U.S. MILITARY ENGAGEMENT WITH TRANSCAUCASIA AND CENTRAL ASIA

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FOREWORD

The United States has adapted a strategy of engaging and enlarging the democratic community of states. Transcaucasia and Central Asia have become important testing grounds of this strategy, by virtue of their strategic location adjacent to Russia, the Middle East, and Europe's periphery, and their large-scale oil and natural gas deposits.

A U.S. goal of irrevocably integrating these states into the Western state system economically, politically, and militarily can make them an intensifying focus of international rivalry with Russia. Moscow still perceives these areas as part of its sphere of interest and deeply resents U.S. engagement there. Furthermore, Moscow's current war with the breakaway province of Chechnya demonstrates its willingness to contest expanding U.S. interests forcefully. Moreover, in this region many factors exist that could cause other conflicts. Accordingly, it is a sensitive place to test the strategic rationale of the engagement strategy and its military corollary, a strategy whose goal is to shape the emerging environment in directions that we wish to see. This monograph contributes to the debate that has just begun and which undoubtedly will last for a long time over what our strategy for the new states should be and how it should be carried out.

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None of the states that emerged from the wreckage of the Soviet Union had any experience as self-governing political communities, or as independent states with their own armed forces. The 12 republics that retained a formalized link to Russia created a loose organizational umbrella called the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Their locations in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia; the significant possibilities of conflict emerging in and around them; and the presence of major oil and gas deposits in Azerbaijan and Central Asia, have caused their strategic importance for U.S. policy to rise steadily. In large measure this is because access to energy is a *vital* U.S. interest, a fact that substantially enhances these countries' importance.[1] After all, the Commander-in-Chief United States Central Command (CINC USCENTCOM), General Anthony Zinni, United States Marine Corps, recently told an interviewer that access to energy drives our strategy.[2] In the CIS increasingly important U.S. interests also confront what Moscow has defined as *vital* Russian interests.[3] Furthermore, Russia's current war with the secessionist province of Chechnya in the North Caucasus demonstrates Moscow's resolve to contest the burgeoning U.S. presence forcefully. Thus, if a new military encounter between U.S. and Russian armed forces (or their proxies) occurs anywhere, this is a likely place, whether in joint peace operations or in hostile confrontations.

Therefore we must assess the U.S. strategic objectives *vis-à-vis* these states and our armed forces' theater engagement strategy for them. That theater engagement strategy is not just a series of directed activities undertaken in peacetime to improve the coordination of our forces with those states' militaries, improve civilian democratic control of the armed forces, and establish habits of cooperation in

operations. Theater engagement strategy is an important part of our military strategy as well, and its importance becomes clearer with every passing day.[4] Our engagement strategy is part of the U.S. global strategy, e.g., strong U.S. efforts to institutionalize civilian democratic control over the military in Latin America, or multilateral defense cooperation in Southeast Asia, key aspects of the multinational engagement of those regions with the United States. Multilateral engagement serves to demonstrate our power projection capabilities as well.[5] The Partnership for Peace (PfP) program that includes all of these states as participants has that same focus. As NATO Secretary General Javier Solana said:

> What we are expanding is a European, indeed Atlantic, civil space. I deliberately include our military arrangements into this definition of "civic space." The postwar experience in Western Europe suggests that political and economic progress and security integration are closely linked. Once their security is taken care of, countries can devote themselves with more confidence to their long-term evolution. And a responsible military, firmly embedded in our democratic societies and under civil control, is part and parcel of that civic space, as are the military structures that are transparent, defensive, and multinational.[6]

But the value of strategic engagement as a strategy does not end with democratization. It represents an attempt to work with partner and/or allied armies to provide stable mutual relations between the U.S. military and those forces and to enhance peacetime military professionalism. The engagement strategy also serves to enhance both sides' capability for successfully making the transition to war and participating in initial stages of combat in any future conflicts.[7] Engagement is both a peacetime and a wartime strategy. Indeed, the rising strategic importance of these countries has led the United States to formulate strategic goals towards them and to develop the instruments and modalities for realizing those goals. Therefore we must also examine potential challenges to security in the CIS.

The professed interest of the U.S. Government is to integrate the key areas of the CIS fully into Western economic and military-political structures.[8] That integration entails these governments' growing democratization and development of open market economies.[9] However, these objectives also call on us to break any Russian hope of monopolizing the economic-political-military life of these states. Such a Russian domination necessarily would diminish regional security by attempting to create, in the face of determined local opposition, an exclusive Russian sphere of influence, perhaps even a restored union, albeit not a Soviet [re]union.

The costs of imposing Russia's strategy and the heavy resistance to it that would inevitably ensue would shatter all the states involved, including, and especially, Russia. For this reason it is difficult to see what "victory" in Chechnya will achieve other than to destroy that province and impose further burdens on the Russian treasury and armed forces which already cannot cope with existing demands. But while those processes would mature, "victory" does allow Russia to forcefully contest the Western presence in the region and provide many opportunities for further destabilizing Transcaspian governments. Therefore this war to safeguard Russia's integrity fully comports with the integration of the CIS into an economic-political-military union which remains Moscow's number one priority in foreign affairs after defense of Russia's integrity. In fact, one reason why reintegration enjoys such a priority is precisely because the Russian elite fears that failure to achieve reintegration would encourage centrifugal and separatist trends within Russia itself.

Conversely Russia's government also believes as (then) Prime Minister Vladimir Putin told the Duma, that "Our quest for integration should be accompanied by the strengthening of the Russian Federation. They (the CIS states–author) will come to us by themselves. This is obvious."[10] This fear betrays the fact Russian elites still define the state and its overall political project in terms of

an imperial vocation. A fundamental U.S. policy goal is precisely to prevent the emergence of a new Russian empire in Eurasia. That restoration would inevitably threaten the regional balances of power in Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East.

The same objective applies with equal force to Iran, another regional competitor in Central Asia and the Transcaucasia. As the 1998 National Security Strategy says, "The United States will not allow a hostile power to dominate any region of critical importance to our interests."[11] But because precisely such a domination remains Moscow's critical objective, the pursuit of U.S. objectives must entail a vigorous political confrontation with Russia over the CIS. That confrontation need not be violent, but, as Chechnya shows, it could become a contest of force. Therefore we would be deluding ourselves if we thought that internal conditions within these regions, plus their geopolitical contexts, make for smooth sailing for the next generation. We would also be deluding ourselves if we thought that Moscow will soon share the U.S. objective that it is only interested in a "win-win" situation in the CIS. Nevertheless many U.S. policymakers and elites continue or profess to believe that Russia shares our goals and will follow our agenda in world politics.[12]

And apart from what Russia and the United States might do, there are enough internal dangers throughout the Transcaspian to trigger conflicts that could then force outside states with major regional interests to intervene. And those need not be only Russia and the United States. Turkey, Iran, and China all have substantial and growing interests in the Transcaspian and could see the need to intervene and defend them. Naturally those interventions could have an impact on our subsequent policies and actions.

