STABILITY & SECURITY IN Central Asia
Differing Interests and Perspectives

A CONFERENCE HELD IN NEW YORK
Jan. 9-10, 2006
SECURITY AND STABILITY IN CENTRAL ASIA: DIFFERING INTERESTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Summary of a Roundtable
Held in New York City
on
January 9–10, 2006

with Policy Recommendations by the NCAFP

Cosponsored by the

National Committee on American Foreign Policy
Dwight D. Eisenhower National Security Series
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FOREWORD

The National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) initiated a Project on Central Asia after 9/11 to focus on U.S., Russian, and Chinese interests in the five former Soviet Republics of Central Asia and on the common interests of those parties and others in the region. Notwithstanding important differences among them but mindful of the political, economic, and military significance of Kazakhstan to the region, the NCAFP decided to make that country the initial focus of its inquiry and analysis.

Of the five Central Asian “stans,” Kazakhstan has experienced a moderate form of Islam, is least infected by militant Islamic fundamentalism, is largely pro-American, has a highly educated and technically proficient elite, and has a form of government that is gradually taking steps toward political reform. Moreover, Kazakhstan is rich in energy and mineral resources that have transformed it into a geostrategic playground for its huge neighbors, China and Russia. In short, Kazakhstan’s significance dictates that the United States be engaged in encouraging the development of a middle class, as well as democratic forces in the country, and in exploring ways and means in which the countries of the region can cooperate in the struggle against militant Islamic fundamentalism.

As early as February 2002, the NCAFP’s bimonthly journal, *American Foreign Policy Interests*, featured articles on Central Asia such as Professor Michael Rywkin’s “Central Asia in the Forefront of Attention,” followed by Kazakhstan’s Minister of Foreign Affairs H. E. Kasymzhomart Tokaev’s “From Renouncing Nuclear Weapons to Building Democracy” (April 2004). In March 2005, the National Committee hosted a conference in New York on “Stability in Central Asia: Engaging Kazakhstan.” The conference was immediately followed by a briefing session with U.S. government officials and other Central Asian experts in Washington, D.C. At the invitation of Kazakhstan’s Foreign Minister Tokaev, the NCAFP sent a five-member fact-finding delegation to Kazakhstan in April. On its return, the delegation attended debriefing sessions with U.S. governmental officials. The sessions, in turn, were followed by the publication in May 2005 of “Stability in Central Asia: Engaging Kazakhstan. A Report (with Policy Recommendations) on U.S. Interests in Central Asia and U.S.-Kazakhstan Relations.” (It was subsequently translated into Russian.) Policy recommendations include provisions that the United States be “sensitive to the fragility of Kazakhstan’s geopolitical position”; that the United States “emphasize that American interests in Kazakhstan are not limited to oil, security, and counterterrorism”; that the United States promote “democratic values,” including adherence to the rule of law and the “observance of human rights.”

In October 2005, NCAFP Senior Vice President Donald S. Rice represented the NCAFP at a conference in Washington, D.C., on “The Challenges of Kazakhstan: Regional and Global Impact.” It was cosponsored by the U.S. Chamber of
INTRODUCTION

U.S. relations with countries in Central Asia were fundamentally affected by the attacks launched on the United States on September 11, 2001. To support U.S. operations in Afghanistan, the U.S. military negotiated significant access—overflight and air base arrangements—with Central Asian governments that initially produced a sense of common purpose and goodwill, generating concern in Russia and China. In 2005, events in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan resulted in an unraveling of some of those arrangements and an expansion of Russian and Chinese influence in the region. In light of those developments and the strategic importance of Central Asia in achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives, the National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) cosponsored a one-day conference titled “Security and Stability in Central Asia: Differing Interests and Perspectives” with the U.S. Army’s Dwight D. Eisenhower National Security Series (ENSS).

The all-day program included nine presentations: “In Search of Internal Stability and Development—Opening the New ‘Silk Road’ (pipelines, roads, railroads, etc.),” by Professor Peter J. Sinnott, director, Caspian Sea Project, Columbia University; “What Happens After the Current Postindependence Phase: Succession Problems, Balance, and Speed of Economic and Political Reform, etc.,” by Professor Steven Sabol, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; “Facing Militant Islamic Fundamentalism,” by Zeyno Baran, director, International Security and Energy Program, the Nixon Center; “Democratization at Variable Speeds,” by H.E. Zamira Sydykova, ambassador from the Republic of Kyrgyzstan to the United States; “Geopolitical Perspectives from Competing Points of View”—“Central Asian Perspective,” Dr. Murat Laumulin, deputy director, Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies; “Russian Perspective,” Professor Vitaly Naumkin, president, International Center for Strategic and Political Studies, and director, Center for Arab Studies, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences; “Chinese Perspective,” Professor Elizabeth Wishnick, Montclair State University and research associate, Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University; “Muslim Countries Perspective,” Zeyno Baran, director, International Security and Energy Program, the Nixon Center; and “U.S. Perspective,” Professor Gregory Gleason, University of New Mexico. H.E. Yerzhan Kazykhanov, ambassador from the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United Nations, offered a brief commentary following the four morning presentations under the title of “In Search of Internal Stability and Development” and opened the discussion among the presenters and the ENSS participants. In the absence of Matthew Bryza, deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, who had to cancel at the last minute to attend the inauguration of President Nursultan Nazarbayev on January 11, 2006 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, John G. Fox, director, Office of Caucasus and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, delivered a luncheon address on U.S. foreign policy in the region.
The ENSS participants included Colonel Daniel G. Groeschen (U.S. Air Force), chief, Central Asia South Asia Branch, HQ USCENTCOM, Security Cooperation Division; Colonel Daniel M. Klippstein (U.S. Army), division chief, Strategy, Doctrine, and Concepts Division, HQ Department of the Army, Office of the G35 (Directorate of Strategy, Policy, and Planning); Major Harry J. Lane (U.S. Air Force), country director, Kyrgyz Republic, Security Cooperation Division, Plans, and Policy Directorate (CCJ5-5C), United States Central Command; Lieutenant Colonel Robin Phillips (U.S. Army), Northeast Asia desk officer, Joint Staff J-5 (Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate); Major John E. Prior (U.S. Army), ENSS program manager; Lieutenant Colonel James Ruf (U.S. Army), response development officer for the Department of State’s Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stability (S/CRS); and Colonel Michael D. Soule (U.S. Army), J-5, branch chief, Central Asia South Asia (CASA).

This summary reports the views, perspectives, and discussions that were developed at the conference and concludes with a set of NCAFP policy recommendations.

IN SEARCH OF STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The conference devoted a great deal of time to the current situation in Central Asia. The year 2005 was troublesome. Reforms were slowed, sometimes reversed, and the vast majority of the population experienced little improvements in living standards. Nostalgia for the stability of Soviet times, for what the West regards as a failed experiment, is on the rise. A series of internal developments shook the region, bringing about political shifts and international realignments. The four major events in the region were the ouster of President Akayev in Kyrgyzstan—often called the Tulip Revolution—the Andijon riots in Uzbekistan, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting in Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan, and the presidential elections in Kazakhstan.

Popular discontent in Kyrgyzstan, though short of revolution, ended in the ouster of President Askar Akayev, spreading fear that regime change would come elsewhere in the region following the example of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan was shaken by popular riots in Andijon (in the Uzbek part of the over-populated and impoverished valley of Ferghana). They were harshly suppressed by government forces. The regime of Uzbek President Islam Karimov, stunned by international condemnations, reversed its international alliances. Karimov put aside his distrust of Russia and sought refuge with Moscow and Beijing, the first indifferent and the second hostile to human rights causes. Karimov’s move was welcomed in both capitals. Seizing the opportunity presented by the continued American preoccupation with Afghanistan and Iraq, Russia and China joined together to try to eliminate the post-2001 American presence in the area. In order to lure Islam Karimov away from Washington, Moscow conveniently overlooked the poor treatment of the Russian ethnic minority in Uzbekistan. A grateful Karimov not only closed the American military base at Khanabad but also allowed a Russian military presence (something Uzbekistan had refused since gaining independence) and adopted a militant anti-American stand in the international arena. Only a last-minute effort by Washington, reinforced by the expectation of financial rewards, saved the large American military base located in Manas, Kyrgyzstan.

