

CENTRAL ASIA:
FAULT LINES IN THE NEW SECURITY MAP

4 July 2001



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the independent states that emerged in Central Asia had to begin almost from scratch in building both military forces and security strategies. The unified position of the USSR was soon replaced by sharply divergent security arrangements, corresponding to the different strategic interests and paths of development of these new states. As a result, there has been more confrontation than cooperation. This is particularly true of the three states that are the focus of this report: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

There are three ongoing military confrontations in the region. First, in Afghanistan the Taliban movement controls more than 90 per cent of the country and is fighting against the United Front to control the remaining territory. Secondly, Islamist rebels based in Afghanistan have been fighting to overturn the government of Uzbekistan and their incursions have spilled over into Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Thirdly, in Tajikistan although the peace process there has largely achieved an end to conflict, some armed groups continue hostilities from within poorly controlled parts of the country, including even the outskirts of the capital Dushanbe, or from the territory of Uzbekistan. These security problems suppress economic development and discourage the countries from embarking on much-needed political reforms.

The Central Asian states have made high-profile moves toward cooperative regional security structures in which outside powers most often play the leadership role, notably the CIS

Collective Security Treaty led by Russia, and more recently the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation led by China and Russia. Within these frameworks, concrete steps toward security cooperation and joint action on the ground have amounted to very little. The will and the financial resources needed to implement cooperation have not been forthcoming, and in some cases may simply not exist. The stark fact remains that the Central Asian states have not cooperated well with one another, either because they have not made it a high priority or because they have perceived it to be in their interest not to do so.

Indeed, rather than cooperating, the Central Asian states in the post-Soviet decade have engaged in a series of serious violations of one another's security interests. The list of points of contention has only grown following the increase in Islamist militancy in 1999. Uzbekistan allowed or supported armed incursions into Tajikistan and harboured dissidents whom Tajikistan accuses of treason. Tajikistan likewise permitted the presence of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) on its territory, from where it has conducted repeated incursions into Uzbekistan. While supposedly searching for IMU targets, Uzbekistan bombed Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, causing numerous civilian casualties. Uzbekistan mined undemarcated borders between it and the other two countries, resulting in dozens of fatalities. Uzbekistan also tried to force territorial concessions from some of its neighbours and unilaterally took control of territories to which it has a marginal claim. In response to Uzbekistan's actions on the borders, Kyrgyz officials

threatened to reclaim territories that were ceded to Uzbekistan in the early Soviet period.

No outside power is sufficiently interested in the region to make major investments in its security. Their interests are often very limited, focusing on the potential of this region to propagate instability in “more important” areas through the drug trade or the spread of Islamist radicalism. Each also has certain special concerns. U.S. involvement has been partially aimed at strengthening the capacity and independence of the Central Asian states, with the goal of reducing Russia’s influence, but other U.S. policies have given priority to particular countries, which has undermined regional cooperation. Russia’s policy has been oriented toward maintaining its influence in the region as a means of protecting its security interests. This has also resulted in regional divisions, where, for example, Uzbekistan resists Russian involvement and Tajikistan embraces it. China’s interests in the region focus around preventing Central Asian nations from being used as a base for Uyghur groups seeking an independent homeland in Xinjiang province. Little regard has been paid to the broader spectrum of security concerns of Central Asian states themselves. As a consequence, multilateral arrangements have generally proven ineffective, and virtually all relations — cooperative or confrontational — operate mostly on a bilateral basis.

Chronic shortages of resources and a very complex regional security environment — wedged between two major powers and sitting next to one of the most unstable countries in the world — will remain facts of life for the Central Asian states. This makes it essential that these states give priority to improving intra-regional relations and finding common ground for closer cooperation. These nations have tended to exaggerate the threats from their neighbours and from exiled militant groups while paying too little attention to issues such as human rights abuses, repression of religious freedom and poverty that all foment unrest at home. No outside actor is in a position to resolve any of the major security problems of the region, yet the engagement of outside governments and international organisations can play a vital role in facilitating the building of effective institutions and reducing some of the major risks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Central Asian Governments:

1. Governments should give the highest priority to boosting regional cooperation, while avoiding unilateral measures aimed at pressuring or undermining the stability of their neighbours such as border closures or cross-border incursions.
2. Governments should reinvigorate joint border commissions and the multilateral approaches to border disputes that have been successful in solving frontier disputes with China. There should be no attempt to change borders by unilateral demarcation.
3. The Central Asian countries should form a regional security structure that includes them alone and that begins with the modest goals of information sharing, coordination of security initiatives and confidence building.
4. Tajikistan should disarm and integrate those field commanders who do not have a role in the coalition government so as to reduce the risk of its territory being used in attacks against its neighbours.
5. Uzbekistan should prevent low-level officials in the border control, police and security services from harassing and extorting bribes from people crossing borders or travelling in the country.
6. Governments should work to reduce grievances of their own minorities and avoid intensifying problems with minorities in neighbouring countries.
7. Governments should foster more professional, less corrupt armed forces by boosting civilian controls and oversight, enhancing command structures and improving training.
8. Governments should rationalise their militaries to ensure that troop numbers do not exceed what can be paid for under current budgets and should improve conditions for service personnel.

To External Governments:

9. NATO members and other donors should expand Partnership for Peace and other military exchange and education programs to foster military discipline, professionalism, and observance of conflict prevention principles.
10. European nations, the U.S. and Japan should carry the strong and consistent message that stability depends on guaranteeing human rights and religious freedom and give no security assistance to governments that undermine regional security by abusing human rights.

Brussels/Osh, 4 July 2001



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I. INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Soviet Union left a fragmented security system in Central Asia that was divided among the five new states that emerged there. In 1992, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan began planning their own security systems based on remnants of the Soviet military that were haphazardly scattered across the region. These had been originally developed to defend a single country from a different set of threats and were built with the expectation of a continuing flow of supplies, personnel and direction from other parts of the Soviet Union. Military production facilities in Central Asia generally contributed only parts to systems that were assembled in the core of the Soviet Union. Similarly, the fragments of the military left on the territories of these countries were often useless and unstable. In the subsequent nine years, the Central Asian states have struggled to develop infrastructure, train personnel and increase preparedness. These nations have also redrawn the military map of the region as they have defined their new security concerns.

The security arrangements of these new states have turned out to be as much a reaction to challenges from one another as from common threats from outside the region. Despite a great deal of fanfare from their leaders about newly formed cooperative security arrangements, in reality there is very little will — indeed, often very little basis — for cooperation among these states. Some of the obstacles to cooperation stem from factors that may diminish with time, such as

the process of establishing sovereignty or the assertiveness of individual leaders, whereas others may be expected to grow, such as differences in political systems and economic strength.

This report surveys the differing and sometimes contradictory security needs of the three Central Asian states that ICG assesses as most at risk of conflict, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Part II), the growing military capacities of these three states (Part III), the elements of the broader security environment (Parts IV and V), and the attempts to date to adopt a coordinated regional approach to security (Part VI).

Each of the countries has been struggling to build its military capacity. All face considerable obstacles, not least of which are their weak economies and competing priorities. Uzbekistan has made the greatest investment in the military, the security services and border controls. Tajikistan's military is largely a product of the civil war, with the former pro-government and United Tajik Opposition (UTO) militias composing a now largely unified force. Kyrgyzstan invested only a small sum in its military and border guards until the shock of incursions by militant Islamists in 1999.¹

It has only been in response to the growing regional threat of Islamist militancy that security cooperation has really come onto the agenda. Yet conflicting approaches and interests undermine

¹ See: *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilisation and Regional Security*, ICG Asia Report, No. 14, 1 March 2001. All ICG reports are available at: <http://www.crisisweb.org/>.

the impulse to build collective security. The absence of effective structures for regional security cooperation means that issues are not dealt with and problems could grow, leading to a wider destabilisation of the region. This risk of instability has drawn some concern from Russia, the U.S. and China, which have become engaged on a bilateral or multilateral basis to reinforce the security of Central Asian states.

The extent to which these powers are willing and able to assist in ensuring stability is limited. U.S. security interests in the region are dominated by concerns about terrorism being spread under the sponsorship of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, as well as the possibility of a broad deterioration of regional security due to Islamist militancy. This is the main concern for Russia although it also views the region as a potential sphere of influence. Some Russian strategic thinkers consider that the old boundaries of the former Soviet Union form a more natural line of defence than Russia's long and open border with Kazakhstan.

Russia's strategic interests are also tied to historical and economic interests in the region and the presence of large Russian diaspora, particularly in Kazakhstan, where Russians constitute one of the largest components of the population. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are both geographically removed, and while Russia is an important trading partner for them, their trade is not particularly significant for Russia. While Russian troops and border guards have been withdrawn from almost all of the former Soviet republics, they maintain a significant presence in Tajikistan where they played a crucial role in stabilising parts of the country following the outbreak of civil war in 1992.

China's security interests in the region are a desire for general stability so that it can reduce its troop levels on its western frontier and a commitment from the Central Asian governments to prevent Uyghur separatists carrying out incursion or smuggling arms into the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region.

II. APPROACHES TO SECURITY: THREAT PERCEPTIONS

Since independence, each of the Central Asian states has followed a very different path, widening divisions that were minor when they were first transformed from Soviet republics. Gradually, rifts have emerged, stemming from divergent circumstances, resources, perceptions, and approaches.

The issue of politicised Islam, for example, stands as a challenge in each country but perceptions and approaches are not only different but mutually incompatible. In Tajikistan, former opposition Islamists have been brought into the regime, setting a precedent and giving Islamism a credibility that causes uneasiness in neighbouring states. In Uzbekistan, there is no officially accepted role for Islamist politics, and thousands of people who have a different view have been arrested -- driving those with this orientation underground, into exile, and increasingly toward radical militancy. Kyrgyzstan shares Uzbekistan's impulse to contain Islamism, but at the same time recognises that a mounting crackdown on political opposition by its neighbour will feed the radicalism that might directly threaten Kyrgyzstan.

Similarly, all three countries remain heavily dependent on Russia as their main source of arms, but each country has a different vision of Russia's role. Uzbekistan has been outspokenly resistant to Russian involvement, while Kyrgyzstan has resisted Russia's direct presence while maintaining close links, and Tajikistan has enjoyed the status almost of a Russian client state with a heavy military presence and close ties between the Russian military and the Tajik government. All countries have been offered an outstretched hand by the U.S., which seeks to wean them away from Russian dominance. Uzbekistan has taken U.S. aid enthusiastically, while Tajikistan has hesitated strongly, due to Russian displeasure. Kyrgyzstan sent its Foreign Minister to the NATO anniversary summit in 1999 while simultaneously supporting Russia's

condemnation of the NATO bombing campaign in Serbia.²

A. UZBEKISTAN: SEEKING ORDER IN A DANGEROUS NEIGHBOURHOOD

Uzbekistan has borders with five countries, each presenting different security challenges. Few of these are 'natural' geographic borders and virtually none make readily defensible frontiers. Only its short southern boundary with Afghanistan was fortified during Soviet times with the remainder generally not even properly demarcated; now most of the country's perimeter is coming to be fortified though not always mutually demarcated with its neighbours.

