient challenges at this time and for the near future. The current leaders are "pushing freedom of expression and the search for equality to the background in favor of creating and maintaining "stable regimes," which are characterized by the state's "major" economic and "minor" political reforms."[12]

Notes

[1] LEXIS-NEXIS, Academic Universe. (1999-2000). http:web.lexis-nexis.com/universe

[2] Ibid. Figures are from 1998.

[3] Ibid.

[4] LEXIS-NEXIS, Academic Universe. (1999-2000). http:web.lexis-nexis.com/universe
note all figures on land area, population, religious affiliation and ethnicity are sourced from one source for consistency.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Batur-Vanderlippe, Pinar, and Vanderlippe, John (1995). *The Rise of the Counter-Hegemony? Islam in the Caucasus and Central Asia.* Washington D.C.: The National Council for Soviet and East European Research, 3

Part 3

Issues Analysis

Americans benefit when nations come together to deter aggression and terrorism, to resolve conflicts, to prevent the spread of dangerous weapons, to promote democracy and human rights, to open markets and create financial stability, to raise living standards, to protect the environment-to face challenges that no nation can meet alone.

— President William J. Clinton

In order to analyze the challenges and potential challenges in the Newly Independent States (NIS) of Central Asia it helps to have a conceptual framework for analysis. Since this study addresses challenges for USCENTCOM the most logical framework is the National Military Strategy (NMS). The NMS lists four broad categories of challenges in the "strategic environment." The four categories are Regional Dangers, Asymmetric Challenges, Transnational Dangers and, Wild Cards. This chapter will analyze the most likely challenges in Central Asia under these categories.

Regional Dangers

Conflict Among States and Groups of States

The NMS asserts that "The potential for conflict among states and groups of states remains our most serious security challenge."[1] In the case of Central Asia there are some entities that have engaged in conflict since independence 1991. As can be expected in a region so rich in

energy assets there are some controversies surrounding energy rights. One of the most recent issues deals with the energy rights to Caspian Sea oil fields that lie in the middle of the Caspian between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. There is a controversy over what the Caspian is technically defined. Is it a sea or is it a lake? Azerbaijan claims that it is a sea. This means that Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan own the rights to these oil fields. The Russians see this from a different perspective. They do not want to get shortchanged over any noteworthy energy assets. If it is determined that the Caspian is a lake then all states bordering the Caspian get a share of the oil. This includes Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan. Russia has tried to coerce Turkmenistan into siding with Russia. Turkmenistan will most likely side with Russia because it needs its hegemonal support more than the wealth gained from these assets.

The Caspian Sea issue is the most salient energy related problem at this time. The parties mentioned above realize how important energy resources are to their economies and their international stature. Unfortunately, it takes years before these assets can be developed and transported for sale which delays economic recovery. At this point in time no state has threatened military intervention. This is an area for concern and is closely monitored by the U.S.

Challenge to the United States Militarily

At this point in time the Central Asians do not pose a viable military threat to the United States or its allies. Since most of them can not independently protect their own borders without the aid of thousands of Russian troops the possibility of mounting any type of offensive power is unlikely in the near future. They have, however, pooled their military resources in the past to enhance regional stability. During the Tajik civil war and the Uzbek-Kyrgyz violence in 1990 CIS forces were deployed to support the government but their combined military is not a venerable force when compared to the U.S. The US is on reasonably good terms with the

Central Asian nations and none of them would benefit from a military confrontation. In fact they would be worse off without the trade and aid the US provides.

Regional Domination

Other than Russia's current domineering position over the Central Asian countries there are two countries that could maneuver to become regional hegemons. They have the greatest potential due to their land area, population, GNP, and size of their military. They are Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan could be problematic to other countries in the region and possibly to the United States. Although the current regime does not appear to be making strong strategic moves toward hegemony it has threatened weaker Tajikistan in the past over religious issues and the Uzbek diaspora located in Tajikistan. Tajikistan is unable to adequately control rebellious paramilitary forces that have transgressed into Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan has hinted that it might be better able to deal with these factions if it owned this territory. These territorial desires are a tinderbox of controversy in the region that could lead to conflict.

Table 1. CENTRAL ASIA: POWER INDICES

Country	Population (Millions)	GNP (Billions, US $)	Area (Sq. Miles)	Armed Forces
Kazakhstan	17.6	22.143	1,049,150	55,000
Kyrgyzstan	5.06	1.423	76,600	12,200
Tajikistan	6.8	1.964	55,251	7,000-9,000
Turkmenistan	4.7	4.319	188,456	20,000-22,000
Uzbekistan	24.9	23.490	172,740	80,000

Source: LEXIS-NEXIS Academic Universe, 1999. GNP:1996 estimate, Armed Forces: 1998, Kyrgyzstan: Military also has 57,000 reservists.

