CENTRAL ASIA: STRATEGIC CONTEXT
TWENTY YEARS AFTER INDEPENDENCE

THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY
CENTRAL ASIA/CASPIAN SEA BASIN REGION PROJECT

ROUNDTABLE CONFERENCE HELD AT
THE KENNAN INSTITUTE,
THE WOODROW WILSON CENTER
WASHINGTON, D.C.

November 17, 2010

CONFERENCE REPORT
(with Policy Recommendations)
Our Mission

The National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) was founded in 1974 by Professor Hans J. Morgenthau and others. It is a nonprofit activist organization dedicated to the resolution of conflicts that threaten U.S. interests. Toward that end, the NCAFP identifies, articulates, and helps advance American foreign policy interests from a nonpartisan perspective within the framework of political realism.

American foreign policy interests include:

- preserving and strengthening national security;
- supporting countries committed to the values and the practice of political, religious, and cultural pluralism;
- improving U.S. relations with the developed and developing worlds;
- advancing human rights;
- encouraging realistic arms control agreements;
- curbing the proliferation of nuclear and other unconventional weapons;
- promoting an open and global economy.

An important part of the activity of the NCAFP is Track I½ and Track II diplomacy. Such closed-door and off-the-record endeavors provide unique opportunities for senior U.S. and foreign officials, think-tank experts, and scholars to engage in discussions designed to defuse conflict, build confidence, and resolve problems.

Believing that an informed public is vital to a democratic society, the National Committee offers educational programs that address security challenges facing the United States and publishes a variety of publications, including its bimonthly journal, American Foreign Policy Interests, that present keen analyses of all aspects of American foreign policy.
Foreword

BACKGROUND

The National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) has been running Track I½ and Track II projects for over 15 years – one on U.S.-China relations with a particular emphasis on the Taiwan issue, a second on the North Korean nuclear challenge, a third on Northern Ireland successfully concluded, a fourth on U.S. alliances with Japan and South Korea, a fifth on the Greater Middle East, and a sixth on the Central Asia/Caspian Sea Basin Region. The NCAFP Central Asia/Caspian Sea Basin Region Project was initiated in 2005 to focus on U.S. national interests in the five former Soviet republics of Central Asia (i.e., Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and to create a Track I½ and Track II framework to facilitate dialogue and advance such interests. The NCAFP has visited Kazakhstan three times as guests of the Kazakhstan government, has hosted Track I½ and Track II roundtables with civilian and military officials from the U.S. and Kazakhstan governments, and has prepared reports on such activities with policy recommendations. Track I diplomacy in the region has encountered many pitfalls in large part because of a suspicion that a fundamental tenet of U.S. policy in the region has been regime change. There are ample opportunities for Track I½ and Track II engagement with Kazakhstan’s southern neighbors as a precursor to more effective Track I diplomacy, and the NCAFP has been encouraged by officials of the interested governments to pursue such opportunities.

ROUNDTABLE OBJECTIVE

In May 2009, the NCAFP and Brookings Institution Energy Security Initiative co-hosted a Roundtable – Strategic Assessment of the Caspian Sea Basin Region – resulting in a report with policy recommendations. Over the course of the following year, NCAFP representatives met a number of times with policy experts and representatives of the various involved governments to discuss developments in the region, strategic and tactical options and policy responses. As a result of such discussions, the NCAFP was encouraged to bring together academic experts and present and former civilian and military policy makers from the U.S., Russia, China and Central Asia to take a fresh look at U.S., Russian and Chinese strategic interests in the region and the challenges confronting the respective Central Asia nations twenty years after independence. The objective of such a roundtable would be to inform the foreign policy debate through a report with analyses, conclusions and policy recommendations emerging from off-the-record, not for attribution, discussions.
The 2010 Roundtable was organized into four panels. The panel topics and Roundtable participants are listed in the Appendix. Dr. Jeffrey Mankoff acted as Roundtable Rapporteur and prepared the Conference Report. The NCAFP Central Asia/Caspian Sea Basin Region Project Group (i.e., Dr. Michael Rywkin, Project Director, Dr. Alexander A. Cooley, Special Project Adviser, and NCAFP Trustees, Steven Chernys, Richard R. Howe, Donald S. Rice, and Grace Kennan Warnecke) prepared the NCAFP Conclusions and Policy Recommendations. The views expressed in the following Conference Report and NCAFP Conclusions and Policy Recommendations are those only of the Rapporteur as to the Conference Report and the NCAFP as to the NCAFP Conclusions and Policy Recommendations.

