

## Locating ‘Central Asian Problematic’ in the State of the Union Addresses and the National Security Strategy Documents of the United States of America Since 1991

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**Abstract:** This article applies a ‘natural language processing framework’ and examines the usage of ‘select keywords’ in the annual State of the Union Addresses by the U.S. Presidents and the National Security Strategy (NSS) documents published under their seal by the White House since 1991. It simply counts the usage of the select keywords and demonyms in both the mentioned sources and examines the context/problematic in which they were used – thus attempting to locate Central Asia in the U.S. foreign policy from an ‘alternate perspective’. It is assumed that the institutions and intellectuals of the statecraft produce American ‘national interest’ differently – looking beyond the state-centric geopolitical vision of one’s foreign policy through an ‘alternate perspective’ becomes pertinent. As the identified sources merely give a broader picture in the form of a synopsis and not a detailed account, the article briefly records the ‘popular’ U.S. foreign policy in Central Asia in the very beginning. The study finds out that the U.S. policy for Central Asia, largely, is a subset of the wider American policies practised around the region. The Central Asian problematic is thus determined by “security” of the U.S. national interests in the region which continue and change. Considering the State of the Union addresses and the NSS documents, the article submits that the significance of Central Asia for the U.S. foreign policy is vital yet relatively limited. And in the absence of any concrete Central Asian policy the security-based ‘problematic’ will continue to exist.

**Keywords:** United States, Central Asia, Foreign Policy, State of the Union, National Security Strategy.

### INTRODUCTION

The ‘idea of America’ in itself has dominated the foreign policy discourses and scholarship of the world geopolitical order since World Wars. After the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991, the United States became an undisputable world power with opportunities to intervene in the world affairs. The former Soviet republics ‘in Asia’ were started to be termed as ‘Central Asia’ – resulting into the dawning of Central Asia as a new geopolitical space consisting of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Often associated with concepts like the ‘Great Game’ and later the ‘New Great Game’, the theatre of Central Asia acquired increasing significance in the U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War scenario.

With the emergence of Central Asia as a separate geographical [as well as geopolitical] entity, the U.S. statecraft started to re-engineer its foreign policy and practices in the region. New territories of Central Asia brought with them new borders and maps as well as conflicts ranging from ideological, border issues, political instability, civil wars and issues of the Islamic fundamentalism – and so a conflict zone.

In the early 1990s, the U.S. opened embassies in all the five ‘stans’. At the same time, the U.S. statecraft was also fearful that these countries might get involved in the regional arms race. The presence of Soviet-era nuclear weapons and means to deliver them were primarily seen as a threat to the U.S. security interests in the region. The U.S. also started to assist Central Asian countries to remove these weapons and related infrastructure from its territory. There was also fear of terrorist ideology of the Middle East affecting Central Asians. With a focus on economic and military assistance, the U.S. adopted a policy of direct intervention in the former Soviet countries [1].

On the one hand, oil and gas reserves in and around Central Asia, including Caspian, started to attract major oil companies to invest in the region; on the other, political instability within the Central Asian Republics and the beginning of the social and economic reforms paved the way for the emergence of various radical organisations. With the eruption of violent clashes among different ethnic groups in the Ferghana Valley and simultaneously ongoing Civil-War in Tajikistan (1992-1997), Central Asia earned the image of an upcoming conflict-zone. Notably, among others,

the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) formed in 1998 gained momentum which wished to establish an Islamic Caliphate across Central Asia. It eventually joined Taliban in Afghanistan [and by mid-2015 registered its support to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)].

In 1994 the U.S. launched Partnership for Peace (PfP) program to establish relations with the former Warsaw Pact countries. It aimed at facilitating participating countries in national defense planning and budgeting transparency, democratic control of armed forces, the capability to contribute to the United Nations and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) operations, development of cooperative military relations with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) [2], including Central Asian countries. The primary goal of the U.S. was the development of market democracy and encouraging American trade and investments. This was done in order not to lose new opportunities in the global competition with other Western, Pacific and Muslim countries [3]. As Acting Secretary Talbott in his address at the U.S.-Central Asia Business Conference stated:

*“Central Asia is a gateway to three regions that are of great strategic importance to the United States: To the east lie China and the rest of Asia; to the south lie Iran, Afghanistan, and the Islamic world; to the west and north lie Russia and Europe. Moreover, in its own right, Central Asia is a region of vast natural and human resources offering the potential for the prosperity of its people and benefits for American entrepreneurs with the foresight to do business there...The Administration wants to be sure that American business is competitive in Central Asia – that we don’t lose in the global competition with Japan, Germany, South Korea, the People’s Republic of China, Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran – all of whom have begun serious efforts to develop business ties to the region.” [4]*

The U.S. has always remained a staunch opponent to the Russian monopoly over politics, economies, conflict resolution, military and energy issues in Central Asia [5]. Against this backdrop, Central Asia was included in the area of responsibility of the U.S. Central Command (USCentCom) in October 1999. However, officially, it kept on promoting fundamental values of democracy, market economies and human rights in the region. Also, drugs and arms trafficking, arms proliferation and terrorism remained highlighted in the U.S. concerns; energy and trade more defined her interests.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001, radically changed the security situation in Central Asia and the American national security interests towards Central Asia underwent a drastic revision and reassessment. It

led to an increased military involvement in all Central Asian states, except Turkmenistan, which maintained its neutral status since 1992 [6]. It was only this time when much information about the region's geography, peoples, issues and conflicts started to be debated and published. Boris Z. Rumer was quoted:

*“The world once again cares about the region.....The world cares – or at least seems to care – about Central Asia for two reasons: the place matters because of its geography – next door to Afghanistan and Pakistan, which have become the hottest ‘stans’ of them all, and because politicians and bureaucrats have come to recognize after September 11 that nasty places far away cannot be left to their own devices indefinitely.” [7]*

The events of September 2001 guided U.S. statecraft to opt for direct geopolitical involvement in the region. However, the U.S. war on terror in Afghanistan made the U.S. relationship with these countries complex. Moreover, the attempt by the United States to use the ‘colour revolution’ to alter and engineer the political systems in the region caused a sense of great unease amongst the Central Asian Republics and the Shanghai Cooperation Organizations (SCO); perceived as a security vacuum by many in Washington. Quoting Cooley and Mitchell, by the end of his presidency “Bush administration gave evidence of ‘establishing democracy’ as a lower priority” [8].

The Obama doctrine was comparatively a soft doctrine from that of the Bush. His doctrine did not support foreign wars, instead focused on strengthening enforcement of international laws, engage and modernise international institutions. Obama called for ‘isolation’ as a credible alternative to military action. The transit centres at Manas was vacated in June 2014. In 2015, his administration forged the partnership with Central Asian countries by forming ‘C5+1 Group’. This group consisted of five ‘stans’ and the United States and came in contract to cooperate on issues of economic and military assistance, counter-terrorism, and trans-continental transportation. In totality, the U.S. influence in Central Asia declined under the Obama administration.

Central Asia under President Donald Trump (Since 2017) “does not appear much at all in the U.S. foreign policy debate” [9]. His administration appears to be busy managing North Korea and the situations in the Middle East more than anything else. Thus, in the absence of any concrete Central Asian policy under Trump, previous policy continues. Many also believe that only an event of the scale of September 11 may refocus American attention in Central Asia.

**Need Felt to Review the State of the Union Addresses and the National Security Strategy Documents**

First delivered by George Washington on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1790 as “the President’s Annual Message to Congress”, the term “State of the Union” was for the first time used by Franklin D. Roosevelt in his 1934 address [10,11]. Addressed annually to the U.S. Congress, it covers various dimensions ranging from budget to economy of the nation, from legislative agenda to the national priorities. Heard around the world, this address is significant to rally support and consensus of the U.S. Congress and the citizens. The President of the U.S. is duty-bound to deliver State of the Union Address under Article II, Section 3 of the U.S. Constitution.