Kazakhstan has hegemonic potential but does not have a large enough military force to secure its own perimeter. Its economy is so bad that it auctioned off 10% of the Tengiz oil fields

to raise capital.[2] It is too weak at this point to become a hegemon and will remain so for years to come.

Although Iran has made some inroads into the various Central Asian countries by sending money, providing religious articles and building mosques the Central Asians as a whole are leery of any formal institution that threatens to institutionalize their way of life. After over seventy years of strong Tsarist and Soviet rule the last thing the Central Asians want is to be dominated by the type of religious dogma Iran preaches. This is not to say that certain parties do not agree with Iranian dogma but the scale so far is balanced against Iran. At this point in time Russia is still strong enough to counter Iran if it threatened the sovereignty of any of the Central Asian States. Iran not only realizes this but it does a considerable amount of business with the Soviet Union and does not want to jeopardize its relationship with Russia over Central Asian control.

Failing States

Perhaps the most volatile situation is the situation in Tajikistan. The regime has battled a pro-democracy and Islamic coalition since the state gained its independence in 1991. In May 1992 protesters rioted in the capital, Dushanbe, and essentially shut down the capital, seized the presidential palace and the Supreme Soviet building. Then President Nabiyev fled for his life as opposition forces temporarily took over the government in bloody conflict. In August 1992 the president was ousted by opposition troops again but a pro-Communist coalition seized Dushanbe from the opposition rebels. Eventually, the Supreme Soviet voted the President out of office this position remained vacant for a few years. In December 1992 procommunist troops regained control of Dushanbe. The year's between1992 and 1993 were full of violent conflict as government troops battled opposition forces. Predominantly Russian CIS forces fought to restore the order and to drive the opposition forces out of occupied areas. The main issues were

government corruption, a decimated economy, government sponsored ethnic violence, and political and religious freedom for all.

In November 1996 Imamoli Rakhmonov won the first presidential election, the opposition claimed the election was rigged. Finally, in February 1997 president Rakhmonov and Sayid Abdullah Nuri (leader of the oppositions' United Tajik Opposition) signed an agreement that would lead to integration of opposition forces into the government.

The integration process has dragged out since 1997. Rakhmonov has given in, a little at a time, since 1997 and only when pressured by opposition or international protest. He knew how much he could get away with, just as armed conflict might erupt he gave concessions to the opposition. He played this game well until the last presidential election in November 1999 and the more recent February 1999 parliamentary election. The OSCE refuses to give legitimacy to these elections, which were not fair and free. Rakhmonovs victory coupled with the victory of mostly non-opposition parliamentary winners has maddened the now splintered opposition factions. Even though the opposition is splintered it is still well armed and still backed by Islamic extremists such as the Taliban in Afghanistan and factions in Uzbekistan.[3]

A second civil war could break out since the accords from the 1997 peace agreement were swept to the side through deceit. The growing dissatisfaction with leaders that continually consolidate their powers by reshuffling government officials, extend the length of their terms, and the poor economy could extend beyond Tajik borders and affect dissatisfied factions in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and possibly Kazakhstan. These countries have relatively weak security forces that may not be able to control large scale conflict. The only regional power that could control the situation is Russia. If violence breaks out one can only imagine to what degree

Russian forces will react. The results could be another blood bath similar to the recent conflict in Chechnya.

Asymmetric Challenges

Terrorism

Terrorism is one of the hardest challenges to predict. Considering all five of the Central Asian nations have a chance for a flare-up of Islamic fundamentalism the chances of this occurring are stronger in the poorest countries with ethnic groups who tend to blame economic woes on the existing government. Of course, based on its track record of civil war and previous acts of terrorism throughout its history since 1991 Tajikistan is the most likely state to have terrorist acts occur. Islamic fundamentalist factions were supported by both Iran and Afghanistan during the civil war.

Russia and Iran were very displeased with the signing of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline agreement but it would gain them little to nothing to sponsor terrorism directed against the construction of these pipelines.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Although there were concerns on what Kazakhstan would do with its nuclear weapons left over from Soviet times, the Kazakhs have worked with Russia and the United States to remove and dispose of its weapons. The Kazakhs have been extremely cooperative in this area and have signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. They have even permanently closed down former nuclear test sites that were used by the former Soviet Union, removing the temptation of nuclear tests from rogue nations.