Much has been made of the threat that Afghanistan poses to Uzbekistan and its neighbours, with some predicting that, if the Taliban gains control of the north of the country, they can be expected to continue their battle northward. The recent contacts which Uzbekistan has made with the Taliban suggest either that they do not actually perceive such a threat, or they are seeking to negotiate it away.³ Meanwhile, the more likely short- to medium-term risks stem from the possibility of a flood of refugees if the Taliban conquer the northern territories, and especially from the use of Afghan territories as a staging area for incursions into Uzbekistan by that country's own militants.

On the borders with Uzbekistan's four other neighbours, the greatest security threats come from the unilateral actions — most often by Uzbekistan — to fortify the frontier. This has resulted in a growing catalogue of incidents ranging from shootings to mine explosions.

A more fundamental challenge derives from the weakness of neighbouring states, particularly Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which makes Uzbekistan vulnerable to spillover effects. Uzbekistan has taken steps to isolate itself from Tajikistan's civil war. There are also concerns about the possible repetition of the outbreaks of

inter-ethnic violence which occurred in 1990 between Uzbek and Kyrgyz inhabitants of Kyrgyzstan's southern territories. Such violence could spark inter-ethnic and inter-state confrontations in the heart of the Ferghana Valley, which runs through these three countries. Russia's continued military role in the region has prompted additional concern and led Tashkent to sever some ties with Moscow. Most notably, in 1999 Uzbekistan dropped out of the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST) and joined the CIS subgroup, GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova), which constitutes a counterbalance to Russia's dominant influence within the CIS.

A much more immediate security concern in the country is the possibility of domestic opposition turning to militant action to topple the government. As opposition political parties had all been repressed or gone into exile in the early 1990s, in the latter part of the decade opposition became channelled increasingly through underground Islamist movements. On numerous occasions President Karimov declared that the country was seriously threatened by Islamic fundamentalists.⁴ In response to that perceived threat, the authorities launched a broad campaign to apprehend anyone suspected of involvement in or sympathy with any religious opposition movement.⁵ The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, (IMU), which has stated its aim to establish an Islamic state in Uzbekistan through force, is considered the most dangerous Islamist movement.

The IMU fighters number only 2,000-3,000, not all of whom were even engaged in the recent hostilities. The actual impact of their incursions is quite limited and they are not likely to topple the regime soon. But the actions of the IMU have dealt a blow to the government's prestige as well

² 'Kyrgyz Foreign Minister attends NATO 50th anniversary summit,' *Vechernyi Bishkek*, 22 April 1999, p. 5, cited by BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit.

³ *Central Asia Briefing: Recent Violence: Causes and Consequences*, ICG Briefing Paper. 18 October 2000 Osh/Brussels, p. 9.

⁴ ITAR-TASS, 14 April 1999 and 15 June 2000; Sanobar Shermatova, 'Alliance against the Wahhabis: Islam Karimov secures the support of the Kremlin in the fight against Islamic Fundamentalists on the southern flank of the CIS,' *Moskovskie novosti*, no. 18, 10-17 May 1998, cited in FBIS-SOV-98-148, article ID: drsov05281998001145, document ID: 0etw144p02u9gqz.

⁵ Pannier, Bruce, 'Uzbekistan,' in Ustina Markus and Daniel Nelson, eds., *Brassey's Eurasian Security Yearbook, 2001* (Dulles, Va.: Brassey's, forthcoming in 2001).

as its image as an invincible keeper of order. All indications point to a likelihood of new incursions in 2001 on a larger scale and with enhanced military force. These developments have served to focus international attention on the problem of Islamist militancy in the region. Some officials in Uzbekistan's neighbours argue, however, that the actual dangers posed have been exaggerated to justify repression of all forms of opposition and all non-approved Islamic organisations.⁶

While Tashkent has stepped up security measures to protect the country from an Islamist threat and justifies its hard-line policies as a necessary response to subversion, there is a general consensus among regional observers that the emergence of militant Islamist groups in the region is a reaction to such policies, and that they are the cause, not the solution, of the problem. The IMU did not spring up in Taliban Afghanistan, but in Uzbekistan. Tashkent's policy for dealing with any potential opposition was so forceful that by mid-1998, human rights groups such as Amnesty International, Helsinki Watch, and the Centre for Monitoring Central Asia were reporting that thousands of people had been arrested on suspicion of subversive activities, often on very weak evidence. The country report on human rights practices in 2000 issued by the U.S. Department of State indicated that 63,000 people are now officially incarcerated in Uzbek prisons, and stories of abuse, torture and forced confessions in jails are widespread. Talib Yakubov, the General Secretary of the Human Rights Foundation in Uzbekistan believes the number of prisoners is much higher than the official figure, placing the number at 300,000, and saying that at least 40 per cent of those can be considered prisoners of conscience.⁷

⁶ Tsentral'no-Aziatskoe Agentstvo Politicheskikh Issledovaniy (API), *Voенно-politicheskie konflikty v Tsentral'noi Azii* [Military-political conflicts in Central Asia] (Almaty, 2000), pp. 53-58; In an interview with the Governor of Batken Province, Mamat Zaribovich Aibalaev on 17 April 2001, the governor said he believed the IMU threat was greatly exaggerated. Many political observers in Kyrgyzstan feel the Uzbekistan government has been using the issue to justify increased control over the media and other institutions.

⁷ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, *Uzbekistan: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2000* [online] (Washington, DC, February 2001), available at:

B. KYRGYZSTAN: ACCIDENTAL TARGET OF ISLAMIST MILITANCY

Prior to the first IMU incursions into southern Kyrgyzstan in 1999, the government was so unconcerned by security risks that military preparedness was a very low priority. A few issues loomed, but only as medium- to long-term concerns, notably the risk of internal ethnic unrest and the unresolved border disputes that had earlier led to tensions between the Soviet Union and China. In order to address the latter, the Shanghai Five in 1997 resolved most border issues between China and its former Soviet neighbours (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation).⁸

Most of the border with China lies in remote and unpopulated territory in some of the highest mountains in the world, and it seemed that this matter could be dealt with easily until internal Kyrgyz opposition to the agreement arose in recent months following the revelation of a secret deal under which Kyrgyzstan was obliged to make major territorial concessions.⁹ Some Kyrgyz see China as threatening because its population is 250 times larger than that of Kyrgyzstan. As a result, although China has become a major trading partner with annual trade turnover worth U.S.\$177.6 million in 2000,¹⁰ and

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/eur/index.cfm?docid+858>; "Crackdown against Islam swells Uzbekistan's prison population," *EurasiaNet* [online] (New York: OSI), 28 March 2001, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/recaps/articles/eav032801.shtml>. Other sources indicate that the confirmed number of people arrested for political reasons is significantly fewer — in the range of 5,000 to 10,000. All estimates are open to doubt because the government does not allow organisations like the Red Cross to access prisons. What is certain is that Uzbekistan is among the world's top countries in terms of political detainees per capita. Also *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilisation and Regional Security*. ICG Report No. 14 Osh Brussels. 1 March 2001.

⁸ 'Border agreements ratified,' *RFE/RL Newsline*, 15 May 1997.

⁹ Some have speculated that Russia put pressure on Kyrgyzstan to accept the burden of concessions when Russia and Kyrgyzstan were together in the common Shanghai Five negotiating team.

¹⁰ Kabar News Agency (Bishkek), 'Central Asia: China-Central Asia: Problems in mutual trade can be overcome,' *The Times of Central Asia* [online] (Bishkek), 3 April 2001, available at: <http://www.times.kg/?D+print&aid+1015847>.

there has been active development of transport links over the Tien Shan and Pamir mountains, there also has been some effort to restrict Chinese citizens and interests in the country. Another irritant in relations stems from the presence of a large Uyghur diaspora in Kyrgyzstan that China fears might support the separatists waging a militant campaign in China.¹¹ Kyrgyzstan, meanwhile, has willingly accommodated China's demand to suppress Uyghur oppositionists.¹² In all, there are over half a dozen Uyghur nationalist groups active in the former Soviet Central Asian states, particularly in Kazakhstan, but all of the governments have denied them any official support and have sometimes cooperated with China in suppressing their Uyghur minorities.¹³

Afghanistan, too, presents limited concerns for Kyrgyzstan. Though there is no common border, the region's major drug-trafficking route passes through mountainous eastern Tajikistan into southern Kyrgyzstan. Corruption, criminality, drug abuse and diseases are major concerns. As a by-product of the flow of opiates through the country, Kyrgyzstan is experiencing a sharp increase in the number of drug users, which stood at some 50,000 in 2000. Kyrgyzstan's Security Council Chairman Bolot Januzakov has claimed that IMU military chief Juma Namangani and his followers controlled as much as 70 per cent of the drugs going through the Ferghana.¹⁴ That claim can be dismissed as propaganda since it would provide the IMU with billions of dollars in revenues, something which is not reflected in their ability to mobilise a powerful fighting force. Nonetheless, it is widely believed that the rebels are engaged in drug smuggling.

A more palpable threat to Kyrgyzstan's security stems from internal regional and ethnic tensions.

The 1990 clashes between ethnic Uzbek and Kyrgyz inhabitants of the cities of Osh, Uzgen and Jalalabad left Bishkek with a lingering concern of renewed conflict. The Ferghana Valley holds 51 per cent of the country's population on 40 per cent of its territory. About 30 per cent of inhabitants of Kyrgyzstan's southern provinces are non-Kyrgyz. Uzbeks are the largest minority at about a quarter of the total population while Russians and Tajiks make up around 2-3 per cent each.

After Kyrgyz Batken was established as a separate province from Osh in 1999, the percentage of Uzbeks in the remaining part of Osh Province became considerably higher. Statistics are not available for the number of Uzbeks in Osh Province after it was split, but it is likely to be at least a third of the population and possibly as much as half.¹⁵

Until recently, in Kyrgyzstan's 'southern capital city' of Osh the largest population group was Uzbek, though the balance has shifted in favour of Kyrgyz in the post-Soviet period. Tensions persist between the two groups, though no major clashes have occurred since the 1990 rioting which left at least 171 dead, and possibly over 1,000.¹⁶ The Uzbeks believe they have been increasingly discriminated against since independence, and indeed the overwhelming numbers of positions in government administration in southern Kyrgyzstan are

¹¹ Interview with Prosecutor General of Narin Province, Talantbek Akyshov, 6 May 2001.

¹² The conviction in 2000 of several Uyghurs for mysterious bombings which took place in Osh several years earlier are widely considered to be trumped up cases, but this action has been explained by local observers as an accommodation to pressures from China to suppress possible separatist activity.

¹³ Institute for Russia and China, *Ekstremizm v Tsentral'noi Azii* [Extremism in Central Asia] (Almaty, 2000).