TRIBUTES

The Central Asia: Strategic Context Twenty Years After Independence roundtable could not have occurred without the generosity of a number of donors who have supported the NCAFP’s Central Asia/Caspian Sea Basin Region Project over the past several years, including Mutual of America, Access Industries, ENI, ExxonMobil, the Shelby Cullom Davis Foundation, John Bell, and other individuals and private foundations. We also thank Dr. Blair Ruble and his colleagues at the Kennan Institute, Dr. Jeffrey Mankoff, Roundtable Rapporteur, Cora Weiss, Central Asia/Caspian Sea Basin Region Project Coordinator, and all the participants for their hard work.

Dr. George D. Schwab, President
National Committee on American Foreign Policy
Introduction and Background

The war in Afghanistan and the U.S.-Russia “reset” have increasingly aligned the interests of both the major outside powers with interests in Central Asia (the U.S., Russia, and China) and of the states of Central Asia themselves. Rather than view the region through a “Great Game” prism, the present moment provides an opportunity to think how best to promote more enduring cooperation in Central Asia while addressing the region’s long-standing social, environmental, and developmental challenges. The key challenges for U.S. policy makers are devoting more high-level attention to Central Asia, forging a differentiated approach to the five countries of the region, and coordinating (to the extent possible) with Russia and China.

The international balance shaping Central Asia’s security landscape is increasingly trilateral – the U.S., Russia, and China are the major actors – rather than bilateral (U.S.-Russia) or unilateral (USSR). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian elites increasingly sought to build ties with states other than Russia as a means of ensuring their countries’ continued independence and sovereignty, while Western (U.S. and European) leaders saw Central Asia as both a potential source of energy and a platform to contain a potential Russian resurgence. After a brief period of neglect in the early 1990s, Russia also started paying more attention to Central Asia, seeking to maintain its dominant economic position (above all its control of the export routes for the region’s hydrocarbons) and limit outside powers’ security role. China was a relative latecomer, but a combination of Beijing’s deep pockets and frustration with both Russia and the West led to a rapidly growing Chinese economic presence, and with it greater Chinese influence in regional strategic issues – though Chinese engagement in Central Asia has been at times haphazard.

For much of the past two decades, the U.S. and Russia were competitors in
Central Asia: for energy, military bases, and political influence. This competitive dynamic was largely counterproductive. It contributed to the escalation of tensions between Russia and the West at the global level, preventing them from cooperating on areas of mutual interest, such as developing a common framework for energy security encompassing both producers and consumers. It also limited outside powers’ ability to effectively engage with the Central Asian states themselves. The U.S. in particular failed to effectively differentiate its approaches to the five states of the region, or to pursue policies addressing problems within and between the states of Central Asia.

The U.S.-led war in Afghanistan focused unprecedented outside attention on Central Asia, which stood astride one of the principal access routes into Afghanistan, and which appeared similarly vulnerable to the noxious mix of extremism and tribalism that spawned the Taliban. The war also appeared to place the major outside powers on the same side, given their shared hostility to the Taliban and its al Qaeda associates; early in the conflict, Russia assented to the placement of U.S. troops in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The Uzbek and Kyrgyz leadership, meanwhile, saw the U.S. military presence as both a guarantee of their security against cross-border extremism from Afghanistan and as a hedge against a renewed expansionist push by Russia.

