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THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS AFTER SEPTEMBER 11,
2001: HOW SHOULD THE US ALTER ITS ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY?

by

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Preface

The Central Asian Republics are an area that has long been ignored by western strategists. The region is significant not only because it is at the crossroads of several cultures, Russian, Chinese, and the more extreme elements of Islam, but also because instability in the region could have long-term implications. This document addresses the changes required in US engagement strategy for the Central Asian Republics. It uses events of September 11th 2001 as a catalyst because changes were made to both US policy, and the policies of the nations in Central Asia with respect to events on that day.

I would like to thank LTC Reynolds Ed.D., my advisor, for his leadership and mentorship in the *process* of converting thought to logical patterns of written word. More important though, my family has again graciously given of their time and I wish to thank Kathryn, Braden and Jarrod for the support they have given me.

Abstract

This document discusses changes needed in US strategy for the Central Asian Republics. It uses events of September 11th as the turning point in US efforts. It describes the previous strategy used in the area and some of the foundations upon which it was built. Using articles and transcripts of congressional testimony, the paper further defines the changes that resulted within both the US and the Central Asian region that facilitate a revision in strategy. Any new strategy will need to treat each country separately. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are all at a different point in their evolution. They have different problems and use different resources to deal with these challenges. The final portion of the document describes an engagement strategy for the region based on two possible outcomes in Afghanistan. If Al Qaeda and Taliban leadership are not captured, security operations should continue to be the focus. If the immediate threat of terrorism is neutralized, military operations should involve stability, nation-building and humanitarian efforts.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The current US National Security Strategy (NSS) of “engagement” for the Central Asian Republics will change as a result of events on September 11th 2001. The region is important for several reasons with strategic location and potential energy resources as two of the most prominent. This paper will discuss some aspects of US strategy with respect to the nations of the region before events in New York, Washington DC, and Pennsylvania changed the world forever. Additionally, this paper will discuss the changes both within the US and within the countries of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan that will allow US engagement strategies to proceed where other attempts have failed. The paper will conclude with an examination of potential engagement strategies for the countries in the region with respect to two possible outcomes of operations in Afghanistan. Importantly, if the US does not become involved in the region, to shape its development, there is the potential for a repeat of the crisis in Afghanistan within another nearby country. If this occurs, other superpowers in the region may take a different strategy and draw the US in at a level where it will either have to apply instruments of national power or yield influence in the region.

In accomplishing this research, several sources were accessed. Many references came from publications but several are taken from transcripts of congressional testimony.

Congressional testimony was used in lieu of the President's NSS because at the time of this research the NSS was still in review. It is believed the testimony of the ambassadors and academicians who testified before the Senate Foreign Relations committee will influence the nation's long-term policy for this region.

Another aspect to this research is that it suggests that not only is a new strategy for the region needed, but that this strategy, for the first time, should be country specific. Each of the countries in the region is at a distinct point in its evolution, has unique problems, has different resources, has different reasons for interaction with the US, and will accept different levels of engagement. More importantly, the military instrument of power alone can assist but cannot solve the problems in these nations. To solve many of the problems within the area, US unity of effort and interagency cooperation will have to occur, but more importantly, true regional cooperation between the nations in the region and other major countries, including Russia, and China, must occur. Each of the areas discussed above will be expanded within the introduction and in the following chapters.

Background

The Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan lie in the center of an area of great importance. As depicted in Figure 1, surrounding these countries are four nuclear nations, Russia, China, Pakistan and India, and one nation thought to possess WMD capability, Iran.¹ Additionally, during the days of the Soviet Union, several of these countries were used as development and test sites for weapons of mass destruction. Instability in this region, no matter what the cause, could cause problems if it spilled over the borders of the region. There are several causes

for tension in the region, but there are also resources that have attracted some western nations.



Figure 1 Central Asian Republics

Hydrocarbon deposits in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have attracted interest and had been an area of focus for US strategy. Although deposits are substantial, accessing and transporting them is not efficient at this time and the resources are not strategically important to the US. The US has never had open access to Caspian oil so it could not be harmed by a change in its delivery. Hence, oil is not a major component of US interests—the recent focus of the US on the Central Asian Republics was more a function of events in Afghanistan.

Three countries in the region have borders with Afghanistan: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The instability and Muslim extremism in Afghanistan were clearly an issue with these countries. Additionally, events in this region affected other countries as well. Russia, followed closely by China, were the biggest factors to US engagement in the region. Any engagement strategy had to consider what effect it would have on ongoing relations with the superpowers in the region.

The final regional factor that previously affected US engagement efforts was poverty's affect on democratization. The countries in the region are among the poorest in the world and do not have sufficient infrastructure in place to enhance their economies. Worse, Tajikistan, the poorest nation having also the least resources, is still overcoming the effects of its civil war. Without improvements to economy, broader issues of human rights and democratization remain on the back burner for most of the Soviet era leaders still in control. All these factors will be expanded in subsequent narrative.

Methodology

The method of research for this paper was a function of each topic area and the types of data available since September 11, 2001. There have been few academic papers produced and most data are from periodicals. To determine the elements of US Strategy prior to September 11, 2001, a review was made of journals and periodicals as well as the latest National Security Strategy. Additionally, several examples of congressional testimony were used to show what was interpreted as the strategy for the region. Finally, transcripts from interviews were used to determine what military strategy had been attempted and what problems or limitations had occurred.

