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Proposal for Grand Strategies Research - Summer 2007

China's Energy Security: The Central Asia Question

This summer I plan to evaluate China's energy security in the province of Xinjiang and in neighboring Kazakhstan. My focus is on oil-related transport and development issues. Gal Luft, the co-director of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security (IAGS) has agreed to take me on as a Fellow and supervise my research. I will investigate the presence of China's military, government officials and private enterprises in the two regions. My larger goal is to work towards improving U.S.-Chinese dialogue on the sensitive issue of energy security.

My academic and extracurricular work has prepared me well at the undergraduate level for this type of research. I speak Chinese and have traveled alone in China as well as with family in Russia and the Muslim world. Through Yale's Directed Independent Language Study program I am currently studying Uyghur, the Turkic language spoken in Xinjiang and eastern Kazakhstan. I will have the advantage of traveling with Jing Su, a Chinese graduate student in the Yale Forestry and Environmental School. We will work side by side for six weeks in July and August, albeit on separate projects.

A new pipeline completed in 2005 from central Kazakhstan to Xinjiang is part of a directional change in the "energy orientation" of Chinese policymakers. In an effort to reduce China's dependency on ocean-going tankers (whose movements are ultimately controlled by the U.S. Navy), Beijing is looking west to overland routes from the rich fields in western Kazakhstan, Russia and Iran. My goal in Xinjiang is to determine the ways in which Kazakh oil imports (and the accompanying infrastructure) are affecting industrialization and development. The province, though sparsely populated, is growing rapidly and becoming increasingly controversial as Uigher separatists, foreign oil refiners, Han migrants from the East and environmentalists all vie for control. In Xinjiang I will seek out government officials, visit oil refineries and examine oil transportation systems. In part through Ms. Su's connections, I am obtaining

invitation letters from the Xinjiang and Gansu central governments. I will also have access to the top executive of SINOPEC (China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation) for China's western region.

In Kazakhstan I will evaluate China's economic and military presence and compare it to that of Russia and the United States. I am in the process of contacting a number of private sector energy-related U.S. firms. For example, Sarah Helmstadter, who formerly ran USAID's project development in Kazakhstan and is now CEO of the Chase Strategy consulting firm, will provide information and help me research the American role in Kazakhstan and how it is changing as China becomes a major player there. As part of this aspect of my project, I will work extensively with the U.S. Embassy in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

From Almaty we will fly to Beijing, where I will study the development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), an association of central Asian countries originally established to solve border disputes. It has evolved into a potential counter-balance to NATO, one that focuses on energy security, conducts joint military exercises and now includes India and Iran as observers. As the overland oil route becomes increasingly important to China's energy security, I want to investigate China's new diplomatic ties with these central Asian countries and evaluate the future of the SCO. In addition to analyzing available documents, I plan to visit the Secretariat in Beijing and interview SCO officials, including the Kazakh representative.

In light of the subject of my research, the areas where I will be working and the nature of the people that I intend to interview, success will depend on flexibility. I will pursue whatever avenues of research have the most potential to contribute substantively to the literature. When I return, I will work with Mr. Luft to describe my conclusions in a paper that will be published on IAGS' website. Mr. Luft is interested in featuring my report in an event around central Asian energy issues. In the fall, I intend to write my senior essay around this research project.