

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC AND THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

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Chairman Faleomavaega, Ranking Member Manzullo, distinguished members of the committee: thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the Department of Defense's Central Asia policy.

Assistant Secretary Blake has outlined for you the broad U.S. goals for Central Asia, which are strongly shared by the Department of Defense. I will focus my comments on the defense and security aspects of U.S. policy toward the region.

Much of the Department's current activity in Central Asia is being driven by our efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and defeat extremism in the region. We provide this support in two ways. First, we use a network of air and ground routes, known as the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), to ship supplies through Central Asia to U.S. and coalition troops and Afghan national security forces in Afghanistan. Second, we assist the sovereign countries of Central Asia in maintaining their own security in the face of extremism, and we support the growing professionalism of their armed forces in the furtherance of democratization in the region.

To achieve both goals, we must increase our engagement with Central Asia at all levels—working in the short term to expand logistical flows and, in the long term, expanding and deepening our relations from a DoD perspective, particularly in the security sector. Such engagement will help give our partners in Central Asia the support they need as we all work to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda.

Shipping and Transit

The Northern Distribution Network (NDN)

The NDN is a network of commercial air and ground routes through which we ship supplies to Afghanistan. It represents a major accomplishment of interagency and intergovernmental cooperation: since November 2008, we have worked with Central Asian governments—along with Russia, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan—and in cooperation with the State Department and U.S. Embassy teams to build a robust transit network that supports our shared fight against the threat of extremism.

With the help of our partners, we are steadily increasing traffic on the NDN and overcoming impediments that hinder the network's efficiency. We are increasing shipments while decreasing processing time both in the air and on the ground. From 20 containers per month in January 2009, we can now ship over 1000 containers per week, and we expect to increase this figure even further in the coming months. Additionally, we support infrastructure projects in the region that expand the NDN's capacity. For example, the recently completed Hairaton to Mazar-e-Sharif railroad—a \$170 million joint Uzbek-Asian Development Bank (ADB) project—now connects Afghanistan to rail systems of Central Asia and beyond.

As part of the NDN we are also continuing to implement the Central Asia local purchasing program. We could not have implemented this program without Congress' addition of the necessary provisions to the National Defense Authorization Act. We thank you for this critical support. This program works with Central Asian businesses to purchase local materials for use in Afghanistan, which is to the benefit of both sides: we save money on shipping, while local economies benefit from increased trade. We help drive greater economic cooperation in the process, as local governments cooperate to keep transnational transit routes open and local economies rise to meet international purchasing standards.

The NDN holds the potential to help Central Asia connect the region to the global economy to a greater extent than ever before. By expanding trade linkages, the NDN has the potential to one day reconnect Central Asia to India, Pakistan, and other formerly closed markets, in a direct land route from the heart of Asia to the heart of Europe. For instance, the most direct route from Lahore to Berlin cuts directly across Afghanistan and Central Asia. Ancient traders knew this. Today's airlines, which fly this route every day, know it as well. With the NDN, we can help ground transit to do the same.

Most importantly, the NDN is an effective (as well as cost-effective) means to resupply our warfighters and provide capacity and redundancy to complement our heavily-burdened lines through Pakistan. This is particularly important as we sustain an elevated level of 98,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Additionally, the recent closure of the Torkum border station in Pakistan highlighted the importance of diversifying our supply routes. Since its inception 22 months ago, we have shipped over 25,000 containers along the NDN. We will expand this number in 2011 to meet the elevated demand. This will continue to support our effort to defeat al Qaeda.

Military Transit Routes

In addition to the NDN, which is purely commercial, DoD conducts military overflights of most countries in Central Asia. We have close relationships with each transit country and are working to increase overflights and open new flight paths. For example, we have just signed a new overflight agreement with Kazakhstan that, in the near future, will allow us to take advantage of new Russian overflight permissions.

Importantly, we also have access to the Manas Transit Center (MTC) in Kyrgyzstan, through which virtually all of our combat troops transit on their way to and from Afghanistan. We greatly appreciate the willingness of the Kyrgyz government and the Kyrgyz people to continue their support in our common struggle, and we look forward to maintaining this important link in our logistical network. It is through such cooperation that we are able to make not just Afghanistan more stable, but also Central Asia more secure.