As U.S.-Russian relations deteriorated during the Bush-Putin years, the initial cooperation in Central Asia gave way to renewed rivalry. The shift of U.S. attention to Iraq after 2003 led many regional observers to question the depth or sincerity of the U.S. commitment to fighting the Taliban. The outbreak of “color revolutions” across the post-Soviet space, including in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 (as well as the violence later that year in the Uzbek city of Andijon) fed worries throughout the region that the real aim of the U.S. was the replacement of existing regimes with new leaders more congenial to U.S. interests. Following Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution, Russia, China, and the other Central Asian states agreed on the so-called Astana Declaration (adopted July 2005) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), calling on the U.S. to set a date for the withdrawal of its forces from Central Asia. This polarization between the U.S. and Russia affected the Central Asian states as well, as their ability to engage with the U.S. and other Western partners became increasingly constrained by the broader rivalry between Moscow and Washington.

As the U.S. and Russia feuded, Afghanistan continued to crumble. The Taliban, which the initial U.S. invasion had not completely finished off, regrouped in southern Afghanistan and Pakistan, until it was strong enough to again threaten not only the Karzai government in Kabul, but increasingly Afghanistan’s neighbors as well through its support for militant groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan/Islamic Jihad
Union (IMU/IJU) and as an example for other homegrown extremists. Afghanistan, particularly areas under de facto Taliban control, became the world’s main source of opium and heroin, much of which was trafficked across Afghanistan’s borders into Central Asia and on to Russia. Gradually, the prospect of failure in Afghanistan forced the U.S. to shift its attention back to that country even as it began drawing down its forces in Iraq. For Russia, fear of Afghanistan becoming a failed state and spreading instability throughout Central Asia (as well as the Muslim regions of Russia itself) encouraged a re-assessment of its earlier hostility to the U.S. presence in the region. Most exposed to the potential fallout of chaos in Afghanistan, the Central Asia states welcomed the lowering of tension between Moscow and Washington, taking advantage of the opportunity to play a more active role themselves in the anti-Taliban coalition.

China largely remained on the sidelines of the U.S.-Russia rivalry in Central Asia during the Clinton and Bush Administrations. The Soviet collapse of course created new opportunities – and new challenges – for Beijing on its Western frontier. China’s engagement with the region has long centered on developing economic ties and maintaining security on both sides of its border with Central Asia. Taking advantage of its deep pockets and geographic proximity, China has rapidly become one of Central Asia’s most important economic partners, underwriting the cost of new oil, gas, and infrastructure development, and seeking to boost cross-border trade particularly with its restive western province of Xinjiang. Beijing’s investment in Central Asia remains closely tied to its plans for developing Xinjiang as a means of consolidating its control over the province. China also wanted to ensure that Central Asia itself did not become a breeding ground for instability that could spread to Xinjiang or even to China proper. For that reason, a central component of China’s engagement with the region has been to preserve the political status quo, whether against democratizing “color revolutions” or the emergence of Islamist extremism.

Russia of course shares many of these concerns, but Beijing and Moscow have often had different priorities in the region. On the one hand, Russia and China are equally concerned about the “three evils” of separatism, terrorism, and extremism, and equally opposed to a permanent U.S. military presence in Central Asia. On the other hand, Russia’s interest in turning the SCO into a NATO-like bloc was resisted by China. China’s investment in energy infrastructure has meanwhile undermined Russia’s dominant hold on the region’s economy, allowing the Central Asian states more room for maneuver.

As relations between Washington and Moscow have improved under the Obama Administration’s “reset” policy, the competitive dynamic that long characterized U.S.-Russian interactions in Central Asia has begun to fade.
At least in relative terms, the U.S. itself is weaker than it was in the 1990s, but its presence in the region is still valued by Central Asian states that see it as a source of legitimacy.

