

# The Challenge of Regional Cooperation in Central Asia

Preventing Ethnic Conflict in  
the Ferghana Valley

**Anara Tabyshalieva**



United States  
Institute of Peace

Peace  
WORKS

Peaceworks No. 28. First published June 1999.

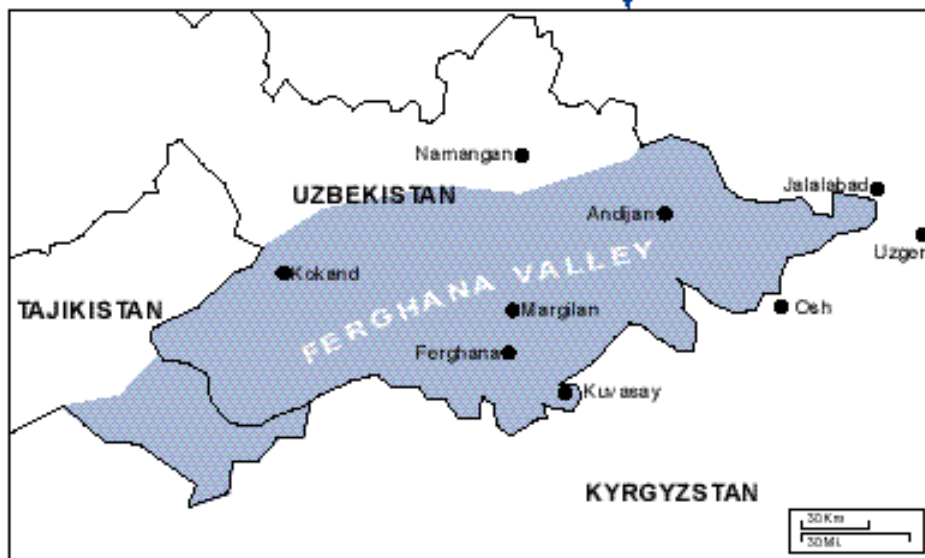
The views expressed in this report are those of the author alone.  
They do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace

United States Institute of Peace  
1200 17th Street NW, Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20036-3011

Phone: 202-457-1700  
Fax: 202-429-6063  
E-mail: [usip\\_requests@usip.org](mailto:usip_requests@usip.org)  
Web: [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)

# Contents

Map	iv
Key Points	v
Foreword	ix
1. Introduction	1
2. Central Asian Fragmentation	3
In the Shadow of the Soviets	3
The Many Dimensions of Central Asian Conflict	5
The Religious Factor	10
The Lack of a Communications Space	13
3. The Politics of National Identity in Central Asia	16
4. Flashpoint of Conflict: The Ferghana Valley	19
Two Massacres	19
Is Ferghana Still a “Trouble Spot”?	23
5. Toward Regional Cooperation in Central Asia	30
The Seeds of Regional Cooperation	30
Russia’s Impact	33
An Enhanced Role for the United States and the West	35
6. Conclusion	41
Notes	43
About the Author	47
About the Institute	49



## Key Points

Central Asia confronts many problems, including the legacy of artificial borders imposed in the Soviet era, overpopulation, a chronic decline in living standards, and ecological crisis. These problems are further complicated by these states' ethnic and religious diversity. The combination of religious and ethnic differences may greatly destabilize the region if more effective methods of managing these differences are not developed. Central Asia's complex and overlapping problems have the potential to escalate from isolated clashes to broader and more violent conflagrations, possibly involving several of the region's states. Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, which has recently been the scene of two massacres, is a vivid example of the region's conflict potential.

Central Asia's ethnic fragmentation can be considered on several levels: tensions between ethnic Slavs and indigenous people, among indigenous ethnic groups, and even among similar ethnic groups: In each Central Asian state, there are internal cleavages within the titular nationality stemming from regional and clan differences, most evident in Tajikistan's civil war. Each of these sources of ethnic tension manifests itself at the interstate level. Separatist and irredentist forces exist in every Central Asian state (with the exception of Turkmenistan). The dimension of interstate conflict is made even more complicated by potential conflicts among Central Asia's political leaders over the regulation and distribution of the region's water resources, and among external powers to exploit Central Asia's natural gas and oil reserves.

Alongside the region's ethnic divisions, there has been a tremendous growth in religious pluralism throughout the Central Asian states, which some observers view as a potential source of conflict. Islamic influence from Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia—despite these countries' cultural proximity—is alien to the traditions of Central Asia. Indeed, Central Asian leaders are concerned about the growth of Wahabbism—a strict Islamic movement that originated in Saudi Arabia—throughout the region. Today the process of Christianization of the northern part of Central Asia competes with Islamization in the southern part. This religious polarization further complicates the region's ethnic divisions.

A serious impediment preventing the Central Asian states from creating a regional partnership in economic and cultural spheres stems from the lack of a unified communication space. Language will also be an important factor in the separation of Central Asia into three or four new regions.

The increasing political polarization among the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union has acquired a profound ethnic dimension, but such polarization is more acute in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have adopted relatively open and democratic free-market systems, while Uzbekistan, unwilling to reform its political institutions, remains stuck with an authoritarian regime and a relatively closed economy. Turkmenistan is an extreme case of a totalitarian state that has reverted to medieval tyranny.

In the years prior to independence and soon afterwards, several bloody conflicts occurred in the Ferghana Valley, including clashes between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz-Uzbek riots in Kyrgyzstan. Although they did not escalate into major regional confrontations, these conflicts demonstrated that ethnic tension in the region has reached a potentially explosive point. Despite the magnitude of these events, they have received very little public discussion or attention in Central Asia itself; the region's state officials do not encourage the scholarly examination of these conflicts.

The Osh-Uzgen clashes are a typical example of an ethnic conflict with an economic and social basis. The conflict arose out of an effort to redistribute land between a traditionally settled and a former nomadic population, a source of many disputes in the region. Although both Ferghana clashes were marked by ethnic rivalry, the underlying causes are more complex than simple interethnic hostility. Both the Kyrgyz-Uzbek and the Uzbek-Meskhetian Turk conflicts were rooted in internal social and political conditions of Soviet rule and have many common features.

The potential benefits of regional cooperation for Central Asia lie in several institutional sources: the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Central Asian Union, and the Economic Cooperation Organization. The low level of cooperation within the CIS shows that it is unlikely to serve as a vehicle for the reintegration of the former Soviet republics. This reality serves as a basis for new relations within Central Asia and between its states and Russia.

The United States and NATO, in particular, could assist in bolstering the region's sovereignty and cooperative institutions. All the Central Asian states (except Tajikistan) are participants in NATO's Partnership for Peace program. In addition, the activities of the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have helped prevent Tajikistan's civil war from escalating. International financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Asian Development Bank, as well as European Union programs, are also active in the region. The U.S. and West European governments should seek to promote Central Asia's privatiza-

tion process, economic restructuring activity, and democratization on the basis of sustainable development.

Perhaps the best way to foster at least initial attempts at regional integration through sustainable development is to tackle the region's most pressing problems. On the environmental front, all states can stop the tragic pollution and desiccation of the Aral Sea. Such action would require less emphasis on cotton-growing and a switch to alternative crops, such as foodstuffs. In this context, the Aral Sea Sustainable Water Management Project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), was a step in the right direction.

The region's disintegration and polarization is likely to be long term. While strengthening their independence and sovereignty, the Central Asian states will likely falter in attempts at cooperative integration without Western assistance. The West should promote steps toward regional cooperation, preventing attempts by Russia or other external players to establish political and economic hegemony in Central Asia. There is hope that a new kind of regional cooperation and partnership will develop as an alternative to the old Soviet-style mechanisms of integration in Central Asia.

## Foreword

In June of both 1989 and 1990, shortly before the USSR's collapse, two violent eruptions occurred in Soviet Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, an area formed by the intersecting territories of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The riots, which left hundreds dead and thousands injured, were surprising in the hitherto quiescent southern rim of the Soviet Union. Thus, Western observers have sought to understand the sources of the riots, even as the region's officials remain silent regarding the causes and consequences of these two deadly and destructive outbursts.

The timing and suddenness of the conflicts touched off a debate among Western analysts as to what—or who—exactly was to blame for the carnage. Some observers suggested “dark forces” operating at Moscow's behest set the tragedies in motion to keep Central Asia within the “protective” confines of Soviet control at a time when the USSR's fissures were admitting the possibility of independence for its constituent republics. Others pointed to the persistence of long-simmering ethnic tensions and a shift in the region's demographics that finally boiled over.

Absent informed analysis of the causes of these outbreaks, we are left with troubling uncertainty about why the rampages were able to sustain their own violent momentum until they were quelled by Soviet security forces. As veteran Central Asia scholar Martha Brill Olcott puts the issue, “regardless of who was responsible for beginning the violence ... it was the locals who continued it, and the trail of blood they left behind made prospects for regional cooperation much more ambiguous.”

Indeed, some sort of regional cooperation among the three Central Asian states that share the valley seemed imperative to prevent another flare-up of conflict in the area. Although a decade has elapsed since the first incident, the factors that propelled the violence have not dissipated in the post-Soviet period. If anything, as Anara Tabyshalieva explains in this *Peaceworks*, they have become more complex and pervasive, as Soviet controls and subsidies recede and as the Central Asian states exercise their sovereignty. Unfortunately, the independent states of Central Asia have few incentives to coordinate policies aimed at diffusing the myriad pressures that continue to plague this and other parts of the region.

To be sure, Central Asia seems burdened with practically every precursor of conflict in the contemporary world—ethnic and religious tension, scarce natural resources (particularly water and arable land), uneven development, overlapping ethnic and state borders, and fragile governments—and the combination seems especially concentrated and combustible in the Ferghana Valley. In this *Peaceworks*, Tabyshalieva examines the major underlying regional dimensions of the conflicts. Although analysts and foreign-policy officials have been quick to point out that the eruptions of violence did indeed involve different ethnic groups (the valley's Uzbek majority against Meskhetian Turk “outsiders” in



the first instance, and against Kyrgyz in the second). The riots in the Ferghana Valley do not fall neatly into the rubric of ethnic conflicts.

Tabyshalieva attributes much of the Ferghana Valley's problems to broader social and political fragmentation in Central Asia as a whole. Although the region is overwhelmingly Muslim, it is known more for its ethnic divisions. There are enclaves of skilled Slavic settlers in the Central Asian states, particularly in Kazakstan's north and in the region's urban centers. The Muslims themselves are often divided by language and culture (separating the region's Turkic-speaking population from Tajikistan's Iranic speakers); regional clans; and religion, as the region undergoes a diversification of Islamic beliefs and a spreading influence of non-Islamic denominations. Not surprisingly, such fragmentation stems in large part from the Soviet legacy: The breakup of the Soviet Union did not change the borders Stalin imposed on the Central Asian states in an ethnic "divide-and-conquer" fashion. In addition, such fragmentation is attributable to the region's historical tendency toward authoritarianism and the difficulty these states have had in developing the institutions of civil society. Although this is a familiar and unfortunate pattern in the post-Soviet experience, there are too many other underlying tensions in Central Asia to ignore these former Soviet republics' continuation of nondemocratic rule.

Nevertheless, the author does hold out the promise of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as a vehicle for monitoring the incipient signs of conflict; promoting more responsive politics; and establishing the rudiments of civil society, including a region-wide communications space, in the Ferghana Valley. Unfortunately, Central Asia's national leaders to varying degrees are resistant to such pluralistic pressures, as they try to rally their countries' citizens around historical figures (and, to some extent, around their own networks of patronage and cults of personality) in the service of post-Soviet nation-building. Needless to say, such an enterprise could have adverse unintended consequences in areas like the Ferghana Valley, where international borders and the state authority they carry with them cannot expect to transform traditional patterns of settlement and local sources of power; in some cases, those same areas may also be strongholds of political power for national leaders.

The author of this study is more than qualified to assess Central Asia's problems and the nongovernmental responses to them. A native of Kyrgyzstan, Tabyshalieva is the head of an NGO headquartered in the country's capital and has spent years surveying social conditions and ethnic attitudes in Central Asia. She completed the research for this *Peaceworks* during her 1996–97 Jennings Randolph fellowship here at the Institute.

Although she reports a low level of tension currently, the stability of the Ferghana Valley rests on a fragile foundation. If economic development and the reform path serve as the first steps toward securing the sovereignty and sense of national purpose of the Central Asian countries, some type of regional cooperation is warranted, not only to maximize the benefits of foreign investment and diversification and complementarity of the region's economies, but to also manage the effects of various "externalities" in such a common, regional endeavor. Tabyshalieva holds out the prospect of sustainable development as the key to managing the region's latent currents of conflict as its leaders assess the trade-offs for promoting economic growth. Her focus on sustainable development projects to reclaim areas of severe environmental degradation testifies to the obstacles to cooperation

among these states on even the most detrimental regional problems. Nevertheless, the author concludes, it is a start.

There are, of course, external factors that also give Central Asia's political leaders incentives to cooperate. The region is susceptible to the influence of many surrounding powers that could foment crises among vast segments of the region's population to promote their own foreign policy goals. Conversely, these powers could be adversely affected by spontaneous outbreaks of conflict within the region. On the northern rim of Central Asia is the Soviet Union's principal successor state, Russia. The Central Asian states are also proximal to Russia's historical rival, Turkey, which can rely on a cultural affinity with the Turkic-speaking population of Central Asia. Both of these regional powers are competing over alternative pipeline routes to deliver the vast reserves of oil and natural gas from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Iran is also a player in the region's pipeline politics, but it is difficult to assess how that country's uncertain movement toward political pragmatism fits into the revolutionary orientation of its foreign policy.

Another unknown regional factor is Afghanistan, whose ethnic Uzbek and Tajik minorities in the country's northeast are defending their enclave against forces of the Taliban, and thus pose the possibility of drawing in some involvement from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Fearful that the fundamentalism of the Taliban will spread into the former Soviet Central Asian republics, Russian troops in Tajikistan continue to guard the border with Afghanistan. China's Turkic-speaking Uighur community also has the potential to foster stronger ties with its Central Asian neighbors to the west—and the possibility of Uighur secession impels China's Leaders to maintain political controls in Xinjiang province.

This Peaceworks report is the latest product of the United States Institute of Peace's ongoing examination of the Soviet Union's dissolution and the resulting problems of sovereignty and national identity. The Institute has devoted special attention to issues in Central Asia. In 1997, the Institute's Press published Martha Brill Olcott's *Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security*. Earlier, the Institute published former Jennings Randolph fellow Nancy Lubin's Peaceworks on *Central Asians Take Stock: Reform, Corruption, and Identity* (No. 2, February 1995). On Russia's relations with former Soviet republics in general, the Institute has also published the late Galina Starovoitova's Peaceworks report, *Sovereignty after Empire: Self-Determination Movements in the Former Soviet Union* (No. 19, October 1997), a product of her fellowship at the Institute. We expect to continue our work on these crucial issues in the political development of Eurasia.

RICHARD H. SOLOMON  
PRESIDENT  
UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

## Introduction

**T**hroughout the Cold War, the landlocked Central Asian states remained isolated subjects of the Soviet empire. Having received independence as an unexpected gift after the collapse of the Soviet Union, five new states emerged in the region. This sudden change ended a long period of Russian domination and has also initiated a traumatic transition characterized by serious problems in these new states' economies and societies. With the weakening of the repressive Soviet system, a number of deadly clashes occurred throughout the region.

The 55 million people who live in Central Asia, a region larger than Eastern and Western Europe combined, are now confronted with many problems, including overpopulation, a chronic decline in living standards, and ecological crisis. These problems are further complicated by these states' ethnic and religious diversity. The combination of religious and ethnic differences may greatly destabilize the region if more effective methods of managing these differences are not developed. Yet such methods will require a greater degree of sophistication than those used in the past. Central Asia's problems are indeed complex and multifaceted; so much so that standard approaches in the examination of such ethnoreligious conflict typically ignore an underlying regional and clan-based competition over economic resources. Despite current and potential conflict in Central Asia, these former Soviet republics have drawn much less attention from the world than they deserve. This lack of attention is unfortunate, because many of Central Asia's complex and overlapping problems have the potential to escalate from isolated clashes to broader and more violent conflagrations, possibly involving several of the region's states. Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, which has been the scene of two massacres, is a vivid example of the region's conflict potential. Indeed, according to one expert, at the beginning of the next century "it may be Central Asia that becomes the central focus of world economic, political and military conflict."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the unstable political environment in neighboring Russia, China, Afghanistan, and Iran could affect—and be affected by—political, social, and economic change in this region.

Social fragmentation is a new threat to Central Asian stability. Ethnic instability along with mass pauperization and a shocking increase in criminal activity seem to be the most vulnerable parts of Central Asia's post-Soviet development. The origin and dynamics of the ethnopolitical situation are highly complex and depend on many domestic and external factors. It is only in the last six years that the newborn states that share a common legacy of the past have chosen different paths in almost all realms. Paradoxically, with the further rapid fragmentation of the region, the mechanisms of interdependence and cooperation are becoming increasingly important as a source of stability for the democratic and sustainable development of Central Asia.