There is still some concern of uranium falling into the hands of US rivals such as Iran though. As recently as February 2000, three men were arrested for trying to sell 530 grams of uranium.[4] It does not appear that any of the Central Asian nations can afford a nuclear weapons program. It is possible that fissile material from Kazakhstan could eventually wind up in the hands of Iran, Iraq or any other nation that desires material, the technical knowledge, and scientists for these nuclear weapons programs. However slight, the existence of biological and chemical agents exists in practically any state due to low production cost and ease of concealment. Nuclear, biological and chemical weapons programs are highly unlikely in Central Asia at this time.

Information Warfare

At this point in time the central Asian community is unlikely to be a source of information warfare against any other nation including the US. Although any computer literate person with the proper knowledge could launch computer attacks, it is unlikely to be a major threat from Central Asia in the near future. As ethnic Russians and ethnic Europeans leave Central Asia they take with them a large percentage of technical know how.

Exploiting Commercial and Foreign Space Capabilities

The Baikonor space Launch facility located in Kazakhstan is currently used and leased by Russia. The possibility of nations hostile to the US using this launch facility is unlikely at this time. However, if a turnover in the current regime occurs with a great change in its philosophy toward the US access to space by hostile nations with the proper resources could take place.

Denying Our Access to Strategic Resources

Once US investments in energy pipelines occur and the US and our allies begin to rely on Central Asian oil and gas, stability in the region will become more important. As we engage the Central Asians economically their stability should increase. The 1998 National Security Strategy sums this up with this quote: "The Caspian Basin, with potential oil reserves of 160 billion barrels, promises to play an increasingly important role in meeting rising world energy demand in coming decades. We have made it a priority to work with the countries of the region to develop multiple pipeline ventures that will ensure access to the oil. We are also working on several fronts to enhance the stability and safeguard the independence of these nations. "The United States depends on oil for about 40 percent of its primary energy needs and roughly half of our oil needs are met with imports. According to certain estimates, from the year 2010, about 20 percent of the world oil production will come from the Caspian Sea states."[5] This will lessen the world's reliance on the Middle East for oil and should contribute to keeping oil prices down. This will be important to the U.S. and its allies that depend on oil exports. This is why Russia, Iran, Turkey, China, Pakistan and others are competing to get oil pipelines to run to or through their countries. The economic and political ramifications are huge. The U.S. has tried hard to keep Iran from getting involved, both to keep it from gaining influence in the region and to maintain its isolation.

Environmental Sabotage

The likeliest form of environmental sabotage could involve the extensive oil and natural gas pipelines that run throughout Central Asia. A disgruntled terrorist group could blow up oil facilities causing an environmental disaster. Any of a number of reasons could set off an attack. The terrorists can attack to make a point against an existing government, to free political

prisoners. Foreign sponsored terrorism could be driven by a state that feels they were denied access to these resources. The worst possible scenario could occur on or near the Caspian Sea where the results could be disastrous.

Transnational Dangers

Extremism

Extremism occurs in different flavors. Either religious fundamentalism or nationalism could become an issue. Kazakhstan is a relatively stable state that has embraced economic reform and political openness. The president is doing a good job balancing power amongst the ethnic clans. Due to Kazakhstan's rich natural resources, stability, good infrastructure left over from Soviet days it has led most of the CIS in foreign investment. Even though it is highly unlikely, if the economy were to take a nosedive Islamic fundamentalism could rise.

Islam is a potential catalyst for extremism. Although the majority of Central Asians are Muslim, "Between one quarter to one half of Muslims can be defined as 'cultural Muslims' who adhere to religious rituals, but have little or no awareness of the doctrinal teachings of Islam. Only about ten percent are 'devoted Muslims' that have some knowledge of Islamic doctrine and who try to integrate their faith into their daily life."[6] While Islam is becoming more important throughout Central Asia it is most important in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The leaders have decided to keep their governments secular in order to suppress Islamic fundamentalism.. The strong leaders that currently rule have prevented religious fundamentalism from creating instability.

Islamic fundamentalism is the most problematic in the Ferghona Valley. This is the largest population center in Central Asia.[7] Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan share this geographic

region. The haphazard borders drawn by imperial Russia years ago have created a random demographic mixture. The inhabitants of this area are very poor, do not feel strong ties to any of the three states, and have deep Islamic beliefs. They are prone to Iranian and Afghani influence and extremist leaders have mentioned forming their own Islamic state. A revolt in this area could spill over into Kazakhstan. Even the combined armed forces of all five Central Asian states would have difficulty containing conflict in this area.