Kazakhstan, uncomfortable with the American role in all the “color revolutions” in the former Soviet republics, tilted slightly in favor of Russia and China. First, it reinforced its participation in the SCO and then it allowed China to extend to the Caspian Sea oil-producing area its oil pipeline linking Sinkiang Province to less productive oil fields east of the Caspian Sea. Furthermore, Washington’s reaction, reflecting hope that President Nazarbayev would show enough confidence in his own popularity and prospects for reelection to aim for less than the 91 percent of the votes that he received in the presidential election of December 2005, was prudent and did not affect mutual relations. Kazakhstan maintained its policy of achieving an overall balance between great power interests by maintaining its cooperation with the United States in the field of Caspian Sea security and normalizing relations with the new leaders in Kyrgyzstan by offering financial assistance.

The U.S. preoccupation with operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and its inability to redirect its attention to Central Asia offer opportunities to Moscow and Beijing to capitalize on the situation and pursue their efforts to eliminate the U.S. military presence in the region and limit American oil interests there as well. Meanwhile Washington’s predicament of finding the right balance between defending human rights and pursuing its own strategic interests in the area will remain a source of preoccupation for the competing powers in the region.

In general, the conference presenters emphasized that most Central Asians remain passive actors in the political sphere; they are more concerned with the daily necessities of life. There is “reform fatigue” in all of the republics, even without much reform. The “shadow” economy is still very active—in much the same way that it helped people throughout the former Soviet Union to survive the 1990s. Skepticism greets the rhetoric emanating from the West or from the regimes themselves. Many people don’t believe that any opposition party or individual has the answers.

The opposition in each republic, whether it is open, as in Kyrgyzstan or Kazakhstan, or clandestine, as in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, or reduced to one party, as in Tajikistan, is unified by one overriding issue—the replacement of the president. Some standard promises are voiced by all opposition groups: the elimination of corruption, fair and timely wages, better housing, education, and health care. But unity of action is difficult to achieve. Who can say that if an opposition leader were elected president, he or she would be able or willing to relinquish the
authority vested in the presidency?

Some presenters were more positive than others about progress in Central Asia, pointing out that after 15 years of independence a lot has been achieved despite many obstacles. Central Asian states have strengthened their independence and created their own state institutions, working financial systems, currencies, military and security institutions, political partnerships, legal systems, and other institutions.

Also positive is the fact that the states of Central Asia have remained much more peaceful than many had predicted. The likelihood of violent conflict is still very low. There has been only one exception, the civil war in Tajikistan. But it was terminated, and the peace agreement signed between the conflicting parties was based on a power-sharing scheme in accordance with which the mostly moderate Islamic opposition was incorporated into political life. There was, however, a disagreement at the conference about the reality of power-sharing in Tajikistan.

On the negative side, the Central Asian states are said to be building their statehood on the basis of priorities that can lead to contradictions among different ethnic groups. Also, a return to tradition, especially in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, has led to a serious decline in education accelerated by the brain drain caused by the emigration of a large number of educated Russians and Germans. Social transformations are no longer influenced by the activity of the state but by its inactivity. The result has been another wave of migrations, this time by local nationalities going to Kazakhstan, Russia, and elsewhere for permanent or seasonal work and a growing sense that the lot of most people cannot be improved, especially in rural areas. Islamists have been quick to build on the situation. Moreover, the use of oil revenues leaves a lot of question marks. Many people in Central Asia share the view of a former Venezuelan minister of oil who said that oil is the “devil’s excrement.” It is feared that as the gap between the elites and the general population increases, more grievances will be felt and expressed by a majority of the people.

Another threat to development comes from clan relations and patronage networks that are either based on kinship or territory. They are very powerful and incompatible with modernization and the democratization process. Whatever happens in the future in any of these states, clan relations will remain the real basis of power for successors of the existing presidents.

Finally, relations among Central Asian states remain problematic. Eurasian integration, initially advocated by Kazakhstan’s President Nazarbayev and subsequently endorsed by Russia’s President Putin, is a concept on paper only. Visas are needed in order to cross borders. Part of the Uzbek-Tajik border is mined. Most people do not like this situation, which is one of the reasons why some Central Asians support the idea of a world Islamic caliphate that would not only open all borders among Muslim lands but would also replace the need for nation-states.

RECENT EVENTS—BY REPUBLICS

Kazakhstan Elections

During the discussion of the recent presidential election in Kazakhstan, it was pointed out that although the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union (EU) had characterized the election as “failing short of international standards,” they evidently judged it to be an improvement over previous elections, which they described as “falling far short.” It was said that the West must embrace “countries making good faith efforts to hold free and fair elections.” Others maintained that Western media had documented numerous abuses of power and human rights’ violations as well as press and media restrictions in the months preceding the elections, and so one cannot simply excuse everything because “autocratic rulers have governed the lands of Central Asia throughout history.” Another comment was made that as elections come to pass, the electoral process will no longer be considered a singular event. In other words, it is expected that the political process will become active, engaged, and not ephemeral as it is extended beyond the brief electoral season.

Turkmenistan Succession Problems

According to the presenters, Turkmenistan continues to be the most problematic state in the region. No reform has occurred, and the regime has stunted all prospects for civil dialogue, the development of civil society, and economic disengagement from centralized, monopolistic control. The chief concern is that the continued absence of social institution building could paralyze an already stagnant, or moribund, economic situation. Turkmenistan has been consistently cited as one of the worst governed former Soviet republics. The potential for regime change may be near if speculation regarding President Niyazov’s (Turkmenbashi’s) poor health is to be believed. That, however, might be more destabilizing for the region than mere regime change. A power vacuum could lead to competition by neighboring states and great powers over the country’s hydrocarbon reserves. Intervening in the transition from President Niyazov to his successor might be more of a seduction than the republic’s neighbors can resist. Conceivably Russia, Uzbekistan, and Iran could become involved in the realignment of Turkmenistan both internally and externally, and Kazakhstan might feel compelled to join the fray.

Tajikistan’s Slow Recovery

Tajikistan was judged to be experiencing a difficult recovery from the civil war. Indeed it can be maintained that the situation has degenerated inasmuch as President Rakhmonov appears intent on strengthening his grip on political power. Human rights organizations cite examples of politically motivated arrests, the curtailment of media independence, and minor protests that some fear may esca-
late. The economic picture is dismal and the prospects are dim given widespread corruption and reports of heavy crossborder drug smuggling from Afghanistan. According to a relatively optimistic view, there are more than 600 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and some independent mass media in the country, and the government is building its policies on a multilateral basis. Mr. Rakhmonov, who was considered a weak candidate for president, has proved to be a successful leader and has managed to attract the support of many internal and external actors. Russian border guards were replaced by Tajiks last year. Other participants saw negative aspects. A new Russian base is being constructed almost as close to the capital as the one it is replacing. Drug seizures were down in 2005; for example, Russian troops scarcely interdicted anything in the first half of the year. In contrast, Tajik troops had substantial success, but large parts of the border with Afghanistan remain barely patrolled. The United Nations assists Tajikistan in combating drug traffic, but money still comes from the transit of drugs from Afghanistan.

Kyrgyzstan’s “Color Revolution”

The conference heard a description of the “color revolution” in Kyrgyzstan, which took place in March 2005. It followed sustained demonstrations throughout the country after the February 2005 elections because it had become clear that President Akayev was going to impose a referendum to extend his term in office. Spurred by an independent media attacking corruption, nepotism, and mismanagement, popular demonstrations undermined the regime, which began to falter. By the morning of March 24 the regime collapsed, and President Akayev was compelled to flee. Some participants warned, however, that the ouster of the president should not be greeted with much optimism. It has had little positive effect on the economy. Some of Kyrgyzstan’s neighbors are still uneasy about alleged U.S. involvement. The new leaders, many previously associated with the fallen regime, are confronting dire economic conditions and have had little time in which to improve the situation.