Although all former Soviet republics share common preconditions of conflict, each one of them has its own combination of advantages and vulnerabilities, since after gaining independence each adopted a different model of political and economic development. Sustainable development—the model that guides current U.S. foreign aid and assistance to developing nations—seeks to promote Central Asia's long-term economic growth through the rational use of its natural resources, while attempting to prevent further environmental degradation and other potential negative side-effects of the region's economic development. More important to the Central Asian experience, sustainable development attempts to mitigate conflicts over scarce resources through an inclusive process of long-term planning in the use and commercial exploitation of such resources. However, in order to ensure sustainable development of the region, a great deal of cooperation is needed. Fulfilling such a need appears unlikely, unless the Central Asian states recognize the consequences of the failure to craft regional cooperative mechanisms to address widespread problems that no one state can hope to solve on its own.

This study looks at social fragmentation currently taking place in Central Asia and its possible repercussions for the future of regional cooperation. The first substantive section begins with a brief overview of the Soviet legacy in Central Asia and its contribution to the region's ethnic and social divisions, and then examines the current state of ethnic and religious tensions in the independent Central Asian states following the Soviet Union's demise; this section also looks at the lack of a unified communications space in the region and how it perpetuates Central Asia's social divisions. Central Asian political leaders' attempts to unify their newly independent states through appeals to each state's distinct interpretation of its role in the region's history and culture is the focus of the next section of this study, which reveals that such nation-building efforts have served only to contribute to Central Asia's further polarization and fragmentation. This section is followed by a brief case study of conflict in the Ferghana Valley and its causes. The penultimate section of this study addresses the prospects for regional cooperation among the Central Asian states to mitigate such tensions, with a special emphasis on sustainable development initiatives. The study concludes with recommendations for U.S. policymakers.

Ethnic peace is a necessary condition for stability and independence in each Central Asian state. Such peace will be difficult to achieve without the participation of Russia, the United States, and other external players that could promote regional cooperation in Central Asia. More Western involvement could play a crucial role in accelerating the process of sustainable development and preventing future ethnic and religious violence in post-Soviet Central Asia.

## Central Asian Fragmentation

### In the Shadow of the Soviets

Before the Russian colonization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Central Asia was a region of feudal states based on local geographic and economic needs rather than ethnicity. However, hostile tribal clashes occurred during this period, often resulting in mutual extermination of the groups involved. On the other hand, there is also a history of fruitful collaboration in the region, marked by mutual cooperation and support in resolving common problems. Under tsarist rule, the relatively homogeneous region was enriched by the in-migration of Russians, Ukrainians, Tartars, and other peoples. Russian administration divided the territory into several provinces. In the 1920s, the Bolsheviks undertook a colonial-style reorganization of borders in order to keep the region under strict control. National republics were artificially created by Moscow in order to facilitate Sovietization and reduce the influence of Islam, while at the same time speeding up the process of ethnic consolidation. For a long time, the “camp mentality” propaganda that divided the world into insiders and outsiders was used to mobilize hundreds of nationalities of the Soviet empire in an attempt to create a “new community of the Soviet people.”

Many of the region’s current problems can be attributed to decades of Soviet rule. The creation of Central Asian national republics through Soviet authorities’ demarcation of the region with artificial borders, for example, has provided the underlying framework of the region’s current conflicts. The Soviets divided Central Asia among its five largest groups, which were previously united by tribe, territory, and Islam, rather than ethnicity. Central Asians were encouraged to develop ethnic cultures that would replace their tribal and Muslim identity. The region was artificially divided into two major areas, the first one consisting of Kazakhstan and the second one incorporating the rest of Central Asia.

During the Soviet period, Stalin (as well as Khrushchev and Brezhnev, to a limited extent) deported various peoples to Central Asia, which further changed the region from a relatively homogenous to a multiethnic and multireligious area. Relations between natives and Slavs were complex and confused due to the rhetoric of Soviet propaganda, which created an illusion of equality among all peoples under the Kremlin’s leadership. However, the rigid hierarchy of the Soviet system enforced divisions among ethnic groups throughout the USSR. In party and state organs, ethnic Russians usually occupied the more powerful, supervisory offices (for example, party second secretaries, in charge of personnel matters), while the natives of the fourteen non-Russian republics usually staffed the more visible (but less efficacious) leadership positions.

In all local capitals, indigenous people comprised the minority of the population. This demographic imbalance was especially true in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where Russians dominated many of the key positions in the country’s intellectual and industrial life. The use of non-Russian languages was severely restricted. At the bottom of the social and ethnic pyramid were those deported during Stalin’s repression. In many of the republics,

smaller ethnic groups lost their cultures in favor of the titular nationality, and many people had to rewrite their own ethnic background to advance their careers or avoid repression. For example, Tajiks and Uighurs in Uzbekistan knew it was better for them, and especially for their children, to declare themselves as Uzbek.

In the Soviet empire theoretically all nationalities were equal, but in reality some was more equal than others. One of the “more equal” nations among the Central Asians was the Uzbeks. Moscow deliberately favored Uzbekistan because it was more populous and industrial among the Central Asian republics, in addition to its endowment of raw materials. This prominence has contributed somewhat to Uzbek historians’ claim of Central Asian historical figures as Uzbeks. This dominant position of the Uzbeks gave them, they believed, the right to consider themselves as an ancient nation that was “more genuinely Muslim than others.”<sup>2</sup> Today Uzbekistan considers itself a more advanced state compared with other Central Asian states and is continuing to assert its desire to become a regional leader, competing with Kazakhstan and Russia.

The Soviet myth of a “nonethnic” worker was but a distant dream in Central Asia. With the division of the area into five distinct republics, each one was presented with a history and culture that served to strengthen its ethnic identity. Instead of the envisioned “Soviet melting pot,” the crystallization of ethnic and clan groups occurred inside each republic, igniting an implicit struggle among ethnic elites for control of power and resources. For example, in Tajikistan people from the northern Khojent region occupied the upper echelons of power. This regional predominance is illustrated in the folk saying: Tajik women in the north bear only leaders and scholars, whereas in the south only workers and farmers.<sup>3</sup> With the collapse of the Soviet empire, the struggle among territorial elites in Tajikistan and other countries has intensified. Ethnic, tribal, clan and *mahalla* (neighborhood community) institutions in Central Asia functioned implicitly under the totalitarian regime and did not disappear during the post-Soviet transition.

The ethnic and religious coexistence of numerous groups is a current issue in the newly independent states, which so far seem to be ill prepared to deal with such diversity. Under the Soviets, the centrally controlled administrative and military apparatus enforced ethnic stability. However, with the disintegration of the USSR, such control has vanished and the Central Asian republics have been left to their own devices. Inexperience and reliance on old methods has led to strife and unrest, demonstrating an urgent need to develop a new model of ethnic coexistence in Central Asia.

Soon after the Central Asian states’ declarations of independence, a crisis of ethnic identity began to shape the image of the region. If, during the Soviet period, all citizens were “united” under the banner of a new historical community—the “Soviet people,” united by an ideology that advocated friendship of all ethnic groups—such ethnic “unity” has now completely disappeared. Yet it is too early to speak about mass nationalism or mass political Islam replacing this apparent void. Even during the Soviet era, and certainly afterwards, the Central Asian republics gradually acquired their own models of social, economic, and political development. At present, each republic is resorting to its own combination of possibilities to manage the social dislocations and conflict that result from political and economic development.



Just prior to and immediately after the fall of the Soviet empire, ethnic conflicts between Central Asian Muslim groups began to emerge. Often, instances of conflict in this region are linked solely to ethnic divisions; but understanding such conflict requires a more sophisticated analytical approach—one that accounts for not only ethnicity, but also religion, geography, and the basic competition over resources as factors contributing to conflictual behavior in this complex region of the world.

### The Many Dimensions of Central Asian Conflict

Central Asia's ethnic fragmentation can be considered on several levels. There are tensions between ethnic Slavs (mostly Russians and Ukrainians) and indigenous people, particularly the more traditional, rural segments of the indigenous population, mainly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The potential for conflict also exists among indigenous ethnic groups, for example, between Iranian-speaking Tajiks and Turkic-speaking peoples. Tensions plague relations even among similar ethnic groups: In each Central Asian state, there are internal cleavages within the titular nationality stemming from regional and clan differences. These take the form of competition between north and south in Kyrgyzstan, among the three *Juz* (hordes) in Kazakhstan, or between different provinces in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Additionally, each of these three levels of ethnic tension manifests itself at the interstate level, a dimension that is made even more complicated by potential conflicts among Central Asia's political leaders over the regulation and distribution of the region's water resources and competition to exploit Central Asia's natural gas and oil reserves.

The first level of fragmentation pits Central Asia's ethnic Slavs against the indigenous population. In the ethnic mosaic of Central Asia, Russians still constitute the second-largest (but gradually shrinking) ethnic group, in contrast to the region's titular nationalities, which are rapidly increasing in number because of high birth rates. The share of Russians in each Central Asian state varies considerably: 33.9 percent in Kazakhstan, 15.5 percent in Kyrgyzstan, 6.6 percent in Turkmenistan, 5.6 percent in Uzbekistan, and 3.4 percent in Tajikistan.<sup>4</sup> If other Slavic populations are included, such as Ukrainians and Belarusians, the percentages would be higher.

Russians are concentrated in Central Asia's urban areas, mostly in the capitals and northern regions. Despite the fact that the capitals are undergoing a gradual process of indigenization, natives still constitute a minority of these urban populations in the former Kazak capital of Almaty, and in Bishkek, the capital Kyrgyzstan. As a result, they frequently see their own major cities as dominated by "outsiders." To be sure, the status of ethnic Russians is changing with the indigenization of Central Asia's urban areas. Alongside the emigration of Russians, Germans, and others, indigenous rural-to-urban migration is changing the ethnic structure of Central Asia's cities, thus affecting the status of Russian-speakers. However, this internal migration is difficult to measure, as many such migrants are not officially registered. The indigenization of cities is a highly dynamic process that is changing the social, economic, and cultural climate of Central Asia's urban areas. Increasing competition for jobs and the growing tension between urban and rural populations are potential sources of conflict. Current social hardships provoke mutual distrust between the indigenous population and the "Europeans." For example, some homeless de-

scendants of the nomads in Kyrgyzstan are trying to end a historic “injustice” by demanding the transfer of land to them from ethnic Russian inhabitants.

Kazakhstan is the only state in the region where the share of ethnic Slavs is almost equal to that of indigenous people, although the number of ethnic Kazaks has increased. (Kazaks account for 51 percent of the country’s population, while ethnic Russians make up 32 percent.)<sup>5</sup> Extreme nationalists in the country’s ethnic Russian population promote a separatist platform aimed at creating an autonomous Eastern Kazakhstan region. According to the results of a survey conducted by the Kazakhstani legislature’s Information and Analytical Center, 87.4 percent of Kazaks, 72.5 percent of Slavs, and 77.3 percent of members of other ethnic groups generally find interethnic relations friendly and stable. However, “on a personal level, interethnic tension is perceived as rather high.” One-third of the survey’s respondents said that they had experienced “unfriendly attitudes in their relations with other ethnic groups.” Among Slavs, the figure rose to 43.2 percent; among other non-Kazak ethnic groups, the percentage of respondents reporting such a sentiment was 38.5 percent.<sup>6</sup> President Nursultan Nazarbaev is so concerned about his country’s unity and the impact of Russia’s policies in the “near abroad,” that he decided to move the country’s capital closer to the northern, overwhelmingly ethnic Russian regions. In order to counterbalance Russian pressure, Nazarbaev seeks support from other Central Asian states as well as from other powers outside the region.

Migration of nonindigenous groups into the region continued to grow from the tsarist period until the end of the 1950s. The 1959 census registered a record share of nonindigenous inhabitants in Central Asia’s modern history. More than 10 million people, or 45 percent of the region’s total population of 23 million, were immigrants, mainly Russians.<sup>7</sup> Out-migration began during the Brezhnev era, at the end of 1970s, and reached its peak in the 1980s and 1990s. Each of the five Central Asian states has experienced a net out-migration of Russians (those leaving for, minus those arriving from, the Russian Federation) over the past five years; the net population transfer from the region is slightly over 1.5 million people.

Several factors have contributed to this out-migration. The Russification of Central Asia’s industrial development during the Soviet era and the sharp decline of Russian-oriented industrial exports upon the USSR’s dissolution meant that the first people in a vulnerable position were the skilled industrial workers, the majority of whom were Russians. The Russian leadership left the Soviet empire without any thought about the fate of Russian workers in numerous industrial and military enterprises in Central Asia. Ethnic Slavs were usually the most highly educated and qualified technical specialists in Soviet Central Asia, and their departure has been a major economic loss for the region.

Besides this economic insecurity, growing political instability and the gradual disappearance of Slavic culture in the region are the main factors encouraging Central Asia’s Russians to return to their homeland. Although there is some anti-Russian (most likely anticolonial) feeling in various areas throughout Central Asia, other factors seem to have more influence on Russians’ decisions to migrate. Many Russian authors warn about the future exodus of all Russians from Central Asia; although two years ago, out-migration began to decline, disproving some of their predictions. Many “Central Asian Russians” feel psychologically and culturally different from—or even superior to—their Russian compa-



trials. These factors slow the refugees' integration into Russian society. In some cases, the repatriates prefer to return to their former homes in Central Asia.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, this issue has not received enough attention in the Russian press.

Fearing economic instability, many Russian-speakers are leaving Central Asia for Russia, Germany, Israel, and other countries. Many authors cite the language problem and Russian-speakers' unwillingness to learn the local language as the main reason for their departure, although this is highly doubtful.<sup>9</sup> The "brain drain" from the former Soviet Central Asian republics is comparable to that from Russia to the West.

The second level of ethnic fragmentation is found among Central Asia's different indigenous ethnic groups. Despite the fact that Turkic and Tajik ethnic groups share the same cultural roots, there is increasing polarization between them. A substantial latent ethnic conflict that has existed for decades involves Turkic-speaking Uzbeks and Iranian-speaking Tajiks. This conflict has its origins in territorial and border issues, the most notable among them arising from Stalin's inclusion of the major Tajik cities of Bukhara and Samarkand in Uzbekistan. Many Tajiks living in Uzbekistan still hope for either gaining cultural autonomy or rejoining Tajikistan, although everyone (except ultranationalists) fears that such separation could lead to widespread conflict. This scenario has led most Tajiks to believe that it is better to try to find a way toward reconciliation. However, Tajik-Uzbek tension is a factor that will continue to have a destabilizing effect on the region. Tajiks are not the only group that has territorial and historical claims on other groups; all of Central Asia's main ethnic groups have similar grievances.

The most troubling manifestation of this interethnic conflict is the direct involvement of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Afghanistan's ongoing civil strife, which poses the danger of the conflict's spread throughout most of Central Asia. Because of their close geographic proximity and ethnic ties to Afghanistan, neighboring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have become deeply involved in the Afghan knot. Uzbek president Islam Karimov has openly called for the assistance of Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek who for several years controlled the north of Afghanistan and has been a central figure in Afghanistan's opposition. Many scholars expected that in the case of Afghanistan's partition, an independent Uzbek enclave in Afghanistan would have ambitions to become a part of Uzbekistan. With the further success of the Taliban, the threat of Islamic fundamentalism's spreading throughout the region may become a reality, posing a distinct challenge to Central Asia's secular leaders.

Fragmentation in Central Asia can also be found at the intraethnic level. Examining tensions between similar Muslim groups is a departure from traditional approaches to ethnic issues, which typically focus on relations between different ethnic groups, rather than relations within them. One would expect ethnic tension to arise between groups that are most different from each other, in this case between Russians (Slavs) and Central Asian states' titular nationalities (Turkic- and Iranian-speaking peoples). However, many conflicts in the region have involved similar ethnic groups, such as Tajiks and Uzbeks, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, or even within the same ethnic group.

The civil war in Tajikistan is an extreme case of the region's intraethnic disintegration, where the primacy of regional, clan, and opposing political interests have resulted in a national tragedy. This regionalism, which has characterized Tajik society for ages, finally cul-

minated in a civil conflict in which fifty thousand have died and more than eight hundred thousand were forced to flee their homes.<sup>10</sup> Uzbekistan has been a participant in the Tajik conflict and is actively supporting the large ethnic Uzbek population in the north of Tajikistan.

Tajikistan's experience provides a vivid example of what can happen if ethnic conflict spreads throughout the region. For example, presently there are forty-five thousand refugees from Tajikistan in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. The accumulation of arms, soldiers, and refugees, and the aggressiveness and fighting in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, are extremely alarming for the rest of Central Asia. A growing arms market and a large number of displaced young people create fertile ground for instability in the region, particularly in the Ferghana Valley. Conflicts in Afghanistan and Tajikistan could spill across the borders, affecting the neighboring states of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Owing to the Taliban's harsh political rule and social controls in Afghanistan, a large number of people are likely to migrate from the country, creating a further imbalance in the already fragile ethnic and social order in post-Soviet Central Asia.