Therefore our shaping strategy, to be effective, must fully, successfully, and peacefully promote the objectives laid out in official U.S. documents and work to prevent

conflicts from emerging. The activities of the relevant U.S. military commands to execute the shaping strategy in the Transcaspian must also have a strategic focus in order to prevent or inhibit the appearance of the security challenges described below.

U.S. Strategic Objectives in the Transcaspian.

The 1998 National Security Strategy expressly states why this region is important to the United States. It has estimated reserves of 160 billion barrels of oil, comparably large natural gas reserves, and will play an increasingly important role in satisfying the world's future energy demands.[13] As General Zinni observed, although the vast majority of proven oil reserves still lie in the Middle East, the fungibility of oil and the interdependence of the market, coupled with our own and our allies' need for secure access to energy, govern our strategy.[14] U.S. officials publicly maintain that this region's energy sources could be a backup to the unstable Persian Gulf and allow us and our allies to reduce our dependence on its energy supplies.[15]

In pursuit of this goal we have worked to establish governments with open markets, i.e., openness to U.S. firms (and not only those associated with energy) and democracy. We have also moved to check any possibility of their one-sided military dependence upon Russia. The determination to prevent either Moscow or Tehran from dominating the area, either in energy, or through penetration and control of their defense structures, goes back at least to 1994.[16] U.S. goals with regard to the regional energy economy do not override our strategic goals of helping to secure the military-political independence and full sovereignty of the new states.[17] Accordingly, our military activities take the same point of departure as does our more general regional approach. And our overall political objectives dovetail with the military one of preventing a return to Russian or a new Iranian hegemony,

and a lack of U.S./allied access to vital and strategic energy resources.

Recent testimony from U.S. officials indicates that our policy embraces many objectives. The goals of American policy are to enhance the new states' independence, bring about peaceful settlements to the region's conflicts, particularly those in Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh, and diversify global energy supplies through multiple East-West pipelines. By achieving these objectives we would increase our own and our allies' energy security, eliminate traditional energy monopolies, support Turkey and the new states of Central Asia and the Caucasus, and invigorate their ability to defend their borders against transnational threats like arms, drug smuggling, and ethnic conflict.[18]

Almost all of these goals came into focus at the Istanbul meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in November 1999. At that conference President Clinton played an instrumental role in advancing the following American policies:

- He tried to further efforts to negotiate a settlement to the unresolved ethnic conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

- He tried to advance the negotiations between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus.

- He pressed for the removal of Russian forces in Georgia in accordance with the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe.

- And he presided over the signature of the protocols of the agreement to open a Baku-Ceyhan (Azerbaijan-Turkey) pipeline for Central Asian and Azeri oil and gas.

All these endeavors were materially devoted to strengthening Turkey's role in the area as well as the American influence over the Transcaspian and Eastern Mediterranean. Naturally our military aims go beyond

making peace and helping states defend their borders to facilitating their military integration into the West.

Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia from 1994-96, stated that a coherent U.S. Caucasus policy began to emerge in 1994, earlier than had previously been suspected. The Pentagon's main concern was the role of regional armed forces, including Russia's efforts at subverting the new states and intervening militarily in their territories. Therefore Washington sought to supplant the primacy of bilateral ties to Russia with other bilateral (i.e., American and Turkish) and multilateral relationships. Washington aimed to support democratization; liberal, market economies; and integration with the European community of states. It also supported removal of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear materials, and opening the area for U.S. business investment.[19]

In practice, energy and security have dominated the agenda as the means to achieve this broader Westernization to the point that evidently little pressure is being directed towards democratization of local governments. Political conditionality as a prerequisite of investment, trade, and aid is fast receding in visibility throughout the area and in U.S. policy as well.[20] To the extent that we lose focus on democratization, we could also be risking an affiliation with forces and trends that, if unchecked, could later act to undermine internal and regional security and development in these states. For this reason, as the area's salience in our policy grows, we must make sure that defense and military strategy do not overly dominate what should be a comprehensive, balanced, and strategic approach.

What enhances the need for such comprehensiveness is the concurrence of rising U.S. interest in the Transcaspian with that area's emergence onto Europe's security agenda. This concurrence has brought about a veritable strategic revolution. An area that was essentially a strategic backwater for centuries has suddenly become a zone of vital

strategic importance for European, Middle Eastern, American, and Asian security.[21] NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana, too, has stated that Europe cannot be fully secure if the Caucasus remains outside European security.[22]

More specifically, the Transcaspian has become, perhaps, the most important area of direct Western-Russian contention today. Those areas of contention with Russia embrace economic issues such as energy routes and pipelines, as well as classical issues of security, territorial integrity of states, and defense. They also overlay the ethnic fractures and tendencies towards conflict throughout the region. A study by Terence Hopmann of Brown University, based on interviews with regional specialists in these states and Russia, concluded that,

> However, it is in the Caucasus, where ethno-political separatism reflecting in part the long history of collisions of ancient civilizations, where the greatest threats to military security are likely to develop over the next ten years. If the fractured identities within this region are reinforced by the intervention of outside parties, such as Turkey, Iran, Russia, and Western Europe, the threats to security of the region and even of the world could become quite serious. The greatest dangers are likely to be a consequence of conflicts of identity in a region where states are weak and national identities are being rediscovered or even created. The continuing crises of the economy, environment, and politics may exacerbate these underlying conflicts, even if they are not the primary cause. Concerted diplomatic efforts within the region and by the entire international community may be necessary to avert such a tragedy.[23]

Furthermore, the U.S. attempt to induce democratization from above—through reliable clients—and from outside by its own efforts may itself be a factor that generates the ethnic tensions and economic polarization that fuel such conflicts. Local and foreign scholars alike conclude that the forces associated with democratization have allowed or set conditions for the emergence and intensification of the flood of ethno-nationalism that often is

a precondition for violence.[24] Therefore arguably our policies and the consequences from which we are trying to avert our gaze may actually be among the prime contributors to regional destabilization.

Indeed, as the oil producing states are now members of the PfP, and Azerbaijan, Kazakstan, and Georgia overtly seek NATO's direct participation in the area, the U.S. or Western contest with Russia and Iran has assumed a more openly military aspect.[25] And that was true even before the war in Chechnya. Turkey wants to play as an organizer and inspirer of a regional peacekeeping force, and provider of military assistance to Baku and Tbilisi, and U.S. forces are increasingly involved in training and exercises. Georgia and Azerbaijan want NATO to guard pipeline routes. This stimulates an equal and opposing reaction. Armenian officials proclaim the vital importance of joint exercises with Russia to defend Armenia's security and talk of an "axis" with Russia and Iran.[26] Consequently and due to the spiraling strategic stakes in the Transcaspian, NATO's collective engagement, as well as the specifically U.S. engagement, with the region is likely to grow.