Uzbek-American Split

Uzbekistan’s turnabout and tilt back toward Russia in 2005 were widely discussed. It was argued that in view of his Soviet communist background, President Karimov knew only how to oppress all opposition movements, whether democratic or Islamist. His oppressiveness has given legitimacy to the Islamists, who label as illegitimate all the Central Asian regimes. According to the West and human rights groups, the harsh responses by the Karimov regime were solely to blame for Andijon. Other than voicing clichés such as “you need to open up; you need democratic reforms,” the West did not give help to Uzbekistan, much less offer guidance about how to undertake constructive change in a way that would not be advantageous to the Islamists. It was noted that the Algerian coup d’état was accepted by the international community despite the fact that it nullified election results. Moreover, it is not only recognized by the West but by many in Central Asia as well that economic development is a precondition for the development of democracy, and it is deficient in many states of Central Asia.

In analyzing developments in the Uzbek-U.S. relationship, it was noted that President Karimov thought that 9/11 would help Americans to realize what he was facing. Despite President Putin’s personal efforts to try to stop him, Karimov signed a strategic partnership agreement with the United States, thinking he was in the same boat with the Americans who would be sympathetic to his oppressive measures or at least look the other way when they were imposed. The situation changed in Andijon on the afternoon of May 13, 2005, when Uzbek troops suddenly fired on a crowd of at least 5,000. The crowd, largely composed of women and children, contained armed Islamic militants who, the night before, had taken over a prison and attacked a nearby military barracks. Eyewitness accounts described the killing of many hundreds as the troops fired indiscriminately and the armed militants’ seized government hostages to shield themselves from the fire. The regime’s failure to conduct an investigation led Western powers and international organizations to demand an international investigation, which the Karimov regime continues to reject. It was not only Karimov who panicked. People around him told him that this was a terrorist uprising, and Russian senior government officials, just before Andijon and immediately afterward, claimed that they had clear evidence that some of the rioters were hard-core terrorists from Afghanistan. This assertion was part of the Russian intelligence and security services’ efforts to turn Karimov against the United States. Many people in Uzbekistan, whether in government or in opposition, have said they believe that Americans were behind the riots in Andijon.

The Andijon context enabled SCO to take full advantage of the situation. Chinese and Russian leaders have clearly identified three evils—extremism, radicalism, and separatism—that concern all Central Asian nations. There is a sense that no one, including the United States, Europe, or even NATO, can give them the kind of support that Moscow and Beijing offer. In dealing with terrorism/Islamic fundamentalism, many Central Asians do not think they can get any real help from the United States despite the fact that U.S. forces not only toppled the Taliban but also killed “Jumaboi,” the military leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Karimov’s greatest threat. U.S. policy, as defined by President Bush in his second inaugural address, maintains that there cannot be stability without legitimacy and legitimacy comes only from democracy. It is a great slogan, but it just does not reflect what is going on in the region now.

The view was expressed that the situation will get worse in Central Asia over the next three to five years. Chinese, Russians, and Uzbek officials saw Andijon from the same angle, whereas the United States did not. The Chinese and the Russians, worried about potential Islamist uprisings, are giving support to President Karimov. When he left the meeting where he and President Putin signed a strate-
gic agreement, President Karimov said that the relationship was not only stra-
gic but union as well—a code word for Soviet-Union-style relationships. Though it was an exaggeration, it contained a message: Uzbekistan is returning to a mili-
tary partnership with Russia that many thought would not be possible.

**IMPORTED ISLAM**

A broad discussion took place about the problem of Islamist inroads into Central Asia and especially into Uzbekistan. Attention was drawn to the fact that radical Islam was first exported to Afghanistan from Pakistan’s northwest frontier after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. When Central Asia opened up in the late 1980s—early 1990s, a lot of people wanted to learn about Islam from imams and mullahs who flocked to the area, supported by Saudi Arabia, Iran, other countries in the Gulf, and even Turkey. Uzbekistan became the key country because of its population, location, and strong Islamic traditions. It was also brought to the attention of the participants that the bulk of Wahhabi imams who went to Uzbekistan in the late 1980s and 1990s were from a large Uzbek community in Saudi Arabia. They were descendents of tsarist-time émigrés or of former Basmachis (equivalent to contemporary Afghan mujaheddin) who took up arms against the Soviet regime after the October revolution until their defeat in the 1920s. They are said to number between 200,000 and 400,000.

Initially Karimov and almost everyone else in Uzbekistan and elsewhere in the region did not understand what kind of Islam was coming to Central Asia—an Islam of a different color. Under Soviet rule the elites largely forgot about their own traditions, their own cultures, their own mixtures of Turkic and Central Asian traditions. Central Asian Islam, containing a lot of Sufism, was more spiritual that than of the Middle East. The kind of Islam that was beginning to engulf Central Asia was very much the Saudi Arabian Wahhabi version—very strict, very anti-Semitic, anti-American, and politicized. A recent attempt to counterbalance it by introducing moderate Islamic schooling with a modern curriculum in neighbor-
ing Tajikistan, financed by the Agha Khan Foundation, has been hampered by the Ismaili origin of the funds. The Ismailis are viewed as Shiia by the Sunni of Central Asia.

The conference gave special attention to a group called Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a transna-
tional radical Islamist organization. Its stated objective is to overthrow the exist-
ing world order and replace it with a kind of Islamic caliphate that does not have much similarity to the historic caliphate that disappeared with the fall of Ottoman Turkey during World War I. It is viciously anti-Semitic and anti-American. It was formed in the 1950s in the Middle East and subsequently became a global organization. Since the war in Iraq, it has gotten even stronger: Its messages are find-
ing more resonance among disaffected Muslims throughout the world. It is even growing in New York and in other parts of the United States. This organization is headquartered in London where it has been taking advantage of liberal attitudes toward freedom of speech and religion. It has been doing considerable damage to the reputation of European Muslims and is responsible for directing a lot of prop-
aganda against the treatment of Muslims in Central Asia. Only after the July 2005 bombings in London did Prime Minister Blair acknowledge that this organization should be banned. But a liberal atmosphere toward the group continues to prevail, and nothing has been done about it.

It was argued that an Islamic revolution is not likely to happen in Central Asia with the possible exception of Uzbekistan where the basis for Islamic mobiliza-
tion and grassroots support for Islamic culture are very strong. To people who are disillusioned by the Karimov regime’s failure to improve their lives, especially in rural areas that have never received much from the regime, Hizb-ut-Tahrir is attractive. The ruling establishments exaggerate the Islamic threat to generate support and to explain the pressures that they exert on different groups. It was suggested that neither the elites in Kazakhstan nor in Kyrgyzstan thought their country had a radical Islamist issue. The Kazakh government, wishing to main-
tain good relations with Saudi Arabia, has had a difficult time barring radical Wahhabi preachers. Kyrgyzstan, seeing itself as a “poster child for democracy,” felt immune. Islamic teaching was allowed, especially in the parts of the Ferghana Valley that belong to Kyrgyzstan and in the southern parts of Kazakhstan close to the Uzbek border, where Hizb-ut-Tahrir and similar groups have strengthened themselves over the last five years.

The Islamist threat, coupled with the color revolutions that took place in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, has caused Uzbekistan to worry about what America and the West in general may be unleashing. Karimov said that Islamists like Hizb-

**ENERGY, PIPELINES, AND ECOLOGY**

**The Caspian Sea Basin and U.S. Oil Strategy**

The total Caspian region, including Turkmenmenistan, produces 1.8 million barrels of crude oil a day and exports about 1.1 million barrels a day. Kazakhstan alone pro-
duces 1.3 million barrels a day. This will grow to 3.5 million barrels a day by 2015, according to Kazakh government statistics. Kashegan, the Kazakh giant offshore Caspian field, alone has the capacity to reach 1.1 million barrels a day. The problem is the imbalance between productive capacity and pipeline capacity and the need for unlocking export routes for oil coming from landlocked Central
Asian, mostly Kazakhstan. Accordingly, the strategy of Kazakhstan is to have a multivector pipeline system that avoids dependency on one neighboring country.