As noted above, the current politicization of ethnic relations in Central Asian societies also manifests itself at the interstate level. The issue of dual citizenship, as expressed by Moscow, is one example. Notably, the demands for dual citizenship, initiated by the Kremlin, imply the conferral of rights to ethnic Russians only, not to Tartars, Germans, Ukrainians, and many other non-Russian minorities living in Central Asia. Such a policy would grant exclusive rights to Russians beyond Russia's borders. Despite Russian pressure on Central Asia's leaders to allow dual citizenship for Russians in the region's states, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have not complied. Central Asian politicians realize that dual citizenship in any state could have extremely negative consequences for interethnic relations. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, where Russian and Uzbek minorities are almost equal in number, granting Russians the right of dual citizenship would lead to the dissatisfaction of other groups. Moreover, those who think that dual citizenship is a panacea for ethnic stability are probably misled by an old Soviet stereotype that decrees and agreements alone can easily improve the situation. Dual citizenship has not changed the status of Russians in Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, proving that there can be no one-sided solution to such a complex problem.

Meanwhile, the question of Russian migration from Central Asia has become one of the most politicized issues in the media. The Russian media often inflames the situation by exaggerating the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and singling out hardships of ethnic Russians. In fact, economically and politically, ethnic Russians live no worse than other Central Asians and in many cases are better off because they are a more educated, predominantly urban population with fewer dependents. In addition, the Russian media still cast Russians as civilized and tolerant people, in contrast to "backward" Central Asians.

The revival of the Cossacks is another example of attempts to glorify a distinct ethnic heritage that could lead to a more turbulent future. During the colonial period, Russian and Ukrainian Cossacks were the main force of the tsarist war administration in subordinating the indigenous people of Central Asia. Now, descendants of the Cossacks romanticize their military past, downplaying the mass killing of native people for the sake of the Russian imperial idea. Although today their *atamans* (leaders) claim to have benign cul-

tural ideals, they still support the use of force to uphold their traditional chauvinism. Cossacks in Kazakhstan proclaim slogans such as “Kazakhstan—To Russia!” or “Keeping Order in Kazakhstan as in Chechnya!” or “Arms to the Russians!”

The Russian Duma (the lower house of the legislature) is a strong patron of Kazakhstan’s Russian population, protesting the arrest of Cossack activists and restrictions on the use of the Russian language. Right-wing groups in Russian politics are determined to reverse the political change of recent years and reestablish the unitary state. The Russian population in Central Asia plays a crucial role in these schemes. The claims on northern Kazakhstan, coupled with the desire of some Russian groups to rejoin Russia, also pose a threat to regional stability. Kazakhstan’s Nazarbaev observed that “any talk about the protection of Russians living in Kazakhstan reminds one of the times of Hitler, who also started off with the question of protecting Sudeten Germans” (in other words, advocating territorial expansion).<sup>11</sup> In a worst-case scenario, Russian separatism in Kazakhstan would thoroughly divide the country. The violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, in which the diaspora of the largest ethnic group, the Serbs, played a crucial role, could be repeated in Russian-Kazakh relations.

Certainly, Central Asia’s ethnic Russian communities are not the only source of potential interstate conflict. Separatist and irredentist forces exist in every Central Asian state (with the exception of Turkmenistan). The most numerous ethnic group in Central Asia is the Uzbeks (over 19 million), while second place belongs to ethnic Russians and Ukrainians (8 million); they are followed by the Kazaks (7 million), the Tajiks (5 million), the Turkmen (2.9 million), and the Kyrgyz (2.8 million). Ethnic Uzbeks constitute a large diaspora in neighboring countries: 24 percent of the population in Tajikistan, 16 percent in Kyrgyzstan, 9 percent in Turkmenistan, and 2 percent in Kazakhstan. Significantly, Uzbek minorities are concentrated mainly along border regions, and segments of these minority populations seek to advance separatist and irredentist agendas. This situation allows Uzbek president Karimov to affect the political and cultural climate in the region, especially in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (mainly in the Ferghana Valley). Uzbekistan’s quest for hegemony in the region may reinforce Uzbek irredentist movements in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Should ethnic Tajiks in Uzbekistan demand autonomy, they may gain moral and material support from Tajikistan and Iran. In today’s Central Asia, an unspoken contest for regional hegemony exists between the two Central Asian powers—Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Ethnic Uzbeks, the largest ethnic diaspora in all republics (except Turkmenistan) have irredentist hopes or desires of autonomy as a way to resolve the current painful transition.

Currently, the most vocal expression of separatism comes from the Uighur movement in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, supporting Uighur activists in China’s western Xinjiang province. Presidents Nursultan Nazarbaev and Askar Akaev are interested in maintaining good relations with China and have so far rejected political overtures from their countries’ Uighur separatist leaders. In 1996, these two countries strengthened their economic ties with China and have signed agreements with China, Russia, and Tajikistan, resolving their territorial disputes that have existed since the 1960s and significantly reducing the number of troops along their mutual borders. Central Asian states have been extremely careful not to offend the Chinese by pressing for the rights of the Turkic Muslim Uighurs across their

borders. However, as recent riots in Xinjiang have shown, the sudden appearance of independent states in Central Asia inspires Uighur demands for autonomy. So far, Uighur movements in the region are popular mainly among the Uighurs themselves, while the reaction of other Turkic peoples in the region seems almost indifferent.

Natural resources are also a source of tension at the interstate level in Central Asia. Water resources have always been a contentious issue among the Central Asian states. Most of the region's water comes from northward-flowing rivers originating in Kyrgyzstan. While there have been some attempts to establish a regulatory regime for the region's water resources, future proposals are sure to meet with the continued strong disapproval of downstream states, which have yet to establish rational pricing mechanisms for agricultural water consumption (particularly for cotton growing, the source of Central Asia's principal export crop and a large and profligate water consumer in this arid region). External players are interested primarily in the region's energy resources. Oil exploration and pipeline construction projects have attracted a number of powerful companies from Russia, the United States, Turkey, Iran, and others that are all competing for the right to extract and ship the vast reserves of Kazak oil and Turkmen natural gas to worldwide markets.<sup>12</sup> Open competition among all states in Central Asia for foreign aid and investment also adds to regional tensions and hampers the establishment of genuine regional partnerships.

### The Religious Factor

Alongside the region's ethnic divisions, there has been a tremendous growth in religious pluralism throughout the Central Asian states, which some observers view as a potential source of conflict. For the first time, Central Asia has become an arena for competition among dozens of religious groups. Whereas Islam and Orthodoxy kept the region's population separated according to race, now dozens of mixed religious societies have appeared, where Turkic people and Russians alike go to the same churches, temples, and mosques.

Since the end of the Soviet period in Central Asia, Muslims have become a visible majority. The strengthening of Islam in Central Asia can be illustrated by the swift increase in mosque construction and pilgrimages to Mecca since the end of the Soviet era. While it is difficult to obtain precise statistics, the number of mosques has increased from several hundred to several thousand; it now seems that almost every *mahalla* and village wants to have its own mosque. Indeed, mosques have begun to replace other communal places throughout the region. Now thousands of Central Asian Muslims go on the *hajj* to Saudi Arabia, and this number is increasing annually. In spite of the rapid mosque construction and accelerated Muslim clerical training, these indicators of Islam's growth are still far below the prerevolutionary level.

Throughout the region's history there has been competition among the various ethnic groups regarding their "Muslimness," stemming from the division between nomadic and sedentary peoples. For example, settled Uzbeks often think of themselves as better Muslims than the traditionally nomadic Kyrgyz or Kazaks. Meanwhile, some Tajiks believe themselves to be the real Muslims of Central Asia, as opposed to the Turks.<sup>13</sup> The division between the "good" and "bad" Muslims was brutally demonstrated during the Osh riots, when land disputes combined with slogans demanding the "return" of holy places to "more righteous" Muslims. Presently, there is a widespread and open tendency to con-

struct ethnically separate mosques and *madrasahs* (religious schools) for Uighurs, Uzbeks, Kazaks, and others, because of different degrees of religiosity. Divisions among Muslims also frequently coincide with ethnic boundaries. The so-called Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Central Asia, which was based in Tashkent during the Soviet era, split into five different divisions—one for each country—in 1993.

Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan are more multireligious than Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, or Tajikistan, and have no official obstacles to the revival or import of any religious denomination. All five Central Asian presidents have officially adopted policies stating their desire to maintain secular regimes and to try to balance the interests of various religious communities. Kazakstan's Nazarbaev has returned hundreds of buildings to the Russian Orthodox church that were seized by Soviet authorities, and became the first Central Asian leader to receive the church's highest award.

The few emerging Islamic parties that have sought to inject religious ideas into political life have been subject to constant harassment and have been declared illegal. Prior to being banned, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) had a mass appeal in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The party now continues its efforts underground and its most active segment is the Uzbek population in the Ferghana Valley.<sup>14</sup>

During the Soviet era, Islam's intellectuals were repressed, and the religion survived mainly in its ritual and traditional forms. The Soviet system prevented Islam from becoming modernized; most progressive Muslim leaders were silenced or annihilated. Central Asia was isolated from the rest of the Muslim world's progressive thought. Any possibility for the spread of progressive Islam in Central Asia was undermined by the rooting out of Jadidism, a movement among Russia's Muslim intellectuals that tried to adapt Islamic principles to conform with the forces of modernization at the beginning of the twentieth century. The need to modernize Islam in overwhelmingly Muslim Soviet successor states is more than obvious today. Still existing in their prerevolutionary form, many Islamic values and practices seem old-fashioned to a large portion of Central Asia's Muslim population. Today's Muslim leaders in the Central Asian states have shown marked rigidity in ignoring the social and psychological needs of many Russified or Westernized Kazaks, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks—particularly women, the part of population most sensitive to religious issues. Raised in an atmosphere of Soviet equality between the sexes, women in the post-Soviet era now encounter pre-Soviet Islamic norms of family life. Some politicians and leaders call for a restoration of polygamy and the restriction of women's rights. At the same time, diverse cultural associations with a Muslim orientation have drawn new members from across the social spectrum, including women. For example, women's organizations in Kazakstan, such as the League of Muslim Women, Association Fatima, and Movement Rifakh, cultivate ethno-cultural distinctiveness of Muslims and the patriarchal values of traditional Islamic society.<sup>15</sup>

Islamic influence from Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia—despite these countries' cultural proximity to Central Asia—is alien to the traditions of the region. Such relative isolation reinforces the tendency among Central Asians to neglect the diversity of Islam. Generous endowments from other Muslim countries are a growing part of foreign influence. Scores of students from Central Asia are being trained at theological faculties in the Middle East. Such foreign education corresponds with a rise in missionary activity, which



may have a significant impact in Central Asia's southern regions, where Muslim traditions are strongly represented. Attempts to create Turkish-style secular schools with some religious elements frequently face the cool indifference of the more well-educated segments of the indigenous population. Istanbul is gradually increasing its influence in Central Asia, especially in the sphere of higher education; yet, on the whole, Turkish efforts to awaken Turkic and Muslim solidarity among Central Asians have not been productive. Yet Central Asian leaders are concerned about the growth of Wahhabism—a strict Islamic movement that originated in Saudi Arabia—throughout the region. In May 1998, Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan formed a special alliance directed against the spread of Wahhabism in Central Asia. This tripartite effort complicates the situation in Tajikistan. Said Abdullo Nuri, a leader of the United Tajik Opposition, said the decision to form such a “troika” to combat the threat of fundamentalism in Central Asia endangers the Tajik peace process. Some observers believe Uzbekistan is able to fight Wahhabism itself, because the state has an extensive security apparatus and does not need help from the Russian or Tajik governments. However, the union supports a broader geopolitical goal shared by all three states: to support the anti-Taliban movement in Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup>

The West, wanting to moderate potential Islamist political movements in Central Asia, has welcomed Turkish activism, failing to realize that the region's new states are more secular than Turkey. At the same time, a group of two hundred thousand Ismaili Shi'ites in Tajikistan's Pamir region is generously supported by Prince Karim Aga Khan, the forty-ninth hereditary imam of the Ismaili Muslims and direct descendant of the prophet Mohammed. The Aga Khan's program plans to make the Pamir region peaceful and economically self-sufficient.

Meanwhile, the label of Islamic fundamentalism in Tajikistan is fading. Clearly, the country's civil war has revealed itself as a regional or clan struggle, not a conflict between secular and clerical powers. Central Asian Muslims are still quite far from attaching themselves to notions of political Islam and a theocratic state. However, some new Muslim leaders are attempting to import fundamentalist ideas, and Islamic influence and funds are gradually increasing throughout the region. Veiled young women are appearing with greater frequency throughout Central Asia.

A new polarization is occurring between traditional and “new” Muslims (usually younger and more radical, and concentrated in the Wahhabi sect), traditional religions (Islam and Russian Orthodoxy) and newcomers (Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahais, and others), Christians, Orthodox, and Protestants, and even between believers and non-believers. Protestants, Orthodox Russians, and other religious groups have been actively finding converts among Central Asians. In the past, when the region was simply divided between an Orthodox center and Muslim colony, Christians and Muslims were segregated by racial and cultural characteristics. A cursory glance at cemeteries in any city of the region is proof of the unspoken division of Central Asian society into its Slavic Orthodox and native Muslim parts.

The Christianization of the Kazaks and the Kyrgyz is another recent development in the region's religious diversity. As a rule, new Christians of Turkic origin turn to Protestantism as the denomination of choice, and many Western missions recruit converts throughout the region. Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses have registered success not

only among young urbanites, but also among some rural Kazaks and Kyrgyz. Today it is possible to speak of thousands of Kazaks and Kyrgyz who have converted to Protestantism. With the spread of the imported Christian and Muslim sects throughout Central Asia, incidents of religious extremism occur regularly. For instance, several disputes have arisen in Kyrgyzstan over proper burial rites for Kyrgyz Protestants, as some local communities oppose burying them alongside their Muslim ancestors and relatives.

The rapid growth of Protestantization has aroused serious concern in the main Central Asian centers of Islam: Tashkent, Almaty, Namangan, Osh, and Bishkek among them. Muslim and Orthodox leaders formed an unspoken alliance of mutual support while resisting Soviet officialdom. This alliance has been revived, although now its target is the financially powerful missions from Western countries and South Korea. Muslim and Orthodox leaders are trying to persuade Central Asian governments to allow more influence from the region's traditional religions, going so far as to ask political leaders to ban foreign missionaries. As a result, foreign missions have been prohibited in Uzbekistan.

At the same time, Almaty has become the heart of Western and Korean missionary activity. Because the rise of Islam has affected the Kazaks to a lesser degree than Uzbeks, Protestant churches in Kazakhstan enjoy a higher level of popularity. After declaring religious freedom and openness to Christian aid, and because thousands of German Protestants have emigrated from Central Asia, Protestant churches in Kazakhstan have intensified their proselytizing efforts. In 1993, there were 271 Protestant denominations in the country, with 58,800 members and 158,490 affiliates. In that same year, there were 63 denominations in Uzbekistan, with 9,500 members and 26,920 affiliates.<sup>17</sup> The segments of the population most interested in Western churches tend to be those educated in Russian and living in the region's larger cities. Now the Protestant liturgy in Kazak, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek languages is spreading to rural areas. In 1997, 24,960 Uzbek-language Bibles were confiscated from the Uzbek Bible Society.<sup>18</sup>

Today the process of Christianization of the northern part of Central Asia competes with Islamization in the southern part. This religious polarization further complicates the region's ethnic divisions.

### The Lack of a Communications Space

A serious impediment preventing the Central Asian states from creating a regional partnership in economic and cultural spheres stems from the lack of a unified communication space. One of many legacies of the Soviet past is that the mainstream of information about Central Asian states comes mainly from Moscow; there are practically no media outlets that disseminate news about political, social, and economic developments in the Central Asian region. The lack of indigenous media stems from various degrees of openness, as the more closed states are still wary of the "disease" of freedom spreading from neighboring countries. At one end of the spectrum are Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where the Soviet-style press still talks exclusively about the "happy and constantly improving lives of the countries' citizens." On the other side are Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, both of which have a relatively free press. More than one hundred newspapers are printed in Kazakhstan's former capital of Almaty and more than half of those are now independent.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the communication space in Central Asia is also fragmenting. For example, while Central Asians receive some coverage of the war in Tajikistan, events in Afghanistan are almost completely ignored. The general public receives very little information about events in Afghanistan and there are few conferences or public discussions of the issue in the Central Asian states. An analysis of the region's mass media indicates a fundamental failure to inform the public about these important events. Lack of public information on such an important topic as Afghanistan reflects the general void of quality information in the media.

Owing to an undeveloped communications network in Central Asia, Moscow has retained control over the dissemination of information throughout the region. This monopoly on information means that a great deal of the news the region receives is filtered through the Russian lens, which is often quite biased. For example, the displacement of one million Tajik refugees, their mass deaths, and hardships owing to the country's civil war are by far less known and rarely discussed than the safer migration by a similar number of Russians. There is no space in the region's print media for free and fair dialogue, as the Russian leadership is interested in using the media to control the region's politics. The Russian migration question is skillfully used in a political game. Only the refugees on the streets remind Central Asians that chaos is not very far away. Russian television is broadcast to all the republics, although it has been cut back recently for various political and economic reasons. Turkish satellite television, which was free to Central Asians, turned out to be quite unpopular among the region's viewers.