Coordination between the U.S. and Russia during the ethnic violence that rocked southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010, and Russia’s participation (along with the Central Asian states) in counternarcotics operations and Russia’s participation in the so-called Northern Distribution Network, are examples of how Washington and Moscow have begun collaborating in pursuit of common interests in the region. Russo-Chinese relations in the region are less certain: China’s ending of Russia’s Central Asian pipeline monopoly and differences over the role and future of the SCO are long-term challenges. Yet Beijing and Moscow also have common interests in regional stability and countering the emergence of violent extremism. U.S. policy, meanwhile, has not seriously engaged with China in Central Asia. Given the uncertainty surrounding the future of the U.S.-Russian “reset” and the common focus on securing Afghanistan, the present moment represents a window of opportunity for advancing fresh thinking that moves beyond the Great Game clichés of the past.

**Current Realities**

Notwithstanding the differing priorities of the U.S., Russia, and China, the conference participants generally agreed that the three major powers are better positioned for cooperation today than they have been in some time:

- The U.S. has moved away from a strategy that centered on containing Russian influence in the region.
- All are concerned by the prospect of Afghanistan again becoming a failed state, particularly in the aftermath of serious political instability in some Central Asian states.
- The U.S. has largely allayed Russian and Chinese concerns that it seeks a long-term military presence in Central Asia.
- All the major powers’ priorities are essentially conservative and not directly threatening to one another or to the Central Asian states themselves.
- The U.S., Russia, and China all support regional stability and economic development.
- In the wake of the failed Bakiyev presidency in Kyrgyzstan, the Central Asian governments have mostly recognized that a generally
cooperative U.S., Russian, and Chinese presence contributes to regional security and development.

In general, U.S., Russian and Chinese priorities in the region are straightforward.

**The U.S. seeks:**
- security, both within Central Asia and vis-à-vis Afghanistan;
- development of Central Asian energy and its sale on global markets;
- political liberalization and protection of human rights;
- economic liberalization facilitating access to the region by U.S. firms; and
- bolstering state capacity to deal with internal challenges and to contribute to regional stability.

**Russia seeks:**
- security vis-à-vis Afghanistan, as well as from transnational threats such as drug trafficking and extremism;
- strengthening economic ties, through institutions such as The Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) and the Customs Union, leading eventually perhaps to a single economic space; and
- maintaining and strengthening cultural ties left over from the Soviet period.

**China seeks:**
- security (especially with regard to Xinjiang);
- enhanced access to Central Asian energy and other resources;
- expanded economic and political influence; and
- preservation of the political status quo inside Central Asia.

Certain Russian and Chinese priorities are, of course, inimical to the U.S. and Europe. For instance, the West’s belief that liberalization and democratization are necessary if the Central Asian governments are to cope with the steep internal challenges they face runs counter to the Russo-Chinese preference for maintaining the status quo. Characteristic are the differing interpretations of the 2010 political turmoil in Kyrgyzstan. Russia sees the country’s North-South polarization and fragmented political scene requiring the centralization of power in a strong president,
while the U.S. (and Europe) believes that de-centralizing power through a parliamentary system with a weak executive is the only way to promote reconciliation and ward off future violence. Despite these fundamentally opposing views, the U.S. and Russia were able to coordinate closely their response to the violence in Kyrgyzstan. Such a *de minimis* approach to coordination provides something of a model for the major powers to manage their approach to Central Asia’s challenges.

The improvement in U.S.-Russian relations since early 2009 has created a foundation for more extensive regional coordination and cooperation between Washington and Moscow. The tempering of the U.S.-Russian rivalry also creates new opportunities for Washington to directly engage the Central Asian states without in the process complicating its relations with Russia. Similar coordination with China would be desirable as well, but for the time being, U.S.-Chinese relations focus more on Asia-Pacific and global issues than on Central Asia. The U.S. would like China to play a more active role in Afghanistan (a step Russia would be unlikely to oppose), but Beijing remains hesitant.