The recent controversy between Russia and Ukraine shows that energy security is rooted in the diversity of supply. The pipelines that the United States championed in the last decade reflect its interests and those of other major oil consumers in achieving a diversity of supply through a diversity of supply routes. U.S. strategy has been based on supporting the construction of multiple pipeline routes connecting Central Asia with the outside world but avoiding Iran and Russia and allowing the Central Asian states to build something on their own. At the same time, the United States has been advocating that local economies diversify beyond their natural resource wealth, eventually leading to economic stability and democracy. It was observed during the discussion that despite Kazakh oil riches, the U.S. air base at Manas in Kyrgyzstan has to import oil from Russia and Turkmenistan instead of from the nearby refinery at Chimikent in Kazakhstan that was operated by Petro-Kazakhstan until its recent purchase by a Canadian company.

The U.S. approach was said to be working better on the opposite shore of the Caspian Sea, where Azerbaijan has two pipelines that skirt Russian territory—a completely rebuilt pipeline that runs from Baku to the Georgian harbor of Supsa on the Black Sea and can deliver about 200,000 barrels a day and the just completed Baku–Ceyhan pipeline that flows to an export terminal on Turkey’s Mediterranean coast; its potential of 1.0 million barrels a day may be reached only in a few years when Kazakh oil flows across the Caspian Sea.

Thus the multivector pipeline system, even with increasing oil production in Kazakhstan, may face a problem of too many pipelines competing for limited supplies. Even the Tengiz pipeline of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium in Kazakhstan, which goes to the Russian Black Sea harbor of Novorossiisk, could top out, in the 700,000 or 900,000 barrels per day range, in a few years.

**Chinese Deals**

The conference discussed the issue of Chinese inroads into the Central Asian oil market. One presenter underlined the fact that China tried for a time to gain access to Kashkeghan oil fields in Kazakhstan. In December 2005 China completed the fast track construction of a pipeline running from Atasu, Kazakhstan, to its Sinkiang Province—a long but very limited pipeline in terms of capacity. It will initially carry 200,000 barrels a day and reach a capacity of 400,000 barrels per day within a few years. In 2005, however, China changed the classification of oil deals in the region, making it impossible for private investors to compete with state identified oil firms now favored by the government of Kazakhstan. Thus Canadian firms such as PetroKazakhstan are said to be on their way out. PetroKazakhstan has been sold for four billion dollars to the China National Petroleum Company. As a result, China owns between 10 and 14 percent of the petroleum reserves in Kazakhstan; the situation will change as new sources come online and further corporate and national firms invest or divest.

This year China became the number one trading partner of Kazakhstan, a status that is unlikely to change for a long time. China’s next enterprise is a superrail line through Kazakhstan, a cargo transport meant to solve problems arising from the difference in the width of track gauges used by Russian and non-Russian companies. The idea is that the trains will pick up maximum speed in Kazakhstan and roll on to Berlin, taking 10 to 11 days off sea transport time—an attempt by China to reach industrial Europe through Central Asia. It is an interesting project, which may compete with the maritime route from the East to Europe, an initiative said to have been suggested by the Kazakh government, not the Chinese.

In summary, China perceives Kazakhstan, not the Middle East, to be its energy heartland. China’s strategy will have a tremendous influence in the region. The March 31, 1996, Chinese Communist party Central Committee strategic paper (Resolution number 6, called the Strike Hard Campaign) dealt with Sinkiang separatism and the large-scale settlement of Han Chinese. It contained four paragraphs outlining Chinese intentions toward the handling of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. The Chinese were quite clear about how they intended to achieve influence. What has happened to date follows that strategy.

**Russian Inroads**

Recent Russian inroads into Central Asia, propelled by Russian oil and gas revenues, were given a great deal of attention at the conference. An agreement was signed between Kazakhstan and Russia last fall concerning the pipelines that go to Russia’s Black Sea harbors, to Samara, and other places in Russia—all points in a game of geopolitical struggle for Kazakh oil. The Russian oil giant, Lukoil, acquired Nelson Resources. Russia’s Gazprom, backed by President Putin, is primarily involved in Central Asian gas, blurring the line between the state and the corporation. There is a clear pattern of Russian inroads into other areas as well, for example, by the Russian company United Energy Systems. (In contrast, the energy from power plants being built in Tajikistan is intended largely for export to China.)

Russia has a very favorable deal with Western Europe where it has just increased its market share with respect to its exports of natural gas, now approximately 25 percent of Western European consumption. The goal is to make Western Europe more dependent on Russian gas. The former German federal chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, signed on to promote Gazprom’s trans-Baltic pipeline initiative to reach Germany without crossing Poland and Ukraine. Another inroad for Russia was the building of the Blue Streak gas pipeline through Turkey, opening a new market for Russian gas. It was suggested that this project could not have been accomplished without massive bribes, illustrating, by contrast, the difficulties
Americans would face in competing for such projects in the region in light of U.S. legal restraints such as the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

In the view of one participant, however, Russia’s successes are not without risk. The Russian national budget is overly dependent on income from Gazprom and Lukoil fees and taxes. Russia has failed to reindustrialize beyond the energy sector. Moreover, its gas revenues depend on its ability to obtain cheaply a large portion of the gas it needs from Central Asia. In 2004 it paid Turkmenistan one-seventh the price that Western Europe paid. The situation is marginally better for Turkmenistan now. Russia needs Central Asian gas in order to continue its aggressive stance toward Ukraine on a political level and toward Western Europe on an economic level. The view was expressed that Russia may well overplay its hand since no Central Asian leader can survive for long if he is seen as being too dependent on Russia as an “elder brother”—to parody the words that the Soviet Union used to describe its relationship with its “national republics.”

**Ecological Problems**

The conference discussed three major ecological problems faced by Kazakhstan and other countries of the region. First is Kazakhstan’s inheritance of the former nuclear polygon at Semipalatinsk located in its northeast territory. This polygon is known as a nuclear site where about 500 nuclear explosions took place over a period of 40 years between the end of the 1940s and the end of the 1980s. The contaminated area covers a territory of 300,000 square kilometers, which is roughly equal to half the territory of France. Kazakhstan is trying to deal with this problem, and UN member states have supported a number of resolutions on the issue. It is clear that this problem has three dimensions: humanitarian, ecological, and economic. A participant noted that Kazakhstan has not blamed any country for the situation; instead, it has sought moral and technical support from the international community to deal with the problems presented by this huge contaminated area.

Another problem is the continued drying up of the Aral Sea. The problem became well known as adjacent countries in the region coordinated their efforts to cope with it. Kazakhstan’s efforts to replenish the northern part of the sea have yielded some success. But the problem is still there, and the attention of the international community must be drawn to this tragedy.

The third important ecological issue in the region that the conference discussed was water management. Kazakhstan is a downstream country; its internal water resources furnish only 60 percent of its needs. Accordingly, the water management issue is at the top of the agenda of cooperation among neighboring countries, including China. This issue is quite contentious for Uzbekistan whose large, irrigated cotton economy is dependent on the headwaters of sources in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Turkmenistan is wholly dependent for most of its needs in agriculture and other enterprises on water given to it by Uzbekistan.

**GEOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVES FROM COMPETING POINTS OF VIEW**

The conference devoted considerable time during both the morning and afternoon sessions to Chinese-Russian cooperation aimed at curtailing the inroads that the United States has made into Central Asia since 9/11. Joint efforts began with the revival of the dormant Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), an economic as well as a political and strategic security alliance originally composed of China, Russia, and three Central Asian states. The key party in this organization is the People’s Republic of China. Largely at the initiative of the Chinese, SCO’s anti-American move at the June 2005 Astana summit was aimed at fixing deadlines for the decommissioning of U.S. bases in the area. It is by no means certain that Russia or the Central Asian states would have tried to take such a stand without China’s prodding. The main problem for the SCO is how long the balance between Moscow and Beijing can be maintained. How will growing Chinese influence affect Central Asian security? What kind of response can the West mount to China’s challenge? Experts, particularly in the Asian countries, regard SCO as a counterbalance to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The security agreement signed in 1992 in Tashkent under Commonwealth of Independent States’ (CIS’s) auspices among Central Asian countries and Russia remained the main safeguard against hypothetical external dangers and threats. But given its diminishing role, the CIS did not prove to be an effective military mechanism with the exception of its intervention in the Tajik civil war. During the militant Islamist incursions into the region in 1999 and 2000 (in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan), there were widespread concerns about the organization’s practical value.

Another issue discussed was the economic, military, and demographic situation of the Russian Federation. How long, it was asked, can Russia be expected to fulfill its security obligations in Central Asia as well as in the Caucasus? What has President Putin done to carry out his intention to restore Russian influence in Central Asia as well as in the CIS in general? Russia has taken some steps toward achieving its goals by restoring some Soviet-era military bases, taking control of Tajikistan’s hydroenergy resources and of Turkmenistan’s gas export routes, achieving a rapprochement with Uzbekistan, and gaining Kazakhstan’s participation in some projects. But Russia’s ability to continue to project its influence in the area is dependent on its economy, which is overdependent on oil and gas revenues.

Central Asian countries and their leaders are concerned about the U.S. military presence. Some, however, regard the American presence as a necessary counterbalance to China and Russia, particularly China. Nobody can ignore the great growth in Chinese influence, discount its future impact on the region, and dismiss the concern that its influence has engendered.
At the SCO summit of prime ministers, Beijing offered to invest more than $900 million in the region in the form of Chinese technical engineering assistance, which would translate into the massive demographic presence of Chinese in the region. Russia and Kazakhstan rejected the proposal. The conference addressed the following question. Is the goal of China in Central Asia merely economic, as Chinese officials say, or is it political and geopolitical as well? Raising this issue poses additional questions about Chinese relations with Russia, the United States, and Central Asia.

**U.S. Interests and Policy**

A key task facing the conference was identifying U.S. strategic interests in Central Asia—a region in the world that is geographically distant from the United States. The conference identified three interrelated U.S. interests in the area: security, energy, and reform. The most important issue is the future of the U.S. military presence in the area. Another issue relates to the question of whether the United States has a Eurasian strategy. During the Clinton presidency, a new role—that of “security manager”—was proposed for the United States in Central Asia. Establishing a U.S.-Russian Federation consensus about strategy would be very important for the region. But it would be complicated by the U.S. position toward specific color revolutions.

It was asserted that the United States has no economic policy toward Central Asia. For example, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) treats U.S. investments in Russian oil more favorably than those in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, the U.S.-Russian Investment Fund is 15 years old, but there is still no such fund for Central Asia. Recently a major Kazakh firm, Kazmis, was listed on the London Stock Exchange but not in New York. A point was made that in monetary terms U.S. assistance is very modest. Even the allocation of $9.6 million for military cooperation for all of Central Asia for the coming year is relatively modest.

It was noted that the Afghan war continues to have a strong effect on U.S. security interests in the region. In Central Asia, the U.S. role in Afghanistan involves overflight rights, base rights, and emergency diversion rights—arrangements that are crucial to the American ability to prosecute the war. Next in importance from a security point of view is drug trafficking. Right across the border from Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan is 80 percent of the world’s opium production that reaches the outside world through Central Asia. Most of those narcotics find their ultimate markets in Russia and to a somewhat lesser extent in Central and Western Europe; relatively little end up in the United States. Nevertheless, it is important for the United States to help others in the war on narcotics in order to obtain reciprocal security assistance.

There is a strong U.S. interest in preventing the states of Central Asian from becoming narcostates where anybody, including terrorists, can find a haven. For example, in summertime as they waged war in Afghanistan and carried out related activity in Pakistan, the commandos of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) crossed regularly into the Ferghana Valley in Kyrgyzstan. They have changed names a few times and have splintered but still operate in Central Asia, raising the possibility of providing transit for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as well as narcotics.

The U.S. State Department’s decision to move Central Asia from the European section to the South Asia section engendered a great deal of concern among discussants. It was officially justified by bureaucratic concerns over having one assistant secretary dealing with 55 countries and the other with only eight. Nevertheless, it might have sent the wrong signal to individual countries that are trying to discern how the United States looks at the region. Being perceived as part of the West helps reformers in Central Asia. Kazakhs, for example, who discover that their country is no longer part of Europe, regard the revelation as a huge vote of no confidence.

The conferees understood that the reorganization was only a State Department bureaucratic change. Nonetheless it engendered considerable discussion about the potential significance a similar reorganization by the Pentagon, the Treasury, or other departments of the U.S. government would have on other countries that also look at Central Asia and the Caucasus together.

Infrastructure was then cited as another important topic. The United States would like to see Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstanz sell hydropower to Afghanistan, then to Pakistan, and perhaps to India. Others suggested that linking the entire region by fiber optic communications is critical. Much is already underway with direct or indirect U.S. assistance. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and USAID are working on hydropower transmission and generation and on all-weather roads linking the region. Secretary Rice announced a $1.4 million initiative for infrastructure integration, which was seen by some participants as too modest.

USAID was said to be working on developing a regional energy market, and the
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is building a bridge across the Pyandz River joining Afghanistan with the Tajik road network up through Kyrgyzstan and on into Kazakhstan. Washington, it was said, wants to see where and how the money can best be used and whether the countries can work together as well as with international financial institutions and other donors and investors, including Russia.

It was suggested at the conference that after 9/11, a lot of thinking in Washington was focused on American foreign policy and security policy, on mistakes made in the Middle East during the last 40 years of emphasizing stability over democracy and of not getting unbiased information from the region, combined with little appreciation of Central Asian culture and preoccupations. Only in the last year or two has it become commonplace to talk about the importance of clans in Central Asia and about the unintended consequences of lecturing local officials about how to act.

The conference discussed the path that the former Soviet republics took after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their direction was determined by where they had come from—not a propitious starting point for becoming a democratic society. U.S. foreign policy toward the Soviet Union recognized the fact that it was a large area. As the region came apart, it became clear that it contained many different cultures and communities. Once the United States recognized the newly independent countries, it formulated its first objective: to prevent the Soviet Union from coming back together again.

Russia, according to the U.S. government, is the pivotal state in the region. If the post-Soviet transition did not work in Russia, Washington concluded, it would not work in a post-Soviet republic. Consequently, Washington had to make sure it got its Russian policy right. Central Asian policy derived from that point of view. Respecting the sovereignty of individual states and preventing Russia from dominating them were key objectives. The evolution of the post-Soviet era coincided with a particular juncture in history when the world entered the process of globalization. That process changed the way in which nation-states interact.

Globalization seems to punish countries that do not integrate into the world economy. U.S. policy was designed to encourage Central Asian countries to globalize and to adopt a legal and regulatory structure open to investments from around the world. In other words, Washington, on the one hand, urged Central Asian states to be sovereign and independent and, on the other hand, encouraged them to “globalize” and reduce restrictions that prevent interacting with other states—in effect, to “lower” their borders. But to protect an emerging nation’s own interests, “higher” borders may be needed. In effect, U.S. policy advice was not very helpful. One example is Kyrgyzstan, which endorsed democracy and moved to adopt it. It was the first Central Asian country to move out of the ruble zone in response to American, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Bank advice, issue its own currency, and join the World Trade Organization (WTO). But Kyrgyzstan experienced the opposite of what it expected. It expected a great increase in trade after it joined the WTO. In fact, trade fell by about 30 percent the year after it was admitted. U.S. policy was not dynamic in the region. It continued to pursue the same objectives without paying attention to problems that had arisen. Many NGOs, sponsored in part by the U.S. government and in part by Western foundations, adopted mechanisms and ways of thinking that did not find fertile ground in the region.