Russian continues to be a language of interethnic communication. Under the Soviet regime, Russians in Central Asia enjoyed distinct privileges and advantages, which included Russian-language schools, newspapers, and broadcasting. Uzbekistan's attempts to spread the Uzbek language throughout the region met with the hostility of other peoples (especially Tajikistan's titular nationality). For interethnic communication, many of Central Asia's ethnic groups are, for the most part, forced to use the Russian lingua franca rather than their own language. However, the region's increased integration with the world economy will make it difficult for some of the countries to assert the currency of their languages, Kazak and Kyrgyz serving as two examples. In both countries, it appears that Russian and English are becoming dominant languages, and attempts to create an official state language have not yet been successful.

Because of the Central Asian states' ethnic diversity, the struggle over an official state language is a source of tension in several countries. Political leaders are trying to establish the primacy of indigenous languages and diminish the use of Russian as the region's lingua franca. Russophones perceive this as an infringement of their rights. For example, the leaders of the Kazakstan's Russian community "harshly criticized" the government's new language policy. Members of the community urged the Russian Duma to take "concrete measures" to protect the rights of Russian-speakers in Kazakstan, who, they said, account for more than half the population. Under Kazakstan's language laws, 50 percent of all broadcasting must be in Kazak and all ethnic Russian state officials must be proficient in that language by 2006.<sup>20</sup>

During the first years of independence, Turkey tried to persuade the Central Asian states to introduce the Latin alphabet, to which all (except Tajikistan) agreed.<sup>21</sup> However,



this change has had little success in terms of creating a common language in the region. Although Uzbekistan introduced the Latin alphabet in schools in 1996, and Turkmenistan has printed textbooks using the new alphabet, Tajikistan has declared its intention to adopt the Arabic script.

After Uzbekistan introduced Latin script in schools, Uzbeks in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan expressed alarm. Many teachers at Uzbek schools in these countries believed their schools should also use the Latin alphabet, even though Uzbek youth at these schools would eventually become “aliens” in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, where Russian’s Cyrillic characters are used. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have neither the revenue nor qualified teachers to adopt the Latin alphabet in Uzbek schools. A majority in the Uzbek communities in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have concluded that they should continue to use Cyrillic, since it is used in their territories. This may raise separatist tendencies among some segments of the Uzbek population residing in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan that want their children’s schools to follow the example of their homeland. Central Asian leaders could avoid further friction by establishing clear, official language policies so that this issue will not become a concern to diaspora populations.

Thus, language will be an important factor in the separation of Central Asia into three or four new regions: Uzbekistan will use mainly the native language with Latin script; Tajikistan, as the one of the least Russified Muslim nations, will be subject to cultural influence from Iran; Turkmenistan continues its isolation; and Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan will retain the use of the Cyrillic alphabet within a Russian-dominated zone of communication. At the same time, English is beginning to seriously undermine the role of Russian throughout the Soviet successor states.

## Three

### The Politics of National Identity in Central Asia

Central Asia has never been a monolithic grouping of peoples or states, despite official proclamations during the Soviet era, and the diversity of the region is quite obvious today. The increasing political polarization among the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union has acquired a profound ethnic dimension, but such polarization is more acute in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have adopted relatively open and democratic free-market systems, while Uzbekistan, unwilling to reform its political institutions, remains stuck with an authoritarian regime and a relatively closed economy. Justifying his authoritarian rule, Uzbek president Karimov points to the need to combat the Islamic threat, facilitate market reforms, and “prepare” the society for democracy. Turkmenistan is an extreme case of a totalitarian state that has reverted to medieval tyranny. Turkmen president Saparmurad Niyazov uses his pervasive personality cult as the basis of his authority, comparable to the political systems in North Korea and Iraq. After declaring “a decade of stability and prosperity,” President Niyazov (or his self-styled appellation, Turkmenbashi—“Father of All Turkmen”) has effectively muzzled any and all opposition in his country. Tajikistan has all but collapsed under a quite unpopular pro-Russian government that had been unable to control the country’s situation until only recently, providing a sad example of how a modern state can implode under the pressure of regional and clan-based tensions. Members of the domestic opposition in these three states have fled to Russia and other countries to avoid political persecution.

Despite Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan’s partial efforts to develop democratic institutions, the dictatorship mode of political rule prevails in the region. Nevertheless, post-Soviet Central Asia is gradually splitting up due to the continuing divergence of political, economic, and geopolitical interests throughout the region. Moreover, almost all of the new Central Asian states republics are now experiencing the pressure of centrifugal forces that were frozen under Soviet rule.

The quest for post-Soviet national and regional identity serves as a major source of ethnic tensions, as titular ethnic groups compete over the true history and greatness of their nations, which has led to increasing ethnic polarization. Although Central Asians have common Iranian and Turkic ethnolinguistic roots and share a common history and cultural past, recent efforts to unify them have met with great resistance. Instead of attempting to seek more unity, some national leaders have frequently politicized distinct ethnic identities in order to divert attention away from current hardships during the post-Soviet transition. The failure of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism in the region is quite obvious. Rather, people in the region are more intolerant of groups with whom they share a close cultural affinity. Tajik-Uzbek, Kyrgyz-Uzbek, and Turkmen-Uzbek clashes confirm

this type of ethnic intolerance. Future tension is likely to take place in the Ferghana Valley between the Uzbeks and the Kyrgyz, in Samarkand and Bukhara between the Uzbeks and the Tajiks, in northern Kazakhstan between the Russians and the Kazaks, in Karakalpakistan between the Uzbeks and the Karakalpaks, in the south of Kazakhstan between the Kazaks and the Uzbeks, and on the border between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. There is no visible hostility towards non-Muslim minorities, such as Koreans, Ukrainians, Germans, or Jews. The major clashes that have been distinguished by extreme brutality have taken place between culturally close Muslims.

Soviet nationalities policies in Central Asia implanted the idea of separate national cultures and identities. In the post-Soviet era, such policies have contributed to the fusion of Islamic sentiment with national consciousness. With the collapse of the Soviet system, de-Russification is taking place, accompanied by the revival of Islam, the promotion of ethnic leaders, ethnic festivals, and the revision of the region's history and cultural heritage. The reintroduction of local languages in schools and the resurrection of national historical figures and national events and festivals are major components of a resurgent ethnonationalism that aims to consolidate fragmented nations and prevent intraethnic struggles in the Central Asian states. The question is whether the current resurgence of Muslim identity and ethnic consciousness is a cultural renaissance, political regression, or both.

Ethnic-based nationalism in Central Asia is a deeply contradictory process that is not dangerous if it remains within the realm of cultural initiatives. If it leads to politicization and political mobilization along ethnic lines, it can have drastic effects on latent conflicts throughout the region. As part of ethnonationalism's resurgence, the current cultural renaissance in Central Asia remains an ambiguous phenomenon. The interest in national history and its reinterpretation is a positive development. However, the manipulation of history remains a powerful tool among Central Asian leaders, reminiscent of Soviet methods of mobilization.

The viruses of fragmentation and polarization have penetrated the use of history, leading to interpretations that are frequently more biased than Soviet propaganda. Due largely to its neglect during the Soviet period, local history is now being reinterpreted to idolize historical figures, sometimes in a very distorted fashion. Paradoxically, common ethno-linguistic roots and cultural affinities that were emphasized during Soviet rule are now being replaced by the kind of adulations of national greatness and tribalization characteristic of the pre-Soviet period. Segmentation and division of Central Asia's cultural heritage and history reflect the desire of local elites and politicians to reinterpret history to legitimize their continued rule. Every titular ethnic group easily finds evidence to support its own history of the region.

Frequently it is difficult to distinguish between the development of ethnic identity and the growth of aggressive nationalism. In Uzbekistan, for example, Timur (Tamerlane), a cruel tyrant of the fourteenth century and a conqueror of neighboring countries, has become a national hero. Uzbek president Karimov officially opened a museum devoted to Timur, noting that "the civilized world has a proper appreciation of Tamerlane's undying service to mankind."<sup>22</sup> This campaign has filled the country's ideological vacuum, spreading medieval ideas of force and autocracy mostly to justify President Karimov's rule and Uzbekistan's role as Central Asia's hegemon.

Although Central Asia's economic development was never a high priority in the Soviet era, the region's population was provided with basic consumer goods, education, employment, culture, and a guarantee of subsistence-level living standards. Today this guarantee has vanished, and a considerable part of the population has lost the hope for a normal existence. The collapse of the social safety net and the dismantling of a unified economic system have provided fertile ground for the revival of nationalism.

Current actions do little to promote trade among the Central Asian states, leading to national rivalries and economic hardship, which is increasingly blamed on outsiders. Indeed, blame has become a common political ritual in Central Asia, and it is clear that the interpretation of history can play a vital role in such blame. As Martha Brill Olcott explains,

The fact of ethnic and religious differentiation in Central Asia should not be understood as a portent of inevitable and ineluctable conflict. Uzbeks and Kyrgyz or Kazaks and Russians will not fight simply because they are Uzbek and Kyrgyz or Kazak and Russian. However, like any people who have been lied to, manipulated, cheated and abused long enough, any of these people could be provoked to seek quick and easy answers to the host of complex problems which beset them—in which case the rich human variety of Central Asia will provide a ready arsenal of ethnic and religious scapegoats.<sup>23</sup>

While the rise of nationalism and the development of national consciousness is taking place under political leaders' slogans of a Central Asian cultural renaissance, what is actually occurring is cultural regression and de-intellectualization of these societies. The mass construction of historical centers contrasts sharply with the deterioration of grade schools, universities, hospitals, and cultural centers and libraries throughout the region. What is even more troubling is the decreasing number of well-educated people, especially women, as well as Russian-speaking and native intellectuals. The revival of the medieval past throughout the region has resulted in the decline of advanced research units, higher education, and the influence of European culture in the Central Asian states. The reluctance of post-Soviet societies to come to some regional understanding on common national and cultural interests suggests that the positive aspects of the national renaissance in Central Asia are still a distant goal.

The cultivation of nationalist sentiment in the Central Asian states manifests itself in a variety of ways in each country. In some cases, the region's artificial and convoluted borders means that attempts to establish national identities may ignite latent conflicts in areas where identities overlap and where the region's other sources of conflict seem to exist in a conflict-prone combination. Central Asia's Ferghana Valley is one such case.

## Four

### Flashpoint of Conflict: The Ferghana Valley

**T**hroughout Central Asia's history, the Ferghana Valley's location between blossoming oases and mountain pastures made it a valuable center for merchants trading with China and the Mediterranean. The Great Silk Road, first described by Ptolemy, ran from Bactra to Samarkand and beyond the Ferghana Valley to Kashgar. Thus, for thousands of years this valley was an important point, serving as a gateway to the high mountainous paths of Eastern Turkestan. During the Soviet era, its importance as a transit point to China was undermined by the complete isolation of Central Asia from its neighbors.

A unified area throughout most of its history, the Ferghana Valley was divided among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan under the Bolsheviks. However, this division was nominal, since all republics were parts of a single Soviet empire. The first real split occurred in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when these states declared their independence and later introduced national currencies. The majority of population of the Ferghana Valley is Uzbek, and the lion's share of territory and population is located within Uzbekistan. Moreover, in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan a substantial Uzbek minority is concentrated in the Ferghana Valley, along the border with Uzbekistan; this minority has aspirations to unite with Uzbekistan. Naturally, Uzbek president Karimov's influence is quite strong throughout the valley. Overpopulation, the increasing scarcity of water and arable land, economic hardships, and social differentiation all have contributed to a reanimation of forgotten historical grievances and calls for justice.

#### Two Massacres

In the years prior to independence and soon afterwards, several bloody conflicts occurred in Central Asia, including clashes between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks in Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz-Uzbek riots in Kyrgyzstan. Although they did not escalate into major regional confrontations, these conflicts demonstrated that ethnic tension in the region has reached a potentially explosive point.

Despite the magnitude of these events, they have received very little public discussion or attention in Central Asia itself; the region's state officials do not encourage the scholarly examination of these conflicts. Instead, many officials prefer to portray them as accidental and absurd events. People in the region are frightened to mention the clashes, while the position of some officials is that the riots would never happen again and, thus, there is no need to explore them further. The failure to investigate the conflicts seriously means that no valuable lessons from the slaughters can be drawn and that, as a result, they could very likely happen again. Presently, there seems to be no available means to resolve the situation, except the force of peacekeeping troops from the Commonwealth of Independent States (mostly from the Russian army, if other CIS peacekeeping efforts are any guide). If

such a conflict occurred today, it would be difficult to find an indigenous mechanism to contain it.

The demographic explosion of the Central Asian states in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in the Ferghana Valley, has created a major population crisis throughout the region. In some areas of the valley, nearly 40–50 percent of the population is under the age of 16. The population density is also very high. In the Andijan region of Uzbekistan it is more than 450 people per square kilometer. In the Ferghana district the corresponding figure is 338; in Namangan, 215. The acute population density contributed to ethnic clashes in 1989 and 1990, and young people were among the most active participants in the violence.

The first outbreak of violence in the valley, in June 1989, had a significant precondition. Stalin had forced the Meskhetian Turks to move to Central Asia from their original homeland in Georgia during World War II. Turks and Uzbeks are linguistically and religiously related and they co-existed peacefully for decades. When the pressure of Soviet control began to weaken and living standards deteriorated, some Uzbeks were inspired to improve their living standards by expelling Meskhetian Turks, who seemed to be better off than other groups in the region. At the time, there were sixty thousand Meskhetians in the Uzbek part of the valley and forty thousand in other parts of Uzbekistan. Paradoxically, that episode of mass violence began as a small bazaar quarrel that swiftly flared up into a mass movement for social “justice” and punishment of “aliens.”

The conflict was a large-scale action, involving thousands of people in Kuvasay, Margilan, Kokand, Namangan, including quite a few members of the region’s “middle-class,” directors of enterprises, organizations, and schools. Among the most active participants were members of the intelligentsia. Official figures claim 103 dead and over 1,000 wounded, 137 of which were soldiers or militia. More than 700 houses were damaged, burned, or destroyed.<sup>24</sup> Almost all of the Meskhetians had to flee for their lives.

Another, smaller violent conflict occurred that same year between titular ethnic groups on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border, in which nineteen people were wounded, one of whom died later. The dispute was attributed to land and water distribution. Only the joint meetings of republican state and Communist Party leaders prevented further escalation.

These two conflicts are relatively minor when compared to death and destruction committed during the 1990 Osh-Uzgen riots, which began as a conflict over redistribution of land to local residents and continued as savage ethnic cleansing. Similar to the Uzbek-Meskhetian case, ethnic violence in Osh started as an isolated incident connected to land redistribution, again turning into a mass slaughter in many rural and urban areas. The conflict swiftly escalated to the destructive stage: During the week of June 4–10, 1990, 171 people were killed; officially, the total number of deaths from the conflict was put at 300, and more than 1,000 were wounded. More than 5,000 crimes were committed, and hundreds of houses were destroyed.

Compared to previous conflicts in Central Asia and the Soviet Union, this conflict was distinguished by the extreme brutality of both sides. The murders were merciless; in some cases, murder victims were burned so that they would be unrecognizable. Both sides also committed mass rapes, with humiliation taking many forms (for example, women were forcefully undressed and dragged into the street).



The popular political movements Adolat and Osh Aimaqy used violent demonstrations in the republics to apply pressure on state and Communist Party institutions. Both organizations were extremely successful in shaping the “image of an enemy” and introducing the idea of national exclusiveness into the mass consciousness of the two opposing populations (Uzbek and Kyrgyz) that played a vital role in the escalation of the conflict.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the participants in the mass violence had no official leadership. Rather, these were cases of uncontrolled mass paranoia, based mainly on fear and conformity with mob values. As one expert has noted, “The Kyrgyz were afraid of Uzbeks to the same extent that Uzbeks were frightened of the Kyrgyz. Vengeance in an adequate form was dominating reaction and the motive for action.”<sup>26</sup> Many Kyrgyz participants believed that they were fighting in the name of the Kyrgyz nation to protect their land and cities, while many Uzbeks expressed the same rationale; some Uzbek activists called for Uzbekistan’s incorporation of several Kyrgyz cities and regions. An alternative view, frequently espoused by Communist Party members, was that the decline of moral and educational standards underlying the Soviet Union’s collapse led to criminal escapades that were usually linked to the protection of ethnic group interests.

While riots were taking place in Osh, Uzgen, and other rural areas, a group of young people demonstrated in the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek, demanding immediate resignation of the Communist leadership. Also, thousands of people in Uzbekistan gathered on the border to protect the Uzbek minority in the Kyrgyz part of the Ferghana Valley. The leaders of both republics publicly condemned the ethnic violence in an attempt to soothe the conflict. Only the arrival of Soviet troops stopped the clashes in several Kyrgyz areas of the Ferghana Valley. Despite official efforts to downplay the event, the Osh massacre is the only violent conflict on Soviet territory that was followed by legal investigations that resulted in the identification and conviction of a number of activists.<sup>27</sup>

The southern regions of Kyrgyzstan that comprise the country’s portion of the Ferghana Valley have suffered an unnatural social division, in which economic power remains in the hands of ethnic Uzbeks, while political levers are used by the ethnic Kyrgyz establishment. Impoverishment, scarce arable land, and ethnic homogeneity of the official leadership and economic elites have combined with the growth of spontaneous nationalism among various ethnic groups, eventually triggering a social explosion of unexpected proportions. The development of events was accelerated by the change in the Communist leadership of Osh, disturbing the balance of corrupt ethnic and regional powers and local mercantile elites. New administrators fired corrupt Kyrgyz officials connected to entrenched Uzbek traders.