¹⁴ Kanai Manayev, 'Narcotic flood threatens to wash away Central Asian stability,' *The Times of Central Asia* [online] (Bishkek), 28 December 2000, available at: <http://www.times.kg/times.cgi?D=article&aid=1013664>.

¹⁵ Nancy Lubin and Barnett R. Rubin, *Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central Asia* (New York: Century Foundation Press, 1999), p. 37; Grigory Pyaduhov, 'Reform in Kyrgyzstan as reflected in the mentality and behaviour of the non-titular population,' in *Contemporary Ethnopolitical and Migration Processes in Central Asia* (Bishkek: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1998), p. 174; The National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, *Results of the First National Population Census of the Kyrgyz Republic, 1999* [online] (Bishkek, 2000), available at: <http://nsc.bishkek.su/Eng/Home/Start.html>.

¹⁶ Official figures cite deaths of 120 Kyrgyz, 50 Uzbeks and one Russian (see Valery Tishkov, "'Don't kill me, I'm Kyrgyz!': An anthropological analysis of violence in the Osh ethnic conflict,' *Journal of peace research*, vol. 32, no. 2, p. 134-35, 1995). According to unofficial sources cited by the UNDP/Kyrgyzstan, Preventive Development in the South of Kyrgyzstan, 'Village Level Early Warning Report' (September 2000) more than 1,000 people were actually killed.

occupied by Kyrgyz.¹⁷ The police are almost exclusively Kyrgyz, as are judges and key officials. In Osh the small number of lawyers who work as public defenders are all Uzbek and they complain that their ethnic compatriots are discriminated against by the local authorities, most of whom are Kyrgyz.¹⁸ While there is a prevailing sense that both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are doing their best to avoid another outbreak of violence, there is sufficient tension based on discrimination, differential access to resources and the memory of past conflict to make the reoccurrence of such clashes a distinct possibility.¹⁹

Following the incursions by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in 1999, instability growing out of militant Islamism virtually eclipsed all other security concerns. The activities of the IMU in Kyrgyzstan clearly represented a danger to the country, though not particularly because the IMU had any designs on bringing down the government of Kyrgyzstan. Rather, the incursions unleashed a chain of events that endangered Kyrgyzstan's citizens and interests as much through their impact on perceptions of stability and through Uzbekistan's potential and actual reactions as through the IMU operations themselves.²⁰

Although the IMU's military chief Namangani has not given any interviews, the political leader, Tahir Yuldash told the BBC in April 2000 that the IMU's goal was to establish an Islamic emirate in the Ferghana Valley and to overthrow

Karimov's regime in Uzbekistan.²¹ Like Namangani and Yuldash, most of the IMU's rank-and-file is composed of Uzbeks who have fled to Tajikistan in order to avoid arrest in Uzbekistan, which began a broad crackdown in 1992-93 on Islamist activists.²² Those Uzbeks have close contacts with leaders of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). For example, Namangani and Mirza Ziyayev, now Tajik Minister of Emergency Situations, fought together against the government of Tajikistan before the 1997 peace accord.²³

The IMU forces gathered in Tajikistan numbered a couple of thousand, including families. Their presence began to be a diplomatic issue between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, prompting pressures to expel them which ultimately led to the IMU's first incursions into Kyrgyzstan in August 1999. As part of a demobilisation of combatants in the Tajik peace process, Namangani's fighters were pressured to give up their arms.²⁴ Uzbekistan responded to the incursions with an offer to send in troops, which Tajikistan declined. The Uzbek government's offer to send in its air force received no public official reply before bombing raids were carried out. The bombs apparently missed their intended targets but caused casualties among the civilian population and livestock in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, sparking official protests from both governments.²⁵

In the aftermath of the 1999 incursions, the three governments declared their intention to coordinate their response to new incursions more

¹⁷ Alisher Khamidov, 'Frustration builds among Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan,' *EurasiaNet Human Rights* [online] (New York: OSI), 26 March 2001, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav032601.shtml>.

¹⁸ ICG interview with Makhmudov Sodykzhan, lawyer and representative of 'Luch Solomon' in Osh, December 2000.

¹⁹ Antonina Zakharova and Nick Megoran, 'Osh ten years on: Positive developments in ethnic relations,' *Eurasia Insight* (New York: OSI), 18 September 2000, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/ea091800.shtml>.

²⁰ At an OSCE briefing in Osh on 2 March 2001, the UN Regional Coordinator for South Kyrgyzstan, Bruno de Cordier, noted that people in Batken were more worried about how Uzbekistan would react if the IMU renewed its incursions than about the IMU itself.

²¹ API, *Voenno-politicheskie konflikty...*, p. 14.

²² See *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilisation and Regional Security*, p. 2.

²³ Continued active support from former UTO members to the IMU is denied. See 'Mirzo Ziyoyev: "Representatives of the former UTO don't fighting [sic] in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan",' *Asia-Plus Blitz* (Dushanbe), no. 576, 28 August 2000.

²⁴ Vitalii Strugvets, 'U terrorizma net natsional'nosti [Terrorism has no nationality],' *Krasnaia zvezda* (Moscow), 31 August 2001; Rafis Abazov and Ustina Markus, 'Kyrgyzstan: In search of a regional security system,' in Ustina Markus and Daniel Nelson, eds., *Brassey's Eurasian & East European Security Yearbook, 2000* (Dulles, Va.: Brassey's, 2000), pp. 537-554. A chronology of IMU activity in 2000 through October can be found in API, *Voenno-politicheskie konflikty ...*, pp. 36-53.

²⁵ Bruce Pannier, 'Kyrgyzstan: Uzbek militants' presence causes concern,' *RFE/RL Magazine*, 31 August 1999.

closely, but despite this, Kyrgyzstan refused offers of joint military operations when the IMU began fighting again in August 2000. Tensions between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan flared again when Uzbekistan imposed tight restrictions on border crossings for Kyrgyzstan's citizens and went so far as to lay landmines in undemarcated areas of their common border, resulting in numerous casualties.²⁶

While it cannot be said that the IMU was widely welcomed in Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyzstan's citizens were not targeted by the IMU and some even viewed the presence of the fighters favourably, as they paid good prices for supplies and services in an otherwise dismal economy. Some Kyrgyz officials say privately that Uzbekistan has sought to take advantage of the IMU incursions to strengthen its dominance in the region. Most Western observers are sceptical of rumours that the Karimov government in Uzbekistan is itself behind the IMU but rather see these developments as playing into the hands of those in Uzbekistan who favour greater authoritarianism, an increased role for the army and security services and a wider regional role for the country.

C. TAJIKISTAN: CONTAINING THE CHAOS LEFT BY THE CIVIL WAR

Unlike in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, where the major security concern is to avoid allowing Islamist movements to gain a foothold, in Tajikistan such groups are already represented in the government as a result of the peace accord which ended the civil war in 1997. In Dushanbe, the perception is that there is more to worry about from the actions of neighbouring Uzbekistan, than from the IMU, which has been allowed to keep bases in the Tavildara District of Tajikistan intermittently. There is also awareness that despite the relatively uneventful elections in 2000, the peace concluded in 1997 remains precarious. The government in Dushanbe has few resources to expend on developing its economy as a way of defusing the threat of civil unrest, and in particular on reintegrating former combatants. It is also unable to build up its armed forces

sufficiently to guard its own border with Afghanistan, which is continuously crossed by narcotics, arms and militants.

Russia maintains an ambivalent presence in Tajikistan, with the 201st Motorised Rifle Division (MRD) stationed in the country along with a contingent of the Russian Border Guards. In Russia, there is little popular support for bases in Tajikistan and little interest in serving there, and it is only through generous commissions to Russian soldiers and local recruitment that forces can be mustered.²⁷ Though an agreement was signed in 1999 that would allow Russia to establish a larger long-term base, Moscow has not stepped up its military presence there.²⁸

Although the 201st MRD supported Tajikistan's President Emamali Rahmanov during the country's civil war, there are concerns that dependence on the large Russian military presence would ultimately mean *de facto* occupation. Many of Tajikistan's citizens have become disillusioned with Russia's peacekeeping forces, feeling that they give Moscow undue influence over the country. There is a widespread belief that Russia has profited from the country's gold and precious stones, while denying Dushanbe any benefits from those assets. In addition, members of the Russian forces have been implicated in the burgeoning drug trade from Afghanistan.²⁹

The most significant external threat is seen as coming from Afghanistan, but not because the Taliban have designs on Tajik territory. Rather, it is the Taliban's offensive against Ahmed Shah

²⁷ ICG interview with senior Russian officer, Dushanbe, May 2000.

²⁸ Oleg Panfilov, 'Russian military base in Khujand: Ambition or necessity?' *Eurasia Insight* [online] (New York: OSI), 12 June 2000, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav061200.shtml>; Bruce Pannier, 'Russia/Tajikistan: Pact likely to bring mixed results,' *RFE/RL Magazine* [online] (Prague), 8 April 1999, available at: <http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/1999/04/f.ru.990408131051.html>.

²⁹ Interview with Anton Surikov, Chief of Staff of State Duma Committee on Industry, Construction and Advanced Technology, in *Moskovskiyevosti*, 29 May 2001.

²⁶ Briefing by UN Regional Coordinator based in Batken, Bruno de Cordier, at the OSCE in Osh, 2 March 2001.

Massoud and the United Front³⁰ that could cause problems for Tajikistan. The fighting has been taking place along its border, and there is always the possibility that it could spill into Tajikistan if Massoud, an ethnic Tajik, were to take refuge there. Dushanbe has itself been trying to maintain a non-confrontational relationship with the Taliban. Yet Russia's pro-United Front policy complicates Tajikistan's non-confrontational position, since Moscow uses Tajikistan's territory to deliver weapons to Massoud. There are concerns over where Massoud would go if he were defeated, although most locals believe he would take refuge in Iran, which has been supportive of the United Front, rather than Tajikistan.

The fighting also causes a massive refugee problem. The September 2000 offensive reportedly drove a mass of 150,000 refugees toward the border with Tajikistan.³¹ Tajikistan, facing a severe drought and struggling with its own underdeveloped economy, turned down an urgent appeal from the UNHCR in January 2001 to accept 10,000 refugees stranded on a border island in the Amu Darya.³²

As in Kyrgyzstan, the drug trade emanating from Afghanistan has overwhelming consequences for Tajikistan. In 1999 Afghanistan became the world's largest producer of heroin and opium. Under pressure from the international community, the Taliban has taken steps to end opium cultivation, and at the beginning of 2001 it was reported that almost no poppies were being grown.³³ Nonetheless, the stockpile of drugs in Afghanistan has ensured that drug smuggling would continue to be a problem. The amount of

drugs confiscated in Tajikistan rose sharply from the late 1990s. In the first six months of 2000, 740 kilograms of opium was seized. Apart from the confiscated narcotics, Tajikistan's border guards killed 30 drug smugglers over that same period and arrested another 150. Officials believed the drug trade had increased ten-fold from the previous year.³⁴

While there has been little direct threat to Tajikistan from the Taliban or IMU militants, there have been serious tensions with Uzbekistan over its policies for dealing with militants. Uzbekistan, with its much larger military, demanded that drastic action be taken against the IMU, and sent bombers to attack villages where the IMU was believed to be hiding.³⁵ These raids damaged homes in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and also caused a number of fatalities and other casualties among the civilian population. Both Dushanbe and Bishkek demanded an explanation from Tashkent, indicating that the raids may not have been cleared by authorities in those two countries as Uzbekistan claimed. Although Tajikistan did not break off relations with Uzbekistan over the incident, it further damaged their already strained ties.