Ethnic Disputes

To one degree or another there are several ethnic disputes in existence in Central Asia today. See Table 2 for ethnic breakdown in each nation. In Kazakhstan, the growing unrest between ethnic Russians and ethnic Kazakhs is growing. During Soviet times the ethnic Russians had the best jobs, Russian was the official language and of course the ethnic Russians held the key political positions. Now the shoe is on the other foot. Kazakh is the official language, and Kazakhs are gradually getting the key government positions and jobs. Ethnic Russians have complained of discrimination. Some have left the country but many refuse to leave their homes and jobs for an uncertain future. A large majority of the ethnic Russians live near the Russian border. The ethnic Russians have suggested dual citizenship but the Kazakhstan government dislikes this idea and fears a succession backed by Russia could occur. If a succession were to occur Kazakhstan would not only lose many of its citizens and land but would also lose some of its most skilled workers which are critical to strengthening its economy. Not to mention embarrassment and loss of stature around the world and in the region. This could lead to Uzbekistan becoming the regional hegemon.

Uzbekistan has several large diasporas located in the Chimkent Oblast in southern Kazakhstan, in Khujand in northern Tajikistan, and in the drug ridden cities of Osh and Jalalabad

in Kyrgyzstan. These diasporas were displaced during Russian colonial times when the Russians drew artificial boundaries thus separating Uzbeks from their homeland. The weaker countries have reason to fear that Uzbekistan may someday try to get this land back. The Uzbeks may decide to make a land grab in the future. Currently Uzbekistan has a high unemployment rate, inflation and a high birthrate. The other scenario that is possible is if the situation worsens the regime may look for scapegoats or a cause to distract the opposition and claim some if its former territory back. Whether Uzbekistan tries to reclaim its diaspora or not a repeat of the ethnic violence between the ethnic Uzbeks and ethnic Kyrgyzs that occurred in 1990 could happen again on a larger or smaller scale.

Table 2 CENTRAL ASIA: ETHNIC COMPOSITION

	% Russian	% Kazakh	% Kyrgyz	% Tajik	% Turkmen	% Uzbek	% Ukraine	% German	% Other
Kazakhstan	37.0	41.9	-----	-----	-----	2.1	5.2	4.7	9.1
Kyrgyzstan	21.5	-----	52.4	-----	-----	12.9	2.5	2.4	8.3
Tajikistan	3.5	-----	-----	64.9	-----	25.0	-----	-----	6.6
Turkmenistan	9.8	-----	-----	-----	73.3	9.0	-----	-----	7.0
Uzbekistan	14.2	-----	-----	4.4	-----	74.3	-----	-----	7.1

Source: LEXIS-NEXIS Academic Universe, 1999.

Religious Rivalries

Religious rivalries occur throughout the region. The suppression of religion by the former Soviet Union had various results. One of the religious rivalries occurs between Uzbekistan and Uzbek Muslims who take their religion very seriously and tend to look down on Tajik Muslims who practice a less orthodox form. "If the economic situation in Azerbaijan and Central Asia continues to deteriorate to the point of crisis, and the states do not deliver on their promises of

prosperity and democracy, Islam as a political expression has the potential to be used to rally for an alternative system."[8]

International Organized Crime

Opium poppies are grown in Kazakhstan and the opium is sold in Europe. Drug lords enjoy the instability caused by ethnic and other concerns. This keeps the government focused in other areas rather than the drug trade. Due to limited budgets throughout Central Asia there is not much money available to fight organized crime and the drug trade.

Osh, Kyrgyzstan is a drug passageway for opium that enters the country from Afghanistan and Pakistan through Tajikistan. Opium is also cultivated within the country, mostly from Issyk Kul and the Chu Valley region. Although the government has formed a special commission to battle the narco-organized crime they have not made a major impact due to lack of funds and training. Just across the northern border in Kazakhstan large quantities of marijuana are grown. This flows over the border into Kyrgyzstan and is sold and used by the local populace in Chu Oblast. The drug trade is prevalent throughout the region. Until adequate funding, training and manpower can be provided it will remain a challenge throughout Central Asia.