The Osh-Uzgen clashes are a typical example of an ethnic conflict with an economic and social basis. The conflict arose out of an effort to redistribute land between a traditionally settled and a former nomadic population, a source of many disputes in the region. Although both Ferghana clashes were marked by ethnic rivalry, the underlying causes are more complex than simple interethnic hostility. Both the Kyrgyz-Uzbek and the Uzbek-Meskhetian Turk conflicts were rooted in internal social and political conditions of Soviet rule and have many common features.

The lack of communication between neighboring groups allowed extremists on both sides of the conflict to manipulate large segments of the population. In both cases, and es-

pecially during the Osh conflict, people were susceptible to lies, rumors, and the public display of the violence's victims (usually women) in photographs and videos of atrocities. Mass hysteria was exacerbated by the widespread abuse of alcohol and drugs. The alarming symptom of ethnic violence in the Ferghana Valley was that the majority of participants were youths and teenagers who were corrupted by ideas of ethnic superiority and intolerance. The Adolat and Osh Aimaqy nationalist movements, made up of Uzbek and Kyrgyz youths, used slogans of ethnic exclusiveness while protesting against the decline of living standards. Such a mixture of social demands and nationalist ideology is particularly dangerous, since it allows radical groups to easily recruit young people, many of whom are un- or underemployed. These slaughters prompted a mass out-migration of Russians as well as other skilled workers of various ethnic backgrounds.

The leaderships in both Soviet Central Asian republics changed soon after the clashes. In 1989, Karimov replaced Rafik Nishanov, first secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party's Central Committee. Nishanov had been held responsible for the Meskhetian Turk-Uzbek clashes, and both Moscow and local elites pinned their hopes on Karimov to restore stability to the troubled region. Taking advantage of the situation, the new leader has continued to rely on his "mandate" for strong rule. In Kyrgyzstan, the riots accelerated democratic reforms, as the Communist leadership was unable to respond effectively to the crisis. The republic's Communist establishment was dismissed in favor of a new government, headed by Askar Akaev, who promised further economic and political reforms. While the new leaders tried to promote cooperation among ethnic groups, the two massacres remained taboo issues. The official version held that the main roots of these conflicts, among other things, were economic hardship, unemployment, and mistakes of the republican leadership. If that were the case, the situation is even worse today than it was when the conflicts occurred.

Yet the most disturbing fact in the wake of the conflicts is that there was no serious action to assuage the pain and mutual suspicion among all ethnic groups, even those that were not directly involved in the riots. Although it is apparent that the overwhelming majority of people deeply regret the massacres, certain people are inclined to blame another ethnic group for these clashes. The official discouragement to discuss conflict issues, along with the decline of educational and research institutions, makes information about the underlying social and ethnic problems inaccessible and provides more opportunities for rumors to seem credible. Often, the only source of information about ethnic massacres is the version that is prevalent in one's local community.

Although new civic education programs are replacing Soviet-era institutions, they are very weak; they are also found more in capital cities than in economically depressed areas. There is no mention of the clashes in new school textbooks; moreover, schools have started to diversify according to language. Another alarming tendency is the virtual disappearance of secular schools against the background of a growing number of mosques throughout the region. For example, in Uzbekistan's Namangan region of the Ferghana Valley, one of Central Asia's most densely populated regions, the ratio between mosques and schools is 13 to 1. Many children have stopped attending schools in favor of the mosques because they simply have no other place to spend their spare time. Construction of new mosques is booming throughout the region, while new school construction has



virtually stopped.<sup>28</sup> Azamat Zieyev, President Karimov's press secretary, mentioned that during the Soviet period there were only thirty to forty mosques in Uzbekistan and that there are now more than five thousand nationwide.<sup>29</sup>

A human rights worker who recently traveled through the Ferghana Valley observed that the governmental crackdown, which lumps religious and political dissidents together with extremists who support building an Islamic state, may encourage the population to cooperate, or at least sympathize, with the fundamentalists. "The situation is very dangerous and there's going to be a real blowup in Uzbekistan if the authorities continue their course," said Sasha Petrov, deputy director of Helsinki Human Rights Watch's Moscow office.<sup>30</sup> A "suspect" is defined as anyone religious who has made the *hajj* (religious pilgrimage) to Saudi Arabia or who has friends or relatives in Namangan, one of the main centers of religious activity in the Ferghana Valley.

### Is Ferghana Still a "Trouble Spot"?

In the Soviet era, the highly centralized political structure managed the unrest in the Ferghana Valley. Although the Kremlin's propaganda of proletarian internationalism played a somewhat positive role in rapprochement among ethnic groups, it did not provide any mechanism for natural cooperation based on mutual economic interests and horizontal links, free from paternalist ideology, guardianship, and strict control from the center.

Now, for the first time, the people of this multiethnic region must develop their own methods of cooperation and conflict resolution. In short, they must invent a way to live with one another. The Ferghana Valley entered the postcommunist era with ethnic and political divisions, suffering from steep economic decline and the legacy of ethnic violence and artificial territorial demarcations dating from the Soviet era. The type of coexistence imposed by the Soviet political order is absent, and the new economic separation of the three interwoven parts of the valley poses a complex challenge to Central Asia's political leaders. Conflict over natural resources, especially water and land, is further complicated by different levels of political and economic development in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in the post-Soviet era. In such conflict-prone environments, it is clear that entirely new forms of regional cooperation are required to avoid the kind of flare-ups that have occurred in the Ferghana Valley. A new model of sustainable development is one such form.

Throughout its history, the Ferghana Valley has been at the periphery of regional and Western interests. The leaders of the three Central Asian states that share the valley regard their respective parts as submissive provinces, eager to accept any decisions coming from the capitals. The residents of the Ferghana Valley are quite distinct and separated from the rest of the national population in each country and are poorly represented by local elites.

Ferghana Valley has a high concentration of minority populations. For instance, more than 700,000 Uzbeks live in the south of Kyrgyzstan, no fewer than 300,000 Kyrgyz consider themselves residents of Uzbekistan, and 1.4 million Uzbeks live in Tajikistan. National minorities associate the faults and failures of transitional reforms with the ruling ethnic group, and this is particularly evident in the Ferghana Valley. The valley's inhabitants consider themselves to be at the end of the line to receive state subsidies and Western

aid. Current privatization efforts seem to benefit mostly former Communist *apparatchiks* or regional elites who seek to maintain their hold on power. The fact that the region has seen little foreign investment only serves to deepen the valley's economic crisis, encouraging a sense of dissatisfaction and vulnerability in the local population.

The many sources of conflict affecting Central Asia in various combinations—which can be divided into several overlapping categories, including socio-economic, demographic, ecological, political, ideological, cultural, psychological, and geopolitical—have all converged in the Ferghana Valley. The three parts of the valley contain political forces that oppose their respective governments to varying degrees and include separatist groups among them. While the three states made some attempts at reform, the situation throughout the region continues to deteriorate economically, politically, and socially. Ethnicity *per se* is not the main source of conflict in these examples; although they are not present to the same extent in all of the republics, economic, social, and political factors are likely to contribute to further instability in the region.

Political factors such as a strong tradition of authoritarianism and the lack of democratic institutions are a major source of conflict throughout the region. The idea of state supremacy over an individual, evident throughout the history of Central Asia, is a reason people frequently look for a strong state to solve their problems. An insufficient political and legal culture and common apathy, together with persistent violations of human rights throughout the region, allow regional elites to easily manipulate the population during domestic political struggles. As a rule, almost all parties (except the Communists) and even religious organizations in the valley attach their allegiance to their own territory and nationalist movements; hence, the struggle for power in this shared region often takes on an ethnic or clan tinge.

The removal of Moscow as the center of power has intensified the interclan struggle for political power in the Ferghana Valley. Indeed, the “new-old” (former Communist) elites are usually dragged into clan and territorial struggles; hence, the tension in “center-periphery” relations sometimes acquires ethnic forms. The continuation of tribal and local territorial divisions in Central Asian politics means an endless contest for power among groups of leaders. This fight among regional elites for the redistribution of power could lead to future political disturbances. The lack of a mature political culture is also exemplified by the fact that citizen's organizations and political parties operate with a limited social base, focusing more on individual personalities rather than on specific political platforms. Although there are dozens of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the Ferghana Valley (with the majority concentrated in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), this does not mean an active civil society exists there. Nongovernmental activity is frequently considered antigovernment, especially in Uzbekistan.

The role of NGOs in grassroots interethnic cooperation is still marginal. Among NGO members, social scientists, and students there have been relatively few opportunities to network and exchange ideas across state borders. Often the only opportunity that scholars have to meet with one another is in conferences, mostly organized by Western countries. The nongovernmental sector in Central Asia is still at a nascent stage; grassroots organizations are new actors in the region's political scene. Environmental NGOs in Central Asia are somewhat of an exception, and they appear to be a significant component of the re-

gion's budding civil societies; they are more organized and have fewer prohibitions on their activities than other NGOs, and they have more support from international organizations. The popular Nevada-Semipalatinsk environmental movement against continued nuclear testing in Kazakhstan showed a rare glimpse at the power of public opinion in Central Asia. The organization's raising of public awareness on this activity in 1989 contributed to the closure of the Semipalatinsk test site two years later.

Among the more important objectives of Central Asia's NGOs is civic education. All NGOs in the region lack public and government support; practically all of them are almost entirely dependent on grants from U.S. and West European donors, as well as from the World Bank and other international organizations. Although many NGOs in Central Asia seek to recruit highly educated people, the region's severe economic situation has forced the majority of citizens from all walks of life to devote their time to simple survival, reducing their interest in the development of civil society. Central Asian NGOs must surmount a great many obstacles and challenges before they can become active in civic education and conflict prevention programs.

One alarming trend in the region's nongovernmental sector is that some NGOs appear to be developing along ethnic lines, attempting to build their clientele by advancing the interests of specific ethnic groups. Such "monoethnic" NGOs are especially undesirable in the Ferghana Valley, where the potential for ethnic conflict is already high. However, one of the more positive developments in the Ferghana Valley and throughout Central Asia in recent years is the proliferation of NGOs that are addressing critical economic issues in the region. Many of these NGOs are working with individuals at the grassroots level to help improve their lives by providing small-scale economic and educational assistance and training in technical skills. Many of the region's NGOs are indirectly addressing the issue of ethnicity in their programming by including individuals living in ethnically diverse communities. While NGOs are by no means a panacea for the multitude of challenges facing the Ferghana Valley and Central Asia as a whole, they do have the potential to contribute significantly to the peaceful development of the region.

Given the increasing inability of state structures to solve ethnic and religious conflicts through coercion or political pressure, NGOs have an increasingly important role to play in facilitating peace among ethnic groups. While many of the civil society organizations in Central Asia exist on paper only (designed to channel state funds to specific patronage groups), NGOs are attempting to serve as the region's first intermediary bodies between the state and citizens in these countries.

The Institute for Regional Studies (IFRS, formerly the Kyrgyz Peace Research Center) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan NGO whose purpose is to support the democratization process in Central Asia. It was established in 1994 and in a short time has made significant contributions to the understanding of peace and conflict resolution in Central Asia. IFRS is a leader in research on ethnic conflict and on ways of educating Central Asia's citizenry on democratic values and institutions. Through its training programs, IFRS tries to empower citizens at the community level by providing them with practical skills in decision making and conflict resolution at the local level. Under IFRS tutelage, researchers, teachers, students, and community leaders work together to inform the public on their rights and re-

sponsibilities, provide mechanisms for effecting change, and research issues related to ethnic and religious peace.

IFRS is one of the premier NGOs in Kyrgyzstan and has coordinators throughout the country. As an NGO, it strives to support, cultivate, and further develop the role of citizens in a democratic society. The main goals of the institute are to contribute to ethnic and religious peace in the region through research, education, and training. IFRS has a number of ongoing projects, including training of teachers in civic education and conflict resolution. This project has a unique focus, as high school teachers from a variety of ethnic groups are brought together to develop collaborative curricula. IFRS also sponsors research on a variety of topics and examines the underlying sources of regional, community, and ethnic and religious conflict throughout the region.

IFRS already has established numerous links with other institutions in the region, including Osh State University, the Kazakstan Center for Conflict Management, the Tashkent Center for Education, the Tashkent Women's Resource Center, the Tajik Academy of Sciences, and many other NGOs and universities throughout Central Asia. In the past, IFRS has held joint training sessions, organized conferences, and published materials throughout Central Asia using these links. In the future, these connections will serve as a basis for expanding cooperative efforts and projects. More important, previous cooperation has been sporadic because of funding limitations and communication difficulties, and it is the hope of IFRS to create a long-term, sustainable center for cooperation throughout the region. Thanks to help from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations (in the Hague), IFRS conducts monitoring of the ethnic situation in Kyrgyzstan's part of the Ferghana Valley.

The second group of factors contributing to the valley's instability is linked with economic crisis and pandemic unemployment, combined with illicit narcotrafficking and the criminalization of the local society.<sup>31</sup> The densely populated Ferghana Valley is an important agricultural area with an ever-increasing need for arable land and water; yet most of the surrounding territory is not suitable for habitation or agriculture. For example, in Kyrgyzstan less than 10 percent of territory is suitable for settlement. The countries that share the Ferghana Valley are highly interdependent through energy, water, and an adequate transportation infrastructure to supply the valley, and they often have contrary needs for scarce water supplies: Kyrgyzstan uses one of the main rivers, the Syr-Darya, for energy production, but Kazakstan and Uzbekistan need the water for irrigation of their large cotton and fruit crops. Kyrgyzstan is interested in generating and exporting electricity mainly during the cold months, leading to a drop in water levels, while the other two states desire more water for irrigation.<sup>32</sup> With further economic development these tensions will exacerbate the water question. Currently, attempts are being made to reconstruct the region's infrastructure, exemplified by the Andijan-Osh-Irketsham highway project that may bring the valley into the stream of economic changes and provide the Central Asian states with access to the Indian Ocean.

Unfortunately, the Ferghana Valley's importance as a center of religious thought and transit has been overshadowed by its prime importance for drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Russia and Western Europe via Tajikistan.<sup>33</sup> In opening up new surface

transportation routes, Central Asian officials often compete with the region's narcotics traffickers, who have revived the Great Silk Road as a new drug route, becoming one of the few examples of coordinated interethnic "cooperation." The war in Tajikistan is a tragic example of problems created by the region's organized criminal elements, as many observers believe that competition between criminal clans in establishing control over the supply and trafficking of illicit drugs and arms is a serious obstacle to the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Although Central Asia has traditionally been a drug-producing region, increasing corruption and drug trafficking have reached unprecedented dimensions, particularly in the Ferghana Valley.<sup>34</sup> Eighty-five percent of Kyrgyzstan's illicit narcotics make their way through Osh, whose image as a "second Mecca" is now being replaced by its reputation as a notorious drug distribution center.<sup>35</sup> At present, large numbers of people all across Central Asia are involved in the trafficking and production of illicit narcotics, and state structures seem helpless in preventing this kind of "regional cooperation" and "ethnic accord." During severe downturns in the region's economies, more and more people turn to growing opium poppies and cannabis. The growing powers of the "Mafia network" mean that criminals are increasing their influence in political and economic decision making throughout the region. The accumulation of revenue and weapons from the operation of these criminal networks could be a serious threat to ethnic stability in the Ferghana Valley.

Virtual anarchy in Tajikistan and Afghanistan stemming from the thriving narcotics trade is further undermining the stability of the Ferghana Valley. Uzbekistan has been a participant in the Tajik conflict and is actively supporting the large ethnic Uzbek population in the north of the country. This involvement of Uzbekistan and its impact on Kyrgyzstan, particularly in the shared area of the Ferghana Valley, have greatly affected the internal politics of both countries. Uzbekistan constantly fortifies its borders in order to diminish the flow of refugees from Afghanistan and Tajikistan, whereas Kyrgyzstan is open to asylum-seekers. Overburdened by refugees, the Kyrgyz part of the Ferghana Valley could experience instability. A further influx of refugees, arms, and soldiers, especially from Afghanistan, would turn all of the valley into an unmanageable region.