The U.S. Strategic Engagement in the Transcaspian.

From seeking to supplant the primacy of Russian affiliations with local defense establishments and energy producers, Washington is now trying to compel Russia to accept a very inferior position compared to its regional ambitions. In September 1995, U.S. experts on Central Asia met at NATO headquarters and cited the extensive U.S. interests in Caspian energy deposits as a reason why Washington might have to extend its Persian Gulf security guarantees to this region.[27] U.S. involvement has only taken off since then. While U.S. officials intone visions of a win-win situation for everyone, where everyone has shared interests in developing these energy markets, they have really aimed to deny and break Russia's monopoly over the

energy producing states.[28] Talk of security guarantees only reinforces the notion that this is the true objective. Indeed,

> It is difficult to escape the conclusion that America's Caspian policy is predicated on the illusion of a "unipolar moment" where Washington alone can orchestrate, and indefinitely maintain a congenial alignment of international forces. The implication is that it is possible to fashion relations in the Caspian region so as to constrain Russian decision-making with relatively little Russian resistance.[29]

Naturally Russia resists this policy because it believes its vital interests are at stake here. Moscow increasingly fears a new U.S.-led *cordon sanitaire* in the area. Russian analysts write that were such a U.S. led system to develop,

> Forces potentially hostile to Russia would gain opportunities to control the principal transport arteries used for Russia's imports and exports, something that, in view of the dependence of entire economic branches and regions of Russia on exports of raw materials and imports of food and other goods, could prove to be a very effective level of pressure on Russia's leadership.[30]

Russian analysts also view with particular alarm the plethora of bilateral military agreements with her former Soviet republics. They regard our shaping strategy with its military presence as a thinly veiled effort to undermine Russia's regional influence and insert America's and/or NATO's military presence throughout the region. Recently, many Russian elites, including Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and Defense Minister General Igor Sergeyev raised the alarm that U.S. policy even aims to force Russia out altogether.[31] These fears have gained renewed immediacy and urgency in the wake of NATO's Kosovo campaign since Russian military-political elites interpreted it as a prelude to a similar future anti-Russian campaign in the Transcaspian.[32] Even though Russia has failed to achieve meaningful reintegration of the CIS, pursuing that aim is essential to Moscow's recovery of a sense of itself as a great power, and to its actual security.[33] Hence Moscow feels the United States should keep out of the region and strives

valiantly to proclaim the equivalent of a CIS Monroe Doctrine.[34]

These contrasting views highlight the strategic quality of the Russo-American competition for leverage and influence over regional energy. Adding to that competition is the fact that as the region's states depend on energy for capital and any future development, whoever controls their lifeline controls their destiny, a regional strategic consideration of utmost importance. Therefore Washington attaches ever more importance to this region as the struggle for energy heats up and parallels the U.S. efforts to construct a world order in Europe and the Middle East.

U.S. policies are also closely tied to NATO's enlargement and the dual containment of Iran and Iraq. U.S. analysts increasingly call this area, and the "greater Middle East" which it is deemed to be part of, the "strategic fulcrum of the future" or the "strategic high ground," due to its energy resources.[35] Prominent Western analysts and former officials in America and Germany, Robert Blackwill and Michael Stuermer, claim that "no Western power has been safe without some measure of influence or control over the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean."[36] This geographical area now includes the Transcaspian, since the Southeastern Mediterranean is precisely where Washington and Turkey want the terminus of Transcaspian oil and gas to be. Ultimately the purpose of military engagement then becomes helping these states defend themselves to the point that they can control their borders and resist attacks or pressure connected with oil and gas flows.

U.S. officials are not shy about spelling out their grander vistas of the future. Ambassador Matthew Nimetz postulates the entire Mediterranean region's rising importance. To maintain regional security, NATO must not only integrate the whole region into the Western economy and foster the development of "pluralistic institutions," it must also grasp the military nettle.

> The Pax NATO is the only logical regime to maintain security in the traditional sense. As NATO maintains its dominant role in the Mediterranean, it must recognize a need for the expansion of its stabilizing influence in adjacent areas, particularly in Southeastern Europe, the Black Sea region (in concert, of course, with the regional powers, primarily Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey) and in the Arabian/Persian Gulf. The United States must continue to play the major role in this security system. The Sixth Fleet will be the vehicle to implement this commitment for years to come, although this is something that might be reviewed some time down the road.[37]

Supposedly Russia's views either do not count, or Russia will blithely accept this outcome.

The advancing encroachment of NATO and the United States into what Russia considers its backyard can also be found in NATO's strategic concept and expanded missions out of area. They maintain that since the threats to NATO originate in the new Middle East, NATO must be prepared to act against them.[38] Nimetz's remarks and the following statement by former Secretary of State Warren Christopher and former Secretary of Defense William Perry highlight the issues at stake.

> The alliance needs to adapt its military strategy to today's reality: the danger to the security of its members is not primarily potential aggression to their collective territory, but threats to their collective interests beyond their territory. Shifting the alliance's emphasis from defense of members' territory to defense of common interests is the strategic imperative. These threats include the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, disruption of the flow of oil, terrorism, genocidal violence, and wars of aggression in other regions that threaten to cause great disruption. To deal with such threats alliance members need to have a way to rapidly form military coalitions that can accomplish goals beyond NATO territory.[39]

Thus, in the future, the United States could be drawn into local conflicts through peacemaking or peacekeeping, and find itself in a combatant role. President Edvard Shevarnadze of Georgia has frequently proclaimed his

intention to pursue a "Bosnia" or "Dayton" type solution to the conflict with the Abkhaz nationalist movement and to take Georgia into NATO by 2005. Shevarnadze evidently seeks a commitment of U.S. military power in order to impose peace and supplant the Russian forces who are now maintaining a truce on the Abkhaz-Georgian border.[40] Similarly Azerbaijan is constantly urging NATO to provide F-16 planes from Turkey and what it calls "operational security" for pipelines going through its territory, although one can hardly see the utility of fighter aircraft in any conceivable Azeri military scenario.[41] Georgia, too, recently approached NATO members for weapons systems.[42]

For now Washington has wisely eschewed the direct commitment of U.S. troops to any of the many conflicts in the area, but that is not a commitment of principle. Washington reportedly is willing to send peacekeeping troops should the OSCE Minsk process lead to a solution in the Armenian-Azeri war over Nagorno-Karabakh. And U.S. military involvement in the region is growing. General John Sheehan (USMC), former CINC of the U.S. Atlantic Command and NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic announced America's willingness to take part in regional peace support operations involving Central Asian forces under U.N. authorization, further extending the willingness of the United States to offer security cooperation to those states.[43] However, the region's multiple security challenges and Russia's alarm at our intentions make the strategic implications of such a military commitment extremely serious.