Policy changes regarding Central Asia, both within the US and the Central Asian Republics, have been widely described through the media. There were several articles relating changes in US outlook on the area and its significance for the operations occurring with respect to the World Trade Center and Pentagon terrorist attacks. Also related to the increased significance placed on the region, there were changes in wielding instruments of national power, such as diplomatic visits and financial incentives in exchange for US basing.

Additionally, there were several articles that explained why leaders of the countries involved, as well as Russia, were now willing to support the US efforts to deal with terrorism in the region. Complementing these articles again, congressional testimony was used to add academic power to the arguments presented.

The basis of a new strategy for the area was determined from congressional testimony from academics, ambassadors, and people with first-hand knowledge of the area. While the NSS is still in review, it is believed testimony will shape the strategy for the region. The level and type of military involvement are in the concluding section. The research here is based on review of doctrine on Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) and Humanitarian Assistance (HA).

Structure

This paper is divided into three sections followed by a brief conclusion. The first section, chapter two, discusses the pre September 11th engagement strategy of the US with the Central Asian Republics. Specifically, it purports that the US had no real long-term vision for the region. Chapter three discusses the shifting interests within the US planning community and the within the region, the cooperative versus adversarial nature

of Russia, and the role of China. The more significant part of this chapter, however, is the change by the leaders of the republics to request or at least permit US operations. The fourth chapter deals with a possible US long-term strategy and, more specifically, military engagement opportunities that fit this strategy. The discussion will center around two possible outcomes in Afghanistan. Additionally, any strategy will have to address the nations individually instead of a part of the former Soviet Union. Each nation will require different aspects of the military instrument of power. It also contains a summary of previous chapters and provides conclusions.

Notes

¹ Frederick W. Kagan, "Afghanistan—and Beyond; A Long Term Strategy for Central Asia", *The Weekly Standard*, Oct 22, 2001, 14, *Lexis-Nexis* On-line, Feb 16, 2002.

Chapter 2

US Engagement Strategy Prior To September 11, 2001

Before the September 11 terrorist attacks, US engagement strategy for the Central Asian Republics was conducted at very high levels, with visits by high ranking officials, and at very low levels, through education and humanitarian training. Unfortunately, regarding day-to-day routine needs, little was accomplished where engagement was most needed. There were several reasons for this disparity. There appeared to be disagreement over why the region was important, two geographical commands had parts in interaction, and, even when engagement efforts were attempted, various internal issues thwarted progress.

The history of recent engagement resembles a roller coaster. The US was very active in courting the countries soon after the breakup of the Soviet Union. However, after the countries failed to produce democratic governments the drug trade increased, and the access and transportation of hydrocarbon deposits proved less profitable than originally imagined. As a result, US efforts slowed to include diplomatic initiatives and a few military exercises in the late 1990's. The goals during this period were access to oil, reducing the drug trade, and antiterrorism—in that order.¹

Lack Of Strategic Vision

There are many academics who believe the US had no "real strategic vision" for the region. Paul Starobin writing for *Business Week* soon after the incident in New York said that this area "won notice in America chiefly from indignant human rights watchdogs," not the US government.² Eugene Rumer, a senior fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University, wrote in an article for the *Christian Science Monitor* that "Washington decided it didn't have a major stake in Central Asia, and American interests would be best served if the struggle for influence there could be avoided all together."³ Ahmed Rashid, the author of *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, asserted "The US failed to have any overall strategic vision for the region."⁴ Additionally, Dr. Fiona Hill from the Brookings Institution while testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on Central Asia and the South Caucasus stated, "the US, to date, has not embarked on a more comprehensive effort in Central Asia."⁵ Finally, S. Frederick Starr, the Chairman of the Central Asia and Caucasus Institute when testifying before the same subcommittee stated that recent events represent "the product of not having a real policy, a really long term-one."⁶

So, how then did the region where the US had great interest, slowly devolve into an area where we had no long-term planning? Economic, diplomatic, and issues having to do with the people of the Central Asian Republics provide the necessary background to understand this problem.

Economic Issues

When engagement with the region first began, the primary interest for the US was access to the hydrocarbon deposits in the Caspian basin. Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and

Uzbekistan all have proven deposits and estimates are that the region may have as much as the North Sea fields.⁷ The problem is that accessing and transporting the oil to market is more expensive than the profit gained by its sale. Although there are pipelines being completed across the Caspian Sea, these are still far from completion. In addition, the oil presently flows through Russia; therefore, while there is great potential for western oil companies to cooperate in the development of the oil and gas fields, short-term profits are unlikely. After pipelines to the west are completed and stable access is secured, there may be profitability for oil companies and energy may become a significant reason for interaction with the region. This engenders another significant reason for a vacillating strategy, diplomatic complexity.