These incidents revived the very serious tensions which arose in November 1998, when a dissident army officer, Colonel Mahmud Khudaiberdiyev, led a large armed incursion into northern Tajikistan. Rahmanov accused Uzbekistan of supporting this attack. Uzbekistan has also allegedly harboured Abdumalik Abdullajanov, former governor of Tajikistan's northern Sughd Province (formerly Leninabad), and Rahmanov's former rival for the presidency, now wanted on charges of treason for complicity in Khudaiberdiyev's incursion. Periodic accusations by President Karimov of Uzbekistan that Tajikistan has supported the IMU have also not helped to alleviate strains in the relations.³⁶

³⁰ The United Front, a coalition of anti-Taliban, *Mujaheddin* forces, is sometimes also referred to as the Northern Alliance,.

³¹ 'Up to 150,000 Afghan refugees head for Tajikistan,' *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 13 September 2000, available at:

http://www.cacianalyst.org/Sept_13/news_bites_sept13.htm

³² 'Tajikistan rejects UNHCR plea to admit Afghan refugees,' Agence France-Presse (AFP), 24 January 2001.

³³ James Callahan, Director of the U.S. State Department's Director of Asian and African narcotics programs, affirmed that the Taliban's ban on poppy cultivation has been 99 per cent effective (Sved Talat Hussain, 'US official praises Taliban's measures: Poppy eradication,' *DAWN Internet Edition*, 5 May 2001).

³⁴ Erika Dailey, 'Governmental and international responses to human rights abuses at Tajikistan's border crossings,' *EurasiaNet Human Rights* [online] (New York: OSI), 15 March 2000, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/hrr051600.shtml>.

³⁵ 'Bombing raids on Tajikistan continue,' *RFE/RL Newslines*, 6 October 1999.

³⁶ Marat Mamadshoyev, 'After a brief thaw, new chill hits Tajik-Uzbek relations,' *Eurasia Insight* [online]

In May 2000, under pressure from its neighbours, Tajikistan expelled the IMU from Tavildara where it had been based for several years. Mirza Ziyayev, a leading UTO commander who became the Minister for Emergency Situations in the post-1997 power-sharing government, has close links with the IMU militants from the time of Tajikistan's civil war. He negotiated with Namangani to leave Tajikistan, ultimately escorting the militants to Afghanistan.³⁷ However, this did little to quell Uzbekistan's criticism. Karimov saw the failure to apprehend the militants as an indication that Dushanbe was indeed protecting his opponents.

The IMU did not remain in Afghanistan long. They reportedly cooperated with the Taliban in operations against Massoud, but soon renewed their incursions into the Ferghana in August 2000. Uzbekistan responded with renewed vigour and began mining its borders with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, claiming that the action was necessary because its weaker neighbours were incapable of controlling their borders. Dushanbe again complained. By February 2001, some 30 civilians and much livestock had been killed by mines.

Tajikistan is also unhappy about Kyrgyzstan's border activities. Not only has Kyrgyzstan mined its frontiers with Tajikistan, but it has also blown up mountain passes to make them impenetrable.³⁸ The relationship between Dushanbe and Bishkek has been a nervous one since Tajikistan's civil war, when Kyrgyzstan was concerned by the prospect that the conflict could spill onto Kyrgyz territory, and in fact was the recipient of significant numbers of refugees. The prominent role of Islamists in the government of Tajikistan

is a matter of concern for Bishkek, as are the continued political rifts that sometimes lead to shootouts and assassinations. Bishkek has been inclined to insulate itself from Tajikistan, rather than pursue cooperation. Kyrgyzstan's latest actions to curb IMU incursions from Tajik territory have pushed the two countries further apart, and these events, rather than prompting a united front against Uzbekistan's domination, have deepened the rifts between the Central Asian states.³⁹

(New York: OSI), 20 October 2000, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav102000.shtml>; Nizomi Zamon, 'Is Juma Namangani a trump card in a mysterious geopolitical game?' *Eurasia Insight* [online] (New York: OSI), 8 February 2001, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav020801.shtml>.

³⁷ Asad Sadulloev, "'SOS': 'Jaga' is going out," *Central Asian News from Ferghana.Ru* [online] 2 February 2001, available at:

<http://www.ferghana.ru/news/english.html>.

³⁸ 'Nuzhen li Tsentral'noi Azii "poias bezopasnosti"?' [Does Central Asia need a 'security belt'?], *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, 15-22 March 2001.

³⁹ API, *Voenno-politicheskie konflikty...*, pp. 76-79.

III. MILITARY CAPABILITIES

While the Central Asian countries may have adopted different political and economic strategies, all countries have expanded their military capabilities in recent years. Most of the military capacity has been oriented towards threats not from outside the region, but from neighbouring Central Asian countries and from domestic sources.

A. UZBEKISTAN: BUILDING A REGIONAL POWER

Uzbekistan's military machine is considered the most potent and capable in the region. With reserves, Tashkent can muster a force of almost 130,000. Active forces amount to some 80,000 — 50,000 in the Army, 9,100 in the Air Force, 18,000 in Interior Ministry units, and 1,000 in the National Guard.⁴⁰ In February 2000, the National Security Council approved a new military doctrine which aimed to adapt the country's armed forces and paramilitary forces to respond to the new threats facing the region stemming from criminal organisations and extremist movements. In practice, that meant Uzbekistan's forces would be trained in anti-terrorist operations, and would be organised into mobile, rapid reaction units.

While the officer corps had been overwhelmingly Russian when the country gained independence, less than 20 per cent of current officers are now non-Uzbek, and almost all generals are ethnic Uzbeks. Like other state institutions in the country, the Defence Ministry is beholden to President Karimov who appoints top-level officials and has the final word on policy decisions. In 2000, Kadir Ghulamov, a civilian, replaced Lieutenant General Yuri Agzamov as Minister of Defence in September 2000, and the press reported that measures were being taken to enhance the military's effectiveness. Among the reforms was a stricter separation of the military's administrative and operational organs. The Defence Minister was to be responsible for the military's administration, while the Unified

Armed Forces Staff, made up of senior military commanders, was to be responsible for operational and strategic planning. The staff was to assume control over all of the country's military and paramilitary units, including troops from the Border Guard, the Interior Ministry and the Ministry of Emergencies.⁴¹

Despite Tashkent's decision in 1999 not to renew its membership in the CIS Collective Security Treaty, Moscow continued to be an important security partner. In 2000 an agreement was signed with Russia to upgrade Uzbekistan's air defence system. Russia also agreed to provide sniper and officer training, and Tashkent remains dependent on Moscow for the maintenance and supply of military hardware.⁴²

The military is regularly extolled by Uzbekistan's government-controlled media and negative reports are not disseminated. The only person to violate this policy was President Karimov himself when he criticised the military's performance against the IMU in 2000.⁴³ Despite the positive coverage, there is evidence that the armed forces are plagued with the same problems of hazing, lack of equipment, poor morale and corruption as other post-Soviet militaries. As a result, military service is viewed with more dread than pride by many in the country.⁴⁴

B. KYRGYZSTAN: MUSTERING LIMITED RESOURCES

The country's limited resources constrain how much the armed forces can be built up, but the

⁴¹ 'Radikal'nye voennye reformy v Uzbekistane [Radical military reforms in Uzbekistan], *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (Moscow), 11 October 2000; Interfax, 29 September 2000.

⁴² Galina Zhukova, 'Civilian takes charge of Uzbek Army,' *Reporting Central Asia* [online], No. 25, 18 October 2000 (London: Institute for War and Peace Reporting), available at: http://www.iwpr.net/archive/rca/rca_200010_25_3_eng.txt.

⁴³ Charles Fairbanks et al, *The Strategic Assessment of Central Asia* (Washington DC: The Atlantic Council and Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2001), pp. 53-56.

⁴⁴ Jennifer Balfour, 'Many families fear for sons' safety in Uzbek military,' *Eurasia Insight* [online] (New York: OSI), 15 June 2001, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav061501.shtml>.

⁴⁰ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2000/2001* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 177.

defence budget was doubled over two years from a mere U.S.\$14 million in 1999 to U.S.\$29 million in 2001.⁴⁵ Most of the funds are earmarked for improving and acquiring better equipment rather than expanding the size of the military. Kyrgyzstan had in 2000 approximately 20,000 troops in all of its military and paramilitary formations. The Interior Ministry accounted for 3,000 of these; the National Guard, 1,500; the Ministry for Emergencies and Civil Defence, 2,000; and the Ministry for National Defence, 1,000. The remaining 12,500 troops belong to the armed forces with almost 10,000 in the Army and the remainder in the Air Force.⁴⁶ Although the military wanted to change the balance between conscripts and contract soldiers, increasing the percentage of the latter to 60 per cent, in reality at the end of 2000 over 97 per cent of the servicemen were still conscripts.⁴⁷ In the fighting against the IMU, troops from all military and paramilitary organisations were used, including the Defence Ministry, Interior Ministry and Ministry for Emergencies.⁴⁸

That small military was beset by morale problems and was not effective. President Askar Akaev had not made the military a priority in the first years of independence owing to its role during the August 1991 coup attempt in Moscow. As a result, Kyrgyzstan was slow in setting up a national Ministry of Defence and its annual budget until 1999 was miserly. During the 1999 militant incursions, the government undertook a broad mobilisation including pleas through newspapers for volunteers, underlining how understaffed the military was. This resulted in an overreaction, and in fact the army did not have the capacity to train and manage the rapidly enlarged ranks.⁴⁹ Reports in the press in 2001 mentioned that the military had been pressing people into the armed forces, using unlawful recruiting methods. That did not help *esprit de corps*, which already suffered from poor

provisioning and equipment and other problems common to post-Soviet militaries. Contract soldiers were being paid 2,000-2,500 söms in 2000, or about U.S.\$50 per month and that sum was due to double in 2001. Soldiers complained that they were paid only partially or not at all. Key counter-terrorist operations are carried out by contract soldiers.⁵⁰

The military was not well-armed when the 1999 conflicts erupted. Despite aid from foreign countries and a large increase in the country's own defence spending, it remains poorly equipped. The army had insufficient MI-8 and MI-24 helicopters to ensure that enough troops could be airlifted if there were coordinated attacks on several areas at once. The Air Force was effectively non-existent as none of the bombers or fighters among the 50 planes inherited from the Soviet Union were operational. The helicopter force was also in poor condition, with dated equipment in constant need of repair.⁵¹

C. TAJIKISTAN: UNDER RUSSIA'S WING

Tajikistan had the smallest military of the Central Asian republics, although its civil war has left arms in the hands of many in the wider population. The peace process was meant to produce a unified army integrating both government and opposition forces. This has meant that some units owe their loyalty more to civil war commanders than the government and it is difficult to assess how much Dushanbe can count on them to follow orders.