NATO's and the European Union's (EU) regional role are also growing. NATO's expanding interest in the region reflects the broader process by which the entire area has entered into the European security agenda after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[44] This is not just a question of conducting PfP programs and exercises with local states in the region. Turkey's provision of military training to Central Asian states and Azerbaijan, and its intention to organize a Caucasian peacekeeping force and to play a much

larger and more visible role as a regional gendarme are only the most prominent of such examples. But Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova are now discussing forming their own peacekeeping force to reduce the need for Russian forces.[45] NATO's and the EU's increasing interest in a southern Mediterranean exposure can only lead them to assume a more prominent institutional role in the fields of conflict prevention, security assistance, and military-political integration.[46]

Accordingly, the increasing interest of the United States in preserving the area as "a zone of free competition" and denying Russian or Iranian influence in the region makes Washington the arbiter or leader on virtually every interstate and international issue in the area. These include everything from the Minsk process to negotiate Nagorno-Karabakh, to the opening of a "new Silk Road" and/or East-West trade corridor, apart from energy and pipeline routes for oil and gas. The consuming interest in pipeline routes has led the U.S. Government to take public positions as well on vital regional security issues like the international status of the Caspian Sea, to arbitrate or mediate competing claims between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, and to take the lead in organizing or guaranteeing regional investment projects.[47] Contrary to the U.S. stated intention that NATO enlargement and associated trends would not lead it to become further embroiled in all kinds of local issues, the exact opposite is happening, placing Washington at the center of international adjudication and influence for those questions.[48]

This deepening political-economic-military involvement can only raise the region's stakes for key U.S. constituencies, perhaps including the armed forces. Or else, the Transcaspian's heightened importance could lead the U.S. Government to determine that in the event of a challenge to security there, that critical or even vital interests are threatened.

Current U.S. and NATO policies involve a broadening and deepening U.S. regulation of the region's security agenda. This political-military presence enhances our ability to employ coercive diplomacy in support of the West in the area and is a major cause for Russia's anger over NATO enlargement.[49] Accordingly, most observers, and even some official U.S. statements, view the totality of the diverse forms of the U.S. regional engagement as intended to further the goal of breaking Russia's monopoly, demonstrate the U.S. power projection capability, help tie the region to the West through the PfP program, enhance local military capabilities for self-defense, prevent a military reliance upon Moscow and cement a local presence to defend U.S. energy interests.[50]

U.S. military analysts are quite frank in how they see the kinds of activities contained under the rubric of engagement and PfP, not only in Europe or Central Asia, as essential aspects of the U.S. strategy of "extraordinary power projection." Our engagement programs take the form of joint exercises, staff visits, training, increasing interoperability, and so forth.[51] These are precisely activities that also facilitate transition to war and if necessary participation in its initial stages. For example, Roger Barnett writes about the Navy's perspective but his analysis actually could serve as a generic one for all U.S. forces.

> It is often the action and activities of these forces that provide the dominant battlespace knowledge necessary to shape regional security environments. Multinational exercises, port visits, staff-to-staff coordination—all designed to increase force interoperability and access to regional military facilities—along with intelligence and surveillance operations, are but a few examples of how naval forces [and the same undoubtedly applies to other services–author] engage actively in an effort to set terms of engagement favorable to the United States and its allies. These activities are conducted at low political and economic costs, considering the tangible evidence they provide of U.S. commitment to a region. And they are designed to contribute to deterrence.

> Deterrence is the product of both capability and will to deter a nuclear attack against the United States, its allies, or others to whom it has provided security assurances, . . . deterrence of other undesirable actions by adversaries or potential adversaries is part and parcel of everything naval forces do in the course of their operations—before, during, and after the actual application of combat force. . . .
>
> That the United States has invested in keeping these ready forces forward and engaged delivers a signal, one that cannot be transmitted as clearly and unequivocally in any other way. Forward-deployed forces are backed by those which can surge for rapid reinforcement and can be in place in seven to thirty days. These, in turn, are backed by formidable, but slower deployed, forces which can respond to a conflict over a period of months.[52]

Thus the United States and NATO use these operations to prepare either for peace, or for short, or protracted military operations in crucial security zones, and point to the Transcaspian's rising profile as one of these zones. But here is where the ambivalence sets in. Because Washington regards Russia as a potential, or even actual, stable democratic partner, it has also cautioned Georgia, Azerbaijan, and presumably other regional states not to infringe on Russia's interests.[53]

Shevarnadze publicly stated that President Clinton advised him not to try and rush the withdrawal of Russian troops from Abkhazia. Shevarnadze also has stated that the entire Caucasus, not just Abkhazia and Georgia, should not become an area of international competition between Russia and the United States.[54] Unfortunately the logic of the evolving U.S. policy comes close to converting the entire Transcaspian into just such an arena. But as long as the Transcaspian basin is alleged to be larger than the Ghawar field in Saudi Arabia, the largest oil field in the world, a stake of this magnitude justifies Washington's compelling interest and growing military presence in the Transcaspian.[55] Thus U.S. policy is impaling itself upon a contradictory logic. Moreover, U.S. military policy may be

insufficient to respond to the Transcaspian region's many structural forces that can and probably will challenge local security.

Challenges to Security in the Transcaspian.

The sources of threats to regional security and to our strategy lie in the region's structural conditions, the expanding interstate rivalry for influence, and the competing policies of local state and non-state entities like the Chechen, Nagorno-Karabakh, or Abkhazian national movements. Indeed, many events of 1999 underscored the fragility of regional security structures.

A second Russian war in Chechnya began after protracted Chechen operations to destabilize all of Russia's North Caucasian provinces, especially Dagestan. In Armenia gunmen shot dead much of the leadership of the legislative and executive branches in a coup attempt. In its aftermath the Armenian armed forces openly challenged the President's attempt to appoint his choice for Defense Minister and resisted civilian authority over them. Neither the ethnopolitical wars in Georgia or in Nagorno-Karabakh moved appreciably closer to political resolution. Gunmen almost killed President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan. An ethnic Russian coup against Kazakstan was uncovered by the latter's police. Islamic fundamentalist forces, supported by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, wreaked havoc in Kyrgyzstan over a period of several months. These episodes merely point to much deeper structural fault lines throughout the region.

They demonstrate that no regional state player in the Transcaspian or aspiring state is fully democratic or stable. They are, at best, proto-democratic or potentially democratizing states who all depend on one man's political or physical health for their stability. It would not take much to generate protracted instability and internal conflict. [56]

Under personalist rule access to state power is everything. It encourages disaffected mutineers, ethnic or otherwise, to plot with foreign elements who are all too willing to support these plots for their own gains. Personalism also discourages political institutionalization and the rule of law. Thus it creates enormous opportunities for politicizing the armed forces or for developing paramilitary forces outside of lawful authority. Since personalism by definition also generates insider government, massive state corruption, and economic maldevelopment or under-development; a general lawlessness and violence, anomic or politically focused in nature, becomes a surrogate, often the only one, for effective political action. In addition, since authoritarian rule generally reproduces or intensifies ethno-social cleavages, the lack of control over the means of violence and the absence of both the rule of law and of socio-economic protection for the population become the perfect pretext and/or real cause for ethnic violence.