Diplomatic Complexity

While the location at the crossroads of two super powers, four nuclear powers, and four cultures made it advantageous for US involvement, it also complicated matters a great deal. All actions taken within the region had to be balanced against US intervention with Russia and China. In most cases a policy of minimal interaction developed. Exceptions to this were the visits by high level Department of State and Defense officials, a few regional military exercises, exchange programs for education, and small humanitarian or medical assistance programs.⁸

As the terrorist threat grew in Afghanistan, senior officials in the Clinton administration, such as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, began visiting the region. General Shelton the Chairman of the JCS made a visit also and met with some of his contemporaries. Although they were quoted as wishing more cooperation and interaction there was very little concrete action. The regional exercises such as CENTRASBAT

were successful in involving several countries but were only held annually. The only military to military interactions that occurred on a regular basis were the educational exchanges and humanitarian exchanges. All these occurred in a long-term policy vacuum. The NSS for the region (published in 2000) still lumped Russia and the “Newly Independent States” together as one entity. The more significant problem, however, was that access and development of energy resources and counterdrug activity were still prioritized above counterterrorism.⁹

A final consideration, *mixed responsibility*, also contributed to unique diplomacy problems. For example, many regional educational programs were under the Partnership for Peace Program. This program is administered through NATO, which falls under US EUCOM purview, but the Central Asian region falls within the US CENTCOM area of responsibility. Further, military command relationships were not the only US induced stumbling block, the other problem affecting engagement activities was coordination through the Department of State. US CENTCOM could not simply plan and execute engagement operations, Department of State had to approve all actions.¹⁰ Even if the US could have had a long-term strategy with unity of effort from all US agencies, it would have still had some problems with engagement in the region. The people of the region have a distrust of US intentions, do not accept charity because of cultural pride,¹¹ and most importantly, have manipulated interested nations to their benefit.

Central Asian Cultural Issues

The people in this area have distrusted US intentions. Whether through years of Soviet propaganda or through observation of our lack of fortitude in dealing with Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal and its Civil War, the people of Central Asia

cannot be certain of US commitment. According to Ms. Peggy Murray, the Deputy Director for US CENTCOM Humanitarian Assistance and De-mining branch, this distrust of intentions has impacted interaction in the past.¹² Ms. Murray had also mentioned the pride of the region's people. The culture of the region has built a core of people "who don't want to have things done for them, but would rather be shown how to do it for themselves."¹³ This requires patience and might go against typical US interaction methods. This pride of the people also affected their desire to request help from the US to assist with some of their problems.

Finally, explaining how this region manipulated interested nations, an article in *Middle East*, reported that China was perceived as a threat and that "Central Asian Leaders appear not to be favouring one side more than the other. But they are beginning to enjoy balancing the powers that court them."¹⁴ Notably, all the Central Asian Nations still have economic ties to Russia.

SUMMARY

Pre September 11th Central Asian policy was disjointed and lacked a long-term vision. Cited academic and government officials asserted there was no strategic vision for what the US wanted to achieve. Additionally, what the NSS described as an objective, access to the energy resources, was neither economically efficient nor should it have been the top priority. The other factors were diplomatic problems of conflicting objectives and a lack of unity of effort. Finally, the culture of the Central Asian region also impacted US capabilities to execute a strategy, no matter how inadequate. Although it was a tragedy, the events of September 11th actually solved many of these problems and brought about many changes that allowed the US an opportunity to engage the

governments as well as the people of the region. It may still be possible to gain the objectives such as peace, prosperity, democratization, and human rights.¹⁵

Notes

¹ Lucy Jones, "Is the West Finding Favour In Central Asia?", *Middle East*, Jun 2000, Issue 302, 14.

² Paul Starobin, "The 'Stans' Seize The Day", *Business Week*, Oct 15, 2001. Issue 3753, 58.

³ Eugene Rumer, "Fear and Loathing in the 'Stans'", *Christian Science Monitor*, Aug 2, 2000, Vol 92, Issue 176, 11.

⁴ Lucy Jones, 15.

⁵ Fiona Hill, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Central Asia and South Caucasus Subcommittee on International Relations, Oct 10, 2001, Federal Document Clearing House. *Lexis-Nexis*, On-line, 28 Jan 2002, 3.

⁶ S Frederick Starr, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Central Asia and the South Caucasus Subcommittee, Dec 13, 2001, Federal Document Clearing House. *Lexis-Nexis*, On-line, Jan 28, 2002, 13.

⁷ Richard Sokolsky and Tanya Charlick-Paley, *NATO and Caspian Security A Mission Too Far?*. (Santa Monica CA. RAND. 1999), 70.

⁸ Peggy Murray, US CENTCOM Deputy Director of Humanitarian Assistance and Demining Programs, Telephone interview and personal communication, 22-24 May 2001.

⁹ *A National Security Strategy For A Global Age*, (The White House, 2000).

¹⁰ Murray.

¹¹ Murray.

¹² Murray.

¹³ Murray.

¹⁴ Lucy Jones, 15.

¹⁵ *A National Security Strategy For A Global Age*.

Chapter 3

Shifting Interests After September 11th, 2001

In a cruel irony, a new administration known for its relative lack of interest in that region was to be pulled into a world that had beckoned America and bloodied it.

Fouad Ajami, The Johns Hopkins University



Figure 2 Result of Weak Policy?

Everything in the world changed on September 11th. Dr. Ajami's comments show that the US did not purposefully develop a new strategy but was pulled toward that end by circumstances.¹ There were several changes to US national strategy but, more significantly, there were several changes in the nations of Central Asia as well. The impact of all these changes was that the US had an increased emphasis on the Central Asian region, it was willing to employ instruments of power simultaneously, and the

Central Asian Republics permitted US actions. This chapter examines the specifics behind the shifting national interests and strategy and the reasons the nations in the region support and allow US operations.

