

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515**

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA
CHAIRMAN**

**before the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC, AND THE
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT**

Central Asia: An Overview

April 8, 2008

Central Asia is emerging as a source of oil and gas for world markets. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the region's natural gas reserves are comparable to those of the United States, and its oil reserves are comparable to Qatar on the low end, and Libya on the high end, or between 10 to 42 billion barrels.

Kazakhstan possesses the region's largest oil reserves at 9 to 40 billion barrels, and exports about 1.3 million barrels per day.

While the Administration has suggested that it considers Central Asia to be significant to the diversification of suppliers of energy to Europe and/or the United States, the position of Special Advisor for Caspian Energy Diplomacy was abolished in 2004, and the State Department has not yet appointed a Coordinator for International Energy Affairs which the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 calls for the Administration to do.

In 2006, when Russia temporarily cut off gas to Ukraine, which highlighted the European Union's dependence on Russian oil and gas, the Administration encouraged Central Asian countries to transport their energy exports to Europe through pipelines that cross the Caspian Sea, thereby bypassing Russian and Iranian territory. However, it is my understanding that the Administration has been unsuccessful in this effort, too, and that Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have not yet agreed to build trans-Caspian pipelines.

On the human rights front, Freedom House gave Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, its lowest possible ratings on political rights and civil liberties. Some have suggested that

Kyrgyzstan may be most likely to make a peaceful transition to a Western-oriented political system. An agreement was reached for Kazakhstan to chair the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010.

Regarding U.S. security interests in the region, in 2001, Kyrgyzstan provided basing for U.S. and coalition forces. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan provided overflight and other support. Tajikistan permitted use of its airport. Uzbekistan provide a base for U.S. operations.

However, in 2005, at a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a regional security grouping consisting of Russia, China, and all the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan) called for coalition members supporting operations in Afghanistan “to decide on the deadline for...their military contingents’ presence in those countries.” Despite signing this declaration, none of the Central Asian leaders have called for the immediate closure of U.S. and other coalition bases.

U.S. security interests also include the elimination of nuclear weapons remaining in Kazakhstan. From 1949 to 1991, the Soviet Union used Kazakhstan as its nuclear testing ground, exploding more than 500 nuclear bombs and exposing more than 1.5 million Kazakhs to nuclear radiation.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Kazakhstan inherited this mess. While Kazakhstan could have become the first and only Muslim nuclear superpower and retained enough highly enriched uranium to produce 20 nuclear bombs, I commend Kazakhstan’s President for voluntarily dismantling the world’s 4th largest nuclear arsenal and shutting down the world’s 2nd largest nuclear test site. What he did for all of us can never be underestimated, and should never be forgotten.

Today, Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher of the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs is with us, and hopefully can address recent developments in Central Asia including two incidents relating to Kyrgyzstan, which have led to increased anti-American sentiment. The first was a collision between an American military aircraft and a Kyrgyz civilian liner, and the second was the murder of Mr. Alexander Ivanov, a Kyrgyz citizen working on the base, by an American soldier in 2006. Both incidents were brought to my attention by Kyrgyzstan’s Ambassador to the United States, who has submitted a statement which I am including for the record. I promised her that I would also bring these matters to your attention, and seek your input and comments.

For the record, I am also including the statement of Ms. Marina Ivanova, widow of Alexander Ivanov. On the human rights situation in Central Asia, the subcommittee will include a statement submitted by Freedom House.

I now welcome our witness, and excuse our Ranking Member who is unable to be with us today.