Similarly, the NSS document is a periodic document prepared by the executive branch of the U.S. government for the Congress. It outlines the major national security concerns of the U.S. and strategy of the administration to deal with them. The analysis conflues the ‘national security concerns’ and the ‘national priorities’ of the United States. Purposely prepared general in content, the NSS is supported by the National Military Strategy (NMS) for guidance. It is intended to be a comprehensive statement articulating the worldwide interests, goals, and objectives of the United States that are important to its security; actions to be taken and their implementation [12]. The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 requires the President to annually submit an articulation of national grand strategy – to lend coherence to the budgeting process; a clear statement of interests, objectives, and concepts for achieving them. This practice gives Congress a fair idea of the resources required to support the President’s strategy. It further leads to inter-agency meetings to resolve any internal differences in the foreign policy agendas. The NSS document is intended to serve a few purposes: communicating strategic vision of the executive to Congress and legitimize its requests for resources; communicating the U.S. strategic vision to the foreign countries; communicating with the select audiences whose support is required in future; and to create internal consensus on foreign and defense policy within the executive branch [13]. The NSS also

provides intra-agency cooperation to deal with specific issues of the national concern. White House in detail charts out the strategy to be followed to achieve the national security of the U.S. and considered to be the mirror of the statecraft [12].

Presidential address and the state document – one is in the form of an address and the other in the form of a published document – both are of the utmost and highest significance. Both the sources broadly inform their citizens, and the world, about significant achievements, and objectives yet to be achieved and present a framework to achieve these objectives. The stated timeline (1991-2018) covers State of the Union Addresses and the NSS documents of the five U.S. presidential administrations: George H. W. Bush (1989-1993), Bill Clinton (1993-2001), George W. Bush (2001-2009), Barack Obama (2009-2017), and Donald Trump (Since 2017).

**METHODOLOGY**

For the study, a ‘natural language processing framework’ is experimented. This framework locates a particular keyword, counts and identifies its usage within a speech or a text and thus explores the significance of a particular object/subject. This is further seen from the context of objectivity/subjectivity against which that particular keyword is used. For the purpose to analyse the significance of Central Asia in the U.S. foreign policy, a similar experiment is conducted. Both, the State of the Union addresses and the National Security Strategy documents since 1991 to 2018 are explored under this analysis. The primary keywords for our analysis are: ‘Central Asia’, ‘Kazakhstan’, ‘Kyrgyzstan’, ‘Tajikistan’, ‘Turkmenistan’, ‘Uzbekistan’ in the Presidential addresses and the NSS documents since 1991. Besides this, mention of the notable players and regions are also searched in the select text. This analysis as an ‘alternate perspective’ would show to what extent Central Asia is significant for the U.S. for its foreign policy. Besides exact nouns, this framework also counts demonyms used in both the sources. Both the identified sources merely present a general idea and a broader picture in the form of a synopsis and not a detailed account of the U.S. foreign policy in Central Asia.

**Table-1: No. of times mention of ‘Central Asia’ and the Five ‘stans’ in the U.S. State of the Union Addresses 1991-2018**

Region/ Countries	1992	1994	1999	2003
Newly Independent States/ Former Soviet Union/ Central Asia	1	2	1	1
Kazakhstan	-	-	-	-
Kyrgyzstan	-	-	-	-
Tajikistan	-	-	-	-
Turkmenistan	-	-	-	-
Uzbekistan	-	-	-	-

Source: Calculated from the State of the Union Addresses Archive, Online available at:

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/sou.php>

**Central Asia in the State of the Union Addresses**

A total of 28 State of the Union Addresses have been delivered from 1991 to 2018 by five U.S. Presidents and considered to be one of the most significant Presidential addresses.

The terms Newly Independent States (NIS), Former Soviet Union/States (FSU) or Central Asia per se were used in the Presidential address only in 1992, 1994, 1999 and 2003 out of 28 State of the Union Addresses since 1991 to 2018. There was no mention of any of the five ‘stans’ since 1991.

Following is the chronological account of prime U.S. concerns on Central Asia as addressed in the State of the Union Addresses:

1992: President George H. W. Bush mentioned his intention to eliminate all the peacekeeper missile systems, reduce the number of warheads on Minuteman missiles, reduce the number of warheads in the sea-based missiles by one-third, and convert a substantial portion of the U.S. strategic bombers primarily for

conventional use if the former Soviet Union eliminate all their land-based multiple-warhead ballistic missiles [14]. 1994: President Clinton mentioned that the best strategy to ensure security and to build a durable peace was to support the advance of democracy. Mentioning the U.S. efforts to support democratic reforms in the former Soviet states, he elaborated that as democracies do not attack each other, this advancement would make better trading partners and partners in diplomacy as well. He further stated that the U.S. along with its allies had created a Partnership for Peace initiative that invites states from the former Soviet bloc to work with NATO in military cooperation [14]. 1999: President Clinton mentioned the necessity to expand partnership with the former Soviet nations to safeguard nuclear materials and technology so that it does not fall into the wrong hands [14]. 2003: President George W. Bush stated his administrations` determined efforts in support with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to track and control nuclear materials in the former Soviet Union by banning its production and shipment of missile technology [14].