Changes In US Interest

With the tremendous loss of life and destruction involved in the terrorist attack, it is difficult to think that anything positive could come from the incident, but it forced changes in US policy. The Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Elizabeth Jones, while appearing before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, stated that this event "testifies to the importance the US now accords to this part of the world".² The following section addresses these changes beginning with the need to use bases in the region.

Necessity of Basing An Immediate Interest

It is clear that any response to the terrorist attacks will require basing within the Central Asian Republics. Although there are many flights flown from aircraft carriers or from outside locations by B-2, B-1, B-52, or C-17 missions, there is still a need to establish bases in the region to accomplish the goals of ENDURING FREEDOM. Turkmenistan is not allowing basing but is allowing overflight and logistical support.³ Further, on October 9th, 2001 it was reported in the *Christian Science Monitor* that the US had sent 1000 troops to Uzbekistan.⁴ The bases are used to support humanitarian operations. As US forces grow in the area, there will be a need to establish logistical support bases also.

More importantly, basing will be necessary for the achievement of long-term interests in the region. If the US is to stabilize the region, a security presence of some sort will have to exist. "Peace is by no means assured in Afghanistan. There are short and long-term risks of a resumption of civil war."⁵ There are still many unresolved issues within Afghanistan and even if Bin Laden is captured there are several more potential terrorists in the region.

Muslim Extremism A Longer Term Interest

Muslim Extremism has moved from a distant third to the primary reason for US engagement efforts. According to A. Elizabeth Jones, the US long-term interests in the region are now "preventing the spread of terrorism, providing the tools for political and economic reform and institution of rule of law, and ensuring security and development of Caspian oil reserves."⁶ Notably, this proposes a strategy emphasizing counterterrorism first. Many of Uzbekistan's problems in dealing with democratization and human rights have been in response to Muslim extremists of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and its terrorist operations. The US has been forced to re-evaluate the priority of its objectives in the area as well as increase the level of importance of the region as a whole—it can no longer ignore the area.

Changed Long-term Vision For Area

The final change in US regional interest is the recognized need for a long-term regional vision. A. Elizabeth Jones testifying to the Senate subcommittee on Central Asia and the South Caucasus in December of 2001 stated "We have a vision for the region — that it become stable, peaceful and prosperous." She also said "We are engaging — seriously and for the long term — with Central Asia."⁷ Dr. Fiona Hill, a

fellow with the Brookings Institution, concluded her remarks to the same committee stating the need for "a systematic approach to regional development that fosters coordination," recognizes the "respective strengths of individual states," and requires "the same level of intensity and attention to detail if we are to avoid future Afghanization [sic]".⁸

Changes Within The Region

There were several changes within Asia, as well, a response to events of September 11th. Instead of dividing the US, Osama Bin Laden united the world in opposition to terrorism. Additionally, the borders of Afghanistan's neighbors were opened to US forces. This section describes the changes that took place and the ways it changed forever the geo-politics of the region.

Russia Offering Support

Perhaps the single most important change within the region was Russia's support for the US and coalition effort to eradicate terrorism. Russia had been bearing the weight of antiterrorism by itself for several years with up to 30,000 troops in Tajikistan for border security.⁹ Where previous US engagement strategy normally considered possible effects on Russia or Russian reaction, Russia was now an ally, not an adversary. The two adversaries had stopped the "Great Game," zero sum approach, and were now working for a win-win situation.¹⁰

Russian support may have also allowed the countries in the region to open their borders and allow US interaction at the level required. In addition to allowing US involvement, Russian President Vladimir Putin "has pledged to share intelligence, make

three air corridors available for humanitarian assistance, drop objections to US use of bases inside Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and supply arms to the northern alliance."¹¹ To put this into perspective, this would be similar to the US allowing Russian troops in Canada. As mentioned before, many of the countries are still reliant on Russia for security or economic purposes. Similarly, the action (or lack thereof) of the other superpower in the region, China, has also been a key to operational success.

China Remaining Quiet

China shares a border with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan so it also is intimately involved in the region. Additionally, it has been attempting to extend its influence in the region as well. China's biggest concern was that unrest in the Central Asian Republics would spread to its western Xinjiang province, an area with close ethnic and cultural ties to the people of Central Asia.¹² China, like the US and Russia, will benefit by regional stability. Although China is watching the area to determine what effect US actions will have, to this point it has not interfered with operations in the region, nor has it used its considerable influence in the UN to block US efforts.¹³

Nations In The Region Offering Assistance

The first country to allow the US access in the region was Uzbekistan. This was primarily due to a desire for US security throughout the country. Robert Barry, a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies was quoted in *Air Force Times* that "Uzbekistan from the outset, has said if we give them a security guarantee, they're prepared to let us use their territory."¹⁴ Also, Alisher Taksanov, an ex-Uzbek Foreign Ministry official was quoted in *Business Week* as saying, "U.S. policy in

Uzbekistan fits Uzbek interests," and "there is a unique chance to destroy the IMU squads."¹⁵

As mentioned previously, Kazakhstan has offered basing but Turkmenistan has not, instead allowing overflight and assistance with humanitarian operations. It is possible this may present an opportunity for engagement with this reclusive nation. Additionally, Kyrgyzstan has offered basing for US and allied use "as part of preparations for an extended US military presence in Central Asia."¹⁶ Finally, Tajikistan has allowed basing of aircraft and troops. President Imamali Rahmonov hopes the US can stabilize the country and bring needed financial aid.¹⁷ Tajikistan, like Uzbekistan, has had problems dealing with the Taliban and the IMU flowing across its borders.