A second challenge to regional security is poverty and dependence on energy as a source of income. Energy is a notoriously unstable source for long-term income and economic-political stability. It is a constant temptation to outsiders. There is a great danger that the oil producing states will fall victim to the diseases of other oil states in the Gulf, Venezuela, Congo, Nigeria, etc., and become rentier states who depend on a single cash crop whose price is subject to external fluctuations. These states' (notably the Gulf states, Nigeria, Congo, Indonesia, and Venezuela) development is corrupt, undemocratic, and economically stagnant.[57] This factor makes economic and political instability interactive processes.

A third structural factor that reflects and causes instability is the limited political control these governments have over their armed forces. Even where controls exist, they are rarely democratic controls that foster long-term stability. Moreover, many of these armies are in only embryonic stages and cannot, on their own, fully defend

their governments or territories.[58] Armenian policy has largely been hijacked by Nagorno-Karabakh and the demands of that war, Azerbaijan is a family oligarchy beset by constant coups, and both Georgia's and Russia's troubles with control over various multiple armed forces are well-known, even if Georgia's situation has improved.[59] However, this improvement probably depends on Shevarnadze staying in power—an example of the dependence on personalities—and is not likely to go untested once he is gone. Indeed, we see recurring manifestations of paramilitary activity in Georgia even now against him or against Abkhazia. Armenia and Russia provide other examples of problems with control of the military. And all these uprisings have very harmful effects.[60] Likewise, Central Asian armies are still in a very early stage of formation and not well tested. Certainly their ability to repulse internal wars or coups is suspect as in Kyrgyzstan. Or else they may foment such coups among their neighbors. For example, Uzbek-based forces recently attempted a coup in Tajikistan.

The absence of effective control over armed forces both abets and reflects the widespread regional ethnic conflicts, the fourth structural factor of instability. The North Caucasus and Transcaucasia are saturated with scholarly, pseudo-scholarly, crackpot, chauvinist, and ethnographic theories masquerading as scholarship which are consciously used for nationalistic incitement and the creation of nationalist "militias" as in Nagorno-Karabakh.[61] Local media are also saturated by the mentality of zero-sum conflict, ethnic suspicion, and propaganda, and are universally regarded as state instruments for political indoctrination. Not surprisingly, ethnic tension is pervasive. The growing restiveness and rising incidence of political violence in the North Caucasus which could develop into full-fledged organized ethnic violence likewise is not surprising.[62] In April 1997, renewed fighting also broke out in the war over Nagorno-Karabakh. And in mid-1998 Georgian irregulars seeking to force their way

back into Abkhazia triggered conflicts that only led to Abkhazian victories and more Georgian refugees. A few months later there was a mutiny or coup attempt from within the Georgian Army. In February 1998 the Karabakh faction of the Armenian government launched a coup that unseated the government. The issue that prompted the coup was the government's willingness to accept a less nationalistic negotiated solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh war than the Karabakhites would have preferred.

These wars, conflicts, and energy holdings have also made the Transcaspian a cockpit of a new great game. Russia's hegemonic designs on the region are well known. Turkey, Russia's regional rival, is the strongest immediate military power in the region and events since 1991 have led or impelled it to pursue an ambitious and comprehensive policy to enhance its interests and stabilize the region while preventing Russia's recrudescence. It considers Azerbaijan a natural friend or ally and regards the Transcaspian as an area newly opened to its influence. As a result, Ankara has vastly expanded trade and investment in Azerbaijan, attempted to route pipelines through Turkey, and signed security agreements and training protocols with Baku whose content is deliberately left to others' imagination. This policy aims to help Baku resist Moscow and has proven successful.

Turkey sees an opportunity to rearrange the regional status quo against Russia and supports Azerbaijan as far as it can. However, its military, economic, and political weaknesses restrict its ability to take a strong lead against Russia even though its policies incite Russian suspicions. [63] Ultimately Turkey depends on Washington for assistance with regard to oil pipelines, for pressure on Armenia to settle the Nagorno-Karabakh war and for direct support for Baku. Much of this assistance has been forthcoming, but it could lead to situations where we have to bail out Turkey lest it along with its clients suffer a major defeat.

Iran, too, has vital interests there to prevent U.S. influence from spreading and to prevent Azeri nationalism from stirring up an irredentist movement in northern Iran. Iran also sees no profit in antagonizing Russia over an area that could explode in both their faces, especially as Russia is eager to provide it with arms and technical know-how. This provision of arms is also intended to keep Iran from stirring up trouble for Russia.

Naturally Iran seeks to maximize its ability to capitalize on the revenues that will accrue from the exploration, refinement, and shipment of Caspian energy products. Therefore, Iran and Russia generally have acted in concert in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia to prevent Western control or even influence over energy developments. Iran has given extensive military-political-economic support to Armenia and continues to forge a working partnership, if not alliance with Russia, to minimize Azerbaijan's ability to exploit its energy holdings.

Until now Russian policy has been driven by the strategic nightmares of being excluded from this troublesome region, or of being engulfed in local conflicts, or of being denied an oil monopoly. Across Transcaucasia Moscow sought to dictate a solution or freeze these conflicts as part of its policy to establish exclusive regional hegemony. That strategy has not only consisted in coercive diplomacy, but also in the time-honored Tsarist and Soviet practices of divide and rule.

Russia has exploited ethnic conflicts. It has supported irredentists against established states, Christians and ethnic minorities against Muslims and titular or majority peoples in these republics, funneled large amounts of weapons to its clients, incited the side seeking to secede from the local Transcaucasian state to revolt, and then used its power to come in under the guise of a peacemaking force (not peacekeeping). Russia has coerced Georgia, threatened Azerbaijan with both internal coups and major support for Nagorno-Karabakh, negotiated a peace and a long-term

base agreement with Georgia and Armenia, and become the arbiter of their fates or security guarantor. Russia has acted to gain bases, lasting strategic footholds, overturn the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty, monopolize the local energy business, and create an exclusive sphere of influence.[64] Yet it has only garnered meager returns and is visibly unable to sustain its position and maintain its own internal stability and armed forces at a satisfactory level.