Stabilizing Local Governments

The threat of Islamic extremism continues in Central Asia. The Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) conducted a suicide bombing in Uzbekistan in 2009, and, throughout the summer, local governments fought with suspected extremist cells in the Ferghana Valley. In 2010, Tajikistan experienced a number of security challenges that the government told us originated with extremist elements. Central Asian governments share our concern about extremism, and we cooperate with them to address this shared threat in two areas: security assistance and humanitarian relief. Unrelated to extremism, we also saw the recurrence of ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in June.

Security Assistance

Our security assistance in Central Asia focuses on the professionalization of local militaries, border guards, counternarcotics forces, and counterterrorism forces. So far we have seen great progress. For example, the George Marshall Center has trained close to 1,000 Central Asian security professionals to date, creating a cadre of professionals aware of the need for modernization and reform. Similarly, our National Guard State Partnership Program uses citizen-soldiers to teach civil-military relations.

With the help of DoD training, our partner governments are building modern counterterrorist, peacekeeping, and demining capabilities, and they continue to engage us in their efforts to move beyond Soviet-era military norms. Through this engagement, we are working together to create stable governments, peaceful societies, and a secure zone to the north of our stabilization effort in Afghanistan.

Humanitarian Assistance

Our humanitarian assistance seeks to enhance the capacity of local governments. DoD works closely with our partners in the State Department, USAID, and the NGO community to implement programs that improve government-civilian interactions, removing incentives for extremist support. Humanitarian assistance programs have included de-worming programs for Kyrgyz citizens, renovating schools and orphanages, donating busses, and school supplies, to name a few.

Engagement

DoD carries out regular high-level consultations with our Central Asian partners. For example, CENTCOM commanders visited Central Asia seven times in the past three-and-a-half years, and CENTCOM Commander General Mattis is visiting the region as we speak. In addition, the TRANSCOM commander has visited the region three times in the past three years. DoD also participates in the Annual Bilateral Consultations (ABC's) described earlier by Assistant Secretary Blake. In Uzbekistan, which is a keystone of the NDN with 98 percent of ground cargo transiting through the Termez-Hairaton land port, we have undertaken efforts to expand our bilateral security ties. DoD led a Special Working Group visit to Tashkent in March of this year to discuss enhancing our military-technical cooperation. These efforts help build the stable, cooperative relationships necessary to achieve our goals in Central Asia.

Regional Actors

Regional powers realize that, as President Obama has said, "This is not just America's war." Russia, China, and Turkey share our desire to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda, which is why they support our efforts in the region, such as Russia's decision last year to allow DoD unrestricted transit. It is also why our assistance packages often complement one another in Central Asia (often to mutual benefit). For example, a container traveling on the NDN may travel on Russian-built rails, Chinese-built roads, and an American-built bridge before reaching Afghanistan. Regional powers recognize that cooperation is the best way to defeat the threat of violent extremism.

This is particularly true in Pakistan. Just as success in Pakistan drives success in Afghanistan, it is also key to a stable Central Asia. The IMU fighters captured in Central Asia last summer did not only come from Afghanistan—they also came from training grounds in Pakistan. Central Asians know that a stable, prosperous Pakistan holds the prospect for increased trade through Central Asia. This is one reason that they support our efforts to stabilize Pakistan.

Long-Term Strategy

Assistant Secretary Blake has already outlined America's long term strategy in Central Asia. DoD's engagement in Central Asia has enhanced security, diplomatic ties, and trade, and accelerated the achievement of our long-term strategic goals. While some of our actions are driven by short-term concerns, we believe that their benefits will be long-lasting.

The Way Ahead

In Afghanistan, President Obama has asked the Department of Defense to "use the instruments of war to preserve the peace." Central Asians understand that they will be the first benefactors of this strategy and are eager to help America win the war in Afghanistan. We must take advantage

of their interest in closer cooperation, and work together to defeat violent extremism and establish a stable peace. In logistics, in security assistance, in political support—we must come together in order to succeed.