The Situation In Tajikistan

Tajikistan also has a large problem with extremists and its situation has been compared to that in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal.¹⁸ The mix of a weak central government, high unemployment, and impoverishment, facilitates growth of radical Islam and may provide motivation for terrorist acts.¹⁹ Tajikistan realized it did not want to end up in the same condition as Afghanistan with terrorist elements in control of the nation and invited US efforts. Also, with the increased tension in Afghanistan, the terrorists may try, as they have done for years, to move into the mountainous terrain of Tajikistan to hide.

With these changes both within the region and US circles alike, what is the desired end state? What are US objectives after operations in Afghanistan are completed? The next chapter deals with a probable strategy and applicable military engagement options to not only fit a regional strategy but address the differences between nations as well.

Notes

¹ James F. Hoge, and Gideon Rose, ed. *How Did This Happen? Terrorism And The New War*, (NY: PublicAffairs, Perseus Books, 2001).

²A. Elizabeth Jones, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Central Asia and the South Caucasus Subcommittee, Dec 13, 2001. Federal Document Clearing House. *Lexis-Nexis* On-line, Jan 28, 2002, 1.

³ Fiona Hill, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Central Asia and South Caucasus Subcommittee on International Relations, Oct 10, 2001, Federal Document Clearing House. *Lexis-Nexis*, On-line, 28 Jan 2002, 2.

⁴Fred Weir, "Terror War Could Create Central Asian Fronts", *Christian Science Monitor*, Oct 9, 2001, Vol 93 Issue 220, 7.

⁵ Hill. 3.

⁶A Elizabeth Jones, 4.

⁷ Ibid. 2.

⁸Hill, 8.

⁹ Weir, 7.

¹⁰ S Frederick Starr, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Central Asia and the South Caucasus Subcommittee, Dec 13, 2001, Federal Document Clearing House. *Lexis-Nexis*, On-line, Jan 28, 2002, 7.

¹¹ Weir, 7.

¹² Roy Allison, and Lena Johnson, ed. *Central Asian Security The New International Context*. (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 250.

¹³ Charles Hutzler, "Beijing Bind in Central Asia", *Asian Wall Street Journal*, Oct 1, 2001, Vol 23 Issue 40, 5.

¹⁴ David Brown, "US Relationship With Uzbekistan Likely to Grow", *Air Force Times*, Nov 5, 2001, Vol 62 Issue 15, 18.

¹⁵ Paul Starobin, "The 'Stans' Seize The Day", *Business Week*, Oct 15, 2001, Issue 3753, 59.

¹⁶ Eric Schmitt, and James Dao, "US Is Building Up Its Military Bases In Afghan Region", *New York Times*, Jan 9, 2002, Vol 151 Issue 51993 A1.

¹⁷ Starobin, 59.

¹⁸ Hill, 5.

¹⁹ Hill, 5.

Chapter 4

A New US Strategy For The Central Asian Republics

No one else has the power, the recent tradition of leadership, and the imagination to lead an international campaign against terrorism. With this inevitable, though uncomfortable, position of world leadership, there arise extreme dangers to us.

Dr. Charles Fairbanks, Director Central Asia-Caucasus Institute

America will not forget in the future those who stand by us now. After this conflict is over, we will not abandon Central Asia. We are committed to providing resources, the high level attention and multinational coordination to support reform opportunities. We want to stand by the Central Asian countries the same way they have stood by us in our war on terrorism. This is not only a new relationship, but a long term relationship.

A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary of State for Eurasian Affairs

With the US operating against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, engaging all the nations in the region, what should be the US regional strategy? Unfortunately, in the absence of the President's NSS, policy makers are left to develop strategies for the various instruments of power from their unique perspectives.

This chapter synthesizes the ideas of the academicians and political leaders who have testified before congressional committees to determine a viable strategy for the region. This chapter touches upon the differences between the nations in the region and their needs as opposed to US desires. It closes by examining the implications of the outcome

in Afghanistan on future engagement efforts. In the final part, the military capabilities best meeting the objectives for the region are discussed.

Probable National Strategy

Counter Terrorism then Nation Building

It is clear that antiterrorism operations will be the focus of the region for the short term. Dr. Fairbanks testified before the House International Relations Committee in October of 2001 that "Taliban Afghanistan was a failed state."¹ He also said the goals of our policy have "been too concerned with strong states that might be rivals and not enough with dangers that arise from weakness."² A shift in public policy will therefore have to address the functions that weaken states to the point where they are unable to "control their territory and expel criminals and terrorist."³ At the conclusion of his remarks he stated a future course of strategy, "Having crippled that network [Bin Laden], we may simply return to our earlier business.... If we choose this short term, narrow approach, the same set of underlying conditions...will produce a new crisis."⁴ As the epigraph stated, there is an alternative to continued reaction to terrorism, a positive approach to change the causes.