**Table-2: No. of times mention of Countries/ Regions ‘Around Central Asia’ in the State of the Union Addresses 1991-2018**

Countries/ Regions	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Russia	-	1	-	7	2	2	2	1	2	7	-	1	1	-
China	-	-	-	1	-	-	6	1	5	9	-	1	1	-
India	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	1	-	1	-	-
Pakistan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	1	-	-
Afghanistan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	3	5
Iran	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	3	1
Iraq	6	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	1	-	2	22	24
Persian Gulf	9	1	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-
Middle East	-	-	-	1	3	1	1	1	2	1	-	-	3	4
Caucasus	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Caspian	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
South Asia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Countries/ Regions	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Russia	-	-	2	-	-	1	2	1	1	-	2	2	-	1
China	-	1	1	1	1	2	4	4	1	2	3	1	1	3
India	-	1	-	1	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pakistan	1	-	-	2	1	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	-
Afghanistan	3	2	4	4	2	3	1	3	4	6	3	1	-	2
Iran	3	6	5	7	-	3	2	4	1	10	4	2	1	3
Iraq	27	16	34	39	4	5	4	3	-	3	2	2	-	1
Persian Gulf	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Middle East	6	6	6	2	-	-	-	1	2	-	2	2	2	-
Caucasus	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Caspian	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
South Asia	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-

Source: Calculated from the State of the Union Addresses Archive, Online available at:

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/sou.php>

The non-usage of the ‘keywords’ itself shows the extent of the significance of Central Asia for the United States. However, at the same time, the countries and the regions around Central Asia were widely covered in the same address.

Iraq and Persian Gulf were noticeably mentioned in 1991 when the Gulf war was going on. In 2002, after the events of 9/11, Afghanistan was mentioned more than any other country or region. Similarly, Iraq was mentioned maximum times in 2003 State of the Union address when the U.S. led coalition forces invaded Iraq and de-throned Saddam Hussein. Middle East and Iran were also started to be discussed more than ever after 2003. Another interesting fact is that South Asia was only mentioned twice i.e. in 2010 and 2015 by President Obama in his address. Earlier it was treated insignificant by the U.S. statecraft. In totality, the regions and countries around Central Asia,

including Russia and China, carry more weight for the U.S. statecraft than Central Asia per se.

**Central Asia in the National Security Strategy (NSS) Documents**

A total of 17 NSS documents are published till 2018, two during the second Reagan administration (1987 & 1988), three by the Senior Bush administration (1990, 1991 and 1993), seven by the Clinton administration (1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000), two by the George Bush administration (2002 & 2006), two by the Obama administration (2010 & 2015) and one by the Trump administration (2017). However, this article considers 14 NSS documents as 3 of them were published before 1991, i.e. in 1987, 1988 and 1990. The NSS document is widely accepted as a valid and most useful document to examine the national security issues and priorities for the United States.

**Table-3: No. of times mention of ‘Central Asia’ and the five ‘stans’ in the National Security Strategy (NSS) Documents of the U.S. 1991-2018**

Region/Countries	1991	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2002	2006	2010	2015	2017
NIS/ FSU/ Central Asia	-	20	11	18	28	22	26	35	60	2	8	-	1	6
Kazakhstan	-	1	2	7	11	1	4	5	4	-	1	-	-	-
Kyrgyzstan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-
Tajikistan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Turkmenistan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Uzbekistan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Calculated from the State of the Union Addresses Archive, Online available at: <http://nssarchive.us/>

After collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, the terms like Former Soviet Union, Former Soviet States, Newly Independent States, and Central Asia were used frequently. In 2005, Central Asia was taken out from the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs to create Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. The notable fact is that Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were never mentioned in any of the NSS documents of the U.S., while Turkmenistan was mentioned only once. After 2006, none of the five ‘stans’ were mentioned in the U.S. National Security Strategy documents. It may be argued that the Central Asian significance for the U.S. policy was over with the end of the Bush’s ‘war on terror’.