Massive Refugee Flows

Massive refugee flows occurred during the recent civil war in Tajikistan. Hundreds of thousands of refugees escaped across the border to Afghanistan. This put a strain on the Afghani economy and took its toll on Tajikistan as well. If the fragile peace between the opposition and the current regime is broken again, the same massive migration to the border could reoccur. In fact, depending on the extent and type of conflict huge amounts of refugees could spill into other Central Asian countries. Large floods of refugees would really test the limits of their already stretched economies and require international support. Since Central Asia is still considered

Russia's back yard high level political considerations must transpire. If another civil war occurs, Russian troops will likely deploy to quell the hostilities. There is no telling what the results might be. If Russia maintained the scorched earth policy it maintained in Chechnya, displaced refugees might not have anyplace to return to.

Wild Cards

Loss of Key Allies or Alliances

The last broad category of challenges in the NMS is Wild Cards. Wild Card threats include the emergence of new technologies, the loss of key allies or alliances, and the unexpected overthrow of friendly regimes by hostile parties. It is highly unlikely a viable new technology threat will emerge from the region. This section will focus on the loss of key alliances and the unexpected overthrow of friendly regimes by hostile parties.

The further the Central Asian leaders stray from true democracy, suppress their citizens, and allow their economies to disintegrate, the greater the chance of an overthrow occurs. As mentioned earlier in this document there are plenty of displeased ethnic and religious groups strewn throughout all five of the Central Asian states. The degree to which this is occurring is dealt with in the next section.

The loss of alliances in the region could critically undermine U.S. will, credibility, access, and influence in the world.[9] A likely candidate and perhaps the most crucial to the U.S. and our allies would be the loss of Turkmenistan and its energy assets. It is important to maintain good relations with all five republics to counter any threats from the Middle East.

Notes

[1] National Military Strategy (NMS). 1997, n.p. On-line. Internet, 4 February 2000. Available from http://www.dtic.mil/jcs/core/executiv.html

Notes

[2] Experts estimate that the Tengiz oil field, adjacent to the Caspian Sea, is the tenth largest field in the world.

[3] Stratfor, Global Intelligence Update, "Looming Crisis In the Heart of Asia", 8 March 2000, 2

[4] Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), U.S. Government Office, 2 February 2000, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 2 February 2000, available from http://199.221.15.211/.

[5] Menashri, David, (1998). *Central Asia Meets the Middle East* London: Frank Cass Publishers, 231

[6] Menashri, David, (1998). *Central Asia Meets the Middle East* London: Frank Cass Publishers, 6

[7] Stratfor, Global Intelligence Update, "Looming Crisis In The Heart of Asia", 8 March 2000, 2

[8] Batur-Vanderlippe, Pinar, and Vanderlippe, John (1995). *The Rise of the Counter-Hegemony? Islam in the Caucasus and Central Asia.* Washington D.C.: The National Council for Soviet and East European Research, 7

[9] National Military Strategy

Part 4

Conclusions/Summary/Recommendations

Moreover, Alert recognizes the capacity of people to resolve their own conflicts and believes that they must be the primary actors in building sustainable peace. The process towards a just peace requires sustainable reconciliation among the different parties to the conflict. Such a process demands time, patience and protracted engagement in constructive efforts leading to medium and long-term change.

— International Alert

The stability of the Central Asian Republics depends largely upon the leaders and the citizens of the Central Asian states to resolve their own problems. U.S. and other Western democracies can engage these nations by providing assistance that will encourage their development towards a market economy and a democratic form of government. The five republics are at various stages towards this end.

In his speech to the House of Representatives Committee on International Relations, George M. Ingram, USAID's deputy assistant administrator for the NIS stated "the degree to which these New Independent States can make sustainable headway in their transitions, the higher the chances are for regional stability and security, enduring links between our peoples and institutions, and mutually beneficial economic growth."[1] Stronger economies, democratic governments and social stability are the three areas that will help to achieve regional stability in Central Asia. To make headway in these areas will take a concerted effort and some period of time. Fortunately, the U.S. and several NGOs recognize this and are acting as enablers to

expedite progress in these areas. The road to improved conditions is one that will not occur overnight but will most likely "...take decades."[2]

The Central Asian Republics have many similarities in all three of these areas. The approach to sustain stability should essentially be the same at the macro level, but tailored at the micro level depending mostly on the form of government and the leadership in each republic. A quote from the NGO International Alert states "...the denial of human rights often led to internal armed conflicts and, in-turn, such conflicts inevitably undermined efforts to protect human rights and to promote sustainable social and economic development."[3] This indicates that if human rights are abused or not allowed to flourish, conflict, to various degrees, is likely to occur. Conflict and the potential for conflict also tend to inhibit economic development.