Few consider President Emamali Rahmanov to have much of the country under his control; indeed he is often brushed off as "the mayor of Dushanbe." Since the UTO were officially allocated 30 per cent of government positions,⁵²

⁴⁵ ICG interview with U.S. defence attaché to Kyrgyzstan, March 2001; IISS *The Military Balance, 2000/2001*, p. 172.

⁴⁶ API, *Voенно-politicheskie konflikty...*, pp. 62-65.

⁴⁷ ICG interview with U.S. defence attaché, March 2001.

⁴⁸ Kanai Manaev, 'Combating terrorism in Kyrgyzstan,' *The Times of Central Asia* [online] (Bishkek), 10 August 2000, available at: <http://www.times.kg/times.cgi?D=article&aid=1012714>.

⁴⁹ ICG interview with official in the security service for southern Kyrgyzstan, June 2001.

⁵⁰ Svetlana Suslova, 'Kyrgyz press gangs,' IPWR *Reporting Central Asia* [online], no. 40, 15 February 2001, available at:

http://www.iwpr.net/archive/rca/rca_200102_40_5_eng.txt

⁵¹ Igor Grebenshchikov 'Kyrgyz army in crisis,' *Reporting Central Asia* [online], No. 44, 14 March 2001, available at:

http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/rca/rca_200103_4_4_2_eng.txt; API, *Voенно-politicheskie konflikty...*, p. 65.

⁵² The 30 per cent power sharing was stipulated in the 1997 Peace Accord, though it was never actually

Rahmanov does not have the same degree of freedom in policy or personnel decisions as other regional leaders. These constraints are demonstrated by the murky picture surrounding the IMU presence in the country. The movement's leaders had cooperated with the UTO during the Tajik civil war and it is widely believed former UTO commanders now provide them with protection in Tajikistan. Both Tashkent and Bishkek insisted that Dushanbe should do more to prevent IMU activities in Tajikistan, but Rahmanov would have to compromise on other issues with the former UTO in order to ensure their compliance on this.

Discipline has been a serious problem within the armed forces, leading the government to launch a campaign against errant soldiers in 2000. Dushanbe announced that military units whose servicemen engaged in criminal activities would be exiled from the capital.⁵³

Following the signing of the 1997 power-sharing agreement the armed forces numbered approximately 6,000, with an additional 1,200 border guards. The UTO had its own forces of 5,000. Those were to be integrated into the national armed forces or disarmed. As of 2001, the two forces had been largely integrated and the country's military stood at 8,000-9,000. Approximately 1,000 former UTO fighters had not been given positions in the national military, however, and there are concerns over how they will behave since many control territory and are known to prey on travellers passing through those areas.⁵⁴ In June 2001, one such rogue commander, Rahman Sanginov, popularly known as 'Hitler,' took fifteen aid workers hostage in Tavildara.⁵⁵ Though the hostages were released after an intervention by former UTO leaders,

implemented in some levels and areas of government, and following the elections of 2000, the number of positions allocated to former UTO members has been reduced (Rashid Abdullo, 'Implementation of the 1997 General Agreement: Successes, dilemmas and challenges,' in K. Abdullaev and C. Barnes, eds.: *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process, Accord*, vol. 10 (London: Conciliation Resources, 2001), p. 51).

⁵³ Charles Fairbanks et al, *The Strategic Assessment of Central Asia*, pp. 43-45.

⁵⁴ ICG interview with U.S. defence attaché to Uzbekistan, May 2001.

⁵⁵ Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 'Roundup: Hostages freed in Tajikistan,' 17 June 2001.

shortly afterwards Sanginov laid siege to the eastern outskirts of Dushanbe.

Russian forces in the country were larger than those of the Tajik government. The 201st Motorised Rifle Division stands at 8,200 servicemen, and there are also 14,500 Russian Border Guards. Most of the Russian Border Guards are actually local conscripts commanded by Russian officers. Many Tajikistanis prefer service with the Russian Border Guard because of the higher pay. By 2001 the Tajikistani armed forces were organising a small air force consisting of helicopters.⁵⁶

The government of Tajikistan's dependence on Russian military support began during the first year of the civil war. That aid played a decisive role in the victors' consolidation of power and has grown steadily since. In March 1993 Russia agreed to help Tajikistan build up its military when the two signed a Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation. Tajikistan's first Defence Minister was an ethnic Russian, Aleksandr Shishliannikov. At that time the Tajik Air Force also had only Russian pilots, and Russian advisors were active throughout the military ranks in support of Rahmanov. In February 2001 Tajikistan's Defence Minister Sherali Khairullayev met with his Russian counterpart Igor Sergeev to discuss military cooperation. That same month the Russian Duma ratified military agreements with Tajikistan allowing for long-term basing rights in that country that could entail as many as 50,000 Russian troops. Nonetheless, owing to the cost of Russia's war in Chechnya, and the unpopularity of service in Tajikistan amongst Russian servicemen, there is a strong possibility that Moscow will not ultimately set up such a base in the country.

Since the IMU began making incursions from Tajikistan's territory into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the armed forces of Tajikistan have given a higher profile to their exercises with Russia as well as regional joint manoeuvres. In March 2000 Tajikistan hosted that year's 'Southern Shield' exercises involving the Central Asian states and Russia. Turkmenistan did not participate as it refrains from all military

⁵⁶ IISS, *The Military Balance, 2000/2001*; Jamestown Foundation's *Monitor*, vol. 7, no. 36, 21 February 2001; Panfilov, 'Russian military base in Khujand....'

alignments, and Uzbekistan's forces carried out their operations within the exercise separately from a joint command. In the first three months of 2001 a series of military exercises were staged by Tajikistan's armed forces, including four separate exercises held in the southern part of the country in January.⁵⁷

IV. PROBLEMS WITH REGIONAL COOPERATION

Since the IMU began its attacks in 1999 there has been a substantial increase in high-level meetings on regional security cooperation in Central Asia. But despite the flurry of security meetings and military exercises, and the formation of several regional structures for security cooperation, the countries in the region have not formed any tight security alliance, and are often at odds with each other over defence issues. This results both from conflicting views of security interests and from a range of other incompatible aspects of the several countries' political systems.

A. INCOMPATIBLE THREAT PERCEPTIONS

Uzbekistan is often behind the lack of security cooperation between Tashkent, Bishkek and Dushanbe.⁵⁸ Kyrgyzstan has a considerable number of serious points of contention with Uzbekistan, apart from the problems with Tashkent over its bombing of Kyrgyz villages and its policies which are perceived as radicalising the Islamist underground throughout the region. The two states have 140 or more unresolved border disputes. In February 2001, a newly printed map of Uzbekistan drew that country's borders into Kyrgyzstan's territory, and even showed a land corridor from Uzbekistan to its enclave Sokh in Kyrgyzstan although no such link had been agreed. A secret meeting had given Tashkent reason to hope that they would get territorial concessions but Uzbekistan's high-handed manner antagonised the Kyrgyz parliament, which would have to ratify an agreement, and heightened public distrust between the neighbours.⁵⁹

While the map drew criticism in Bishkek, Tashkent was not shy about its demands. Uzbekistan's deputy Prime Minister Rustam Yunusov did not attempt to hide his country's ambitions on Kyrgyzstan's territory when he

⁵⁷ 'Large-scale military exercises held in northern Tajikistan,' *The Times of Central Asia* [online] (Bishkek), 7 February 200, available at: <http://www.times.kg/times.cgi?D=article&aid=1013614>; Jamestown Foundation's *Monitor*, vol. 7, no. 36, 21 February 2001.

⁵⁸ 'Unichtozhat terroristov budut poka na kartakh' *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 21 March 2001.

⁵⁹ The controversial memorandum on the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border signed on 26 February 2001 by the prime ministers of the two countries was printed in *Obshchestvennyi reiting* (Bishkek), 26 April-2 May 2001.

acknowledged the link between Uzbekistan cutting off gas supplies to Kyrgyzstan and the border issue. According to Kyrgyzstani parliamentarian Alisher Abdimunov, Yunusov told the Kyrgyzstan delegation negotiating border issues that if Bishkek agreed to cede the corridor to Sokh, then Uzbekistan would resume gas deliveries.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan claimed Uzbekistan owed it U.S.\$180 million for rent on its territory and exploitation of its gas fields.⁶¹ Kyrgyzstan has also sought to link the issue of gas with water supplies as Uzbekistan depends on its neighbour for free irrigation. Uzbekistan has resisted any linkage between gas and water provisions despite international support for the country's to trade.⁶²

In August 2000 Tashkent introduced a visa regime for Kyrgyzstan's citizens. People living in the border areas can still travel to Uzbekistan without visas as long as they do not stay in the country longer than three days. Those needing to stay longer now must pay a fee and present justification for their visit. The general consequence of Uzbekistan's tightening of border controls has been a burgeoning of corruption by border control officials, who take bribes from those attempting to violate the border control regime and equally from those who attempt to adhere to the rules. In Kyrgyzstan, there is a perception that terrorists and drug traffickers can find ways across the borders more readily than law-abiding citizens.

⁶⁰ Arslan Koichiev, 'Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan map out their differences,' *Eurasia Insight* [online] (New York: OSI), 5 March 2001, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav030501.shtml>.

⁶¹ Zamir Osorov, 'Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan: Border disputes,' *The Times of Central Asia* [online] (Bishkek), 3 August 2000, available at: <http://www.times.kg/times.cgi?D=article&aid=1012660>.

⁶² USAID has been pushing for a solution which links water and energy, which Tashkent has found unacceptable. A high-level OSCE initiative to resolve regional water disputes, led by Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1999, encountered intransigence from the leadership Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which apparently felt that there was no need to compromise their own position by involving international actors which could negotiating strength to weaker countries from whom they currently receive summer water releases for their agriculture at no cost.

Tajikistan's internal strife made the country a problematic strategic partner for its neighbours and it did not develop close relations with any of its neighbours after independence. Tajikistan has been very inwardly oriented, preoccupied with problems of regional disputes over power and the building of integrated institutions in the aftermath of the civil war. Indeed, Tajikistan has been a conduit for destabilising influences to its neighbours. There has also been some concern in China that the Uyghur separatists might use the country as a route into Xinjiang.

Relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the post-Soviet period have been marked by nearly continuous tensions. Uzbekistan has been seen as sponsoring the aspirations of the northern province of Sughd (formerly Leninabad) to regain the dominance of Tajikistan's political and economic structures that it had during Soviet times. This issue came to a head after the incursions into northern Tajikistan by Khudaiberdiyev, which Rahmanov attributed directly to Uzbekistan's sponsorship, and to the northern political figure then in exile in Uzbekistan, Abdumalik Abdullajanov. In Tajikistan, further proof of Uzbekistan's meddling is seen in the fact that Khudaiberdiyev reportedly fled to Uzbekistan and yet neither Abdullajanov nor Khudaiberdiyev has been turned over to Tajikistan to stand trial.⁶³ Some observers claim that the incursions conducted by Namangani were a direct answer by authorities in Tajikistan to the Khudaiberdiyev incursion.⁶⁴

For much of the post-Soviet period, Tajikistan has felt itself under siege by Uzbekistan, which has maintained a blockade of sorts to contain the perceived threat of spreading instability. Tajikistan is almost exclusively dependent on Uzbekistan for transport links to the outside world, and yet in crossing into Uzbekistan, citizens of Tajikistan are often humiliated and forced to pay bribes. Similar problems exist for Tajikistan citizens travelling through Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where it is often impossible to get across the country without having all of their assets confiscated. Though much of this is

⁶³ *Segodnia*, 11 November 1998.

⁶⁴ Arkadii Dubnov, 'Uzbekskii dzhikhad [Uzbek jihad],' *Vremia MN* (Moscow), 30 September 1999, p. 1, 6 (reprinted at: <http://www.ferghana.ru/news/kirgiz46.html>).

undoubtedly not a specific state policy, it is supported by the general system of corruption existing in the region, and in Uzbekistan, it is combined with a tacit endorsement through the official policies whereby containment of instability translates into an ethos of domination by the stronger neighbour.

All attempts at regional cooperation run up against problems of resources and priorities. While it is evidently a high priority to be perceived as promoting cooperation, as expressed through high-profile summits, the practical work of cooperation is often not covered in budgets. For example, though all three countries signed onto the regional Anti-Terrorist Centre established in Bishkek in December 2000 as of June 2001, none of them followed through on their financial commitments.⁶⁵ Given that there is a general expectation that new IMU incursions are imminent, the lack of funding reflects a view that the centre is not likely to produce results for which it is worth finding money.

Cooperation is also hindered by different perceptions of the proper role for outside powers, with Russia and the U.S. sometimes undermining regional cooperation by encouraging bilateral relations and discouraging participation in regional structures. The U.S. appears satisfied, for example, that Uzbekistan has left the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST) and joined GUUAM. Washington has cast a sceptical eye on participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which increasingly appears oriented against the U.S. and the West. Russia has sought to play a dominant role in the regional groupings in which it participates, such as the CST and the Eurasian Economic Community. The Central Asian states themselves have prioritised bilateral relations over regional structures, and there has not been any attempt, for example, to employ regional institutions to address border delimitation issues, as the Shanghai organisation was used to resolve China's border issues with former Soviet states.

B. INCOMPATIBLE POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENTS

Cooperation between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is not only difficult because of their divergent security concerns. There are also differences in the way the three states are governed that make effective cooperation elusive. In Uzbekistan, the media and dissemination of information are tightly controlled and there is little political pluralism. Political parties are illusory, having been set up by the regime to give the appearance of democracy. President Karimov has sought to gain legitimacy by appearing strong, and sometimes this has entailed belittling his neighbours. In a February 1999 radio interview, he accused Akaev of being unable to 'do much of anything apart from smile.'⁶⁶ This had predictable effects on public opinion in Kyrgyzstan, where parliamentary deputies demanded that cooperation with Uzbekistan be reduced and measures be taken to defend the dignity of the country. President Karimov also frequently broadcast invective aimed at Tajikistan and its president, reducing further the already dim prospects for friendly relations.

Deputies in Kyrgyzstan were critical of Akaev's refusal to stand up to Karimov's abuse and were further annoyed by his reluctance to use Kyrgyzstan's leverage as a supplier of water to its neighbour. There has also been a widespread outcry in response to Uzbekistan's efforts to seek territorial concessions. Though relations between the two presidents warmed a bit in the fall of 2000 in the run up to the Kyrgyz presidential elections, this was widely seen in Kyrgyzstan as a cynical move to strengthen Akaev's candidacy by boosting his support among ethnic Uzbeks and showing others that he was capable of handling Karimov. The sharp differences between the media cultures and the political cultures of the two countries make cooperation often difficult or impossible.

The more open societies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan present a challenge to Karimov, who feels that he must discredit his neighbours in

⁶⁵ 'CIS Antiterrorism Center not operational,' *Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation), vol. 7, no. 108, 5 June 2001.

⁶⁶ Nick Megoran, 'The borders of eternal friendship,' *Eurasia Insight* [online] (New York: OSI), 19 December 2001, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav120899.shtml>.

order to validate his own authoritarian style of rule. The presence of a legalised Islamist party in Tajikistan presents a particular problem, since the approach in Uzbekistan is to harass, jail and even torture those in that country who would aspire to the same goal. Uzbekistan severely restricts the free flow of information but many issues that it considers sensitive are openly discussed in broadcasts from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and, to a lesser extent, Tajikistan. Karimov's dealings with Tajikistan are further complicated by the fact that some of the Islamists in the current government are very close to Juma Namangani, Karimov's sworn enemy, and he certainly cannot count on them to support his aspiration to annihilate the IMU.

The economic differences present additional challenges. Uzbekistan, due to its non-convertible currency, erects barriers to trade with its neighbours, driving most commerce underground. In Kyrgyzstan there is a relative free market economy while Tajikistan is dominated by the black market, corruption and drug trafficking. Because of these factors, the security services are given also the task of imposing restrictions on the flow of goods and population across the borders, further inhibiting regional cooperation.

V. OTHER REGIONAL ACTORS

A. KAZAKHSTAN: A REGIONAL POWER IN RUSSIA'S UNDERBELLY

Kazakhstan is the only former Soviet Central Asian republic that could balance Uzbekistan's dominance in the region. Yet Astana is loathe to carry the costs of such a policy, preferring to ensure its security through its relations with other regional powers rather than committing itself to a Central Asian security alignment. The republic is sheltered by the territories of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan from the major conflicts in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and did not need to become engaged militarily in those conflicts. Kazakhstan has been a relatively loyal participant in Russian-led regional groupings, such as the CIS Collective Security Treaty and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. It remains very vulnerable to its northern neighbour due to the long, indefensible border and the presence of a large number of Russians in the country.

Recent events have changed the regional security environment and led Kazakhstan to take a more active position regarding military and security issues. In January 2000, border guards from Uzbekistan were caught unilaterally marking out their border allegedly deep into the territory of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan responded with a diplomatic protest. A joint Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan commission, which had been set up in 1999, held an emergency meeting to discuss the border dispute and Karimov issued a statement that Tashkent had no territorial claims on any of its neighbours. By the middle of the year, however, the commission had agreed on the delimitation of a mere 40 of around 2,000 kilometres of the border.⁶⁷ Moreover, Uzbekistani border guards were frequently caught carrying out unilateral demarcations.⁶⁸

Kazakhstan has recently become increasingly concerned about the spread of Islamist extremism, particularly in the southern regions of the country near Uzbekistan which share the

⁶⁷ 'Kazakhstan i Uzbekistan podpisali soglashenie... [Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have signed an agreement...], *Panorama*, 14 July 2000.

⁶⁸ 'Granitsa na grani [Border on the brink], *Express-K*, 7 September 2000.

stronger orientation towards Islam common to the southern Central Asian republics. This has prompted Kazakhstan to say that it wishes to follow cooperative approaches to security, though such declarations have yet to be followed with much action.

Meanwhile, Kazakhstan has occasionally adopted a dominant stance, particularly in relations with Kyrgyzstan. For example, when Kyrgyzstan became the only Central Asian state to be admitted to the World Trade Organisation, Kazakhstan responded by imposing severe restrictions on trade with its weaker neighbour.

B. TURKMENISTAN: GOING IT ALONE

Upon independence Turkmenistan declared itself neutral and resisted joining any military blocs. That precluded security cooperation with its neighbours if it meant any type of military commitment. Instead, Ashgabat's policy was to insulate itself from regional conflicts rather than to cooperate in any regional security system.

Relations between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have been tense and there have been shooting incidents on their border. President Saparmurat Niyazov called for the construction of border fortifications in the problem areas and reinforced the border guard with an additional 500 servicemen. Those incidents have led Ashgabat to view its relationship with Tashkent as potentially more volatile than its relations with Kabul.⁶⁹

In fact, the government in Ashgabat does not treat the Taliban as a significant threat and has maintained ties with both the Taliban and the opposition United Front led by Ahmad Shah Massoud. In 2000, Ashgabat hosted informal talks between the warring Afghan factions and repeatedly called on the UN and international community to work towards resolving the Afghan conflict.⁷⁰ Turkmenistan's reliance on Moscow for the transport of its energy has led it to seek

alternative transport routes. That is one of the reasons behind Ashgabat's positive attitude towards the factions in Afghanistan. It was hoped that if the conflict there subsided it would be possible to build a pipeline through Afghanistan to major Asian and world markets, as well as highways that would increase access to Chinese and Pakistani markets. While the other four former Soviet Central Asian republics have made moves to set up an economic union and a collective security system to stem the flow of insurgents, arms and narcotics from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan has refrained from joining either a joint economic space with its neighbours or any regional security system.

C. THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION: AMBIVALENT SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Russia's major interest in the region is articulated as a fear of the spread of Islamist extremism. Russia is engaged in hostilities in Chechnya, where its opponents, it argues, are supported by an international network of Islamists that extends to Central Asia and particularly Afghanistan. Russia is surrounded on the south by Muslim countries and Muslims make up a major component of its own population (13 per cent), which it fears is susceptible to outside influences. Russia has threatened to conduct bombing raids on Taliban targets in Afghanistan in response to this threat.

Russia also has a broader interest in engagement in the region to preserve stability on its vulnerable southern frontier, to defend itself from the negative effects of the narcotics trade, and to limit the influence of other parties that might seek to expand their role: the U.S., Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and China.

Yet there is ambivalence in regard to Russia's engagement in Central Asia. The prospect of committing more Russian troops — already bogged down in a costly war in Chechnya — is not appealing to the Russian public or leadership. Nor is there readiness to contribute major funds to build up the Central Asian states' defences, since Russia's own citizens are experiencing serious hardship. While it was unrealistic for Moscow to simply wash its hands of the region, the nature of its involvement in regional security

⁶⁹ Nikolai Mitrokhin, 'Turkmenistan's open surveillance of foreigners caps policy of isolation,' *Eurasia Insight* [online] (New York: OSI), 6 March 2001, available at: http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/ea_v071000.shtml.