Following is the Phase-wise account of prime U.S. concerns on Central Asia as mentioned in the listed National Security Strategy documents:

**Phase 1: 1993-2000**

The NSS of 1993 mentioned need to actively promote representative political participation, market economies, and a democratic culture in the former Soviet Union States by means of providing expertise, including implementation of the Freedom Support Act

to assist the newly independent states. Describing regional instabilities as threat to the U.S. interests and security, it cautioned the statecraft from unpredictable and over-armed states in the region. It also highlighted proliferation, terrorism and the international drug trade as a threat to stability and the presence and spread of weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical or biological) as well as means to deliver them as the most threatening security challenges to the U.S. security. It called for bringing into effect an arms control treaty to reduce nuclear arsenals and former Soviet biological warfare programs. The NSS mentioned to create opportunities for weapons scientists and engineers and redirect their talents to peaceful endeavors. The report mentioned that the U.S. “strategy has shifted from a focus on a global threat to one on regional challenges and opportunities, from containment to a new regional defense strategy” [15]. The NSS of 1994 mentioned that as dissolution of Soviet Union has radically changed the security environment, the U.S. has successfully expanded its support for democratic and market reform in the newly independent states. It also emphasized on following the methods to curb the nuclear proliferation, regional instability, reversal of reform, unfair trade practices etc. in the Central Asian States and find

cooperative and multinational solutions for the same. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was engaged to provide expertise and technical assistance to the republics of the former Soviet Union. It also advocated to pay attention to measures that can overcome the social dislocations resulted due to collapse of the Soviet-dominated regional trading system. The U.S. also opened negotiations on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) to eliminate all nuclear weapons and dismantlement of intercontinental ballistic missiles located in Kazakhstan [15]. The NSS of 1995 highlighted to bring Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan to exchange instruments of ratification for the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty – START I Treaty. It also mentioned that in a joint effort of the U.S. Department of Defense and Energy, the U.S. could successfully transfer 600 Kilograms of vulnerable nuclear material from Kazakhstan to safe storage in the U.S. It repeated the previous objectives to strengthen democratic processes in key emerging former Soviet States; securing the basic goals unilaterally by cooperative, multinational and multilateral solutions [15]. The NSS of 1996 stated to create free markets in Central Asia that offers economic opportunity. It also mentioned that the rise of the organized crime in the newly independent states has weakened new democracies and poses a direct threat to the U.S. interests, particularly in light of the potential for the theft and smuggling by organized criminals of nuclear materials. It described democratic reforms as the best answer to the emerging aggressive nationalism and ethnic hatreds unleashed due to the Soviet disintegration. It also highlighted that by the end of 1995, all nuclear weapons had been removed from Kazakhstan and CTBT was signed in 1996 [15]. The NSS of 1997 declared to cater to the issues of resource depletion, rapid population growth, environmental degradation and refugee migration. It also mentioned that organized crime was a major threat to the U.S. interests because of the potential for theft and smuggling of inherited nuclear materials remaining in the Former Soviet States [15]. The NSS of 1998 stated that a stable Central Asia will help promote stability and security in the region and facilitate rapid development and transport to international markets of the large Caspian oil and gas resources, with substantial U.S. commercial participation. It repeated the previous argument on need to deactivate the strategic nuclear delivery systems and assisting to eliminate and prevent the proliferation of chemical weapons and biological weapon-related capabilities in the former Soviet Union nations [15]. The NSS of 1999 mentioned the launch of the Expanded Threat Reduction Initiative (ETRI) to address the new security challenges in the NIS caused by the financial crisis; preventing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) proliferation, reducing the threat posed by residual WMD, and stabilizing the military. It again repeated that a stable Central Asia will facilitate

rapid development and transport to international markets of the large Caspian oil and gas resources, with substantial U.S. commercial participation. The document casted its willingness to work with the newly independent states to promote their accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) on commercially fair terms. The NSS forced to mobilize the international community to provide assistance to support reform and to help the NIS countries stimulate foreign and domestic private investment, especially by the U.S. companies [15]. The NSS of 2000 emphasized to have overseas presence of the U.S. military forces to deter and even prevent the conflict by identifying emerging security problems and facilitate a swift response, if necessary. Also, the U.S. embassies in these countries also allow her to advance its interests and values in real time, detect opportunities and challenges to these interests. The NSS mentioned to consolidate democratic and market reforms in the newly independent states. It repeated that the START I treaty of 1994 helped Kazakhstan to become a non-nuclear weapon state and the START II treaty of 1996 prohibited land-based missiles from being deployed with more than one warhead and eliminate heavy land-based missiles entirely [15].

