

# RUSSIAN-CHINESE-AMERICAN COMPETITION IN CENTRAL ASIA



**Brianne Todd**

**Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies**

**CENTCOM International Military Officers' Forum**

**4 November 2021**

**UNCLASSIFIED**

# **PRESENTATION OUTLINE**

## **Part I – Regional Dynamics**

- **Overview of Regional Security Drivers**

## **Part II – Strategic Competition**

- **Interests of External Actors**
  - **Russia**
  - **China**
  - **United States**

## **Part III – Scenarios for Future Competition**

- **Russian and Chinese Engagement in Central Asia**
- **Future U.S. Engagement in Central Asia**

# PART I: REGIONAL DYNAMICS



# REGIONAL SECURITY DRIVERS

- **COVID-19**
- **Personality-Driven Politics**
- **Demographics**
  - Ethnic Majorities/Minorities
  - Youth Bulge
- **Geography & Borders**
  - Energy-Water Nexus
  - Exploitation of Natural Resources
- **Domestic Economic Crises**
  - Secondary Sanctions (CAATSA)
  - Migrant Labor Remittances
- **Narco Trafficking**
- **Islamic Radicalization**
- **Influence of External Actors / Foreign Relations**



# PART II: STRATEGIC COMPETITION



# STRATEGIC COMPETITION IN CENTRAL ASIA

- **Interests of Individual States**

- Sovereignty
- Stability
- Territorial Integrity

- **Interests of External Actors**

- Security and economic interests
- Natural resources
- Transit to other markets

- **Regional Organizations and Multilateral Fora**

- OSCE, EU, NATO, C5+1
- CSTO, SCO, and Eurasian Economic Union



# **RUSSIA'S INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA**

- **Sphere of “Privileged Interests”**
  - Historical, cultural, linguistic, political, and security ties
  - Trade and energy
  - Military technical assistance
- **A Source of Instability**
  - Radicalized individuals / Foreign fighters
  - Narco trafficking
- **“Buffer Zone” between Russia and Afghanistan**



# COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY ORGANIZATION (CSTO)





# EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) 2021

● Has FTA with EAEU   ● Members of the EAEU   ● Observer status



Note: Cuba is also an Observer member of the EAEU

# CHINA'S INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

- **Domestic Interests**
  - Containing ethnic Uyghurs in Xinjiang
  - Economic expansion
- **Regional Security Presence**
  - Protect BRI investments
  - Rumored military outposts and patrols in Tajikistan & Afghanistan



# SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (SCO)





# BELT & ROAD INITIATIVE IN CENTRAL ASIA



# U.S. INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

## ***2019 CENTRAL ASIA STRATEGY = SOVEREIGNTY, INDEPENDENCE & TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY***

- **Support and strengthen the sovereignty and independence of the Central Asian States, individually and as a group.**
- **Reduce terrorist threats in Central Asia.**
- **Expand and maintain support for stability in Afghanistan.**
- **Encourage connectivity between Central Asia and Afghanistan.**
- **Promote rule of law reform and respect for human rights.**
- **Promote United States investment in and development of Central Asia.**

# U.S. INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

***2019 CENTRAL ASIA STRATEGY =  
SOVEREIGNTY, INDEPENDENCE &  
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY***

- **Bilateral Security Cooperation**
  - Professional Military Education
  - Defense Institution Building / Institutional Capacity Building
    - Medical
    - Sustainment/Maintenance Technical Training
    - English Language Training
  - Border Security/Defense & Countering Terrorism
    - SOF Training
- **Regional Economic Development**
- **People-to-People Exchanges**