Today Russian military and economic power is visibly retreating as Moscow's capability to control its outlying provinces and neighboring republics came into question even before the Chechen war and indeed provoked it. This retreat of Russian power is another structural factor that plays an important role in shaping regional outcomes because it opens the door to numerous local and foreign actors. In Abkhazia and the North Caucasus, Russian forces now preside over a very fragile truce where no peace appears in sight. Increasingly, Shevarnadze's government in Georgia seeks to internationalize the solution to the conflict with the Abkhazians and pressure Russia into siding with Georgia lest Tbilisi refuse future permission for them to stay. Thus Georgia seeks help from Washington, the U.N., and even NATO. And U.S. forces are now helping train Georgia's coast guard as the first step in what will only be a larger policy conducted under the rubric of engagement, to minimize the need for Russian military presence there.[65] If Russia's retreat continues, Moscow could lose effective military control over the North Caucasus, the strategic gateway for Russian influence in the Transcaucasus, and beyond that, to the Middle East. But it continues to attempt to limit this retreat by means of its connection to Armenia.

Armenia depends on Russia for support against an Azerbaijan supported by Turkey. As long as Armenian policy is haunted by the past *vis-à-vis* local Turkic states and dominated by the exigencies of its "diaspora" in Nagorno-Karabakh's struggle to rejoin Armenia, it has little

flexibility in formulating security policy and must align itself with Moscow. Russia has obtained a long-term base and treaty that governs relationships with Erevan. This new treaty is extremely close to an outright military alliance against Azerbaijan and allows Russia and Armenia to press Baku and Turkey.[66] The treaty reaffirms Russia's lasting military presence in Armenia, is a virtual bilateral military alliance against Baku, commits Armenia not to join NATO, and could be used to justify perpetuation of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh or further military pressure against Azerbaijan that will impede any energy exploration and transshipment.[67] It also reconfirms Russia's determination to counter U.S. presence and remain the exclusive regional hegemon as well as its greatest power. Because Armenia can still menace Baku, incite Kurdish attacks against Turkey and threaten pipelines in both countries, thereby forcing outsiders to factor these threats into any plans for peacetime pipelines, both Ankara and Baku discount Russian protestations of peaceful intention.

While this relationship certainly confers great benefits upon Russia, Moscow's other policy fiascoes show that it is no longer strong enough to exercise exclusive hegemony over the area and may ultimately have to abandon Erevan's exorbitant claims to Nagorno-Karabakh to stabilize its overall regional position and limit the Western presence. Erevan, for its part, seems unwilling to consider any policy other than force and thus may continue to destabilize the region. But this policy cannot achieve any positive or lasting benefit other than to deny tranquility.

Russia's drive for hegemony over the Transcaucasus and Central Asia therefore led those states and interested foreign powers to an equal and opposing reaction that has blunted the Russian drive. Baku, Erevan, Tashkent, Astana, and Tbilisi, to a greater or lesser degree, are seeking a Western counterbalance to Moscow, which the West, especially Ankara and Washington, are all too happy to provide.[68] Central Asia has also turned to China, the United States, and Iran in energy and economics, is exploring forms

of regional cooperation, and has begun to build its own national militaries to escape from Russia's shadow. Apart from expanded trade and commercial relations and support for infrastructural projects beyond the energy and pipeline business, Turkey trains Azerbaijani troops and provides economic-political assistance to Georgia and Azerbaijan. Other Western powers, especially France and Great Britain, also display a rising regional profile.

Washington's burgeoning military-political-economic involvement seeks, *inter alia*, to demonstrate the U.S. ability to project military power even into this region or for that matter, into Ukraine where NATO recently held exercises that clearly originated as an anti-Russian scenario. Secretary of Defense William Cohen has discussed strengthening U.S.-Azerbaijani military cooperation and even training the Azerbaijani army, certainly alarming Armenia and Russia.[69] And Washington is also training Georgia's new Coast Guard.[70] However, Washington's well-known ambivalence about committing force to Third World ethnopolitical conflicts suggests that U.S. military power will not be easily committed to saving its economic investment. But this ambivalence about committing forces and the dangerous situation, where Turkey is allied to Azerbaijan and Armenia is bound to Russia, create the potential for wider and more protracted regional conflicts among local forces. In that connection, Azerbaijan and Georgia's growing efforts to secure NATO's lasting involvement in the region, coupled with Russia's determination to exclude other rivals, foster a polarization along very traditional lines.[71]

In 1993 Moscow even threatened World War III to deter Turkish intervention on behalf of Azerbaijan. Yet the new Russo-Armenian Treaty and Azeri-Turkish treaty suggest that Russia and Turkey could be dragged into a confrontation to rescue their allies from defeat.[72] Thus many of the conditions for conventional war or protracted ethnic conflict in which third parties intervene are present in the Transcaucasus. For example, many Third World conflicts

generated by local structural factors have a great potential for unintended escalation. Big powers often feel obliged to rescue their lesser proteges and proxies. One or another big power may fail to grasp the other side's stakes since interests here are not as clear as in Europe. Hence commitments involving the use of nuclear weapons to prevent a client's defeat are not as well established or apparent. Clarity about the nature of the threat could prevent the kind of rapid and almost uncontrolled escalation we saw in 1993 when Turkish noises about intervening on behalf of Azerbaijan led Russian leaders to threaten a nuclear war in that case.[73]

Precisely because Turkey is a NATO ally, Russian nuclear threats could trigger a potential nuclear blow (not a small possibility given the erratic nature of Russia's declared nuclear strategies). The real threat of a Russian nuclear strike against Turkey to defend Moscow's interests and forces in the Transcaucasus makes the danger of major war there higher than almost everywhere else. As Richard Betts has observed,

> The greatest danger lies in areas where (1) the potential for serious instability is high; (2) both superpowers perceive vital interests; (3) neither recognizes that the other's perceived interest or commitment is as great as its own; (4) both have the capability to inject conventional forces; and, (5) neither has willing proxies capable of settling the situation.[74]

Russian perceptions of the Transcaspian's criticality to its interests is tied to its continuing efforts to perpetuate and extend the vast disproportion in power it possesses relative to other CIS states. This power and resource disproportion between Russia and the smaller states of the Transcaspian region means that no natural equilibrium is possible there. Russia neither can be restrained nor will it accept restraint by any local institution or power in its pursuit of unilateral advantage and reintegration.[75]

The only restraints it now accepts are the objective ones that limit its faltering economic and military power and

that preclude its easy attainment of regional hegemony. And even the perceptions of waning power are difficult to accept and translate into Russian policy. In many cases, Russia still has not truly or fully accepted how limited its capabilities for securing its vital interests are.[76] While this hardly means that Russia can succeed at will regionally, it does mean that for any regional balance, either on energy or other major security issues, to be realized, someone else must lend power to the smaller Caspian littoral states to anchor that balance. Whoever effects that balance must be willing to play a protracted and potentially even military role in the region for a long time and risk the kind of conflict which Betts described. There is little to suggest that the United States can or will play this role, yet that is what we are now attempting to do. This suggests that ultimately its bluff can be called. That is, Russia could sabotage many if not all of the forthcoming energy projects by relatively simple and tested means and there is not much we could do absent a strong and lasting regional commitment.