**Regional Issues**

The conference also aimed at identifying the interests of the Central Asian states themselves. Participants identified a tendency to instrumentalize ties with Central Asia and to approach the region with a one-size-fits-all approach despite the diversity of issues within Central Asia as major impediments to U.S. influence. They emphasized the importance of U.S. policy makers having a clear picture of what Central Asians want from their engagement with outside powers. Of course, the five Central Asian states have significant disagreements among themselves, and their development trajectories have increasingly diverged since the end of the Soviet Union. Kazakhstan is a stable, relatively open middle-income country, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are impoverished, chaotic, and poised on the verge of state failure. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – with significant human and industrial capital (Uzbekistan) and hydrocarbon resources (Turkmenistan), but leadership wary of engaging with the outside world – are somewhere in between. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan are also affected by their proximity to Afghanistan and the potential for Afghanistan's instability to spread across the border. Kazakhstan, which does not share a border with Afghanistan, sees it as less of a threat.

Many participants noted that the Central Asian governments are particularly concerned about the consequences of a precipitous U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Some worried that Afghanistan’s ills – including radicalism, violence, drugs – could take hold within Central Asia itself if more is not done to stabilize the country before the U.S. and its allies withdraw, though others questioned how relevant the Afghan example is for the largely secular,
non-Pashtun Central Asian states. Recent bouts of instability in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have focused minds in the region on the dangers of negative spillover from Afghanistan. Conversely, a secure Afghanistan would represent a potential resource for Central Asia. It sits along the principal transit route between Central and South Asia, and occupies part of the shortest route to the sea for landlocked Central Asian states. For this reason, Central Asian governments are playing an active role in promoting economic development in Afghanistan – a role that reinforces the U.S./coalition effort.

Apart from Afghanistan, the Central Asian states face a number of other common challenges as well.

- encouraging economic development without political instability;
- regional economic challenges;
- water management and the related water-energy nexus;
- a “youth bulge” combined with limited economic opportunities (outside of Kazakhstan);
- cross-border migration;
- serious and worsening corruption;
- potentially restive minority populations (such as the ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan at the center of this summer’s violence);
- drug trafficking;
- nuclear proliferation; and
- managing succession in autocratic states without strong government or party institutions.

Several panelists argued that the biggest impediment to development and cooperation is mistrust – both toward the outside powers and toward other states in the region. Given Russia’s imperial legacy, many Central Asians continue to fear Moscow. At the same time, they are disappointed in Washington, whose engagement in the region over the past two decades has brought them few tangible benefits; and uncertain about Beijing, whose policy has not always been clearly articulated.

This uncertainty about outsiders reinforces the Central Asian leaders’ mistrust of one another: they often see other states in the region as a cat’s-paw for one or another of the outside powers. Meanwhile, the Central Asian
states have failed to develop mechanisms for dealing with problems of a regional nature – such as water-sharing, border management, or environmental remediation because they remain skeptical of cooperation with their neighbors. Many of their actions are governed by a zero-sum logic. Overcoming this mistrust will not be easy. Their mistrust undermines regional organizations’ effectiveness and prevents cooperation even in areas of shared interest. Beside the conflict in Afghanistan, several panelists suggested the issue most likely to spark a regional crisis is water management, another area where mistrust impedes cross-border cooperation.

A second major problem common throughout the region is governance broadly defined, including corruption, unresponsive leadership, absence of respect for human rights, and uncertain succession processes. Participants agreed that such internal challenges pose significant difficulties (albeit in different proportions) for all five Central Asian states, but were divided over how outsiders such as the U.S. should deal with them. Some favored a consistent focus on democratization, while others preferred a more nuanced approach that encouraged openness, responsiveness, and legitimacy. All agreed that internal weakness made the Central Asian regimes more vulnerable and wary of taking risks (including cooperation with one another). Corruption also creates direct security challenges: elites in one state, for instance, may be complicit in drug trafficking across neighboring states. Western assistance, including the presence of U.S. military facilities, contributes to this problem by serving as a source of rents.

Despite these problems, some bases for regional cooperation already exist and could be strengthened. These include existing regional bodies (such as the Customs Union), and joint projects such as the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and the U.S.-Central Asian Trade and Investment Facilitation Agreement (TIFA). Unfortunately, regional groupings often have a patchwork nature – for instance Kazakhstan’s participation in the Customs Union actually inhibits trade with neighboring Central Asian states who are not members. Some participants spoke of the ambition to create a regional common market across Central Asia, but recognized that the political obstacles for the time being remain steep. Some participants suggested that greater coordination among U.S. and Russian institutions with a regional presence (ranging from universities to military forces) could also help alleviate U.S.-Russian tensions and contribute to regional stability.