This paper has discussed several challenges in Central Asia. These challenges take a more defined form when measured on some type of scale. There are several NGO's that perform this service as well as advocate democracy and the protection of human rights around the globe.

"Freedom House is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the promotion of democracy, political rights, and civil liberties worldwide."[4] This organization publishes a "Country Ratings" report that indicates how "free" a country is. This report measures several indices including the type of government, the economy, political rights and civil liberties.

Although Freedom House has been performing this service since 1972 data for the Central Asian republics begins in 1991 for obvious reasons. Table 3 shows the ratings for Central Asia from 1991 through 1999. "The assessment rates countries as "Free" (F), "Partly Free" (PF), or "Not Free" (NF) by averaging their political rights and civil liberties ratings."[4] The scale is from 1 to 7 with a score between 1 and 2.5 being "Free," between 2.5 and 5.5 "Partly Free," and from 5.5 to 7 "Not Free".

As indicated in the chart Kyrgyzstan is the only nation that has been Partly Free since 1991. It has the lowest score (5.0). The next best is Kazakhstan, although it is rated Not Free, with a score of 5.5. Third is Tajikistan with 6.0. Fourth is Uzbekistan with a score of 6.5. Finally, Turkmenistan brings up the bottom end with the lowest score possible (7.0). Incidentally, Turkmenistan is listed as one of "The 13 Worst Rated Countries"[5] in the world. This is due to President Niyazovs' authoritarian regime. His unrelenting, absolute power made Turkmenistan a virtual dictatorship ripe with corruption and human rights violations.

Table 3 CENTRAL ASIA: SURVEY OF FREEDOM SCORES

Country	Variable	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
Kazakhstan	Political Rights Index	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6
Kazakhstan	Civil Liberties Index	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5
Kazakhstan	Freedom Status	PF	PF	PF	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF
Kyrgyz Rep.	Political Rights Index	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	5
Kyrgyz Rep.	Civil Liberties Index	4	2	3	3	4	4	4	5
Kyrgyz Rep.	Freedom Status	PF	PF	PF	PF	PF	PF	PF	PF
Tajikistan	Political Rights Index	3	6	7	7	7	7	6	6
Tajikistan	Civil Liberties Index	3	6	7	7	7	7	6	6
Tajikistan	Freedom Status	PF	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF
Turkmenistan	Political Rights Index	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Turkmenistan	Civil Liberties Index	5	6	7	7	7	7	7	7
Turkmenistan	Freedom Status	PF	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF
Uzbekistan	Political Rights Index	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7
Uzbekistan	Civil Liberties Index	5	6	7	7	7	6	6	6
Uzbekistan	Freedom Status	PF	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF

Source: Freedom House. (1999)

Even with its authoritarian principles the U.S. has engaged Turkmenistan at the highest levels. President Niyazov met with President Clinton, in the U.S., he received a $750,000 grant to research alternative pipeline routes. Iran and Russia have postured themselves to get a piece of the energy pie, so they won't be left out down the road. Iran signed an agreement in 1997 to "exploit oil and gas in the Caspian Sea." Russia's Lukoil corporation began oil operations in the

Caspian Sea area. Despite its current form of government it is wise for the U.S. to vie for energy assets in this oil and gas rich country now so that we are in a better position once the infrastructure to transport these vital resources is developed. This will decrease our reliability on Middle Eastern oil.

Although Kyrgyzstan has maintained the highest level of political rights and civil liberties, in Central Asia, it still has economic problems. It has one billion dollars of foreign debt, a huge budget deficit, decreasing export rate, and little foreign investment.[6] There are still confrontations between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the southern part of the country. Fortunately, citizens are allowed to elect their own officials. The president has strong powers and the parliament is rather weak. This waters down the checks and balances system this causes corruption in the government. The former communist elites have exasperated privatization efforts by allowing their friends and relatives get first choice in the business opportunities.

With some improvement in the political rights arena Kazakhstan could boost itself from the not free category to the free category in the near future. In 1999 Kazakhstan held its presidential election a year earlier than previously scheduled. This was a ploy by President Nursultan Nazarbayev to get a head start before the opposition could adequately prepare. In order to ensure Nazarbayev was re-elected his opponent was banned from running.

The Kazakh president can rule by decree. Individuals that are loyal to the president, as well as members of his family, hold several high-ranking political and economic positions. Although multiparty elections are held, the parliament is relatively powerless. The constitution guarantees religious freedom but no religious political parties are allowed. Adding to its list of problems the discrimination of ethnic Russians, Germans and others have caused a substantial amount of these groups to migrate out of the country. Unfortunately, these highly trained and educated people

took much needed skills with them. Migrations of this type are common throughout Central Asia and negatively affect the economy.

