



Lesson/Discussion Plan: Central Asia

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NOTE: Those taking this course will need access to the internet and/or local library.

Subject of Lesson:

What exactly is “Central Asia” and why is it of such strategic importance to so many countries – from the U.S. to the Middle East (including its neighbors Iran and Afghanistan, but also Iraq and Saudi Arabia), to its powerful neighbors China and Russia – and even Japan, Turkey, Pakistan & India, and the European Union. This course will help students identify this area on a map, will provide a brief historical overview of the region, and highlight some of the major economic, political, military and diplomatic trends – including its strategic location for NATO and US military bases, the increased competition for the region’s natural resources, Muslim and minority group influence, and the rise (and fall) of democracy movements in several of these countries since the break-up of the Soviet Union. By the end of this class, students should be able to identify the following countries on a map, and AT LEAST three critical facts about each: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan. Students should also know what countries surround the region, and be able to identify key geographic features – including the location of the Caspian Sea and Aral Sea. Those teaching this course may also want to include some facts and information about history of the Silk Road, and the history of the Soviet Union and its break-up. Also suggested – provide some information about some of countries on the other side of the Caspian Sea – including Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. *A short map-quiz is strongly suggested as a way to reinforce what's been learned in class.*

Instructional Materials/ Useful Websites:

*Great Decisions 2006 - Foreign Policy Association

*Map of the Various Countries in Central Asia

(http://www.fpa2.org/maps/fpa_world_atlas/norm.htm/asia.htm)

(<http://www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/maps/Caucasus%20and%20Central%20Asia.gif>)

*United Nations Website

*Website links to the U.N. Missions to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan

*Podcasts on BBC & CNN websites (Keyword Search: Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Caspian Sea, Aral Sea, Oil Companies in Central Asia, Pipelines, China in Central Asia, Afghanistan's border)

*EurasiaNet (<http://www.eurasianet.org/>)

*CIA Fact book (https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/Fact_book)

Reference Materials / Hand-outs:

*A print-out of a map of the region for each student is strongly encouraged

*A possible starting point for information on these countries is print-outs the CIA Fact book to share with students in class.

*Print-out the most recent stories on the region from various news sources as a way to stimulate dialogue and debate – one possible source is EurasiaNet (<http://www.eurasianet.org/>)

Additional Resources/ Suggested Hand-outs:

*History of Central Asia, Hartford Web Publishing
(<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/53/index.html>)

*Harvard University, Central Asia Department
(<http://centasia.fas.harvard.edu/>)

*Wikipedia has some good maps/diagrams of the Silk Road
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_Road

*Stephen Cohen on the fall of the Soviet Union

* Robert Kaplan (of "The Atlantic"): Eastward to Tartary (Central Asia)

* "The Great Game" (Wikipedia entry, book with same title) on the history of Central Asia

* Daniel Yergin "The Prize" - great book about the oil issues in the region

**"Oil on the Brain: Adventures from the Pump to the Pipeline" (Margonelli)*Website for oil issues research: Cambridge Energy Research Associates*Imperial History of the Middle East
(<http://www.mapsofwar.com/ind/imperial-history.html>)

*“The politics of U.S. Bases Abroad” by Alexander Cooley, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2005

*“Let them Drink Oil”, Donald M. Snow, Chapter 14, *Cases in International Relations*

*US State Department - USAID In Eurasia (http://www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/)

*Map of Ethno-linguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region
(<http://www.geocities.com/SouthBeach/Marina/6150/ethno.jpg>)

Lesson Outline / Discussion:

This lesson should begin showing the FPA Video - “Great Decisions 2006 - Central Asia” Then start with a map – and the concept of “Geography as Destiny”. Give a brief overview of the history of the region, especially its history since the break-up of the Soviet Union (note: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are all former Soviet Republics). You may also want to include some mention of the areas prominence as a trade route along the silk road that connected China with the Western World (some mention of the Greek, Roman and Persian influence in this area is strongly suggested). Once the region is put in geographic and historical perspective, then move onto some of the economic, cultural, and political issues of each of these countries now faces.

Special attention should be paid to some of the trans-national issues currently affecting the region, including ongoing ties to the former Soviet Empire, and some of the ongoing and emerging conflicts between each country and with some of their key strategic neighbors – especially Russia and the rise of Chinese and U.S. influence, and the role Iran continues to play in the region.

A great deal of attention should be paid to the natural resources in the area (for example, the new sources of oil and gas discovered in the 1990's in the Caspian sea and how that could impact Azerbaijan, and other deposits of petroleum/natural gas/coal in Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan's huge natural gas reserves), also the role of private business in the region's economic growth infrastructure development (especially oil companies, and the huge boom in pipe-line construction in countries like Uzbekistan), communications in the region (including media outlets and newspapers, and the rise of the internet and access to information in the region), the political structures of each country (which ones are autocratic, democracy movements in this region since the fall of the Soviet Empire), Human rights issues and how that has impacted diplomatic relations (especially in Uzbekistan), Illicit trade issues (prostitution and human trafficking, narcotics trade), Health issues (increased standard of living, impact of AIDS/HIV). The teacher should also strive to touch on some of the internal conflicts – especially minority issues and religious extremism. *It is suggested that students do some reading before coming to class – at the very least have a downloaded copy of a map of the region beforehand.*

Suggested Talking Points:

- 1) Democracy promotion in Central Asia (Has it worked? Not worked? And Why? Include a brief overview of the current political structures of each country here)
- 2) Competition for Central Asia's natural resources (The role of private industry and market liberalization to the regions growth, China role in development in this region and access to Central Asia's resources, U.S. interests in the region – are we meeting our missing our goals there)
- 3) Central Asia's strategic role in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (NATO and US interests in the region, include some mention of the loss of the U.S. in Uzbekistan in 2005, ongoing concerns about Iran influence, border issues with Afghanistan and illicit trade – including heroin and opium, human trafficking and prostitution, the use of Central Asia to transport weapons)
- 4) Changes in Central Asia since the break-up of the former Soviet Union
- 5) The rise of ethnic minorities and the potential for religious extremism (address the large Muslim population in the region, and the ongoing ethnic and cultural ties in Tajikistan in particular to Iran)
- 6) Human Rights challenges in the region (research the following websites for more information on this – Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, U.S. State Department, Foreign Policy Association)
- 7) U.S. foreign policy objectives in the region, and some of the economic and diplomatic challenges the U.S. may face (As always, students are encouraged to think outside-of-the-box, and potentially come up with their own policy solutions to some of these concerns)

Homework:

Each student is required to prepare either a 800 word (3+ page) report on a topic related to Central Asia – either a report on a specific country OR one of the suggested talking points. There must be AT LEAST 4 sources used in the creation of this report – two academic (and wikipedia is not allowed) and at least one government or historic website must be used as a potential resource for this report (either a United Nations source, information from the CIA Factbook, or information from these countries diplomatic websites, preferably all of the above). Finding immigrants from these counties, or policy experts to interview as “primary sources” is strongly suggested (if possible). The use of multi-media (either photo, video, audio interviews or power-point presentations) is also encouraged. Extra credit will be given for especially well researched reports with accurate footnotes and the use of multiple-sources for information, and especially for those students who suggest policy solutions.