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RESPONDING TO ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CASPIAN BASIN

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Environmental Security as a Theater Engagement Enabler

In the last decade we have seen a major shift in the national security issues faced by the United States and the emergence of regional instability as the chief threat to U.S. security interests. Environmental issues such as competition for scarce resources (water, oil), droughts that cause millions to migrate, or major man-made (oil spills) or natural disasters (earthquakes, floods) result in a loss of confidence in a nation's legitimate government, destabilize regions and threaten U.S. national security. Most of these environmental problems are transnational in nature and require multilateral cooperation for their resolution, making them valuable instruments for regional confidence building measures. Recognizing this fact, the Commander-in-Chief, United States Central Command (USCINCCENT) incorporated an environmental security annex into his Theater Engagement Plan (TEP) as a shaping element to promote cooperation and communication among regional states, and designated environmental security as his primary engagement instrument for the Central Asia States.

The United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) Central Asia States Environmental Security Conference *Responding To Environmental Challenges In Central Asia and The Caspian Basin* initiated this theater engagement effort. Conducted March 6-8, 2001, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, it was cosponsored by the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Environmental Security, the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, and the Collins Center for Strategic Leadership United States Army War College.

Purpose

Conference planners faced the challenge that the number of issues dividing the Central Asia Republics is greater than those uniting them. It was necessary to identify a vehicle from which key issues could be addressed without being confrontational. Using the environmental security issue of disaster response planning as the primary topic, the conference clarified the environmental issues central to the security of the region and emphasized the impor-

tance of both military environmental stewardship and cooperative contingency planning in responding to these threats.

The conference attendees were composed of senior military representatives and senior representatives of Ministries of Emergency Situations (or comparable authorities) or Ministries of Environment of the Central Asia nations (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), Armenia, and Romania (representing OSCE); personnel of all sponsoring organizations; and resource persons from Latvia, the Philippines, Turkey, the U. S., the World Bank Group, and NATO/EADRCC.

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Defining the Issues

Environmental Security deals with the quality and quantity of resources necessary to sustain the country's security interests. There must be a balance between the needs of the people and the resources necessary to meet those needs and maintain the country's cultural integrity and vitality. If it is to maintain its legitimacy, the political system of a country must be able to meet the demands placed upon it by its people; thus environmental security is a significant variable in governmental tenure. Since a major natural or man-made disaster can threaten the population's confidence in the central government, the Central Asia governments welcomed the opportunity to improve disaster response planning and coordination. Examples of how effective disaster response procedures can mitigate the political and security impacts of a major environmental disaster were provided by two case studies.

When the 987-foot tanker Exxon Valdez ran aground shortly after midnight March 24, 1989, over ten million gallons of crude oil entered the pristine waters of Prince William Sound, Alaska. Uncontained, the oil moved rapidly into areas previously untouched by pollution. Extraordinary actions by the U.S. Government and the availability of all necessary funding from Exxon headed off a major U.S. political crisis.

In the Southern African floods of 2000, the Government of South Africa (GSA) deployed the South African National Defense Forces (SANDF) to Mozambique as a rescue force to deal with the massive and widespread flooding in that neighboring state. This action was both a humanitarian effort and a proactive measure by the GSA. Mozambique was a failed state. If no action was taken to reestablish minimal government services a vacuum would be created that threatened the security and stability of the region.

In neither case were the disaster response processes perfect, but an infrastructure existed. It was upon the existing agencies and procedures that the USG and the GSA built their responses and addressed the serious environmental issues that faced them. The lesson extracted by the con-

Exxon Valdez Grounded on Bligh Reef

ference participants was that it is too late to build a disaster response apparatus after the environmental crisis has begun.

National Experiences

Co-existence within an environmental system that is stressed by both natural and man-made disasters and increasing human consumption places constant pressure on the stability of the Central Asia States and their Caspian Basin neighbors. Due to its abundant energy resources and unique fisheries resources, the Caspian Sea, surrounded by Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, is a critical economic factor not only to these countries, but to their inland neighbors as well. As the future exploitation of oil and gas rights is pursued, the region is emerging as a focal point for international environmental tensions. Given this environmental security situation, conference discussions by the Central Asia participants provided the following insights: 1) a nation's military priorities should include the protection of it's people from environmental threats; 2) negotiation is the preferred option to resolve transnational environmental issues; 3) although most countries have some semblance of a disaster response infrastructure, multilateral regional cooperation is much more likely in a Caspian Sea environmental event than to a disaster in the land locked nations; 4) economically disadvantaged nations such as Tajikistan are least equipped to deal with an environmental crisis; 5) sustainable development is more difficult to achieve in Central Asia than in the developed world.

Conclusion

Environmental security is USCENTCOM's most viable option for engaging the Central Asia states and promoting multilateral cooperation. It provides opportunities for communication and cooperation between regional states that

might in other ways be antagonists. Because the Central Asia states are young and politically risk adverse, engagement activities must be complementary to their short-term perspective and non-threatening to their national sovereignty. Disaster response as the environmental security engagement vehicle has proven valuable to meeting these requirements.

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