# U.S. INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

## CENTCOM COMMANDER'S PRIORITIES

### STRATEGIC



**1**

Deterring Iran

**2**

Resolving Conflict  
In Afghanistan

**3**

Maintain D-ISIS  
Campaign

### FUNCTIONAL



**4**

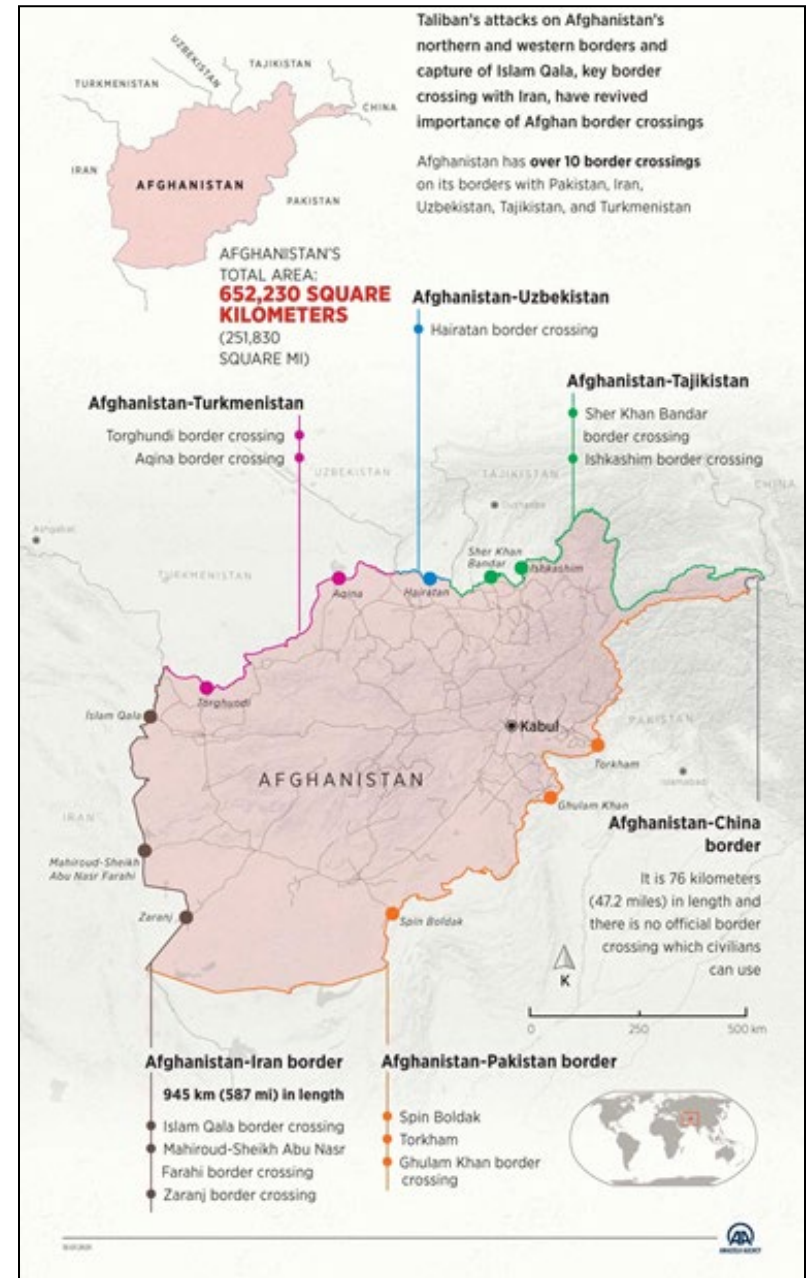
Counter-UAS  
Capabilities

**5**

Weaponization  
Of IDPs by ISIS



# ACCESS TO AFGHANISTAN



Taliban's attacks on Afghanistan's northern and western borders and capture of Islam Qala, key border crossing with Iran, have revived importance of Afghan border crossings

Afghanistan has over 10 border crossings on its borders with Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan

# PART III: SCENARIOS FOR FUTURE COMPETITION IN CENTRAL ASIA



# RUSSIAN & CHINESE ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA

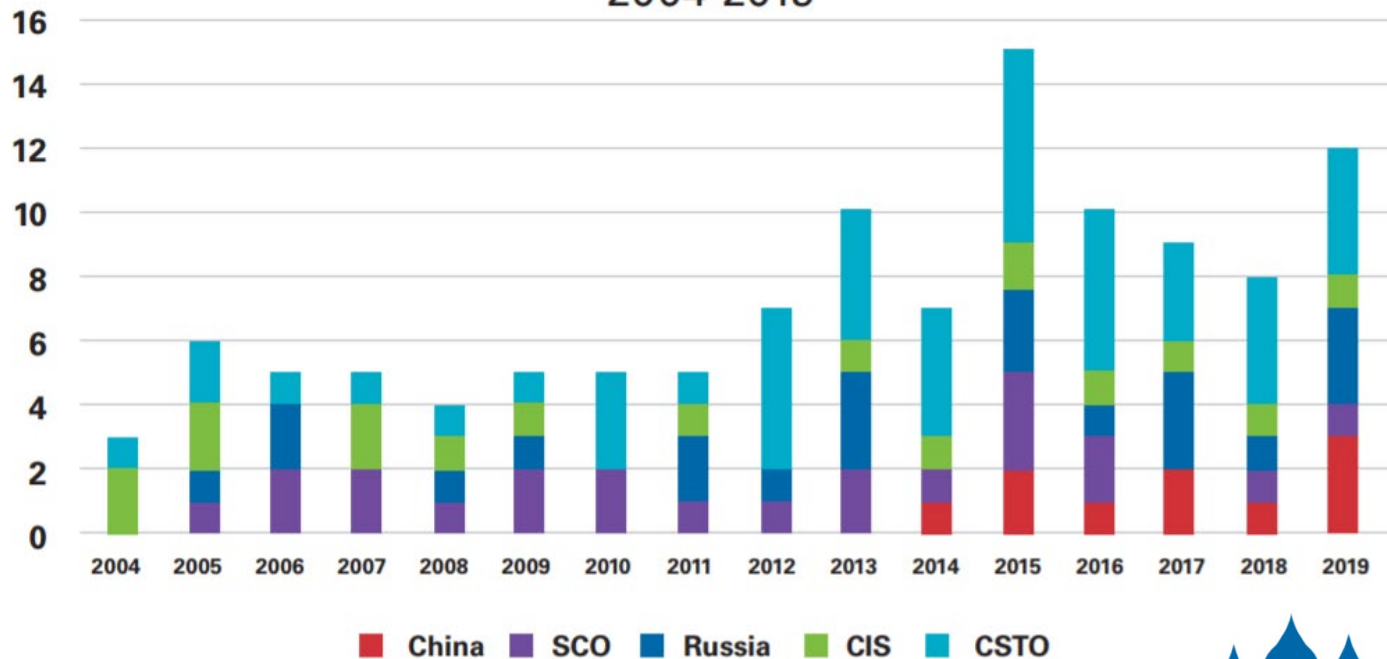
- **Cooperation or Conflict?**
  - China's increasing security role
  - Russian concerns about Chinese encroachment
- **“An Alliance, Strategic Partnership, or Marriage of Convenience?”**



# RUSSIAN & CHINESE ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA

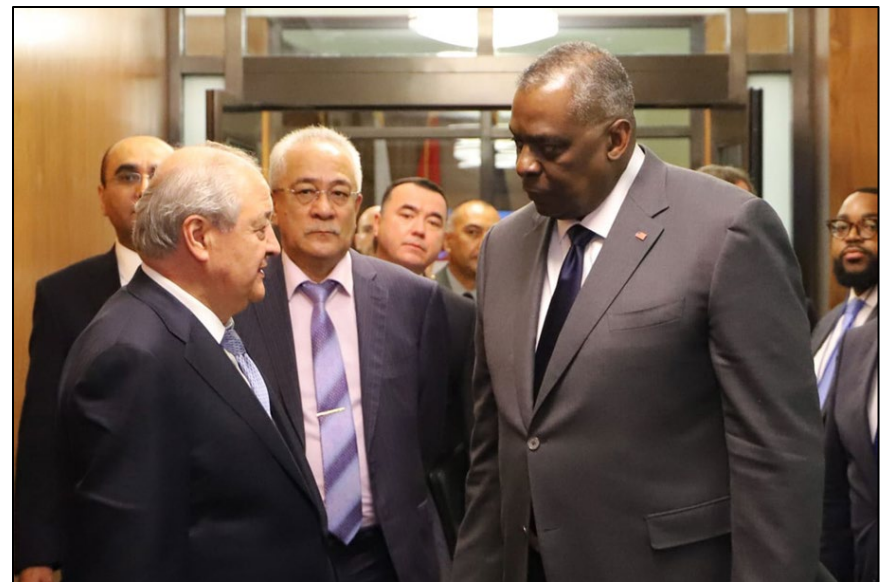
- Central Asian responses
  - Perceptions of an unspoken agreement
  - Hedging by balancing partners

Military Exercises in Central Asia  
2004-2019



# FUTURE U.S. ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA

- U.S. maintains status quo in its relationships
- U.S. cedes opportunities through bureaucratic inertia
- U.S. engages specific Central Asian countries in support of regional priorities



# DISCUSSION



**For additional information:**

**Brianne Todd**

**Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies**

**Email: [brianne.todd@ndu.edu](mailto:brianne.todd@ndu.edu)  
[brianne.e.todd.civ@mail.mil](mailto:brianne.e.todd.civ@mail.mil)**



# **BACK-UP SLIDES**



# ETHNIC DIVISIONS





# ENERGY INSECURITY



# NARCO TRAFFICKING

