

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EASTERN AND SOUTH CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS.

DAVID SEDNEY
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA

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Chairman Casey, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about Department of Defense policy in Central Asia.

The Department of Defense's primary goal in Central Asia is to support the war in Afghanistan. We provide this support in two ways. First, we use a network of air and ground routes, known as the Northern Distribution Network, to ship supplies through Central Asia to our troops in Afghanistan. Second, we assist the sovereign countries of Central Asia in maintaining their own security in a way they find acceptable.

When announcing the troop increase in Afghanistan, President Obama noted that, "the status quo is not sustainable." This is also true in Central Asia. To achieve success 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 to expand and deepen our relations, from a DoD perspective particularly in the security sector. Such intensive engagement will help give our troops the support they need 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, in cooperation with the State Department and especially their embassy teams, we worked with Central Asian governments to build a robust transit network that supports our shared fight against the threat of extremism.

With the help of our Central Asian partners we are steadily increasing traffic on the NDN and overcoming impediments that hinder the network's efficiency as they arise. In both the air and on ground we are increasing shipments while decreasing processing time. From 20 containers per month in January, we now ship 350 containers per week, and expect this figure to increase further. Additionally, we support infrastructure projects in the region which expand the NDN's capacity. For example, the recently begun Hairaton-Mazar-Sharif railroad, a \$170 million joint

Uzbek-Asian Development Bank project, will connect Afghanistan to the vast former Soviet rail system, and serve as one of the few direct rail lines into the country.

As part of the NDN we are also implementing the Central Asia local purchasing program. This program works with Central Asian businesses to purchase local materials for use in Afghanistan, to the benefit of both sides - we save money on shipping, while local economies benefit from increased trade. In the process we help drive greater economic cooperation, as local governments cooperate to keep transnational transit routes open and local economies rise to meet international purchasing standards. I would like to note that 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.

The local purchasing program also demonstrates a potential benefit that the NDN holds for Central Asia – the ability to reconnect the region to the global economy. By expanding trade linkages the NDN helps reconnect Central Asia to India, Pakistan, and other formerly closed markets, while opening 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. So do today's airlines, who fly this route every day. With the NDN we can help ground transit do the same.

Most importantly, the NDN is an effective means to resupply our warfighters and provides capacity and redundancy to complement our heavily-burdened lines through Pakistan. This is particularly important in light of President Obama's decision to send 30,000 more soldiers to Afghanistan, and the commitment by our allies for another 7,000. Since its inception 11 months ago, we have shipped almost 5000 containers along the NDN. We will expand this number in 2010 to meet the new demand, and 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.

Importantly, we also have access to the Manas Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan, through which the majority of our combat troops transit on their way to Afghanistan. We greatly appreciate the willingness of the Kyrgyz government to continue its support in our common struggle, and look forward to maintaining this important link in our logistical network.

Stabilizing Local Governments

The threat of Islamic extremism is once again rising in Central Asia. In 2009 the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) conducted a suicide bombing in Uzbekistan, and throughout the summer local governments fought with suspected extremist cells in the Ferghana Valley. Local governments share our concern about extremism, and we cooperate with them to address this shared threat in two areas: security assistance and humanitarian relief.

Security Assistance

Our security assistance focuses on professionalization of local militaries, border guards, counternarcotics forces, and counterterrorism forces. So far we have seen great progress. For example, to date the George Marshall Center has trained close to 1000 Central Asian security professionals, creating a cadre of western-oriented professionals predisposed towards reform. Similarly, our National Guard State Partnership Program uses citizen–soldiers to teach western-style civil-military relations.

With the help of DoD training our partner governments are building modern counterterrorist, peacekeeping and demining capabilities, and continue to engage us for help moving beyond Soviet-era military norms. Through this engagement we work together to create stable governments, peaceful societies, and a secure zone to the north of our most important war effort.

Humanitarian Assistance

Our humanitarian assistance seeks to enhance the capacity of local governments. We work 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.

Diplomatic 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 3 ½ years, while the TRANSCOM commander visited the region three times in the past two years. In addition, we participate in the Annual Bilateral Consultations (ABC's) described earlier by Deputy Assistant Secretary Krol. 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 recently said, “this is not just America’s war.” Russia, China, Turkey, and even Iran share our desire to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda. This is why they support our efforts in the region, such as Russia’s recent decision to allow DoD unrestricted transit. It is also why our assistance packages often overlap in Central Asia, often to mutual benefit. For example, a container traveling on the NDN may travel on Russian-built rails, Chinese-built roads, an Iranian-built tunnel, 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 this summer did not only come from Afghanistan – they also came from Pakistan. However, while Pakistan can export instability, it can also export wealth. Central Asians know that a stable, prosperous Pakistan means increased trade through Central Asia, and it is for this reason that they support our efforts to stabilize Pakistan.

Long Term Strategy

Deputy Assistant Secretary Krol has already outlined America’s long term strategy in Central Asia - a strategy that, for twenty years, has been remarkable in both its consistency and its success. DoD’s engagement in Central Asia has enhanced security, diplomatic ties, and trade, and accelerated the achievement of our long term strategic goals. Even though some of our actions are driven by short term concerns, 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 the defeat violent extremism and establish a stable peace. In logistics, in security assistance, in political support – we must come together in order to succeed.