Tajikistan's rating of 6.0 may be heading toward a 7. Increased assassinations and violence between the current regime and the United Tajik Opposition heats up periodically, despite cooperation between the group leaders and the appointment of opposition leaders to key government positions. The latest scandalous elections which opposition leaders where replaced by pro-government officials will surely drive this to a 7.0 in 2000, unless the president makes adequate concessions to the UTO. It is one of the poorest countries in the region and foreign investors have steered clear due to the risks involved with the instability. The people of Tajikistan can not "change their government democratically". Rampant corruption and organized crime are also problems that add to instability. Confrontations with powerful Uzbekistan over territory and Uzbekistan's diaspora in Tajikistan are also major problems.

Uzbekistan has suppressed Islamic fundamentalists via a religious law passed in 1998. The law places restrictions on religious groups. President Karimov has singled out Wahhabis in particular. He has also replaced several cabinet members to strengthen his position. The economy is lagging and privatization is slow. Only pro-government parties were allowed to participate in the last election and any opposition is severely suppressed. Ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Jews, and Kurds have left the country in significant numbers to avoid persecution. Corruption throughout the government and business community is widespread. Those areas that are privatized was favor former communist elites. Strict controls over the media are enforced.

Turkmenistan has the worst ranking of the Central Asian states. It is no doubt because of the absolute rule of President Niyazov. He has a popularity cult similar to Saddam Hussein. No

criticism of the president or the regime is allowed. The huge amount of gas and oil assets has gained worldwide focus on this country recently. Iran, Russia the U.S. and others have been trying to tap into these resources. Despite these vast resources most of the citizens live in dire poverty. The government strictly controls the media. Corruption is also a major issue here. "A Soviet–style command economy diminishes equality of opportunity and leaves citizens dependent on bureaucrats, state managers, and the government for a livelihood."[7]

The denial of human rights, restrictions on the economy, authoritarian rulers and ethnic strife are the main issues that cause instability in the region. How and if the leadership of Central Asia deal with these issues will determine the regions future. In most cases, change at too fast a pace can be as destabilizing as no or little change.

The future of any nation is hard to predict. But if engagement with democratic governments and NGO's is accepted and progress flourishes the chances of stability is increased. Those nations that have numerous ethnic groups and religious groups have more difficulty moving towards democracy. The two most dynamic and potential causes of challenge to USCENTCOM are by far religious extremism, the lack of political rights and the lack of civil liberties in Tajikistan and the lack of civil liberties and human rights in Turkmenistan.

The results of recent elections in Tajikistan have turned a simmering pot into a boiling cauldron. If conflict breaks out here the U.S. may get involved with humanitarian interests. In Turkmenistan political rights abuses, civil liberties abuses and a ravaged economy make this another hotspot. If the people of Turkmenistan decide they have had enough of Turkmenbashis' omnipotence access to the huge energy resources by the US and its allies could be blocked, depending on the oppositions' disposition toward the United States.

Notes

[1] United States of America, Department of State. International Information Programs, Public Diplomacy Query, *USAID's Ingram Testifies on Assistance to NIS Jun 9 1999*, 1999; on-line, Internet, 11 February 1999, available from http://www.usia.gov/usis.html.

[2] Ibid., http://www.usia.gov/usis.html.

[3] International Alert, *Annual Report 1998/1999*, 1999, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 11 Jan 2000, available from http://www.international-alert.org/.

[4] Freedom House. 1999, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 1 February 2000, available from http://www.freedomhouse.org/. Since 1972, Freedom House has published an annual assessment of state state of freedom by assigning each country and territory the status of "Free," "Partly Free," or "Not Free" by averaging their political rights and civil liberties ratings. Those whose ratings average 1-2.5 are generally considered "Free," 3-5.5 "Partly Free," and 5.5-7 "Not Free." The dividing line between "Partly Free" and "Not Free" usually falls within the group whose ratings numbers average 5.5. For example, countries that receive a rating of 6 for political rights and 5 for civil liberties, or a 5 for political rights and a 6 for civil liberties, could be either "Partly Free" or "Not Free." The total number of raw points is the definitive factor which determines the final status. Countries and territories with combined raw scores of 0-30 points are "Not Free," 31-59 points are "Partly Free," and 60-88 are "Free."