Dr. Fairbanks is not the only academic who believes continued presence is required for the US in the region. Frederick Kagan, an instructor at the US Military Academy and coauthor of *While America Sleeps* stated "the fear of 'nation building' ...must be abandoned; we should even embrace the idea in the name of establishing stability in a vital and volatile region."⁵ Although Kagan believes our best strategy is a large ground presence, his statement with respect to fear of nation building echoes Dr. Fairbanks.

Ms. A. Elizabeth Jones examined another dimension to the problem of terrorism when she testified "underdevelopment and repressive antidemocratic regimes provide conditions that terrorists and other extremists exploit."⁶ As mentioned earlier, after the US has provided the region security from terrorism and addressed the causes of terrorism, then the US can address economic issues. Then and only then will the US be able to promote the growth of more democratic forms of government. How the US arrives at the end-state will involve international cooperation whether through the countries in the region or through the UN.

Necessity For International Cooperation

Dr. Fairbanks mentioned another factor concerning the formation of failed states, the influence of outside actors. He said that in several cases the actions of outside actors serve to destabilize and undermine borderline cases.⁷ This does not mean that the US should not cooperate in regional actions but it must recognize the fine line between interaction and meddling.

There are some individuals who believe that the UN is the best organization to handle events in Central Asia.⁸ Dr. Quadir Amiryar from George Washington University while testifying before the House International Relations Committee in October of 2001, asserted US involvement should be part of a greater UN effort to coordinate reconstruction activities in Afghanistan.⁹ He believed the UN would best serve the needs because of its neutrality and experience in such situations. Dr. Fiona Hill, for all her misgivings about the countries in the region, agrees in spirit. Again, during her testimony before the Senate committee, she stated "the US and allies will have to pressure regional actors [Russia] to cut links with former leaders ...because there is a danger of continuing

fragmentation."¹⁰ Later in the same testimony she added, however, that "bringing in regional players in a cooperative sense... China, Iran, Pakistan and India" requires that the US "start thinking about a fully integrated and larger region not compartmentalizing our approach."¹¹ It is clear, therefore that to solve some of the region's problems, true international cooperation and less unilateral influence will be necessary.

Country Strategies

Assistant Secretary Jones made a significant comment in her Senate testimony, "Even though they [the countries of Central Asia] all started out the same, they've developed their own personality."¹² She also said support for the Central Asian nations, "will require resources tailored to each country."¹³ Dr. Fiona Hill defined some of the problems of individual states in her testimony before the Senate. She equated the situation in Tajikistan with that of Afghanistan including but not limited to disintegration of state institutions, crushing poverty, high unemployment, infiltration of radical ideas, and free flow of drugs and weapons.¹⁴ Her comments about Turkmenistan's problems are equally pointed, "President Saparmurat Niyazov has devoted his life tenure to an old style Soviet cult of personality and turned Turkmenistan into a Central Asian version of North Korea."¹⁵ She described Kyrgyzstan as one of the weaker states and said it had many problems similar to Tajikistan.¹⁶ The bright spot is Kazakhstan, if only because it is stable, has the largest territory, possesses the most economic potential and, because of its large Russian population, has substantial Russian influence.¹⁷ US interaction with Kazakhstan will most likely be economic; the military will most likely be involved minimally. Of the countries in the region; however, Uzbekistan presents an enigma for US policy.

Uzbekistan is the most strategically located Central Asian state and has the most significant military capability; however, involvement is troublesome for the US.¹⁸ Whereas Uzbekistan has been the most active partner in facilitating the war on terrorism, it does represent higher order problems for the US. President Islam Karimov has been progressing towards a policy similar to his neighbor in Turkmenistan. Instead of opening up his government to democratization, he has actually passed several measures centralizing his control. He endorsed a proposal to hold a referendum to name him President for Life.¹⁹ He also delayed opening the Termiz bridge into Afghanistan. Ostensibly concerned over safety reasons, he did open the bridge after assurances from Washington that a \$100 million aid package had been approved.²⁰ It is not just his political aspirations and concern for economic aid that are troubling, his domestic policies have been called into question also.

In order to deal with the security situation presented by IMU and Taliban rebels, Karimov has tightened control over religious activities often arresting religious leaders. The fear on the part of western leaders is that this is the behavior that fosters, not allays, Muslim extremism. Additionally, he has not endeared himself to his neighbors, mining borders with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to stop the flow of extremists. The test for his domestic policies will be if he relaxes control once the IMU and Al Qaeda terrorist are brought to justice.

His financial policies also have shown cause for concern. He has refused to deregulate the economy although it is similar to the failed Soviet economy of the late 1980s. It is feared if current trends continue, Uzbekistan will become a closed state.²¹ The IMF has ended its program in Uzbekistan and foreign investors have pulled out.²²

US policy for Uzbekistan will hinge on the actions of Karimov and his government if his security from terrorism can be assured. If terrorism is effectively stopped and the government and economy are opened, the US will have a great chance to positively influence the region. However, if President Karimov chooses to remain on his present course, US policy will have a far different approach and he may not receive the level of engagement he desires.