The third group of factors affecting the region comes from the ideological vacuum that exists in post-Soviet Central Asia. Although it appears that Islamic fundamentalism has not made serious inroads in the region, religious organizations could have greater influence in the Ferghana Valley in the near future. The IRP and the Wahhabi movement are popular in the valley, with centers in Namangan, Andijan, and other places. Some units of the illegal IRP that represent a more militant strain of Islam are still active in the Ferghana Valley, even though the party operates almost completely underground.<sup>36</sup> There are also tensions among the various Islamic groups in the Ferghana Valley. Many of the new Muslims, subsidized by foreign Muslim organizations, see themselves as observing "true Islam," free from "heathen" cults and customs. This activity has been severely suppressed by Uzbek president Karimov. Independent Islamic leaders have "disappeared" and fear has spread throughout their congregations and the Islamic community as a whole. Islamic activists reportedly are detained and harassed for wearing beards, failing to sufficiently praise the government in their prayers (Islamic teaching prohibits praising anyone other



than God), showing solidarity with practitioners of conservative Islam, or being financially independent from the government's spiritual directorate.<sup>37</sup>

Central Asia's ideological vacuum is being filled by ethnocentrism, manipulated and spread by politicians in an attempt to prevent regionalism and intraethnic cleavages. The results of a sociological poll conducted after the Osh-Uzgen riots showed that a majority of respondents had an absolutely positive image of their own ethnic group and a predominantly negative one of neighboring groups.<sup>38</sup> Ethnonationalist propaganda in the three parts of the valley advances the ideas of separatism and irredentism, reinforced by the failures of ruling groups. The most densely populated area in the region, the valley contains all the major sources of conflict that plague Central Asia, making it a likely venue of severe unrest in the future if preventive measures are not taken. Although some experts have noted that the Ferghana Valley is "the most explosive region the world over,"<sup>39</sup> it nevertheless has the potential for avoiding and preventing violent and deadly conflicts. Of course, no single measure will completely eliminate ethnic tensions, but it is possible to reduce the threat of destabilization and ethnic cleansing and save the lives of potential victims. However, current attempts to improve the situation do not match the level of instability and economic hardship. The Ferghana Valley can serve as an incubator for a more peaceful future in the whole of Central Asia if proper efforts are undertaken. Or it can become a source of disaster for the entire region.

IFRS conducted a survey in Kyrgyzstan's part of Ferghana Valley in March 1998. In total, 1,000 respondents were polled in the Osh and Jalalabad regions (Kyrgyzstan's portion of the Ferghana Valley). Although the majority of respondents (about 90 percent) assessed current interethnic relations as generally good, one of the reasons behind such an optimistic assessment is the mentality of Central Asians, who usually answer positively if they are asked questions of such kind. Not only are they relatively unaccustomed to opinion polling, but they believe that if they answer in the negative, it will influence the situation. Another reason is the legacy of Soviet nationalities policy, in which people were compelled to speak well of interethnic relations and using terms such as "nationalism" was a punishable offense.

At the same time, the overwhelming majority of respondents believes it is necessary to improve corresponding legislation on ethnic relations. Also, a considerable part of population continues to rely on state bodies for defending the dignity of ethnic groups; people would like the promotion and facilitation of communication and joint activities of representatives of different nationalities.

Women respondents show somewhat more inclination toward a monoethnic environment. The survey found that up to 60 percent of respondents would prefer schools whose curricula are offered in more than one language. However, about 40 percent of respondents were in favor of separate education in schools whose curriculum is offered in one language only. Although education in the students' mother tongue is necessary, increasing linguistic and cultural separation can lead to ethnic self-isolation in this environment.

Among the reasons for the deterioration of interethnic relations, respondents ranked unemployment and declining living standards first, followed by inappropriate staffing of local administrative posts by central governments, crime, and shortages of land and water. Among other possible reasons for the worsening of interethnic relations, respondents also

point to officials' biases in enforcing customs and border controls. The survey also identified a contradictory approach to refugees, particularly from Tajikistan. Although more than one-third of the respondents sympathized with them, the same number did not want them in the area; more than half of the respondents were worried that an influx of refugees could be a possible source of destabilization of ethnic relations.

The survey results demonstrate the complexity of interethnic issues in the region and the need to construct a comprehensive framework for their study and possible solution. The parameters of conflict identified in the survey show that a detailed analysis of the dimensions of interethnic relations in this region continues to elude researchers. The absence of such surveys in the past makes analyses and forecasting difficult, and it disables comparative analyses and the monitoring of changes in attitudes toward other ethnic groups.

The critical social-economic situation in the region creates an unfavorable climate for interethnic relations. The overall picture of the situation reveals one acute problem—unemployment. Although many rural residents received plots of land, they are not able to make a living from agriculture, nor are they eligible to be registered as unemployed. In fact, they are the “hidden unemployed.” In villages and the highlands' remote districts, the level of unemployment is higher, and there is no social safety net, causing able-bodied people to migrate. Clearly, there is a need to develop small-scale industries and small- and medium-sized businesses through micro-credit programs, which would reduce unemployment considerably. To do that, however, it is also necessary to initiate various retraining courses for the region's youth.

Kyrgyzstan's management of refugee problems demonstrates the country's important achievements in this field. Kyrgyzstan's leaders realistically assessed the demographic situation in Central Asia and provided refugees with opportunities to live and work on the territory of the republic. Nevertheless, further increases in the number of refugees on the territory of Kyrgyzstan and the associated burdens on state services require further development of a regional migration strategy and the assistance of international organizations.

In general, despite the significant work done by state agencies on the harmonization of ethnic and religious relations, the creation of an atmosphere of ethnic tolerance and religious pluralism is beyond their scope. Many governmental decrees and decisions are declarative rather than substantive, and there is no serious oversight mechanism for their implementation. Many of the activities of state bodies in the field of interethnic policy are hampered by the lack of coordination, and they do not consider long-term perspectives. In short, the efforts of public agencies are sporadic and isolated; they are based on short-term projects.

## Five

### Toward Regional Cooperation in Central Asia?

#### The Seeds of Regional Cooperation

Despite Soviet officials' claims of success in the political integration of Central Asia, it is clear that such integration was achieved through strict subordination and vertical linkages; the economic, political, and public life of the republics was heavily dependent on Moscow. Strictly speaking, no force has ever united this region horizontally, which is why ties among the former Soviet Central Asian republics are almost always fragmented. The current chaos of ethnic identities derives from the Soviet era; with the collapse of the Soviet house of cards, the Central Asian states for the first time faced the necessity of real cooperation with each other beyond Moscow's tutelage.

The potential benefits of regional cooperation for Central Asia lie in several institutional sources: the CIS, the Central Asian Union, and the Economic Cooperation Organization. The May 1992 CIS summit in Tashkent adopted the Collective Security Treaty, which was signed by the Central Asian states (except Turkmenistan, declaring its neutral status), Russia, and Armenia. This defensive alliance has given Russia an opportunity to keep Central Asia militarily dependent on Moscow. According to the 1993 agreement between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, these countries cooperate in protecting the Tajik-Afghan border as the common borders of the CIS and maintain a peacekeeping force in Tajikistan (Russian troops and a joint Kazak-Kyrgyz battalion).

In other areas, however, the CIS has had very limited success: Of approximately five hundred agreements among CIS countries, mainly on economic cooperation, only 10–15 percent have been put into practice.<sup>40</sup> The failure of the CIS to promote tighter economic and political integration under Russian leadership is further evidence of the mostly artificial character of Soviet-era linkages and the need for a new approach to post-Soviet political and economic cooperation.

Many native Central Asians view the CIS as a tool for prolonging Russian hegemony; the idea behind the formation of the CIS is losing its initial appeal. Kazak president Nazarbaev pointed out that "according to the logic of the previous life within the Union, the center, the core of the CIS could and should be Russia. But I say with great regret that by force of objective and subjective causes it did not happen. Moreover, in some issues within the CIS, Russia conducts a destructive policy, not attracting allies, but pushing them out."<sup>41</sup> A more open opponent of the union, Uzbek president Karimov also came out "against turning the CIS into a political-military bloc or creating supranational CIS institutions." He also spoke against "chauvinist and imperialist tendencies sometimes noticeable in Russia."<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, some CIS mechanisms could play an important role in preventing open hostility and confrontation among its members. Kazakstan even proposed an initiative to



establish a CIS Conflict Resolution Committee. Kazakstani foreign minister K. Tokayev believed that the CIS required such a body to resolve interstate conflicts because the ethnic situation in the former Soviet Union, in his words, "can hardly be called 'safe.'" The CIS has failed to resolve several long-standing conflicts, and the Commonwealth does not deserve its name if bloody conflicts exist on its territory. President Nazarbaev proposed the setting up of the committee, but his initiative was not accepted by the foreign ministers of the eleven other CIS members.<sup>43</sup> According to Kyrgyz president Akaev, "the historic importance of the CIS is in providing for new independent states on the initial stage of strengthening sovereignty and acquisition of the necessary experience of international affairs."<sup>44</sup> The low level of cooperation within the CIS shows that it is unlikely to serve as a vehicle for the reintegration of the former Soviet republics. This reality serves as a basis for new relations within Central Asia and between its states and Russia.

Soon after Central Asia's independence, Kazakstan's Nazarbaev suggested a new alliance of the former republics, called the Euro-Asian Union, that would be a confederation of twelve nominally independent former Soviet republics grouped within the CIS. But this proposal found support from only one other Central Asian leader, Kyrgyzstan's Akaev. At the same time, calls to restore one united and indivisible Turkestan are quite unpopular in Central Asia, with the exception of some circles in Uzbekistan. Notably, seventy years ago the idea of Turkestan's division was just as unpopular.<sup>45</sup> Despite Turkey's current attempt to create something similar to a Turkic commonwealth (or at least a Turkic cultural entity), ideas of pan-Turkism remain more popular in Turkey than in Central Asia.

During their first years of independence, Central Asia's states were quite reluctant to develop greater cooperative partnerships among themselves. This is especially true with regard to more powerful Uzbekistan and Kazakstan, and richer Turkmenistan. Modest steps towards a common agenda and the search for cooperation among members of the Central Asian "trinity" (Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan) were made in order to prevent contradictory policies or even confrontation. In 1994, the presidents of Uzbekistan, Kazakstan, and Kyrgyzstan formed an Integrated Economic Area, establishing an Interstate Council and Councils of Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers. Agreements were signed to cover industrial cooperation, the legal basis for free movement of labor among the three countries, policy coordination on migration, and other issues. However, this cooperation exists more in theory than practice and is limited to a few common economic issues. The Central Asian Bank, with a symbolic capitalization of \$10 million, seems intended more to please the public than to resolve practical and urgent economic and trade problems.

The same three states signed a Treaty on Eternal Friendship at the Bishkek summit in January 1997 and also agreed to form a Central Asian peacekeeping battalion, linked to the UN and NATO's Partnership for Peace program; the battalion, which will include more than five hundred troops, will be located in Shymkent, Kazakstan. The existence of this battalion symbolizes the future diminution of Russia's role in the region.

The presidents of all five states also have proclaimed 1998 the Year of Environmental Protection in Central Asia under UN auspices. They also urged all interested countries to support the idea of declaring Central Asia a nuclear-free zone.<sup>46</sup> The last Soviet nuclear warheads in Kazakstan were dismantled or shipped back to Russia in 1995; however, there

is still fissile material in the country that could be purchased or stolen by radical powers or groups. The Soviet nuclear testing site in Kazakstan is also seen as the source of many health problems throughout the region. These initiatives are significant, since environmental degradation (exemplified by the gradual destruction of the Aral Sea) and the proliferation of nuclear material and technology contribute to interstate and interethnic tension.<sup>47</sup>

Despite these accomplishments, many factors impede genuine cooperation, including the lack of a normative-legal basis for policymaking, problems with mutual conversion of currencies (especially the Uzbek sum), discord over customs and tax regulation, and, most important, the lack of political will. While rapidly developing the involvement of external powers, the Central Asian states are still very cautious about promoting cooperation among themselves. During 1993–94, all countries in the region left the “ruble zone” and introduced their own national currencies. This decision had a profound impact on the economic, social, and political dimensions of cooperation among the Central Asian states.

The geographic interdependence of the Central Asian states necessitates cooperation to resolve water and land disputes, internal migration, and many other concerns. According to official sources, relations among the Central Asian states are flourishing; however, such collaborative efforts are usually within the purview of top officials only, while the rest of the government establishment, as well as economic and cultural entities, are rarely involved. As a result, efforts at regional cooperation typically have an official facade, concealing the isolationist ideologies at the top levels of state decision making and, as a result, growing disintegration. Economic leverage is a popular tool officials wield to alter the policies of neighboring countries, and economic disputes and rivalries are on the rise. Russia has cut oil exports to Kazakstan, demanding higher prices; Uzbekistan halted gas supplies to Kyrgyzstan when the latter introduced its own currency. The latest example of this kind of economic warfare is Uzbekistan’s decision to cut water shipments to southern Kazakstan.<sup>48</sup>

Naturally, the “stronger” countries in the region are less dependent on the “weaker” ones, while the latter need infrastructure, natural resources, and technology from their neighbors. According to Boris Rumer, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan simply cannot survive for the foreseeable future without substantial assistance from their neighbors. And, for that very reason, Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have little interest in regional economic integration that would require them to become donors for their less prosperous neighbors.<sup>49</sup> President Niyazov’s goal is to turn Turkmenistan into a “second Kuwait.” Uzbekistan, with its superpower ambitions, is strengthening its borders and imposing control over its national currency to prevent the importation of inflation from its neighbors. At the same time, impoverished Tajikistan greatly depends on Uzbekistan for transport infrastructure and industrial manufactures, among other goods. A new heated discussion is taking place between Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakstan over the issue of water distribution; Uzbekistan and Kazakstan demand more water for irrigation from weaker Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which are located upstream in the region’s river system.

It is often said that one of the greatest disadvantages of the Central Asian countries is the fact that they are landlocked and isolated from the rest of the world. This geographic

reality is worsened by the deliberate separation of these countries from one another. Paradoxically, they all are to a certain degree dependent on neighboring countries for energy, water, raw materials, and manufactures. For over seventy years, the region was part of a highly interwoven Soviet economy, in which its role was to supply raw materials to other republics in exchange for manufactured products; hence, there is very little indigenous industry in Central Asia.<sup>50</sup> The region's tendency to rely on the development of extractive economies is one of the reasons Central Asia is going through a more difficult economic transition than the rest of the CIS.

Recently, some attempts have been made to establish economic links with the outside world. In 1992, all of the Central Asian states, together with Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, joined the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), originally founded by Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. The ten ECO countries now cover an area of 7.2 million square miles and have a combined population of 310 million. Some ECO members have conflicting political and economic interests, which have limited the organization's potential as a regional body to foster cooperation in facilitating its members' ambitious economic development plans. However, the ECO's members realize that this organization cannot only restore severed trade and financial links, but also develop modern infrastructure in these landlocked states and help find a common agenda on communications networks and optimal routes for oil and gas pipelines. During the 1997 Ashgabad summit, ECO members agreed to expand the joint exploitation of their geopolitical advantages. Among the first successes in such joint efforts was the rail network linking Turkmenistan and Iran in 1996. The construction of planned oil and gas pipelines, railways, and highways from the Central Asian countries to Pakistan, Turkey, and China would lead to a major shift in the region's geopolitical balance.

Indeed, the absence of a transportation infrastructure between Central Asia and its neighbors (with exception of Russia) is still a strong impediment to the development of the region. Transport and communications issues require extensive cooperation among all Central Asian states. Some positive steps already have been made, demonstrating the possibility of dynamic collaboration among the Central Asian states, including the opening of a natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to northern Iran, plans for constructing highways through Pakistan and Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean, and a number of new projects that include construction of pipelines and expansion of shipping lanes in the Caspian Sea. Ironically, despite the positive achievements of joint transportation projects, some Central Asian states (mainly Uzbekistan) have made passage across their borders more difficult by complicating customs procedures.

Nevertheless, despite some signs of progress on joint initiatives, Central Asian states are trying to become more and more independent of one another at a time when numerous common problems demand new forms of cooperation.

### Russia's Impact

Owing to its geography and history, Russia still enjoys a great advantage over other external players that are trying to increase their influence in the region. Although Russia can provide incentives for developing mutually beneficial relations with the Central Asian states, its reliance on old stereotypes toward its former colonies will only lead to increased

cooperation of the Central Asian states with other regional and international actors. Thus the Slavic union created by Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus in December 1991 was perceived as a counterweight against the non-Slavic states of Central Asia and the Transcaucasus. Russia's leaders still do not have a clear vision of the country's interests in the region, resulting in policies that are often vague and chaotic. After the collapse of the Soviet empire, Russian policy was based on the definition of the Central Asian and Transcaucasian states as part of Russia's "near abroad." The name alone was evidence of a double-standard in Russian foreign policy. As S. Neil MacFarlane notes, such a designation means the division of

the international system into two categories—one in which states enjoy full rights of sovereignty and agency in international relations and the other in which they do not. As Russian policy emerges, it becomes increasingly clear that, from the Russian perspective, Central Asia exists in some intermediate category. In particular, Russia is arrogating unto itself a right for the systematic intervention in the internal affairs of other former Soviet republics, with the qualified exception of the Baltic republics. This includes a right to intervene—in a solicited or unsolicited fashion—with military force in the affairs of these states when Russian decision makers judge their interests to be served in so doing.<sup>51</sup>

Each Central Asian state has a different level of dependency on Russia and a different model of ethno-political development. Karimov and Nazarbaev, presidents of Central Asia's larger and more powerful states, criticize the Russian leadership more harshly and more often than other Central Asian leaders. Only Uzbekistan, with its stronger army, has dared to emphasize its independence from Russia, whereas Tajikistan remains in a semi-colonial status; Turkmenistan has succumbed to Russian pressure and adopted a dual-citizenship policy for its ethnic Russians.