#### **Phase 2: 2001-2009**

The NSS of 2002 vowed to strengthen the U.S. energy security and the shared prosperity of the global economy by working with its allies, trading partners, energy producers to expand the sources and types of global energy supplied, in Central Asia. It also stated that the U.S. would also continue to work with its partners to develop cleaner and more energy efficient technologies [15]. The NSS of 2006 mentioned that South and Central Asia is a region of great strategic importance where American interests and values are engaged as never before. It further stated that the U.S. goal is for the entire region of South and Central Asia to be democratic, prosperous, and at peace which can serve as a foundation for deeper engagement throughout Central Asia. It highlighted the role of Afghanistan as a land-bridge between South and Central Asia, connecting these two vital regions. The document emphasised that Central Asia was an enduring priority for the U.S. foreign policy and its foreign policy for each of the five countries differ. It repeated the U.S. larger strategy of democracy promotion, expansion of free-market reforms, diversifying global sources of energy, enhancing security and winning the war on terror. War on terror was the new addition in 2006. It also lamented U.S. efforts to continue working with Kazakhstan on market reforms needed to join the WTO which would strengthen the rule of law and honour the intellectual property rights that sustain the modern knowledge economy, to remove tariffs subsidies and other trade barriers that distort global markets and harm the world's poor. It further stated that since 2002, the world had seen extraordinary progress in the expansion

of freedom, democracy, and human dignity and the ‘colour revolutions’ in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan have brought new hope for freedom across the Eurasian landmass [15].

**Phase 3: 2010-2018**

The NSS of 2010 neither mentioned Central Asia nor any of the five ‘stans’. The NSS of 2015 mentioned to promote strategic stability, combat terrorism, and advance regional economic integration in South and Central Asia [15]. The NSS of 2017 majorly talked about the terrorist threats emanating from the Middle East. It also mentioned emerging threats from Pakistan and insisted on the need to take decisive action against militant and terrorist groups operating from its soil. The document mentioned the U.S. commitment to

supporting Afghan government and security forces in the fight against Taliban, al-Qaida, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other terrorists. The U.S. will also continue to work with the Central Asian states to guarantee access to the region to support its counter-terrorism efforts further. It further stated that the U.S. interests in Central Asia include countering terrorist threats, preventing cross-border terrorism, preventing nuclear weapons, technology, and materials from falling into the hands of terrorists. It mentioned that the U.S. seeks “Central Asian states that are resilient against domination by rival powers are resistant to becoming Jihadist safe heavens, and prioritise reforms”. It also stated that the U.S. “will work with the Central Asian states to guarantee access to the region to support our counterterrorism efforts” [15].

**Table-4: No. of times mention of Countries/ Regions ‘Around Central Asia’ in the National Security Strategy Documents of the U.S. 1991-2018**

Countries/ Regions	1991	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2002	2006	2010	2015	2017
Russia	-	3	19	33	42	30	39	43	52	19	17	14	15	25
China	7	5	10	16	25	23	47	31	53	18	28	10	12	33
India	2	-	3	3	3	4	12	5	13	16	11	9	6	8
Pakistan	3	-	2	2	2	4	10	7	16	5	9	15	2	8
Afghanistan	2	1	1	1	1	1	6	2	4	6	18	25	13	7
Iran	2	-	8	7	13	10	21	16	21	1	16	14	11	17
Iraq	19	2	10	12	17	11	23	22	25	1	57	33	15	7
Persian Gulf	30	9	6	7	8	8	12	10	14	1	1	2	1	1
Middle East	8	9	8	10	14	15	15	13	15	1	12	9	11	12
Caucasus	-	-	-	-	-	1	3	4	1	-	-	1	1	-
Caspian	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	11	5	1	-	-	-	-
South Asia	3	3	6	6	5	7	10	10	14	1	2	1	2	2

Source: Calculated from the State of the Union Addresses Archive, Online available at: <http://nssarchive.us/>

Russia, China, Iraq, Iran, Persian Gulf and the Middle East were widely mentioned in the NSS documents till mid-1990s. Since 1996 to 2000 Caucasus, Caspian and South Asia regions were also discussed to some extent. One finds notable mention of Afghanistan, Iran, India and Pakistan along with the others in the NSS documents 2000 onwards.