As it can be deduced from the above discussion, any military strategy for engagement within the region will be a function of many issues, most not within the control of the military itself. The following section will, therefore, address military specific issues.

Military Actions To Fit New Regional Strategy

US military engagement operations will not only depend upon the cooperation of the regional actors, it also will depend upon the end state of operations in Afghanistan. If Taliban and Al Qaeda are eliminated and if security from terrorism is assured, US military efforts can be focused away from security and towards nation building. If the threat of terrorism exists, US military forces will continue actions across the spectrum.

Although there is usually reluctance on the part of military organizations to engage in nation building following the failed interaction in Somalia, several academics have affirmed that nation building is necessary in some areas.²³ There are some functions that are better handled by civilian agencies, IOs and NGOs, but may still need to be handled by military organizations because of the austere and threatening conditions in the region and the capabilities inherent in military forces such as security and command and control.

Acknowledging that military instruments of power are not capable of addressing all issues within the region, the following strategies will only address those areas the military can affect. Other general guidance for military engagement is that it should support unity of effort and not work against higher level political objectives. It would be counter intuitive to ensure security for a dictator if he is then using his security troops to oppress his people. This actually becomes significant with respect to several countries.

Strategy If Taliban and Al Qaeda Forces Still At Large

Provided Taliban and Al Qaeda forces remain a threat, an individual strategy with each of the nations is advisable. Regarding Turkmenistan, military engagement should continue along with humanitarian operations. This may be the only military-to-military contact available. With Turkmenistan closing its society, the US will have minimal chances to engage. Educational and cultural exchange may also be possible in the future. If terrorism threatened this country it would probably withdraw further and not allow the US to assist. Without the invitation to enter Turkmenistan, the US's only options may be participating in regional exercises.

Like Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan will probably never invite the US inside for antiterrorism purposes. They are not threatened at this time and, as mentioned, it remains the region's most stable country. The Kazak's are supporting efforts in Afghanistan but do not have an immediate security need; further, they will remain within the Russian sphere of influence. The US should continue to engage as part of regional antiterrorism efforts. While terrorist are still at large, engagement opportunities should include multinational operations. The objective should be to convince the Kazak leadership that the US is not a threat to its security. The US must walk a fine line between Kazakhstan

and Uzbekistan. It must balance engagement efforts with one nation versus its efforts with the other.

Uzbekistan still presents the most challenges and yet the most opportunities as described above. Security operations are definitely necessary while terrorists are on the loose. The IMU has stated its objective to bring down the secular Uzbek government; however, the US must not allow its security efforts to facilitate the oppression of the Uzbek people. The US cannot condone actions that further the terrorist cause. In addition to security operations, the US should continue humanitarian operations and refugee support within Uzbekistan as well as assist in the clean-up of the anthrax contaminated Vozrozhdeniya Island.²⁴ This not only facilitates interaction, it also supports the US objective to counter the proliferation of WMD.

Like Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan also requires security assistance to deal with Muslim extremists. Suggested engagement for this area includes counter and antiterrorism operations, border patrol training and humanitarian operations. This nation is poor and, as such, is likely to be influenced by other actors vying for access. There may be opportunities for military construction units to provide basic infrastructure needs.

Efforts in Tajikistan, the region's most needy country, are most urgent. When a country has few resources, any help is appreciated. According to S. Frederick Starr, the smallest of engagement efforts can yield great benefits. He related a story where a former rebel had given up his gun and attitude of hate because he had been able to return to and profit from farming.²⁵ Also during his confirmation hearing, Ambassador designate Franklin Huddle stated "post war reconstruction, widespread unemployment of former combatants, poverty, malnutrition, terrorist incursions, and narcotraffickers are all

challenges still faced by Tajikistan.”²⁶ Clearly, engagement strategies must include humanitarian operations. Any counter and antiterrorism operations or counterdrug operations the US might consider would require coordination with the Russians due to the large contingent of troops in the region as discussed earlier. Additionally, as in Kyrgyzstan, there may be opportunities for joint construction projects to simply return the basics of life, irrigation systems, schools, and adequate housing to the Tajiks.

Strategy If Terrorist Threat From Al Qaeda Minimized

When the terrorist threat in the area is neutralized it will actually eliminate some options for engagement. Turkmenistan is not likely to want to participate in large scale military engagement programs. Humanitarian operations and cultural/educational training may be the only options available. There are other places where other interaction will take place, but the military may not be involved, as in, for example, pipeline planning and determination of Caspian Sea boundaries.

Similarly, Kazakhstan may not need much US help especially as energy resources are developed and its economy grows. The key difference is that Kazakhstan may not need to interact with the US but it may choose to do so. Large-scale military maneuvers like the previous CENTRASBAT exercise should continue, and there may be some military involvement regarding Kazakhstan's participation in other regional issues such as reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Tajikistan or interregional conferences. Interregional cooperation will be the best opportunity to engage, especially in areas such as water availability and the desiccation of the Aral Sea. Kazakhstan also has problems (as all the republics do) with narcotraffickers. This may be yet another opportunity for interregional cooperation.