⁷⁰ ITAR-TASS, 10 December 2000; *Vremia novosti*, 14 December 2000.

arrangements is an issue being debated.⁷¹ Following the IMU incursions in 1999, Russia offered equipment and training to Kyrgyzstan's armed forces, but refrained from committing its own armed forces to actions there. It has continued to be active in military exercises in the region, however, and the Central Asian states are heavily dependent on Russia for weaponry and their maintenance.

There is also ambivalence from the side of the Central Asian states. While they look to Russia for support and many have signed on to Russian initiatives and blocs such as the CST, the republics also are wary of Moscow's intentions and concerned that dependence on Russia can compromise their sovereignty. Prominent figures in Russia have regularly argued that they should not give up their dominance over the former Soviet space, and many policy-makers in Russia would clearly prefer to limit Central Asian states' economic and political engagement with other countries (as illustrated by the pipeline issue, where Russia seeks to maintain Central Asia's dependence on its monopoly). As neither Russia nor the Central Asian republics have clearly defined what their interests are in relation to one another, their policies are often contradictory.

D. CHINA: STABILITY ABOVE ALL

There are three factors driving China's Central Asia policy. First, there is an economic interest. Chinese trade with the Central Asian states increased several-fold since independence and there is potential to develop those markets further. Secondly, Beijing is interested to develop friendly relations, which would allow it to decrease forces deployed along its borders with Central Asian states. The primary vehicle for cooperation in building military confidence between those countries is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Third, China is concerned about the activities of Muslim Uyghur separatists seeking independence for China's Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Overall, those interests complement the Central Asian countries' interests in China. The People's

Republic of China (PRC) became a major trading partner for those countries in the 1990s. Given their limited military capabilities, the newly independent Central Asian republics have preferred to see their Chinese borders demilitarise. Finally, concern over the activity of extremist organisations over the 1990s has led the Central Asian states generally to adopt a policy of no tolerance for such groups.

While China has refrained from taking a leading role in the region's security cooperation, deferring to Russia as the major power in the area it has provided aid. This has included lethal aid, and was given free of charge, unlike Russian assistance. China also participates in meetings on regional security, using those to make sure its interests in fighting Uyghur separatists are respected.

E. AFGHANISTAN: SOURCE OF INSTABILITY

Afghanistan is a country without a functioning state, and consequently constitutes a source of instability for all neighbouring countries. After twenty years of civil war, Afghanistan's economy is totally devastated and the controlling Taliban movement adheres to an extreme Islamist ideology which causes alarm among all of the states in its vicinity with the partial exception of Pakistan which helped bring the Taliban into existence. The continued war to wrest control of the country's northeast worries its neighbours, since the fighting threatens to create a mass exodus of refugees into Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and beyond. The Taliban also provide some support to militant Islamists — and particularly, the IMU.

In spite of the country's political and ideological isolation, toward the end of the 1990s there was a trend in the region toward a limited rapprochement with the Taliban. Central Asian governments are pursuing this as a potential strategy to further the goals of promoting greater stability, containing radical Islamism, reducing drug trafficking, and returning refugees. Russia, however, has taken a firm position against contacts with the Taliban, alleging that Afghanistan trains and supplies Chechen separatists. This has been one of the few major issues on which Russian and U.S. policy-makers currently see eye to eye, because of the Taliban's

⁷¹ Dmitri Trenin, 'Central Asia's stability and Russia's security,' *Program on New Approaches to Russian Security Policy Memo Series*, no. 168.

refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden for trial for anti-American terrorist activities. Both sides have sought to make the most of this given the current conflicts over other issues such as NATO expansion and America's pursuit of a missile defence system. In addition, Moscow is reported to be a major source of military support for Ahmed Shah Massoud and the United Front, allowing a prolongation of the war.

VI. REGIONAL COOPERATIVE INITIATIVES

A. THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES (CIS)

Given the dependence of Central Asian states on military support from Russia and the inevitability of Russia's extensive security interests in the region, the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST) might have seemed the logical vehicle for regional cooperation. Yet efforts towards this end have had very little success. The non-Central Asian states in the pact, Belarus and Armenia, have stated flatly they would not be sending their forces to fight in distant lands that hold little significance for them. Within the region itself, Turkmenistan refused to join the collective and Uzbekistan dropped out of it in 1999. The efforts at joint peacekeeping in Tajikistan, in which Central Asian states played only an ancillary role to Russia's, only underlined how unwilling the Central Asian republics were to expend manpower or resources on collective security. When it comes to broad security policy, each country gives clear priority to its national interests over regional cooperation. As a consequence, virtually all significant steps towards security cooperation are taken on a bilateral basis. A multi-lateral security system is not only elusive, but may be impossible until limiting factors are overcome, such as the competition for regional dominance by Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and the reluctance to make budgetary outlays.

While the CST does not provide for a regional security system, its participants continue to hold joint military exercises within its framework and the countries' defence ministers meet annually to discuss defence and security cooperation. In some areas such as air defences, the independent states were unable to establish their own systems and need the CST to maintain the former Soviet system. In addition, the CST is still a useful vehicle for discussion and information exchange. Thus it continues to exist, although more as a forum for talk and loose cooperation than as a tight military alliance.

Despite the shortcomings of the CIS Collective Security Treaty as a military alliance, Russia has continued to promote it and to try to draw in CIS

states that have remained outside it. At the May 2001 CST meeting, an agreement on the creation of rapid deployment forces (RDF) was ratified. Each of its six members is to contribute one battalion to the force. The agreement included plans to deploy such a force in Central Asia by August 2001, as well as a similar force made up of Russian and Armenian troops in the Caucasus.⁷² That in itself indicates the RDF will not be a full CIS force, but will operate in different parts of the CIS through regional groupings. Since neither Uzbekistan nor Turkmenistan belong to the CST, while Kazakhstan is inclined to take care of its own security and not become entangled in its neighbours' problems, it is uncertain how much the RDF in Central Asia can expect from the countries in the region in terms of personnel and budgetary contributions.

Another major recent initiative of the CIS has been the creation of an Anti-Terrorist Centre (ATC) to be based in Bishkek. This was one of the first initiatives of Vladimir Putin as president, initially proposed at the January 2000 CIS summit, and formally established at the CIS summit of December that same year. However, as of the CST summit of May 2001, it was officially admitted that the Centre is a long way from being operational, despite the prospect of new Islamist incursions. Very few of the participating countries have made promised budgetary outlays (only Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan have paid up on part of their commitments, whereas Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan among others have paid nothing). The ATC is also constrained by a very limited mandate, since, contrary to Russia's efforts, it has not been authorised to operate freely without additional authorisation on the territory of the Central Asian states.⁷³ In the best case, it is expected that the Centre could become operational by December 2001, though it could go the way of other initiatives which have attracted more interest as ideas than realities.

B. SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION

At its inception in 1996, the Shanghai Five, recently renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, was a means for China and its neighbours to build confidence and work toward reducing the armed forces along those borders. In that respect it has been quite effective. In the late 1990s it was recognised that those states had more issues in common between them than just border demarcation and defence. China was also worried about radical Muslim movements and found the grouping useful for cooperation on this issue. The original Shanghai Five (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), became the "Shanghai Forum" when Uzbekistan participated as an observer in Dushanbe in 2000, and the "Shanghai Cooperation Organisation" when Uzbekistan became a full member in June 2000. Although that country did not share a border with China, Tashkent was interested in involvement with the forum due to its concern about Islamist radicalism.

While the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) allows the participants to meet and discuss various regional security issues, it does not have a military dimension. Since the Islamist incursions of 1999 and 2000, however, the SCO has been taking on a more active role regarding security cooperation. In 2000 at a Shanghai Forum meeting, the group declared it would set up a counter-terrorist centre, but apart from locating it in Bishkek there were no other concrete decisions as to how much each country would contribute financially, what the centre's mandate would be, and how it would be staffed. At the June 2001 SCO summit, more details about the centre were made public and it was announced that it would operate within the framework of the CIS Collective Security Treaty.⁷⁴

For all of the fanfare surrounding the SCO and the ambitious projects that the grouping has announced, it is still far from a tight alliance. China has been pushing the group to take a strong stand against the United States' plans to develop a missile defence system and amend the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM). Uzbekistan,

⁷² Haroutiun Khachatarian, 'Creation of rapid deployment force marks potential watershed in Collective Security Treaty development,' *Eurasia Insight* [online] (New York: OSI), 30 May 2001, available at: http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/ea_v053001.shtml.

⁷³ 'CIS Antiterrorism Center not operational,' *Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation)...

⁷⁴ Kabar News Agency (Bishkek), 18 June 2001.

which only became a member of the SCO at the June 2001 summit, has not been supportive of that initiative and Karimov warned that the SCO should not become an anti-American bloc.⁷⁵ Russia, in turn, finds Karimov an unreliable partner as the Uzbek president makes no secret of the fact that he wishes to limit the influence of regional powers over policies in his own country.⁷⁶

The issue of China's role in any Central Asian security organisation is also uncertain. The latest summit produced an agreement stipulating that China could send troops to the Central Asian republics if they requested it, but it is almost unthinkable that any of them would want Chinese troops on their territory.⁷⁷ China's overwhelming size and population and the history of tensions from Soviet times and earlier makes the region's population deeply suspicious of involvement with their larger neighbour.⁷⁸ While that has not precluded diplomatic cooperation, there is little room for joint military cooperation. China itself has also refrained from pressing for such cooperation as it could complicate an already tense situation in Xinjiang, and it has been deferential to the primacy of Russia's interests in the area. Essentially that leaves the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation as a forum for discussion and not a potential regional bloc.

C. EXTERNAL SUPPORT

In addition to support coming to the region through such Russia- and China-led regional forums as the CST and the SCO, external involvement in Central Asian security has taken additional, mainly bilateral forms.

⁷⁵ 'Uzbek head warns Shanghai Forum must not turn into bloc,' *The Times of Central Asia* [online] (Bishkek), 18 June 2001, available at:

<http://www.times.kg/times.cgi?D+article&aid+1023001>.

⁷⁶ 'Russia has misgivings about Shanghai Cooperation Organization,' *The Times of Central Asia* [online] (Bishkek), 21 June 2001, available at:

<http://www.times.kg/?D+print&aid+1023355>.

⁷⁷ 'Shanghai Cooperation Organization ends summit,' *The Times of Central Asia* [online] (Bishkek), 17 June 2001, available at:

<http://www.times.kg/times.cgi?D+article&aid+1022998>.

⁷⁸ ICG interview with Procurator General of Narin Province, Talantbek Akyshov, 6 May 2001.

The most significant external engagement in the region, apart from Russia's substantial presence in Tajikistan, took the form of the United Nations Mission of Observers to Tajikistan (UNMOT). Though never a large force and without a mandate for combat, this mission of military observers served from 1993 to 2000 to monitor the conflict and provide strategic information to facilitate the peace process. UNMOT was removed after the official declaration that the provisions of the 1997 Peace Accord were completely implemented, and the UN kept in its place a small office, the United Nations Tajikistan Office of Peace-building (UNTOP). Also important for Central Asia is the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) based in Islamabad, which has been seeking to facilitate a peace process in Afghanistan, so far without much success. Increasingly, UNSMA is engaging the region more broadly, as there is a recognition that the security problems affecting the entire region are tightly interlinked and as Central Asia states recognise that a solution to their security problems hinges on ending the conflict in Afghanistan.