**Conclusions: Locating the ‘Central Asian Problematic’**

The State of the Union address and the National Security Strategy document are prepared with certain objectives but present only a general idea and a broader picture in the form of a synopsis. They broadly depict the U.S. foreign policy objectives and following institutions of the statecraft namely Department of State, Department of Defense, Bureau for South and Central Asian Affairs and others transform these objectives into action. The terminology used in these sources depicts significance/insignificance of a particular subject/object. Usage of the name of a country or a geographical region thus determines its

importance for the U.S. statecraft. In a broader sense, more a country/region is debated; more are its chances of being significant to pursue the foreign policy objectives. Sometimes, there are few regions which are automatically added to the policy. Central Asia is one such region which gained significance in the U.S. foreign policy – defined more by situations around the region. The U.S. policy for Central Asia, largely, is a subset of the wider American policies practised around the region and that the ‘practice on ground’ strategies are not reflected in the State of the Union addresses and National Security Strategy documents.

Analysis of both the sources combined, Central Asian Problematic appears in layers – further coalesced by securitisation of different issues – which abide continuity and change. Although U.S. foreign policy for all the five Central Asian countries differs, the commonalities in the policies weave the Central Asian Problematic. This problematic is thus determined by “security” of the U.S. national interests in the region primarily threats emanating due to the regional

challenges. These threats can further be divided into two categories: high intensity problematic and the low intensity problematic.

### High Intensity Problematic

With the threat of communism gone, the widely debated issue in the presidential remarks in the early years of independence was to promote and strengthen democracy in Central Asia and contain the political instability. Besides this, threat emanating from the presence of conventional, deactivation and complete elimination of nuclear arms and safe storage of the recovered nuclear material and technology remained the top priority. Fear of potential risk of theft and smuggling of the nuclear material by the organised criminals and terrorist organizations, the spread of the WMDs (nuclear, chemical or biological), and dismantlement of the intercontinental ballistic missiles also remained highlighted. Another significant issue which was regularly mentioned was to curb aggressive nationalism and ethnic hatred; at the same time to counter cross-border terrorism and to support counterterrorism efforts. Besides this, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism around Central Asia was also an issue of concern. It is believed that Central Asia is resistant to become Jihadist safe heaven, but still, the growing threat coming from the Middle East is worrying. Moreover, "several high profile international terrorist attacks over the past year – the Istanbul airport bombing, the St. Petersburg metro bombing, and the Stockholm truck attack – were committed by extremists with ties to Central Asia" [9]. The analysed sources repeatedly mentioned counter terrorism measures as guarantee to access the region. Regional economic integration and rise in the drug trade and organised crime were also often debated.

### Low Intensity Problematic

There were various security threats associated with the U.S. national interests which kept on appearing and disappearing from either of the two sources – put in low intensity problematic. Moreover, most of them are the recent phenomenon, especially debated during the Bush and Obama administration. Besides war on terror, these include issues of energy security (cleaner and more energy efficient technology) and resource depletion, environmental degradation, refugee migration, market reforms – free markets to stimulate foreign and domestic private investments besides removing tariffs and other trade barriers.

The 'alternate perspective' submits that the significance of Central Asia for the U.S. foreign policy is vital yet relatively limited. The level of significance of Central Asian countries for the U.S. foreign policy can also be assessed from the fact that since independence in 1991 no American President has ever paid even a single visit to any of the five 'stans'. The U.S. pursues its foreign policy objectives aggressively

whenever a particular threat challenges its national interests in Central Asia. However, 'security of the U.S. interests' will continue to play a vital role in Washington's relationship with Central Asian countries. Moreover, the U.S. has Russia, China, Afghanistan and now Pakistan to manage before Central Asia. The policy securitised since 2001 (due to proximity to Afghanistan & now ISIS), shows no sign of any other direction even under the Trump administration. In the absence of any concrete Central Asian policy, previous problematic continue to exist in future also.

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