Uzbekistan will represent the best opportunity for engagement after the terrorist threat is neutralized. Provided the US does not revert into its previous engagement strategy, the groundwork laid during this crisis may bear fruit. The full range of options is available, from education and cultural exchanges to military exercises. Uzbekistan will have a hand not only in Afghanistan and Tajikistan rebuilding, but humanitarian operations throughout the region could also be a possibility. With true interregional cooperation, engagement opportunities may only be limited by the imagination. The key here is that Uzbekistan will now want to interact with the US instead of rebuffing its efforts. US military planners, however, must bear caution that the US is not engaging in Uzbekistan to the detriment of other national objectives for the region such as democratization and human rights initiatives.

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan will require interaction as well. Engagement with Kyrgyzstan may not be as easy. China will likely keep a watchful eye and protest if the US has too much influence. Again the full bag of engagement will be possible if and only if Kyrgyzstan seeks or allows US engagement efforts. Those which best assure movement towards US objectives are the engagement opportunities that foster stable growth of a core group of western friendly leaders.

Tajikistan as mentioned will require nation building especially regarding infrastructure. Providing the basics of life should be the focus of US efforts. Possible strategies include deployment of construction units such as Red Horse or Combat Engineers to build schools and repair infrastructure, which, in turn, will facilitate growth, security and stability. Again, any operations conducted in Tajikistan will have to be part of larger regional cooperative effort with regional players to include Russia.

Conclusions

This paper has identified the lack of any real strategy in Central Asia prior to September 11, 2001. Since that time, events have unfolded at lightening speed. The US must carefully consider its strategic steps in the region — this paper provides some recommendations to that end.

Uzbekistan, the key to US engagement efforts, must be made secure, and, subsequently, the economy and democratic government strengthened. Tajikistan also must be secured before development of an economy and stable government. The key difference is that there are few natural resources in Tajikistan, thus engagement efforts will be more along humanitarian lines. Kyrgyzstan also has few resources, but this may be the most difficult area to engage because of the influence of China. Kazakhstan will, because of its proximity to Russia and its large ethnically Russian population, remain within the Russian sphere of influence. Engagement opportunities will be more in the cooperative nature and will be more likely to be focussed on humanitarian rather than security issues. Finally, Turkmenistan may continue along its introverted and isolated path. Interaction with this nation will most likely involve humanitarian activities. Most importantly, however, the US must recognize the continuing divergence within the region and the subsequent importance of an individualized approach among all the republics.

There are several areas of future study still available in this area. Do humanitarian operations actually positively affect the development of national politics? Will future leaders develop western friendly governments? Can nation building work if security is not an issue and is the military the correct instrument of power? These questions will remain for future researchers to debate. The task at hand is to implement a focused

policy for the Central Asian Republics that is sensitive to needs of all the actors, but ensures a peaceful future for the region. Failure to do so may lead to another situation in the region, most likely in Tajikistan, where Muslim extremism festers and the basic issues that caused it are left unchecked. The result of this strategy could be more horrific than events of September 11, 2001.

Notes

¹ Dr. Charles H. Fairbanks, "US Policy in the Caucasus and Caspian Region". Testimony before the House Subcommittee on International Relations, Oct 10, 2001, Federal Document Clearing House Inc., *ehostgw1.epnet.com* On-Line. Dec 17, 2001. 1.

² Fairbanks, 1.

³ Fairbanks, 1.

⁴ Fairbanks, 6.

⁵ Frederick W. Kagan, "Afghanistan-and Beyond; A Long Term Strategy for Central Asia", *The Weekly Standard*, Oct 22, 2001, 14, *lexis-nexis* On-line, Feb 16, 2002, 3.

⁶ A. Elizabeth Jones, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Central Asia and the South Caucasus Subcommittee, Dec 13, 2001. Federal Document Clearing House, *Lexis-Nexis* On-line, Jan 28, 2002. 4.

⁷ Fairbanks. p 1.

⁸ Michael, J. Jordan, "UN May Be Best Equipped To Rebuild Afghanistan", *Christian Science Monitor*, Oct 25, 2001, Vol 93 Issue 232, 7.

⁹ US House of Representatives Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights, Oct 31, 2001, *ehostgw1.epnet.com*, On-Line Dec 17, 2001, 5.

¹⁰ S Frederick Starr,. Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Central Asia and the South Caucasus Subcommittee, Dec 13, 2001, Federal Document Clearing House. *Lexis-Nexis*, On-line, Jan 28, 2002, 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³ A. Elizabeth Jones, 3.

¹⁴ Fiona Hill, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Central Asia and South Caucasus Subcommittee on International Relations, Oct 10, 2001, Federal Document Clearing House. *Lexis-Nexis*, On-line, 28 Jan 2002, 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷ A. Elizabeth Jones, 3.

¹⁸ Hill, 5.

¹⁹ Hill, 4.

²⁰ Hill, 4.

²¹ Hill, 5.

²² Hill, 7.

²³ Jordan, 7.

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²⁴ David Brown, "US Relationship With Uzbekistan Likely to Grow", *Air Force Times*, Nov 5, 2001, Vol 62 Issue 15, 18.

²⁵ S Frederick Starr, "A Tajik Transformation", *Christian Science Monitor*, Nov 23, 2001, Vol 93 Issue 253, 11.

²⁶ Franklin Huddle, Statement of Ambassador Designate Huddle to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sep 25, 2001, Federal Document Clearing House Inc., *ehostvgwl.epnet.com* On-line, Dec 17, 2001.

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