**Constraints**

While the present moment presents numerous opportunities for the U.S. to reshape its approach to Central Asia, Washington continues to face certain constraints that limit its options. Among these are:

- Unlike Russia and China, it is not a regional power – its presence is
more contingent than Moscow’s or Beijing’s – especially after U.S. forces begin withdrawing from Afghanistan and, presumably, the Manas Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan.

• Consequently, Central Asia is less of a priority for U.S. foreign policy than it is for Russian or Chinese foreign policy; Central Asia must compete for attention with the dozens of other regions and issues confronting U.S. policy makers. Secretary Clinton’s December 2010 trip to the region in the context of the OSCE’s Astana summit was the first ever visit to Central Asia by a Secretary of State; no U.S. President has ever been to the region.

• Apart from the OSCE, the U.S. is not a member of most regional organizations, though it has strong bilateral engagement with most of the Central Asian states, particularly through the framework of Annual Bilateral Consultations (ABCs).

• U.S. emphasis on democratization and human rights creates tension with Central Asian governments that object to foreign “meddling” in their internal affairs, even though liberalization would promote the stability and security Central Asian leaders crave.

• The U.S., being far away from Central Asia, has had far fewer economic interests and involvements there relative to Russia and China.

• The U.S. emphasis on isolating Iran has had a negative economic impact in Central Asia, which would benefit from expanding trade ties with Iran; already dealing with Afghanistan on their borders, the Central Asian states are profoundly concerned about the consequences of a conflict involving Iran.
The round-table dealt, among other problems, with two major issues: the state of the Central Asian region twenty years after independence and the current U.S. policy towards the five states. The following is a summary and list of NCAFP conclusions regarding the issues discussed:

**Foreign Affairs Issues**

1. A basis for cooperation increasingly exists among the key players in Central Asia.

2. Russian-American cooperation in Central Asia has been motivated by Chinese inroads, the survival of the Taliban (an enemy of both countries), the growing narcotic problems in Russia (exacerbated by increasing production in Afghanistan) and U.S.-Russian cooperation on transit to Afghanistan. Russia's desire to improve relations with the West soured after the 2008 Georgian war but has been facilitated by the fizzling of “color revolutions,” the U.S.-Russia “reset,” and a growing recognition that Russia has a direct interest in the success of the U.S./ISAF mission in Afghanistan.

3. The great power play in the region is triangular, not bi-lateral (U.S.-Russia), thus including China. The interests of the other secondary players, such as the European Union, Iran, India, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, should not be discounted.

4. The U.S. is too remote from the region to be the primary external actor, especially at this time of U.S. economic difficulties and focus on domestic issues.

5. The extent of security cooperation between many Central Asian states and the U.S. depends more on shared strategic interests, including opposition to extremism, than on the character of the regime.

6. Central Asia matters to the U.S. despite some opinions to the contrary.

7. The Gazprom pipeline monopoly is a key source of Russian influence in the region and has been used to exclude companies from the U.S. and the E.U. from participating in the development of energy resources. With the growth of Chinese investment in energy assets, that monopoly is increasingly breaking down.
8. Despite some shortcomings, the United States is still the major provider of legitimacy in the area, and its approval is widely sought.

Internal and Regional Issues

1. Since independence the five Central Asian states developed unevenly and are today at different stages of economic and political development.

2. Regional cooperation between the states is needed, especially in the fields of access to water supplies, opening of borders, interdiction of drug and human trafficking, reducing ethnic tensions, and managing the movement of guest workers and their remittances.

3. Notwithstanding the spillover of internal ethnic tensions, the five states respect each other’s sovereignty.

4. Kazakhstan is increasingly in need of new “guest workers,” and the countries providing the labor are increasingly in need of the remittances sent back home.