After 9/11, the situation changed. The United States suddenly embraced Uzbekistan whose regime has been described by many in the Western world as brutal and authoritarian. Central Asian governments, especially in Uzbekistan, thought that the United States would understand the constraints they were dealing with. In contrast, Washington expected behavior that was not realistic. In effect, Uzbekistan was trying to implement a set of objectives that were different from Washington’s.

What the Western world fails to recognize when it promotes reform and runs into reform fatigue is that some actors have rational interests for opposing reform. Based on that premise, it may be helpful to try to answer the following question. What policy would be effective in helping the United States achieve its objectives in the region? A view was presented (against objections from others) that the primary U.S. interest in the region is based on the role that Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan can play in assisting the reconstruction of Afghanistan. According to that point of view, U.S. interests in Kazakhstan—potentially a large U.S. trading partner in the future—are twofold: developing its trade relationship with Kazakhstan and providing assistance for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

It was said that the United States had not managed to take advantage of the secular nature of Central Asian authoritarian regimes that are religiously moderate because of their adherence to the Hanafi school of Islam and its strong Sufi influence. It was suggested that even Uzbekistan should have been given some credit for what it was doing right in supporting secular government, not just criticized for what it was doing wrong. A participant quoted the NCAF report on Kazakhstan, which emphasizes that U.S. interests in the country should not be limited to oil, security, and counterterrorism but to Kazakhstan’s vital importance to U.S. interests in the region; it is a secular Muslim state with a large non-Muslim minority and pro-Western sympathies that is undergoing speedy economic development and providing better standards of living for its diverse population.

Finally, it was argued that the United States ought to recognize that not all cultures are alike. Throughout Central Asia are clans that work outside formal political institutions that are not synonymous with democratic processes. For example, USAID workers have discovered after working with legislators to persuade them to enact specific reforms that the legislature does not make actual decisions.
Decisions, it turns out, are made on the basis of things that have little to do with legislative structure or even with a constitution. As U.S. policymakers seek to promote economic and political reform in Central Asia, they must adapt to the cultural and practical realities at the most basic levels of local society.

**Russian Interests and Policy**

It was asserted that neither Russia nor the United States has a policy in Central Asia. Instead, both indulge in reaction, either underreaction or overreaction. Despite a measure of activism evident in Russian policy toward the region during the last few years, Russia, it was noted, is not about to sacrifice its resources or to spend much money to pursue its interests beyond security.

It was reiterated that the main concern of Russia is security. Economics is second. Russia’s increase in economic investments in Central Asia for the first time last year was attributed to President Putin’s belief and that of his government that such investments can enhance Russia’s security in the region. The Russian Aluminum Company invested up to two billion dollars in Tajikistan’s hydropower stations and a new aluminum plant that will use some of the power generated. Lukoil is active in Kazakhstan, and Gazprom is active in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Such a huge investment would have been unthinkable a few years ago. It was stated that the Russian Aluminum Company’s investment would be a very risky project for a private enterprise. It was also noted that Russian companies investing in Central Asia are not without important foreign investors, including prominent oligarchs with Uzbek ties.

Drugs are considered a serious threat to Russian security. Russia has a real problem with drugs, drug trafficking, and drug addicts, especially in some depressed regions of Siberia, the Urals, and the north, where the price is low. Very little has been done to stem the flow of drugs from all directions, and the traffic continues to increase.

Islamic extremism and terrorism are also perceived as considerable threats to Russia. It was emphasized that perception is important to Central Asia. For example, it was suggested that even a bureaucratic decision such as the transfer of Central Asia from the European to the South Asian desk of the State Department could be perceived by Russians and Central Asians as a sign of American retreat.

Russia seized the opportunity from the growing U.S.–Uzbekistan split to fill the gap and occupy the niche that was left in Uzbekistan by the Americans. The Russian position in the area is also reinforced by the fact that large numbers of Uzbeks and Tajiks work in Russia and a large Russian minority still lives in Kazakhstan. George Kennan was quoted as having said many years ago that the effectiveness of power, which radiates from every national center, decreases in proportion to the distance involved. Distance speaks in Russia’s favor relative to the United States.

Russia was said to understand the dangers emanating from the weak position of the Uzbek leader and from denying the fact that democracy cannot be imported into or imposed on Central Asia. It was suggested that cooperation between Russia and the United States would be in the interest of all, especially the states of Central Asia.

**Chinese Interests and Policy**

It was underlined at the conference that China has been consistent in its political concerns about the region, especially about the possibility that political change from Central Asia will spill over into the neighboring Chinese province of Sinkiang (Xinjiang). China shares a border with three Central Asian states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The part of China that borders on Central Asia is the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, the largest Chinese province. It accounts for one-sixth of Chinese territory but has a relatively small population in Chinese terms—around 19 million people. Forty-seven percent of that population is Uighur Muslim; 41 percent is Han Chinese. Other groups that live in this region include one million Kazakhs and smaller numbers of Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tajiks. Moreover, more than 300,000 Uighurs live across the border in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The Han population in Xinjiang has been growing because of efforts by Beijing to encourage the Han Chinese to settle in this region. Their presence has increased from only 10 percent in 1950 to slightly below 50 percent today. In essence, China is very much concerned with what is happening across the border because of overlapping populations.

One of China’s first tasks in the early part of the 1990s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union was to secure its borders with its Central Asian neighbors. The process of border demarcation was controversial in some of the Central Asian states (most recently in Kyrgyzstan where there were demonstrations against the process), but now it has largely been completed. In July 2001, the SCO emerged from the process of demarcating the borders and from confidence-building efforts by China, its three Central Asian neighbors (later, Uzbekistan), and Russia.

Concern about Islamic extremism and separatism is not new in China. In 1996 a police campaign, called the Strike Hard campaign, was directed against separatist activities in Xinjiang. Human rights organizations point to the systematic persecution of Uighurs by the Chinese government, and both the Chinese government and Uighur organizations have interests, for different reasons, in playing up Uighur separatist activities. It was stated at the conference that even the Chinese government would acknowledge that since the late 1990s there has been little indigenous Islamic radicalism in Xinjiang, belying concern about outside influence, including influence emanating from Pakistan and Afghanistan. In fact, the level of military presence maintained by China in Xinjiang does not indicate...
It was pointed out that to ensure stability in Xinjiang it is necessary to promote economic development and expand economic cooperation with Central Asia. Thus in March 2000 the Chinese National People’s Congress endorsed a policy, called Go West, of developing China’s inland provinces. Its centerpiece was the investment of more than five billion dollars in a 4,000-kilometer east-west gas pipeline linking Xinjiang’s Tarim Basin with Shanghai. This pipeline has a capacity of 12 billion cubic meters per year and became operational last year. Xinjiang has been slated to become the center of China’s oil and gas industry, both by developing its own resources, which contain one-third of China’s oil and gas reserves, and by becoming a gateway to Central Asian oil.

Trade has been growing rapidly between China and Central Asia, but the monetary amount is still quite small. For example, half of Xinjiang’s trade is with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In monetary terms, it amounts to less than two billion dollars per annum. Nonetheless, Chinese investments in Central Asia have grown rapidly since 1993, when China became a net energy importer and began to seek alternative supplies. Recent difficulties in energy relations with Russia in connection with Siberian oil projects also play a role.

Since 9/11, the U.S. military presence in Central Asia has complicated China’s geopolitical picture. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, SCO played a very marginal role. It lacked an office and telephones, which U.S. military commanders discovered when they tried to contact the organization. Since then, its charter has been approved, and the organization has become institutionalized. Its Secretariat is located in Beijing and is headed by a former Chinese ambassador to Russia. China participated in SCO peacekeeping and confidence-building military exercises with Kyrgyzstan in 2002, with Kazakhstan and Russia and Tajikistan in 2003 (as well as with Kyrgyzstan) and, most recently, in the summer of 2005, with Russia.