Russia has been most successful in applying pressure on the smaller Central Asian states, such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, which must protect their sovereignty against the dual forces of territorial competition and increased influence from external powers. Russia's interest in establishing military "peacekeeping" missions in Central Asia and its attempt to restore Central Asia's dependence on Moscow would explain democratic Russia's support of a neocommunist regime in Tajikistan, sustained by an unpopular local clan loyal to Moscow. At the same time, Russian troops prevent Tajikistan's complete collapse from internal fragmentation. Meanwhile, the failure of the Russian military in Chechnya and its inability to put an end to the war in Tajikistan have forced Central Asian regimes to seek cooperation with other players, thus limiting the Russian military's influence in these countries. For example, Kazak president Nazarbaev has criticized Russia's military presence in Armenia and Tajikistan, which he said reflected a "pro-communist mentality" in the Russian bureaucracy.<sup>52</sup>

Central Asia's dependence on Russia in security affairs stems from the Russian view that the external borders of the Central Asian states are Russian frontiers, because there are still very few guarded borders in the former Soviet republics. Most borders are patrolled by Russian border guards; Uzbekistan is the only state in the region that does not

use Russian border guards. The new Central Asian states are not prepared to equip and maintain their own armies, and Russia's military establishment intends to keep a presence in the region, using any pretext it can. For instance, Russian leaders criticize Uzbekistan's human rights record while simultaneously supporting Tajikistan's neocommunist and authoritarian government.

With the goal of establishing political and economic hegemony in Central Asia, Russian policy has sought to increase the country's mission in the region and to diminish the independence of its former colonies. It does this by trying to manipulate ethnic tensions, energy supplies, and other internal problems of the newly independent states. For example, Moscow is unwilling to allow the construction of pipelines from Central Asia through Turkey, Iran, or Afghanistan, seeking instead to lay the pipelines through Russia to its Black Sea shipping terminals. Russia and Iran have been supplying the forces of Afghan warlords Rashid Dostum (an ethnic Uzbek) and Ahmad Shah-Masood (an ethnic Tajik), who are fighting against the Taliban movement. Russian-Iranian cooperation and Pakistan's policy in Afghanistan threaten to seriously destabilize the new Central Asian states.

Russia's profound impact on Central Asia is two-sided. Progressive ideas coming from Russia are intellectually beneficial for Central Asia. The positive impulse of Russian cultural influence during the Soviet era led to the development of industry, education, sciences, and the arts, creating organizational uniformity in the republics' economic and cultural affairs. Severing these links would be regressive for the Central Asian states. Sandwiched between the two giants of Russia and China, Central Asia has more political, economic, and cultural affinity to the former imperial center than to the prosperous Asian communist power.

For the first time in 150 years, Russia's attempts to restore its hegemony in the region are facing competition from other external powers, specifically China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United States. The West wants to promote democracy in the region, Turkey wants to awaken Turkic solidarity, and Pakistan and Iran stress the importance of religious and geopolitical cooperation. All of Central Asia's new suitors are in search of lucrative deals in the region's energy sector. Nevertheless, Russia's role, while it has diminished, is likely to remain significant in the near future, although it will be constantly undermined by forces of nationalism in both Russia and Central Asia.

### **An Enhanced Role for the United States and the West**

According to Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, American support to Central Asia has four dimensions, including "promotion of democracy, creation of free-market economies, sponsorship of peace and cooperation within and among the countries of the region, and their integration with the larger international community."<sup>53</sup>

The West could play a very important role in bolstering the region's sovereignty and cooperative institutions, and in shaping the future regional balance of power as well. The United States and NATO, in particular, could assist in developing the region's militaries. All the Central Asian states (except Tajikistan) are participants in NATO's Partnership for Peace program. The European Union and the United Nations have offered technical assistance for coordinating the joint Kazak-Kyrgyz-Uzbek military battalion; in addition, the activities of the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have

helped prevent Tajikistan's civil war from escalating. International financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Asian Development Bank, as well as European Union programs, are also active in the region. The U.S. and West European governments seek to promote Central Asia's privatization process, economic restructuring activity, and democratization; influential corporations from the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Japan are beginning to assist in the development of Central Asia's vast energy resources and raw materials.

The need to support indigenous efforts is extremely urgent in such assistance. Central Asia's population is well educated and skilled. People who are trying to build strong civil societies in the region desperately need to concentrate on long-term efforts instead of having to worry about day-to-day survival solely. The main drawback of the first years of independence in Central Asia is an obvious lack of long-term cooperation. As Kyrgyz president Askar Akaev pointed out,

among the lessons we have been taught by the process of transformations, there is that I would call "the collapse of illusions." The essence of this lesson is that both the West and postcommunist nations naively expected too much in too short a time. The ruling elites in postcommunist nations, including Kyrgyzstan, obviously had an exaggerated and simplistic idea about the kind of support and assistance they could receive from the West. They all looked forward to some kind of an expanded "Marshall Plan." As for the West, there was a wide-ranging underestimation of the systemic complexity of the necessary changes and of the degree of resistance of the old and still powerful structures.<sup>54</sup>

However, Western initiatives and support could be more future-oriented and do more to ease Central Asia's economic hardship and ethnic tensions, thereby diminishing the major sources of the region's deadly conflicts. The resolution of economic and social problems, development of civic institutions and stability-promoting measures (particularly those that combat the production and trafficking of illicit narcotics), and help in the integration of refugees and displaced persons are just some areas in which the West could be helpful in promoting stability among the Central Asian states.

Taking into account the region's extremely harsh economic situation, the most beneficial assistance to the Central Asian states would concentrate on implementing a large-scale program for reducing unemployment and improving the region's economies. Common aims might create a basis for developing horizontal ties and for the joint resolution of the region's many interrelated problems. Local development efforts should include programs aimed at bringing different ethnic groups together to encourage cooperation instead of competition. To avoid the tendency of such assistance to reinforce traditional dependence of Central Asia on foreign donors and international institutions, the international community should promote programs that encourage the indigenous development of the institutions of civil society and the private sector, as well as policy innovation in the region's governmental bureaucracies.

The West supports the building of democracy; promoting the growth of NGOs; and developing exchange programs for students, teachers, and government officials. Neverthe-



less, the transition to civil society is an extremely difficult challenge in the region, even for the two states that have taken some significant steps along this path, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Under the pressure of the West and its desire to develop new ties to influential regimes, even the leaders of the region's most autocratic states are anxious to create a democratic image for their countries. For example, Uzbekistan's Karimov publicly demands "more courage" from his country's parliamentarians in revealing human rights violations while at the same time goes to great lengths to silence the leaders of the political opposition. Turkmenistan's Niyazov tries to demonstrate the democratic character of his one-party regime. For example, an officially sponsored Human Rights Center was opened in Turkmenistan, even though according to Freedom House, the country has the lowest level of political rights.<sup>55</sup> Educational opportunities to promote the values of civil society should be fostered at all levels of Central Asian society.

Increasing regional cooperation among public officials and NGOs would be extremely beneficial. Joint programs between Central Asian and Western grassroots organizations are of special value. Many experts, including Deputy Secretary of State Talbott predict that "if internal and cross-border conflicts simmer and flare, the region could become a breeding ground of terrorism, a hotbed of religious and political extremism, and a battleground for outright war." Thus "conflict resolution must be job one for U.S. policy in the region: It is both the prerequisite for, and an accompaniment to, energy development."<sup>56</sup> International support is especially vital for conflict resolution programs and civic education in schools throughout Central Asia and particularly in the Ferghana Valley. It is also important to foster cooperation in the area of human rights; only the idea of universal human rights can transcend the primacy of ethnoregional clans in Central Asia.

In its goal of promoting sustainable development around the world, the Clinton administration should naturally endorse regional cooperation in Central Asia. In fact, sustainable development is an integral part of the administration's national security strategy, since such development not only "improves prospects for democracy in developing countries," according to the administration, but "alleviates pressure on the global environment, reduces the attraction of the illegal drug trade, and improves health and economic productivity."<sup>57</sup>

The United States has taken the lead in establishing the financial and entrepreneurial foundation for the development of the post-Soviet Central Asian economies. In 1994, it established a Central Asian-American Enterprise Fund to encourage small- and medium-sized privatization of Soviet-era firms, and extended Overseas Private Investment Corporation financing and insurance to U.S. investors. Such funding should continue, but should focus on attracting businesses and investment that contribute to the region's sustainable development. The U.S. Department of Commerce's liaison offices in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, set up in 1993 to assist U.S. firms that want to open branches in the Central Asian states, should operate under such a new mandate.

Central Asians from almost all walks of life view Western interest in their region as a way toward overall economic development and better standards of living. For example, the Kazakstani populace is fairly open to the idea of foreign investment: 75 percent of respondents in a recent survey believe it should be welcomed or allowed, while just 17 per-

cent say it should be prohibited.<sup>58</sup> Among the CIS countries, Kazakstan is a leader in foreign investments, exceeding \$400 per capita between 1993 and 1997.<sup>59</sup>

People in Central Asia realize that the region's predominant natural resources such as oil, natural gas, and gold could provide the immediate impetus to the revival of industrial production throughout the region. The resulting income can promote diversity of these countries' economies and the improvement of education and health-care systems with the additional revenue—if Central Asian leaders carry out the necessary economic reforms. The examples of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan indicate that significant reserves of energy resources and deposits of gold, which have practically no value-added inputs in their pricing, forestall structural reform of their economies. Central Asian elites have relied on revenue from natural-resource exports rather than creating a strategy for national development by diversifying their economies; in such a way, the region's political leaders avoid having to make difficult choices in industrial planning and regional coordination of economic policies. Moreover, revenues from the energy and mining sectors are not always reinvested in these countries' economies, precluding the development of new domestic industries and the growth of small- and medium-sized enterprises.

Needless to say, Central Asia's reliance on extractive economies also comes with a heavy environmental toll, including the degradation of the natural landscape, wildlife, and agriculture; the expansion of the region's petroleum industry means more oil spills in the Caspian Sea. Serious accidents from Western companies' activities are quickly dispelling the initial euphoria from the profits accruing in the partnership between Western businesses and local elites. More than six hundred Kyrgyz citizens were poisoned (several of them fatally) in May 1998 by a massive sodium cyanide spill into Kyrgyzstan's Lake Issyk-Kul due to negligence of Kumtor, a joint venture between Kyrgyzstan and the Cameco Corporation, a Canadian mining conglomerate. Some local citizens started a protest against the company, but continued carelessness and its environmental and health repercussions throughout the region may give rise to widespread anti-Western sentiment in the Central Asian countries.<sup>60</sup>

If there is one region of the world that meets the prerequisites for sustainable development, it is Central Asia. However, the region's reliance on extractive economies poses an immense challenge to broad-based, let alone sustainable, development. Nevertheless, the focus of U.S. development aid in Central Asia—and that of the West in general—should be on industries that encourage national and, most important, regional integration. While the new states of Central Asia have generations to go before they can develop the kind of complementarity found in the European Union's economies, it is clear that the continued promotion of subregional and clan-based pockets of economic development in the Central Asian experience can only lead to more fragmentation and potential conflict as these countries seek to develop specific sectors—in areas dominated by particular ethnic groups—that currently enjoy a comparative advantage.

Kazakstan and Turkmenistan (and, to a lesser extent, Uzbekistan) will lead the region in the export of energy resources. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan boast of their vast gold production, the former also possessing major reserves of strategic minerals. Tajikistan has the fourth-largest aluminum processing plant, although its productivity has suffered from a

Soviet industrial legacy, civil war, and ongoing disputes among the country's regional leaders over the plant's assets. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are also leading producers of cotton. Owing to the lack of industrial development during the Soviet era, Central Asia does not have much of a manufacturing sector; most of the few plants that do exist are antiquated. Hence, natural resources will probably dominate Central Asia's export potential for years to come, leaving little to establish regional integration along the lines of a customs union or free-trade area.

Perhaps the best way to foster at least initial attempts at such integration is to tackle the region's most pressing problems. On the environmental front, all states can stop the tragic pollution and desiccation of the Aral Sea. Such action would require less emphasis on cotton-growing, an environmentally unsound crop which is also a profligate consumer of scarce water resources, and a switch to alternative crops such as foodstuffs. Such action would also require the adoption of a rational pricing system for water throughout the region, possibly supplemented by conservation measures such as drip-irrigation, and alternative agricultural methods. In this context, the Aral Sea Sustainable Water Management Project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), was a step in the right direction. The project aided the implementation of the first-ever water-sharing agreement among all five Central Asian states in addition to providing technical assistance for improving water quality, management of scarce water resources, and public health education. In addition, the recent Atarau Conference was a welcome sign that "environmentally friendly" firms can contribute to the region's economic development.<sup>61</sup>

Officially, all Central Asian presidents stress adherence to sustainable development in their countries. In Kyrgyzstan, the Presidential Council elaborated a "Strategy of Sustainable Human Development." In all Central Asian states, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) contributes greatly in highlighting the importance of sustainable development as a reference point for governmental agencies and NGOs. At the same time, the concept of sustainable development is not widely known outside of a few government agencies and some segments of urban populations; the concept is virtually unknown in the region's rural areas. As such, sustainable development allows a wide degree of latitude over its interpretation and implementation.

Regional cooperation in sustainable development practices has proved difficult to date. The geographic and economic interdependence of Central Asian states emphasizes the need to coordinate economic development policies. Yet the fragile nature of these relatively new political systems makes their leaders cautious about surrendering sovereignty, even for the realization of mutual economic gains or the prevention of cross-border environmental hazards resulting from economic development. Unfortunately, Central Asia's political leaders are preoccupied with more serious issues confronting this huge region, especially the region's water shortage and food security.

Problems or issues in which there is evident common interest, such as road construction and drug control, remain the most potentially fruitful way for regional policy coordination in Central Asia. In this context, one of the more notable achievements of the Central Asian Union is the creation of an executive committee, which is to embody all the decisions of the Interstate Council; a council of the region's presidents, prime ministers, and foreign and defense ministers has also been established. Energy management, trans-

portation and communications, customs regimes, and currency clearinghouses for trade are among the more acute problems on the Central Asian Union's agenda.

While AID points to its Aral Sea project as the main sustainable development project in the region, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UNDP have implemented similar programs in three parts of the Ferghana Valley. A program on tolerance education was first implemented in the Tajik and Kyrgyz parts of the valley. UNDP has so far begun only the first steps of a joint program in three parts of the valley on the development of local communities. Many other similar projects should be established in areas of the Ferghana Valley that are prone to conflict. Obviously, international organizations or Western governments may effectively inspire regional cooperation for sustainable development in Central Asia.

Meanwhile, the tragedy of the Aral Sea represents only the surface of the region's severe environmental degradation due to economic and social policies that give little regard to their ecological impact. In the Ferghana Valley, the expansion of the mining industry has led to a rapid deterioration of the region's topography and natural drainage system, causing flooding and cross-border pollution from the erosion of gold and uranium tailings. Because Central Asia is landlocked, regional powers will obviously play a crucial role in its economic development. China, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey are not only Central Asia's future gateways to international markets, but also important partners in the financing and construction of the infrastructure required. These regional powers have a firm stake in Central Asia's stability; hence, their cooperation with the region's states in promoting their nationally and regionally integrated economic development redounds to their benefit as well. Such an agenda is ambitious, but the ECO already provides an institutional forum for planning and coordinating economic projects on a regional basis.

Russia is obviously another regional power that will want to maintain its considerable influence over the former Soviet Central Asian republics' future economic development. But influence—whether it is Russian or that of any other major regional power—should not be equated with hegemony in this regard. Russia does have a special role in Central Asia, but it should not interfere with the region's attempts to integrate itself in the global economy and bring prosperity to its peoples. Such interference would not serve Russian interests in maintaining a belt of stability along the southern tier of former Soviet republics. An expanded and fortified U.S. role in the region will certainly counterbalance attempts by regional powers to dictate the course of Central Asia's development.

The United States could also use its influence to encourage improvements in legislative procedures and the move toward truly law-abiding civil societies that would replace varying degrees of autocratic, one-party rule throughout Central Asia. A regional newspaper or other source of interstate communication would be very advantageous in this regard. Academic research and cooperation should be encouraged within and among Central Asian states, as well as between them and the West. The success in supporting this area of the world would be important evidence of the effectiveness of U.S. policy in promoting sustainable development and preventing deadly conflict in Central Asia.

## Six

### Conclusion

All the Central Asian states are struggling with the legacy inherited from a post-colonial era. During the past six to ten years, the countries of Central Asia have changed drastically, advancing in some areas and regressing in others. This process is further complicated by the polarization of the region's various ethnic groups. Although Central Asian nations have a common history, each state has its own model for its future development.