Therefore, for a win-win solution to come about, some external factor must be permanently engaged and willing to commit even military forces, if need be, to ensure stability and peace. This does not necessarily mean a unilateral commitment, but more likely a multilateral one, e.g., under the U.N.'s auspices but actually under U.S. leadership. Without such a permanent presence, and it is highly unlikely that the United States can afford or will choose to make such a presence felt, other than through economic investment, Russia will be able to exclude all other rivals and regain hegemony over the area. Therefore, Russia has little incentive to desist from efforts to monopolize the energy business, and subordinate the producers to its dictates apart from the limits of its own power. And the record to date of such efforts as the U.N. and OSCE have undertaken give little grounds for hoping that a regional balance can come about of its own accord or through their activities.

This internationalization of the regional security agenda reflects the fact that since 1995 all of Eurasia has entered into the agenda of all of Europe's security organizations. NATO's military engagement policies through the PfP throughout Eurasia reflect this trend. Thus this area has become a borderland of European security and a lasting issue on Europe's agenda.[77] Europe's involvement will only grow as NATO and the EU expand and as Russian power weakens.

Meanwhile the local states themselves are also expanding and diversifying their international relationships to elude Moscow's suffocating embrace now that they have tangible foreign support. All of the Transcaspian governments have joined the PfP and become open to the influence of Western militaries and to regular interactions with them and their governments. They also seek greater involvement with European states and especially the United States.[78] This process reduces chances for a regional Russian military monopoly despite the Russian bases there.

This internationalization of regional security issues is vital for the long-term, even though the West does not yet fully appreciate its significance. More generally, efforts to internationalize regional security conform with the goals of small states to import multiple and diverse security resources from outside to fend off exclusive reliance upon any one state. Thus the Transcaucasian states, Central Asian states, Ukraine and even Chechnya have all tried to create regional security mechanisms.

NATO reciprocates Caucasian interest in the organization even if it is not ready to commit itself to regional peacemaking.[79] Baku and Tbilisi have formed a loose association, if not bloc, with Ukraine, Moldova, Uzbekistan, and even Kazakstan within the CIS. This formation includes increased defense cooperation and has multiple objectives. It aims to alleviate Ukraine's energy shortage, reduce Kyiv's dependence upon Russia for energy,

and give the three other states non-Russian options for pipeline, commercial routes, industrial goods, and political support.

In general this "bloc" aims to shield them from Russian efforts to make the CIS a vehicle for reunification of the former Union, the fundamental objective of Russian foreign policy.[80] This proliferation of security mechanisms ultimately might enable local governments to create their own indigenous mechanisms for preventive diplomacy, continual negotiation, and conflict resolution without depending on Moscow. They would then avoid or reduce vulnerability to Russia's imperial games and strategies based on exploiting their divisions. But the chances for such an outcome depend heavily on whether or not there is a constant Western security presence or at least diplomatic support for such non-Russian networks. In short, an emerging pattern or system of regional international relations is taking shape despite Moscow's best efforts to arrest or inhibit the process. This factor, too, will drive the United States and perhaps some of its NATO allies to maintain a constant presence in these states or just over the horizon. Thus the internationalization of the Transcaspian security agenda will also make engagement into a long-term and protracted factor of U.S. strategy and deepen the implied commitment to these states, especially the energy-producers, that is already taking shape.

If real peace, true independence, economic stability, and the future prosperity that depends on those three factors are to endure, political stability must take root. Unfortunately, most factors here work against long-term stability. The linkage between authoritarian, personalist government and violence is a profound structural cause for regional unrest and ethnic violence. Once that violence begins, it is hard to stop for two reasons. First, ethnic wars where land, sovereignty, and the integrity of the state and of the government are at stake are intrinsically harder to stop, even more so than civil wars.[81] Second, foreign powers are

almost certain to try to exploit conflict and perhaps prolong it to their own advantage.

Russia, in particular, has identified its interests with the perpetuation of interstate and inter-ethnic enmity and has repeatedly exploited every opportunity for conflict in the area. Russia's regional escapades belie the pretense of its being an impartial peacemaker, and its operational method of peace operations do not promote a political solution.

However, Russia is not the only regional actor who may soon resort to force or to proxies. Essentially, in the North Caucasus, the threat or actual deployment of force in one or another form lies behind every single ethnopolitical conflict and efforts to prevent them from exploding. This has been the case since 1991. It is hardly surprising, then, that the same mentality is carried into interstate conflicts. Political resolution of any of the North Caucasus' and Transcaucasia's many wars, therefore, appears to be far from realization unless Russia's role is minimized.

Notwithstanding recent trends, the real danger in this context remains that Moscow will exploit deficiencies in regional conflict resolution mechanisms to prevent its marginalization, obstruct peace, and preserve a military approach to local problems, even though its own abilities to impose a just and/or lasting settlement are absent. In other words, Moscow could easily do something stupid and embark upon strategic adventurism that puts its own integrity at risk. Or it might incite others to launch a conflict whose ends are unforeseeable. The current Chechen war could easily develop into precisely the kind of reckless adventure that risks Russia's integrity and whose ends are nowhere in sight. For example, at a time when there is no usable conventional force to speak of above the level of minor police actions, and the entire North Caucasus is on the brink of war, Admiral Viktor Kravchenko, CINC of the Black Sea Fleet, Russia's local naval forces, announced a program to give Russia parity with Turkey in the Black Sea by creating special missile-carrying hovercraft and

deploying long-range aircraft. These are hardly useful deployments given the real threats at hand. But they signify that Moscow is still competing with NATO's naval forces, not local unrest. Thus in any potential regional conflict Moscow is still fighting the wrong war, and doing so with weapons and systems ill-suited to the threats at hand. [82]

Because there is so much "dry timber" throughout this region and in Russia, adventurers may try to force a military action through, seeing that otherwise all is lost. Indeed, many now intone despairing remarks about the future precisely because of the West's penetration of Transcaucasia. Accordingly, gamblers and adventurists in the Caucasus could stimulate like-minded actors in Russia who would have no sound concept of strategic reality or of the stakes involved. Internal instabilities and structural defects in one state could easily reinforce those in other states, drawing many actors into the fray. Thus, the confluence of these structural defects makes this area the most dangerous one in the CIS and at the same time creates a target for sound domestic and foreign policies to stabilize the area and prevent recurrent violence.

Presently it remains an open question whether the forces of integration can defeat the forces of fragmentation. But continuing regional violence will undo the three Transcaucasian states' viability and possibly Russia's too, leaving the United States with not a moment to lose in seeking solutions for this unhappy region. If any region cries out for preventive diplomacy, it is this one.

Theater Military Engagement as an Aspect of U.S. Strategy.