Since the emergence of the new leadership in China, Chinese policy has resulted in greater activism directed toward energy diplomacy and greater attention to Central Asia. China’s Communist party First Secretary Hu Jintao’s first overseas trip in the summer of 2003 was to Central Asia. In Kazakhstan, many economic agreements were signed. China’s first crossborder pipeline from Kazakhstan to Xinjiang became operational recently. It represents an investment of almost ten billion dollars, a huge commitment on China’s part that may mark the beginning of a whole series of Chinese pipelines to other countries, including Russia.

Finally, China has endorsed efforts to contain democratic changes in Central Asia, especially of the “color revolution” type. Concerned by events in Bishkek and Andijon, Chinese leaders received President Karimov in Beijing, gave him the red carpet treatment, and pledged $1.5 billion in investments, half in the energy sector. Since then, the Chinese have been very active throughout Central Asia, promising military aid to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (less than three million dollars but not so little compared with U.S. aid). The conference raised the question: What does all this mean for China and Russia in Central Asia?

Areas of agreement between China and Russia involve reducing the U.S. military presence in the region in order to constrain pro-Western political change as well as classifying violence in Chechnya and Xinjiang as terrorism, which would justify oppressive countermeasures. Russia has been resisting Chinese efforts to enhance multilateral cooperation within SCO, preferring instead to link Central Asian states bilaterally with Russia via CIS institutions. China would like to expand its access to Central Asian markets, and that could happen if SCO became a multilateral organization such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Finally, there is distrust of Chinese intentions in Central Asia and concern about the possibility of economic domination by China and population imbalances such as those between the Russian Far East and China. There is a feeling in Central Asia of being squeezed by the major powers that are pursuing interests not always compatible with the interests of the states in the region.

Focus on Turkey

Turkey is important for many reasons but primarily because it is a member of NATO. Since the Iraq war, Turkish-American relations have changed primarily because of the different approaches that Turkey has taken to the Central Command (CENTCOM) and the European Command (EUCOM). Turkey did not establish the same kind of cooperative arrangement with CENTCOM that it had with EUCOM. Concerning Iraq, Turkey shares the concern of many other countries, including China and Russia, that the United States is creating instability in the area. From the Turkish perspective, the United States initiated the war to achieve worthwhile goals but was not prepared for the post-Saddam situation. By extension, there is concern that the United States may do similar things in Central Asia, the Black Sea region, and other places in the area. Moreover, the Turkish military, even those who worked in NATO, are drawing closer to Russia. Turkey regards Russia as a partner in countering American moves in the Middle East that it disapproves of, including “color revolutions” and further interventions in the area. Turkish-Russian relations have gotten stronger. President Putin met Prime Minister Erdogan three times in 2005, and trends suggest that in a few years Russia may become Turkey’s largest trading partner, replacing Germany. President Putin, it seems, would like to draw Ankara away from NATO, inducing Turkey to become an observer if not an eventual member of SCO.

Many people in Turkey are very concerned that the United States does not understand the full scope of the Islamist danger—a concern shared by the Turkish mil-
...and seizing opportunities and responding to setbacks with appropriate action, including damage control.

- The republics of Central Asia cannot resist combined Russian/Chinese pressure without a larger commitment from the United States supported by the European Union.

- The NCAFP expects that China will eventually overplay its hand in Central Asia, fueling local apprehensions and Russian suspicion. The U.S. government will be in a position to take advantage of such an opportunity if it presents itself as the Chinese and the Russians did at the SCO summit after regime change in Kyrgyzstan and the Andijon uprising had occurred.

- There is a broad sense that U.S. policy, seen to be supportive of regime change such as occurred in Kyrgyzstan, lacks follow through.

- With both Russia and China flush with trade surpluses and in a position to back their state-controlled firms, Western enterprises may no longer be able to compete on their own without government support. U.S. policymakers should examine economic areas of strategic importance to U.S. national interests for which government support might be made available to private enterprise in the form of tax incentives, credit enhancement, and other measures.

- Although support for human rights and democratization is built into U.S. foreign policy, progress cannot be expected uniformly without regard for traditions and local circumstances.

- The State Department’s shift of Central Asian Affairs from the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs to the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs appears to be sending the wrong message. To many in the region the reclassification seems to denote the perception that Central Asia is not receptive to Western values. Considerable fence-mending is in order. The United States would articulate to good effect the connection between U.S. interests in Central Asia and its activities in Afghanistan by identifying and emphasizing mutual interests.

NCAFP CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The U.S. strategic position in Central Asia, which greatly improved between 9/11 and the beginning of the war in Iraq and progressed further through the “color revolutions” in the CIS republics, has deteriorated—the low point being Uzbekistan’s shift after the Andijon uprising and the Astana summit of the Shanghai Cooperative Organization in which Russia and China combined their efforts to push back U.S. inroads into the area. Those developments require a rethinking of U.S. policy objectives and strategy in the region to reflect changed circumstances.

The NCAFP has reviewed the Main Conclusions and Policy Recommendations that it presented in its May 2005 Central Asia report titled Stability in Central Asia: Engaging Kazakhstan, A Report (with Policy Recommendations) on U.S. Interests in Central Asia and U.S.-Kazakhstan Relations, which are attached as an appendix to this summary. The NCAFP believes that these conclusions continue to be sound and reaffirms its policy recommendations.

Set forth below are the NCAFP’s conclusions that were formed after analyzing the proceedings of the January 2006 conference on substantive issues that bear on U.S. policy in Central Asia and policy recommendations relating to such issues.

- There is a compelling need for a dynamic U.S. foreign policy in Central Asia—one that has made provisions for identifying...
environmental issues.

- The conference regretted the fact that the U.S. government has not called attention to the secular nature of the Central Asian regimes and to the moderate form of Islam adopted by a large majority of the population.

- Finally, there was a strong sense that increased educational and cultural exchanges between Central Asia and the West are essential to the furtherance of U.S. interests in the region.

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Main Conclusions

The NCAFP delegation reached the following conclusions at the completion of its fact-finding mission in Kazakhstan.

- During the decade and a third that has elapsed since achieving its independence, Kazakhstan has become the leading state in former Soviet Central Asia in terms of such criteria as GDP, GDP per capita, privatization of the economy, volume of exports, rate of economic development, volume of energy production, effectiveness and transparency of the banking system, development of transportation, growth of technical education, and so forth.

- The process of democratization, though still unsatisfactory by U.S. standards, has been superior to that undertaken by each of the other post-Soviet republics of Central Asia. Opposition parties and groups, though restricted in their access to electronic media, are allowed to publish newspapers, to hold small meetings, to equip their offices with telephones and fax lines, and to travel abroad. Opposition leaders are more often harassed than jailed, although there have been some violent episodes. On the positive side, both the Kazakh political establishment and the opposition are conscious of the geopolitical position of the country, which necessitates maintaining a balance among Russian ambitions, growing Chinese influence, Middle Eastern Islamist inroads, and Western pressures. The principal disagreement between the U.S. and Kazakh governments relates to whether political and economic liberalization can proceed simultaneously or whether economic liberalization must occur first.

- Kazakhstan is fast becoming a key energy producer—behind the Gulf States and Russia but on par with North Sea producers. Its production and known reserves are growing, and its role...
is steadily increasing. The country is doing what it can to diversify pipeline routes in order to decrease its dependency on Russian pipelines (and their often high transit fees) for its exports to the West.

• Kazakhstan’s armed forces, though small in number, are the best trained in the region. They receive assistance from the United States and other sources. The army is becoming professional, has a qualified officer corps, maintains close contacts with the U.S. armed forces, and participates in the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. The training language of the army is still Russian, but an understanding of English is growing rapidly. The percentage of ethnic Russians in the armed forces, though declining, remains substantial.

• Kazakhstan is ethnically, religiously, and linguistically tolerant. It shows little discrimination against non-Kazakhs, non-Muslims, or Russian speakers. Ethnic Russians, however, are less visible than in the 1990s, and since independence the ethnic Kazakh proportion of the population has increased from less than 40 percent to a majority. Concurrently the ethnic Russian representation in public institutions has declined. The urban population is predominantly secular, the Russian language still predominates, and mixed marriages are not uncommon—at least in the capitals. Affirmative action from Soviet times benefits native Kazakh job applicants to the detriment of Russians. It has reduced rather than eliminated opportunities for non-Kazakhs.