[4] Ibid., http://www.freedomhouse.org/.

[5] Karatnycky, Adrian. *Freedom House. The Comparative Survey of Freedom 1989-1999, A Good Year For Freedom*, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 1 February 2000, available from http://www.freedomhouse.org/.

[6] Ibid., http://www.freedomhouse.org/.

[7] Ibid., http://www.freedomhouse.org/.

Glossary

CIS	Confederation of Independent States
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
NBC	Nuclear, Biological, Chemical
NIS	Newly Independent States
NMS	National Military Strategy
NSS	National Security Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	United States Central Command
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

Definitions

asymmetric challenges. Some state or nonstate actors may resort to asymmetric means to counter the US military. Such means include unconventional or inexpensive approaches that circumvent our strengths, exploit our vulnerabilities, or confront us in ways we cannot match in kind. Of special concern are terrorism, the use or threatened use of WMD, and information warfare. Other challenges include exploiting commercial and foreign space capabilities, threatening our space-based systems, interrupting the flow of critical information, denying our access to strategic resources, and environmental sabotage. We must increase our capabilities to counter these threats and adapt our military doctrine, training, and equipment to ensure a rapid and effective joint and interagency response.

authoritarian regimes. These are typically one-party states and military dictatorships in which there are significant human rights violations.

Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. From the Caspian seaport at Baku, Azerbaijan to Tbilisi Georgia, to the Turkish Mediterranean seaport of Ceyhan. On November 18, 1999, President Clinton was present in Istanbul, Turkey for the signing of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline agreement and the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline Declaration. (NSS, 1999, 33)

democracies. These are political systems whose leaders are elected in competitive multi-party and multi-candidate processes in which opposition parties have a legitimate chance of attaining power or participating in power.

globalization: The process of accelerating economic, technological, cultural, and political integration-means that more and more we as a nation are affected by events beyond our borders. Outlaw states and ethnic conflicts threaten regional stability and economic progress in many important areas of the world. (A National Security Strategy for a New Century)

OSCE. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has a key role to play in enhancing Europe's stability. It provides the US with a venue for developing Europe's security architecture in a manner that complements our NATO strategy. In many instances, cooperating through the OSCE to secure peace, deter aggression, and prevent, defuse and manage crises offers a comparative advantage because it is more cost effective than unilateral action. The US will continue to give strong support to the OSCE as our best choice to engage all the countries of Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia in an effort to advance democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and to encourage them to support one another when instability, insecurity and human rights violations threaten peace in the region. (NSS, 1999)

regional dangers. The potential for conflict among states and groups of states remains our most serious security challenge. "...it is likely that more than one aspiring regional power will have both the desire and means to challenge the United States militarily" "Some may attempt to become dominant in a region, intimidating US allies and friends, pursuing interests hostile to our own, and developing asymmetric capabilities, including nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the means to deliver them. "Failed and failing states and conflict that is not directed against the United States, can also threaten our interests and the safety of our citizens.

restricted democratic practices. These are primarily regimes in which a dominant ruling party controls the levers of power, including access to the media, and the electoral process in ways that preclude a meaningful challenge to its political hegemony. In the first half of the century, states with restricted democratic practices included countries which denied universal franchise to women, racial minorities, and the poor and landless.

Trans-Caspian gas pipeline. Natural gas pipeline that runs from Azerbaijan to Turkey.

transnational dangers. The security environment is further complicated by challenges that transcend national borders and threaten our national interests. Human emergencies other than armed conflict; extremism, ethnic disputes, and religious rivalries; international organized crime, including illegal trade in weapons, strategic materials or illicit drugs, as well as piracy; massive refugee flows; and threats to the environment each have the potential to put US interests at risk. These challenges can obstruct economic growth and democratic development and lead to conflict. Complicating the situation is the continued blurring of the distinction between terrorist groups, factions in ethnic conflicts, insurgent movements, international criminals, and drug cartels. Failure to deal with such security concerns early in their development may require a more substantial response to a more dangerous problem later.

wild cards. We can never know with certainty where or when the next conflict will occur, who our next adversary will be, how an enemy will fight, who will join us in a coalition, or precisely what demands will be placed on US forces. A number of "wild card" threats could emerge to put US interests at risk. Such threats range from...loss of key allies or alliances and the unexpected overthrow of friendly regimes by hostile parties. While asymmetric challenges and transnational dangers are serious in themselves, a particularly grave "wild card" is the combination of several such threats. This could critically undermine US will, credibility, access, and influence in the world.

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