One may speak of the U.S. engagement strategy as a military branch of this necessary preventive diplomacy in that it strives to create democratic, professional, and loyal armed forces that can maintain legitimate order, avoid internal political participation and reliably defend the national interests of the various states. However, an

assessment of what we are doing suggests that we still lack adequate measurements to assess what engagement is accomplishing. Moreover, the basic challenges to Transcaspian security are not those that the U.S. Army is equipped or trained to overcome. Furthermore, the growing presence of all kinds of U.S. institutions in these societies has a profoundly destabilizing effect upon them and could easily aggravate the processes by which these states become Nigerias and not Norways.

For example, USCENTCOM has Central Asia in its area of responsibility (AOR). While it has yet to publish a statement of its posture and strategy for this area, its CINC has stated the Command's goals. General Zinni observed that we are getting started in Central Asia and have the goal of creating a formal regional presence to help reduce transnational threats: drugs, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).[83] For the entire AOR, CENTCOM's growing peacetime engagement commitment includes "the full range of activities designed to strengthen ties with regional militaries." These include bilateral military interactions, interpersonal relationships, security assistance, tailored training, and humanitarian assistance operations.[84] The problem is that in lieu of either a fully developed program or criteria for measuring the effectiveness of our activities there, or with Central Asian militaries, it is difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate the impact of these programs. Moreover, Central Asian participation in PfP activities that NATO is promoting, e.g., the airborne operation of September 1997 in Kazakstan, entail substantial security risks in the political domain. Certainly they alarm and antagonize Russia.

Furthermore, it is gratuitously provocative to proclaim that the exercise proves or shows that "we can go anywhere, anytime." In fact were we to face a military contingency that we deemed of sufficient value to cause our active military intervention in Central Asia, we could easily face insur-

mountable logistical, strategic, and political difficulties. It is a landlocked area with no friendly port for hundreds of miles; air corridors of neighboring countries like Afghanistan, Iran, China, and Russia are unlikely to be friendly; the water supply in the region is declining; and much of the region is environmentally at risk. Central Asia's physical infrastructure might charitably be called "Third World" and the region is highly diverse ethnically and politically. Thus we might quickly end up on the wrong side of a Central Asian ethnic conflict. In such a case we would also quite likely be opposed by one or more of the key neighboring states, China, Iran, or Russia, all of whom might find it easier to project and sustain power into the area (or use proxies for that purpose) than we could. [85]

Therefore we must conclude that for now CENTCOM lacks an adequate engagement strategy for this region, which comes a poor third after the Middle East and the Gulf in its official statements. There are good intentions, a collection of activities, but no well-designed grand strategy or deeply conceived analysis of the area's strategic potential for or against U.S. operations in the region. To be fair, the problem lies not with CENTCOM but above it, because the strategy for the Caucasus and Central Asia as a whole is in fact, although perhaps we will not admit it, a quite provocative one.

Unfortunately, USEUCOM's program for the Caucasus does not appear to be qualitatively different even though it is documented more extensively. General Wesley Clark, former CINC EUCOM, writes that "we use presence to actively mold the security environment in peacetime, this is what is meant by engagement." Our aim is to reduce the conditions that lead to conflict. [86] Furthermore our presence is based on bilateral or multilateral agreements and therefore is welcome. This makes our presence and engagement the "agent of an effective international consensus." Engagement materially contributes to the promotion of regional stability and democratization, by developing professionalism with our partners, showing them how to

integrate military organizations into democratic political institutions, helping to create a "cadre of security managers with international experience," who understand and can act to change contemporary security issues. Engagement with our allies and partners also relates to the shaping elements of the national security strategy because it helps prepare a more democratic and peaceful international environment in EUCOM's AOR and makes the outbreak of conflict less likely. As a major participant in PfP activities, EUCOM also acts to upgrade standards of professional conduct, promote interoperability, and enhance mutual security for member states including those who are not yet members of NATO. [87]

However, nowhere in its posture statement or mission statement does EUCOM indicate specifically what it does and present any evidence as to whether it is enjoying success and, if so, how much. In other words we still lack adequate criteria for measuring how much success we are achieving and whether we are actually contributing as much as we think to regional stability. This criticism does not mean engagement should be scrapped. But it does suggest that it still remains in fact, if not formally or programmatically, more a collection of important activities in military affairs that have a strategic intention, but not a strategic content.

It is not enough to list all the inter-staff talks and exercises we do with CIS, or other states. We need to devise better standards for measuring achievements and failures in this field because without them we have no way of truly knowing to what degree we are achieving U.S. strategic goals, improving the regional security system, and helping stabilize the host countries involved. Once again, as in CENTCOM, the problem lies outside of and above EUCOM. Much of what engagement is appears to be repackaging what friendly militaries do on a normal day-to-day basis with each other and giving it a fancy strategic rationale. While these activities are indispensable to security and good fighting order, they do not, in and of themselves, constitute strategy or strategic operations. Rather, they are

military activities that contribute to the fulfillment of the national security strategies of the governments involved.

Conclusions and Recommendations.

Undoubtedly the United States must be engaged with the new independent states of the former Soviet Union. To the extent that states like Ukraine are vital to European security or the Transcaspian states are vital to unimpeded energy access; we need to be there to maintain a regional security balance. But we have no way to gauge the effectiveness of our military engagement. Thus, for engagement to represent a truly strategic program in fact, and not just in rhetoric, we need effective standards to measure progress so we can chart the improvement of the local armed forces' capabilities and those forces' democratization.

Above the level of the major commands whose task it is to devise and implement those standards, we need a more comprehensive review of what our strategy is in areas like the Transcaspian. Are we making the same mistake we have made earlier in the Third World in identifying with men and regimes that are inherently unstable and whose pathologies are visible to unbiased observers? If we are doing so, the results will be like those of prior American defeats in the Third World. We need to review to what degree we are creating an implied commitment to defend these governments against both internal and external threats to their security and independence. Military engagement cannot become, as it has been, an uncontrolled version of mission creep by which training and provision of assistance becomes a policy that ties our hands and creates an atmosphere of moral commitment that may be unjustified in some crises. (Of course, it may well be justified in others.)

There is a great danger that in the Transcaspian, because of the importance of access to energy and of balancing the Russian presence, we are drifting into an unplanned but protracted military presence. Such a drift is

the opposite of strategy because it represents a policy of short-run opportunism and taking the easy way out rather than a critical examination of where our interests lie and how we can, in fact, support them. If engagement is a strategy, or part of our overall national security strategy as advertised in official statements, then it must be soundly conceived. For now it appears that many preexisting programs have been quickly extended, or improvised.

On balance it does not appear that either the government or the executive agencies to implement this strategy know exactly what it is supposed to achieve, whether it is achieving some unspecified goal, or what risks it entails. Ultimately, our current regional engagement represents programs that address only a relatively small but important part of the regional threats to security, but do so in an improvised fashion. However, inspired improvisation is not sufficient as a policy or as a strategy.

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