• The principal political preoccupations of the present regime, which has been in power since independence, are internal political stability, the preservation of the country’s independence through balancing relations with its great power neighbors, the war on terrorism, and narcotraffíc. The Confederation of Independent States (CIS) is dismissed as outdated, and a new Kazakh foreign policy doctrine is under consideration. Except for objecting to the levels of internal controls maintained in Kazakhstan in the name of stability, U.S. interests coincide with all other Kazakh policies.

• Most governmental agencies and independent observers are concerned about the situation in the rest of Central Asia, especially about neighboring Uzbekistan where they predicted an almost imminent danger of explosion triggered by declining standards of living, harsh rule, and the rise of religious fanati-

cism provoked by the desperate situation. The Kazakh government is concerned about the possibility of a massive influx of refugees into southern Kazakhstan in such an event. The stability of post-Turkmenbashi Turkmenistan is regarded as questionable, though less threatening to Kazakhstan given the relatively small common border. The situations in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are viewed as unsettled.

• Russian ideas about enticing Kazakhstan into the ruble zone are dismissed as unrealistic. Kazakhstan sees itself as a partner rather than a client of Russia and perceives China, not Russia, as the fastest growing force in the area. The presence of American capital is welcome for its value and as a counter-weight to Chinese inroads.

• Kazakh officials maintain that the country is ready to become the locomotive of a Central Asian economic “union” by providing capital and assistance to neighboring states. Given relations with Uzbekistan and the isolation of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan’s plans appear to be premature, awaiting regime changes in those countries. Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, is a recipient of Kazakh aid, and Tajikistan may be a candidate as well.

• Kazakh officials were very concerned about whether the U.S. secretary of state would certify Kazakhstan as a country that “has made a significant improvement in the protection of human rights during the preceding six-month period” as required by Congress before funds can be allocated. Although U.S. assistance to the Kazakh military is significant and Kazakhstan has benefited from other U.S. foreign aid funding, the officials were primarily concerned about the political impact of a negative decision, which could discourage foreign investments and blacken the image of the country. (Subsequent to our meetings with Kazakh officials, Secretary of State Rice notified Congress that she could not make the certification but had granted a waiver in light of U.S. national security interests.)

• Kazakh authorities are appealing to the United States for support of their candidacy to assume the chairmanship of the OSCE in 2009. Germany reportedly supports Kazakhstan’s candidacy. This issue is important to the government because occupying the OSCE chair would buttress President Nazarbayev’s prestige both domestically and internationally. It would also strengthen Kazakhstan’s claim to regional leader-
ship and remind the world that Kazakhstan is an important “European” nation.

• Kazakh officials contend that the country’s post-Soviet renunciation of its arsenal of WMDs, its secular attitude combined with its ability to maintain an atmosphere marked by the absence of religious tension, the lack of serious conflicts among ethnic groups, the positive feeling toward the West in general and the United States in particular, and especially President Nazarbayev’s role in implementing those policies should be better appreciated.

NCAFP Policy Recommendations

To sum up: The United States and Kazakhstan share a vital interest in the continuation and ultimate success of Kazakhstan’s political and economic transition to a mature, functioning, secular, democratic state. U.S. interests in Kazakhstan transcend oil and Kazakh support for the war on terrorism. They include Kazakhstan’s strategic importance as a moderate, pro-Western, secular Muslim state that contains a large non-Muslim population that can serve as both a model and a stabilizing force in the region; Kazakhstan’s strategic location as a land bridge from Europe to East and South Asia; and its potential for being the engine of growth, investment, and economic development in Central Asia. As seen through the prism of the Bush Doctrine, Kazakhstan, of all the Central Asian countries, has the greatest potential for achieving a relatively fast-track transition from authoritarian pluralism to an acceptable form of functioning democracy.

Based on the fact-finding conclusions of the NCAFP delegation and the summary of U.S. interests presented above, the National Committee on American Foreign Policy makes the following recommendations consistent with American foreign policy interests.

• U.S. policy should assist and not undermine the basic great power equilibrium that Kazakhstan is attempting to sustain in order to maintain its independence and pursue economic development and modernization. It is in the interest of the United States to forge special relationships with Central Asian countries in order to contribute to the stability of the region. U.S. policy should be sensitive to the fragility of Kazakhstan’s geopolitical position.

• The United States must show more understanding of the Kazakh reality given that it has experienced only 13 years of independence; has pursued privatization and democratization for only a brief time; must accommodate a multiethnic, multi-tribal, and multireligious population; and has to confront instability in neighboring states. Steady improvement, not rapid progress, should be the expectation. American pressure should be exerted but not overused. To promote mutual understanding, the United States must make an effort to explain to the Kazakhs how the American political system functions, something difficult for a society that has emerged from a Soviet system to comprehend.

• The United States must continue to emphasize that American interests in Kazakhstan are not limited to oil, security, and counterterrorism. It also must communicate the fact that because Kazakhstan is a secular Muslim state that contains a large non-Muslim minority, is sympathetic to the West, and is undergoing rapid economic development that is providing a better standard of living for the diverse population, the country is of vital importance to U.S. interests and those of the entire region as well.

• U.S. interests would be served if Kazakhstan’s burgeoning free market becomes the engine of growth in Central Asia and if Kazakhstan becomes more financially engaged in the Southern Caucasus. Kazakhstan’s ability to play a leading role in the economies of the other republics of the region, as well as make investments in the Southern Caucasus, would have a stabilizing effect on the region as a whole. According to all accepted criteria, Kazakhstan, as the leading state in former Soviet Central Asia, should be the centerpiece of U.S. efforts in the region. Its rapid development requires the informed attention of the U.S. government and the skillful formulation of an appropriate foreign policy.

• The United States should encourage Kazakhstan to create an opening to the south through Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan to Pakistan, India, and the Indian Ocean. This opening would proceed slowly as trade and transport routes develop naturally in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse. Transregional commerce between Central and South Asia will have a beneficial effect on world politics. Substantial progress has been made in rebuilding and augmenting Afghanistan’s road network connecting South Asia, the Indian Ocean, and Central Asia. Railroads and pipelines are on the drawing board and could go forward if stability in Afghanistan is attained.

• The United States has a legitimate interest in promoting democratic values by basing foreign aid to Kazakhstan and Central
Asia on individual regimes’ records of protecting human rights. The current certification process mandated by Congress, which requires the secretary of state to find that significant improvement has taken place during the preceding six-month period or grant a waiver for national security reasons, is hardly the most effective leverage that can be exerted. Consideration should be given to a revised process that would give the secretary of state more discretion in responding to the observance of human rights in the region by rewarding progress or withholding benefits in a time frame that would not be limited to six months. The NCAFP supports the recent decision of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to waive the requirement. We believe that it would have been counterproductive to American foreign policy interests to cut off such U.S. foreign aid to Kazakhstan as IMET and U.S. democracy projects.

- The United States should make clear to the Kazakh leadership what incremental steps Kazakhstan can take to achieve a favorable finding; for example, the appointment of independent observers or monitors to electoral commissions, the proper counting of ballots, the public posting of protocols at the precinct level, improved access to media, and the right of assembly. How to devise and implement such measures may be an appropriate focus of Track I/II or Track II engagement.

- The United States should coordinate its efforts to promote open societies, free and fair elections, and humanitarian goals in Central Asia with the European Union in order to prevent the inference that our preoccupations with the area are mere reflections of U.S. foreign policy aimed at achieving U.S. dominance and securing the flow of oil. Coordination with EU countries would increase leverage on human rights issues and electoral reform in Kazakhstan given its interest in acceding to the OSCE chair in 2009.

- The United States should continue to support and encourage educational and cultural exchanges with Kazakhstan as a means of stimulating mutual interests and understanding. Kazakhstan has begun to increase its support for these exchanges, and the United States should advance this effort by facilitating the processing of visas and the acceptance of Kazakh students at U.S. universities.