The U.S. has taken an active interest in the region, largely in support of strengthening the sovereignty and capacity of the new states, with a view to reducing the region's orientation toward Russia. An assessment of U.S. interests in Central Asia by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Atlantic Council and the Central Asian and Caucasus Institute found that the United States does not have vital interests in the area, only strategic ones. On a practical level, that means that Congress would not be inclined to approve any major security assistance package for the countries.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, U.S. interests were deemed sufficient to justify some aid. The U.S. has provided non-lethal military equipment to Uzbekistan, and units of Uzbekistan's armed forces trained with U.S. mountain combat units. In all, military aid to Tashkent amounted to over \$10 million in commitments by the year 2000. In addition, in April 2000 the U.S. promised more than U.S.\$3 million in aid through the Central Asian Security Initiative program.

The U.S. has also been a major donor of military aid to Kyrgyzstan, providing as much as U.S.\$4-6

⁷⁹ Fairbanks et al, *Strategic Assessment of Central Asia*

million worth of aid, apart from the U.S.\$3 million promised for the Central Asian Security Initiative. That aid was also in the form of non-lethal equipment. Mostly that meant radios, night vision equipment, and the like. There was some disappointment in Kyrgyzstan when it was discovered that the electronic equipment was incompatible with existing equipment, and also that no weapons were provided.⁸⁰ Other countries that offered Kyrgyzstan aid following the IMU attacks included Turkey and Germany. In 2000 Ankara promised Bishkek U.S.\$150,000 to reinforce its southern border, and an additional U.S.\$1 million grant for fighting terrorism. Turkey's aid was non-lethal, as was that from the U.S., and included wet suits, all-weather gear and training in counter-terrorism.⁸¹

NATO continued to engage the Central Asian republics in Partnership for Peace (PfP) activities. It held its annual CENTRASBAT military exercises in Central Asia in September. Troops from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan participated in the drill that was geared towards counter-terrorism training. In January 2001 a high level U.S. military delegation met with Tajikistan's defence officials to discuss military cooperation, including Dushanbe's participation in NATO's PfP program.⁸² While participants in the meeting agreed that it is desirable for Tajikistan to be involved in PfP, the economic realities in the country limited its abilities to engage in many of the program's joint exercises. Although Kyrgyzstan continued to participate in NATO's PfP program, it too found it was limited in how far it could develop its ties with the western alliance because of its financial constraints. Despite NATO subsidies for many of the PfP programs Kyrgyzstan defence officials decided against having a liaison officer to NATO when they found that the post would cost U.S.\$50,000 per year.⁸³

Relations between Tajikistan and Iran have improved over recent years. During the civil war the government in Tehran had supported the UTO making Rahmanov hostile to Iran. Since the cease-fire, however, the two countries have been cooperating over the issue of Afghanistan and both have been trying to resolve that conflict as it has affected them in a similar way. Iran also has a serious problem with refugees from Afghanistan, which have remained in the country since the Soviet invasion. It is also the most active state in the region fighting the drug trade coming out of Afghanistan. Both Iran and Tajikistan have taken part in the Six-Plus-Two group that also included Afghanistan's other neighbours — Pakistan, China, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — as well as the U.S. and Russia. That grouping sought some political solution to the continuing civil war in the country. Tajikistan was inclined to recognise the Taliban government or have the Taliban form some coalition with the United Front so that hostilities could cease.⁸⁴

As a security partner China was not prepared to become involved directly in the regions' conflicts, but in 2000 Beijing provided Kyrgyzstan with U.S.\$600,000 worth of aid, mostly offering the country army gear and tents.⁸⁵ It also gave Uzbekistan military aid, and that assistance included lethal aid in the form of sniper rifles. That makes China and Russia the only two states involved in the region's security that have provided weaponry to the Central Asian republics.⁸⁶ Since the IMU incursions began Beijing has participated in Central Asian conferences and forums on the problem of terrorism through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, although those meetings produced few concrete results other than sweeping condemnations of terrorism.

⁸⁰ ICG interview with U.S. military attaché to Kyrgyzstan, March 2001; Grebenshchikov, 'Kyrgyz Army in crisis.'

⁸¹ ICG interview with U.S. military attaché to Kyrgyzstan, March 2001.

⁸² AP, 17 January 2001.

⁸³ Grebenshchikov, 'Kyrgyz Army in crisis'; Mana Kerimov, 'NATO trains Kyrgyzstan for war,' *Transcaspian Project* [online] (Moscow), 8 March 2001, available at: <http://www.transcaspian.ru/cgi-bin/web.exe/eng/12668.html>.

⁸⁴ 'Iran and Tajikistan urge broad based Afghan government,' *IRNA* (Tehran), 12 March 2001; 'Talks between Iranian, Tajik officials fruitful,' *IRNA* (Tehran), 13 March 2001.

⁸⁵ Aziz Soltobaev, 'Central Asian armed forces prepare for militant intrusion,' *CACI Analyst* [online] (Washington, DC: Central Asia and Caucasus Institute), 28 February 2001, available at: http://www.cacianalyst.org/Feb_28_2001/central_asia_armed_forces.htm.

⁸⁶ ICG interview with U.S. defence attaché to Uzbekistan, May 2001.

V. CONCLUSION

Serious conflict is already a feature of the Central Asian security landscape, and the situation could well deteriorate further. The impact of the two-decade long civil war in Afghanistan is integral to the security situation of the countries to the north: any possible scenario for developments in Afghanistan carries great dangers for Central Asia, regardless of whether the civil war continues or the Taliban drive the United Front out with an ensuing exodus of refugees and combatants. The fragile peace that has lasted four years in Tajikistan may not be the end of fighting but rather an interlude. There is every indication that Islamist militancy targeting Uzbekistan is on the rise and it threatens to combine forces with much larger, and until now quiet, underground movements that could threaten the Karimov government.

The Central Asian nations and the international actors in the region may have already missed the opportunity to build effective security strategies and institutions to head off conflict. There is also a probability that these urgent needs will not be addressed, and instead the countries of the region will be preoccupied with petty struggles which could be resolved through cooperation and accommodation, but instead are only increasing the likelihood of a more serious deterioration in security.

Given the number of contentious points between the Central Asian republics — territorial claims and border tensions, payment arrears for gas and water, ethnic divisions that extend across boundaries, militant groups operating on neighbouring territories — there is a growing risk that any combination of these issues could spark inter-state violence on a regional scale.

Realistically, the international community can play only a limited role in addressing the region's security problems. The interests of outside players in the area are limited. Central Asian states enjoy no enduring security commitments from states beyond the CIS, and CIS structures are very limited in what they currently offer Central Asian security. The limited aid that goes

to the region not only stands to strengthen the countries' armed forces, but also has the potential to add to instability in the region, due to perceptions of outsiders' intentions and contradictory bilateral relations. In the best case, assistance cannot be expected to eliminate the factors leading to instability in the area, which depends first and foremost on the national governments themselves. It will be only through the resolution of such issues that real stability will come to the region. Military build-up, in the absence of the resolution of outstanding issues, could have the opposite effect.

Military and economic assistance to the Central Asian republics has been linked to reduction in human rights violations, which are seen as the cause of instability in some areas, notably Uzbekistan. Yet, while the weaker states of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are more susceptible to such pressure, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are less so. The international community also has a limited ability to influence policies that hinder regional cooperation and work against the goal of conflict prevention. Since the levels of assistance which donors are currently likely to give are not great, effective economic incentives for regional cooperation are unavailable. This situation calls for greater cooperation among international actors to ensure that their efforts are mutually reinforcing rather than pursuing potentially contradictory agendas. All security assistance must be carefully crafted to ensure that it does not exacerbate the potential for conflict, as it can if it bolsters authoritarian controls, encourages aggressiveness toward neighbours or heightens tensions over access to resources.

While all of the Central Asian governments expect imminent renewed IMU incursions, they have -- rather than putting aside difference in order to enable closer cooperation -- been pursuing their internal interests to the detriment of regional stability. Any action that undermines the fragile security situation in Central Asia risks pushing the region toward broad and devastating conflict, and it is crucial that all parties understand what is at stake.

Brussels/Osh, 4 July 2001

APPENDIX A

THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS AT A GLANCE

KAZAKHSTAN

Population:	16.8 million
GDP per Capita:	3,200 USD
Capital City	Astana
President:	Nursultan Nazarbayev

KYRGYZSTAN

Population:	4.5 million
GDP per Capita:	2,300 USD
Capital City	Bishkek
President:	Askar AKayev

TAJKISTAN

Population:	6 million
GDP per Capita:	1,020 USD
Capital City	Dushanbe
President:	Imamali Rahmonov

TURKMENISTAN

Population:	4.2 million
GDP per Capita:	1,800 USD
Capital City	Ashghabat
President:	Saparmurad Niyazov

UZBEKISTAN

Population:	23 million
GDP per Capita:	2,500 USD
Capital City	Tashkent
President:	Islam Karimov

APPENDIX B

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

201st MRD	201st Motorised Rifle Division (of the Russian Army)
ATC	Anti-Terrorist Centre
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CST	Collective Security Treaty (including some CIS members)
GUUAM	Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IRP	Islamic Renaissance Party
PfP	Partnership for Peace
RDF	Rapid Deployment Force
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMOT	United Nations Mission of Observers to Tajikistan
UNSMA	United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan
UNTOP	United Nations Tajikistan Office of Peace-building
UTO	United Tajik Opposition

APPENDIX C

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (ICG) is a private, multinational organisation committed to strengthening the capacity of the international community to anticipate, understand and act to prevent and contain conflict.

ICG's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts, based on the ground in countries at risk of conflict, gather information from a wide range of sources, assess local conditions and produce regular analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers.

ICG's reports are distributed widely to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made generally available at the same time via the organisation's internet site, www.crisisweb.org. ICG works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analysis and to generate support for its policy prescriptions. The ICG Board - which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media - is directly involved in helping to bring ICG reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. ICG is chaired by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari; former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans

has been President and Chief Executive since January 2000.

ICG's international headquarters are at Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington DC, New York and Paris. The organisation currently operates field projects in eighteen crisis-affected countries and regions across three continents: Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia in Europe; Algeria, Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe in Africa; and Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in Asia.

ICG raises funds from governments, charitable foundations, companies and individual donors. The following governments currently provide funding: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, the Republic of China (Taiwan), Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Foundation and private sector donors include the Ansary Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Open Society Institute, the Ploughshares Fund, the Sasakawa Foundation, the Smith Richardson Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the U.S. Institute of Peace.

July 2001

APPENDIX D

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