The Crisis of Governance in Central Asia
Panel Discussion

with
David Merkel
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs

Sean Roberts
Associate Professor of the Practice of International Affairs and Director of the International Development Studies Program at George Washington University.

Philip Shishkin:
Reuters correspondent

David Short (moderator)
Senior Counsel, Trade & International Affairs, for FedEx Express

Since emerging as independent states from the ruins of the Soviet Union 20 years ago, the five Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have struggled with the fundamental question of statehood: how to govern their societies fairly and effectively.

Guided by autocrats, Central Asia has produced staggering amounts of corruption and human-rights abuses, majorly contributing to the region’s instability. As evidenced by recent events in the Middle East and Northern Africa—and by Central Asia’s own roller coaster of revolutions in Kyrgyzstan—seemingly unassailable dictatorships can crumble quickly, with unpredictable consequences.

Central Asia, with its vast natural resources, also occupies a strategically important neighborhood: between China, where the country’s growing economic and geopolitical gravity is pulling the region into its orbit; Russia and its newly assertive foreign policy, which seeks to reclaim its economic and strategic supremacy in its old Central Asian dominion; and Afghanistan, where the West has spent nearly a decade waging war and where the military campaign has thrust the United States, and to a lesser extent Western Europe, deep into Central Asian affairs.

Within this geopolitical context, our speakers will discuss Central Asia’s governance challenges, the region’s strategic importance to its neighbors’ energy security, and its role in regional solutions to conflict in Afghanistan.

David Merkel is a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs and a former Director for Central Asia at the National Security Council.

Sean Roberts is Associate Professor of the Practice of International Affairs and Director of the International Development Studies Program at George Washington University. In 1998–2000 and
2002–2006, he worked in Central Asia on USAID democracy programs.

**Philip Shishkin** is a correspondent at Reuters. He served as an Asia Society Bernard Schwartz Fellow during 2011, writing the report, *Central Asia’s Crisis of Governance*. He spent 10 years as a staff reporter of *The Wall Street Journal*, running their Baghdad bureau in 2006 and 2007; he has written extensively about Central Asia.

**David Short** (moderator) is Senior Counsel, Trade & International Affairs, for FedEx Express, building and enhancing the company’s relationships with governments of more than 220 countries/territories. From 2003–2006, he led negotiations between FedEx and the Government of Kazakhstan for the establishment of a Central Asian Hub.

**Friday, April 20, 2012**
**9:00-11:00 am**
**Lindner Commons, 6th Floor**
**1957 E Street N.W.**
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