5. Remittances flowing from émigré workers employed in Russia and Kazakhstan back to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan constitute a significant portion of each country’s GDP.

6. There has been a lack of serious preparation for expected succession problems in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – too much emphasis on “who” and too little emphasis on “how.”

7. The West has over-emphasized the mechanics of democratization (such as elections and constitutions) over improving governance and strengthening institutions (such as grass-root initiatives, respect for property rights, and the rule of law, among others).

8. The secular nature of the existing Central Asian regimes, as well as of the bulk of the local society, has been critical to the maintenance of stability, the existence of some hotbeds of fundamentalism notwithstanding.

9. The Central Asian nations have a legitimate concern about the prospect of Afghanistan again becoming a failed state.

10. Many issues as diverse as energy and fighting extremism should be analyzed across the Caspian (i.e., Central Asia and the Caucasus together).
The following is a summary and list of NCAFP policy recommendations:

1. Events in Central Asia have moved past the point where everything must be viewed as a zero sum game. The U.S. should pursue opportunities to expand cooperation with Russia and China in Central Asia in areas where cooperation is appropriate or which relate directly to U.S. national interests, and should use the opportunity afforded by the triangular U.S.-Russia-China relationship to pivot and partner with each of these external powers.

2. The U.S. should have a much broader engagement in Central Asia, using all tools available to it – diplomatic, cultural, commercial, military, industrial, financial, etc. – including Track I½ and Track II initiatives.

3. The U.S. should facilitate regional cooperation between the Central Asian states, which presents a real opportunity for U.S. foreign policy.

4. American emphasis on country-wide elections and democratic constitutions should be accompanied by support for “good governance,” development of grass-root involvement, civil society and the rule of law, and processes for the peaceful and orderly transition of power. As long as Russia fails to provide a positive example, progress will inevitably be slow, and numerous matters – ranging from respect for previously granted concessions to progress in democratization – may be put on hold.

5. The U.S. should work with regional partners to coordinate security arrangements ahead of the planned U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and reassure regional partners of its long term interest in Central Asia post-Afghanistan. Such coordination could also focus on how the transportation links comprising the Northern Distribution Network could be adapted to civilian use after the U.S. withdrawal.

6. Washington should use more actively its role as provider of legitimacy to local regimes by favoring diverse kinds of contacts – from high level face-to-face encounters to educational exchanges and involvement in different kinds of common initiatives, including promotion of visa programs to send students to the U.S. for university and graduate level study.

7. Washington should encourage and support the activities of European and East Asian nations in the region, as well as the work of the Asian Development Bank and similar institutions with regard to trade
liberalization and promotion of cross-border investment. In addition, the U.S. should encourage India to increase its diplomatic, military and economic ties within the region.

8. U.S. aid should be reformed to work more cooperatively with International financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank.

9. The U.S. should continue to highlight and promote development of multiple export routes for Central Asian natural resources.
APPENDIX

LIST OF PANELS

Panel 1. Great Power Interests-Strategies and Tactics
Panelists from the three great powers involved in Central Asia underlined the key interests of their countries in the region. The discussion focused on defining conflicting as well as common interests of parties concerned, and the possibilities to develop better great power cooperation with more concern for the interests of local states.

Panel 2. Common and Conflicting Security Interests Between U.S. and Central Asian States
Panelists from Central Asian states presented common and conflicting security interests between the U.S. and their countries and discussed how they intersect with U.S. priorities for the region.

Panel 3. Meeting the Internal Challenges of the Third Post-Independence Decade
Panelists stressed the impact of given issues on Central Asian states and possible policy responses. Such challenges included those presented by (1) governance issues, (2) corruption, (3) ethnic conflicts, and (4) intra-regional migration and remittances.

Panel 4. U.S. Central Asian Policy for a New Decade
American panelists from different areas of expertise presented various policy options and obstacles. Contradictions between geo-political requirements, economic needs, and ideological principles governing U.S. policies were also discussed.
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS  
(in alphabetical order)

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