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Partnering for Environmental Security Cooperation In Central Asia and the Caspian Basin

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Environmental Security Enables Regional Cooperation

The Central Asian region encompasses Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. These newly independent republics, as well as the Transcaucasus states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, have become increasingly important to the United States' national security interests. Decades of mineral exploitation, inefficient water use, and environmental neglect have left the region scarred—this environmental damage continues to threaten the stability of these new nations. Environmental Security has the potential to become a catalyst for multilateral cooperation and a powerful enabler for U.S. regional policy and security interests.



The United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) conducted the conference *Partnering for Environmental Security Cooperation in Central Asia and the Caspian Basin* April 3-5, 2002 at the Armed Forces Recreation Center—Chiemsee, Germany. The conference was co-sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Installations and Environment, the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, and the Center for Strategic Leadership, United States Army War College.

Purpose

The purpose of the conference was to promote security cooperation with the Central Asian States through multilateral environmental security planning. The conference participants reviewed environmental challenges that threatened regional stability, identified obstacles to regional cooperation, and developed regional contingency plans that stressed interoperability and consequence management.

Conference participants included senior military and civilian representatives of the Ministries of Emergency Situations or Ministries of the Environment of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia; key staff members from U.S. Central Command, the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Department of State; and representatives from the state National Guard partners of Arizona, Louisiana, Montana, and Nevada. Speakers were drawn from a distinguished group of international military officers, academicians, and representatives of humanitarian relief, international development and disaster response organizations.

Threats to US Regional Interests

The United States has numerous interests in Central Asia. The region includes some of the Caspian Basin's most significant petroleum and natural gas deposits. The region's location adjacent to Iran and Afghanistan make it critical in U.S. counter terrorism efforts. Former Soviet states continue to play a crucial role in nuclear non-proliferation. The United States supports both the development of market economies and the nascent democratic reforms that promise to help stabilize the region.



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By itself, the Central Asian region is home to many destabilizing influences. Situated on vast and varied terrain, the region's water sources are concentrated in the eastern mountains and the earthquake-prone states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The region's ethnic diversity has for centuries been a source of regional tensions. The region's location adjacent to Russia, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, China and Russia make Central Asia

an arena for external destabilizing influences: radical and secular Islam, terrorism, drug trafficking, people trafficking, and HIV/AIDS.

A severely damaged environment has become the legacy of the Soviet-era exploitation of Central Asia. Heavy metal mining, uranium refining, oil and gas extraction, unrestricted coal burning, and pervasive over-irrigation and over-fertilization are some of the causes of this destruction. The long-term diversion of water from the Syr Darya and Amu Darya for agricultural use has resulted in the disastrous recession of the Aral Sea and the subsequent salinization of the surrounding land. These underlying environmental problems pose a significant threat to stability within the Central Asian states.



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Issues

The conference used scenario based workshops and roundtables to identify the critical issues associated with multilateral environmental security cooperation in the region. Critical environmental security issues were identified as economic, cultural, and infrastructure related. The region is isolated geographically and bound together through an eroding economic network based upon the erstwhile Soviet economy. Production is dropping as inefficient plants fall out of production and soil productivity declines with increased salinization and the deposition of toxic silt from Aral Sea basin dust storms. The disparate ethnic composition of the region and artificial political borders create tensions that are exacerbated by environmental issues such as cross border pollution, mismanagement of water resources and mining of borders. Soviet built physical and organizational infrastructure is eroding with catastrophic health and disaster implications. Water treatment and distribution systems are in disrepair, exposing the population to unsafe drinking water, polluted water tables and contaminated vegetables. Laboratories and monitoring organizations that once warned of high levels of pesticides, toxins or bacteria, or impending natural disasters from mountain dams or earthquakes no longer exist or are marginally effective. Although these issues must be addressed at the national or regional level, the military and donor community can play an important role.

Conclusions

Through its security cooperation strategy, USCENTCOM can use its environmental experience and capabilities to encourage local militaries to support civil authority in addressing regional environmental security issues. The military role is especially important in the areas of infrastructure repair, monitoring and testing, and disaster response. These activities have a multilateral compo-



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ment that will facilitate communication, cooperation, trust and understanding between regional states.

The Deputy Commander in Chief, Lieutenant General Michael P. DeLong, underscored USCENTCOM's commitment to environmental security as its primary security cooperation activity for the region. He led a roundtable that determined security cooperation would best contribute to U.S. regional interests when coordinated with U.S. interagency and international environmental initiatives. Therefore, USCENTCOM and DOD will take the lead in encouraging an interagency approach to regional environmental security activities and the convening of a donor conference focused on addressing environmental issues that threaten regional security.

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