Contradictory trends in the search for national identities in the post-Soviet era and the unstable social environment in Central Asia may lead to more conflict situations. If these potential sources of tension are not addressed, they may easily turn into destructively brutal conflicts. The need to promote democracy and peaceful conflict resolution within the region is of the utmost importance; it will be far more costly to compensate for the consequences of a conflict rather than its prevention. To change tense ethnic and religious conditions that threaten to reverse the course of democratic and sustainable development, the region's political leaders must arrive at a new understanding of the roots of such tensions and how they may be ameliorated. Although it is very difficult to generalize across the Central Asian states, it is possible to reach some tentative conclusions about the sources of conflict.

Prospects for Central Asia's regional stability are closely linked to internal processes. It is estimated that by 2025, the population of the region will reach 83.4 million (see table 1), whereas the distribution of resources in the region remains uneven. The lack of water, land degradation, and overcrowded agricultural areas and urban zones are potential factors of tension, often masked as ethnic rivalry. Rapid demographic change, combined with the steady decline of the economic system and social safety net, will further aggravate unemployment and social tensions accruing from the region's pandemic poverty and high

**Table 1: Central Asia's Population and Demographic Trends**

	Population mid-1998 (millions)	Population "Doubling Time" (in years)	Projected Pop. (millions)		Percentage <15/65+	
			2010	2025		
Kazakstan	15.6	133	17.6	18.7	30	7
Kyrgyzstan	4.7	48	5.6	7.0	37	6
Tajikistan	6.1	41	7.7	9.3	40	4
Turkmenistan	4.7	41	5.2	6.1	39	4
Uzbekistan	24.1	35	31.9	42.3	41	4

Source: Population Reference Bureau, *1998 World Population Data Sheet* (Washington, D.C.: Population Reference Bureau, 1998).

expectations for political and economic reform. It also appears that the out-migration of skilled Russians and, possibly, skilled indigenous labor will continue.

Weak attempts directed at changing the current situation will not be effective because they do not match the scope of fragmentation and polarization. Moreover, the underlying sources of conflict are not being seriously investigated. If the situation continues to deteriorate, more violent conflicts are likely to occur. This is especially the case in the Ferghana Valley, where ethnic tensions and poor demographic and economic conditions are acute. In one possible scenario, localized outbreaks of conflict can likely spread into a wider destabilization of the region. Despite the recent peace agreement, the situation is even grimmer in Tajikistan. The process of internal fragmentation and criminal anarchy could be stopped only if the West devotes serious attention to the region. Five years of civic crises and armed conflict have demonstrated the inability of the post-Soviet establishment to resolve the region's conflicts. Sporadic massacres in Tajikistan and in the Ferghana Valley have revealed that militants and rebels cannot be controlled by state action alone.

In the quest for their own national identities, Central Asians will consciously stress Muslim traditions. Yet it is clear that, at present, political Islam cannot play a significant role in the political life of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and particularly Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, one should not exclude the possibility that in the not-so-distant future, under the influence of the Middle Eastern Muslim organizations, there could be a rapid politicization of Islam and a strengthening of Islamic parties in their struggle for political power in Central Asia. While Central Asian politicians have escaped the clutches of colonial infantilism and enforced mass atheism, they will have to reconcile their secularism with the interests of religious communities.

The region's disintegration and polarization are likely to be long term. While strengthening their independence and sovereignty, the Central Asian states will likely falter in attempts at cooperative integration without Western assistance. The West should promote steps toward regional cooperation, preventing attempts by Russia or other external players to establish political and economic hegemony in Central Asia. There is hope that a new kind of regional cooperation and partnership will develop as an alternative to the old Soviet-style mechanisms of integration in Central Asia.



## Notes

1. Nancy Smith, "Central Asia's New 'Great Game,'" *The Wall Street Journal*, October 15, 1996, 13–14.
2. D. Ibrahim, *The Islamization of Central Asia* (Markfield, Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1993).
3. R. Narzikulov, "Dvulikii Ianus v Serdtse Azii. Nekorotorye Itogi 70-Letnego Razvitiia Sredneaziatskikh Respublik," *Vostok*, no. 5 (May 1991): 128.
4. Timothy Heleniak, "Going Home: Migration Among the Soviet Successor States." *Analysis of Current Events* 9, no. 6 (June 1997): 5.
5. See *RFE/RL Newswire*, May 30, 1997.
6. *Kazakstanskaya pravda*, February 6 and 9, 1998; *CIS Digest* (published by the UNHCR Bureau for Europe), no. 158, (February 12, 1998).
7. Y. Kulchik, A. Fadin, V. Sergeev, *Central Asia after the Empire* (London: Pluto Press, 1996), 4.
8. Constantine Dmitriev, "New Migration Tests Russian Immigration Policy," *Transition*, June 28, 1996, 57.
9. For many years, German embassies in Central Asia were always crowded; no ethnic German or ethnic Russian seemed to have any complaints regarding the difficulty of learning a new language.
10. See "Tajikistan: Tajik Refugees in Northern Afghanistan," *Human Rights Watch* 8, no. 6 (May 1996): 3.
11. Interview with President Nazarbaev, Interfax, November 24, 1993.
12. The Caspian Sea shelf has approximately 3 percent of global oil reserves. Recently, the Russian Federation intensified its "carrot-and-stick" tactics in order to bring other littoral states to its side in resolving legal and practical issues of exploiting the sea's resources. On the one hand, Moscow is proposing to extend national sectors in the Caspian sea to a forty-mile limit. On the other hand, it tries to apply pressure on its CIS partners in the Caspian zone (for example, by reducing energy shipments to Kazakhstan). Russia's goal in these kinds of actions is to show that it is still the master of the situation. See A. Shoumkhin, "Economics and Politics of Developing Caspian Oil Resources," *Perspectives on Central Asia* 1, no. 8 (November 1996).
13. Olivier Roy, *Islam in Tajikistan*. Occasional Paper no. 1 (New York: The Project on Open Society in Central Eurasia, July 1996), 2.
14. Some of them dream of building Musulman-Abad, the land of Islam in Central Asia, hoping to establish an Islamic state on the territory of Uzbekistan that would use Islamic law exclusively, including segregating schools by gender. They want Central Asian states to halt the policy of drawing closer to Turkey, establish diplomatic relations with all Muslim countries, and break ties with Israel. Some of the militant activists are currently under arrest in Uzbekistan, while others are working illegally.
15. Alma Sultangalieva, "Religion in Transition: Kazakstan Experience," *Central Asia Monitor*, no. 6 (June 1996): 28.
16. *Central Asian Post*, June 8, 1998, 2.

17. Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (Carlisle, Pa.: OM Publishing, 1993), 570.
18. *RFE/RL Newslines*, June 13, 1997.
19. Bruce Pannier, "Central Asia's Closely Watched Media," *Transition*, October 18, 1996, 70.
20. "Russians in Kazakhstan Protest Language Law," *RFE/RL Newslines*, August 22, 1997.
21. The change from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet was imposed by the Bolsheviks in the 1920s. In the 1930s, the Cyrillic alphabet was introduced to cut off Central Asians from their written heritage.
22. "Tamerlane Celebrations Begin in Uzbekistan," *OMRI Daily Digest*, October 22, 1996.
23. Martha Olcott, "Ethnic Violence in Central Asia: Perceptions and Misperceptions," in *Central Asia: Conflict, Resolution, and Change*, ed. Roald Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (Bethesda, Md.: CPSS Press, 1995), 125.
24. Roald Sagdeev, *Perspectives on Central Asia* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 2.
25. Ainura Elebaeva, "The Osh Incident: Problems for Research," *Post-Soviet Geography* 33 (February 1992): 82.
26. Valery Tishkov, "Don't Kill Me, I Am a Kyrgyz: An Anthropological Analysis of Violence in the Osh Ethnic Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 32, no. 2 (1995): 147.
27. *Ibid.*, 135.
28. *Central Asian Post*, June 8, 1998, 2.
29. H. Clark, "Uzbekistan Bent on Fighting Islamic Sects," *Central Asian Post*, June 29, 1998, 5.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Officially, Uzbekistan has the lowest crime rate in the CIS. See *RFE/RL Newslines*, May 5, 1997.
32. See R. Taylor, "Energy Development in the Kyrgyz Republic," *Central Asian Post*, February 20, 1997.
33. Afghanistan grew nearly 40 percent of the world's opium in 1995. A total of 240 tons of drugs worth \$75 billion crossed Tajikistan in 1995. See "UN Worried over New Drug Trafficking Routes via CIS," *Interfax*, February 4, 1997.
34. In 1973, Soviet Kyrgyzstan produced approximately 16 percent of the world's opium. A whole generation grew up knowing neither opium nor its stupefying properties. Today, more and more opium is being confiscated from illicit drug trafficking in the state. See *Proceedings of the Central Asian Conference on Regional Cooperation* (Bishkek: UN Development Program, 1995), 170.
35. *Nasha Gazeta*, January 1997, 2.

36. One of the first fundamentalist movements that arose in the Soviet Union was the IRP, established at the constituent assembly of the USSR Moslem Representatives on June 9, 1990. Simultaneously, regional branches of the IRP were established in Tajikistan and Dagestan. The former took upon itself the coordination of Islamic movements all over Central Asia, the latter in the Northern Caucasus. With the help of the Tajik IRP, a constituent assembly of the Uzbek regional branch was convened in January 1991 in Namangan. There is no information concerning any significant republican branches of the IRP. At present, the coordination of actions and the exchange of information and experience is taking place in Moscow, Kazan, Grozny, Mahachkala, the Ferghana Valley, Karategin, Gorno-Badakhshan Republic, and the camps of Tajik refugees in Afghanistan. See D. Trofimov, *Islam in the Political Culture of the Former Soviet Union: Central Asia and Azerbaijan* (Hamburg: Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik an der Universität Hamburg, October 1995), 34.
37. "Uzbekistan: Persistent Human Rights Violations and Prospects for Improvement," *Human Rights Watch* 8, no. 5 (May 1996): 7–9.
38. Elebaeva, "The Osh Incident," 84.
39. Interview with Governor Rustenbekov, *Kyrgyz Ruhu*, no. 27 (July 5, 1996).
40. "Natsional'nye Interesy Rosii i Sodruzhestvo Nezavisimyh Gosudarstv. Issledovatel'skii Proekt," *Problemy Bezopasnosti Rossii*, no. 17 (July 1996): 17.
41. "Integratsia v SNG: Sostoianie i Perspektivy," *Panorama* (Almaty), no. 5 (April 1997): 38.
42. See *Jamestown Monitor*, January 18, 1996.
43. *CIS Digest* (published by the UNHCR Bureau for Europe), no. 158, (February 12, 1998).
44. A. Akaev, *Ternisty Put' Vhojdeniai v Novuu Epohu* (Bishkek: Uchkun, 1997), 34.
45. In the 1920s, the Bolsheviks asked a prominent scholar, V. Bartold, about the necessity of delimiting the region. Bartold strongly opposed the idea, pointing out that Central Asia had never been divided into ethnic states. The region's indigenous inhabitants never expressed their desire to divide Central Asia into several states in that manner, but the Bolsheviks were bold and powerful enough to force the demarcation.
46. *RFE/RL Newslines*, June 26, 1997.
47. Owing to river diversion and the return of pesticide- and defoliant-laden runoff from cotton-growing, the surface area of the Aral Sea has decreased by half and the water has become heavily polluted. In terms of its ecological, social, and economic consequences, this may be one of the worst ecological disasters of the twentieth century.
48. Recently Tashkent cut supplies to the Druzhba ("Friendship") Canal, which enters Kazakstan from Uzbekistan, by 70 percent. Following negotiations, Uzbekistan decided to increase the flow by 20 percent, but Kazakstan claims this is insufficient. See *RFE/RL Newslines*, July 25, 1997.
49. Boris Rumer, *Central Asia in Transition: Dilemmas of Political and Economic Development* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 45.
50. More than 50 percent of industrial enterprises were directly controlled by Moscow, 40 percent had semicolonial status, and only 7–10 percent were under republican control; Nazrikulov, "Dvulikii Ianus v Serdtse Azii," 124.

51. S. Neil MacFarlane, "Regional Security in Central Asia: The Role of Russia," *Policy Staff Commentary*, no.6, at <http://www.dfaitmaeci.gc.ca/english/foregnp/dfait/coment~1/1995/asia1e.htm>.
52. *Central Asia Update*, May 1996.
53. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, "A Farewell to Flashman: American Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia." Address delivered to the Johns Hopkins University's School for Advanced International Studies, Washington, D.C., July 21, 1997.
54. Address by President Askar Akaev at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., July 11, 1997.
55. *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and of Civil Liberties* (New York: Freedom House, 1996).
56. Mike Field, "Talbot Defines U.S. Central Asia Policy," *The Gazette*, August 4, 1997, 1-7.
57. *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, May 1997), 18.
58. Craig Charney, *Opinion in Kazakstan 1996* (Washington, D.C.: International Foundation for Election Systems, April 1997), 22. The survey had a sampling size of 1,500.
59. *Central Asian Post*, June 22, 1998, 2.
60. *Central Asian Post*, June 1 and June 29, 1998.
61. Keely O. Lange, "Long-Term Causes of Conflict in Central Asia," *Swords and Plowshares* 9, no. 2 (Winter 1994-95): 8.

## About the Author

**Anara Tabyshalieva** conducted the initial research for this study during her 1996–97 Jennings Randolph fellowship at the United States Institute of Peace. Currently she is director of the Institute for Regional Studies and a lecturer at Kyrgyz-Slavonic University. In 1995 she was the recipient of a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in support of her research on “The Women’s Question in Central Asia: Historical Roots of Contemporary Contradictions,” and a grant from HIVOS (Holland) for researching a group project entitled “Kyrgyzstan: Factors of Destabilization and Stabilization of Ethno-Religious Peace.” She is the author of several articles on Central Asia and religion and conflict resolution, and of *Faith in Turkestan: A History of Religions of Central Asia* (1993) and *Cultural Tradition and Women* (1995). Tabyshalieva holds a Ph.D. equivalent in history from Kyrgyz National State University.

## About the Institute

The **United States Institute of Peace** is an independent, nonpartisan federal institution created by Congress to promote research, education, and training on the peaceful resolution of international conflicts. Established in 1984, the Institute meets its congressional mandate through an array of programs, including research grants, fellowships, professional training programs, conferences and workshops, library services, publications, and other educational activities. The Institute's Board of Directors is appointed by the President of the United States and confirmed by the Senate.

*Chairman of the Board:* Chester A. Crocker

*Vice Chairman:* Max M. Kampelman

*President:* Richard H. Solomon

*Executive Vice President:* Harriet Hentges

### Board of Directors

**Chester A. Crocker** (Chairman), Research Professor of Diplomacy, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University

**Max M. Kampelman**, Esq. (Vice Chairman), Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver and Jacobson, Washington, D.C.

**Dennis L. Bark**, Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University

**Theodore M. Hesburgh**, President Emeritus, University of Notre Dame

**Seymour Martin Lipset**, Hazel Professor of Public Policy, George Mason University

**W. Scott Thompson**, Professor of International Politics, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University

**Allen Weinstein**, President, Center for Democracy, Washington, D.C.

**Harriet Zimmerman**, Vice President, American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Washington, D.C.

### *Members ex officio*

**Ralph Earle II**, Deputy Director, U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency

**Phyllis Oakley**, Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research

**Daniel H. Simpson**, Vice President, National Defense University

**Walter B. Slocombe**, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

**Richard H. Solomon**, President, United States Institute of Peace (nonvoting)



## OTHER TITLES IN THE PEACEWORKS SERIES

- Territorial Conflicts and Their Resolution: The Case of Ecuador and Peru*, by Beth A. Simmons (No. 27, April 1999)
- The Quest for Democratic Security: The Role of the Council of Europe and U.S. Foreign Policy*, by Heinrich Klebes (No. 26, January 1999)
- Nagorno-Karabakh: Searching for a Solution*, by Patricia Carley (No. 25, December 1998)
- Removing Barricades in Somalia: Options for Peace and Rehabilitation*, by Hussein Adam and Richard Ford, with Ali Jimale Ahmed, Abdinasir Osman Isse, Nur Weheliye, and David Smock (No. 24, October 1998)
- Muddling toward Democracy: Political Change in Grassroots China*, by Anne F. Thurston (No. 23, August 1998)
- Preventing Genocide in Burundi: Lessons from International Diplomacy*, by Stephen R. Weissman (No. 22, July 1998)
- The China Challenge in the Twenty-First Century: Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy*, by Chen Jian (No. 21, June 1998)
- Private Peacemaking: USIP-Assisted Peacemaking Projects of Nonprofit Organizations*, edited by David R. Smock (No. 20, June 1998)
- Sovereignty after Empire: Self-Determination Movements in the Former Soviet Union*, by Galina Starovoitova (No. 19, October 1997)
- Keynote Addresses from the "Virtual Diplomacy" Conference*, by Richard H. Solomon, Walter B. Wriston, and George P. Shultz (No. 18, September 1997)
- Greek-Turkish Relations and U.S. Foreign Policy: Cyprus, the Aegean, and Regional Stability*, by Tozun Bahcheli, Theodore A. Coulombis, and Patricia Carley (No. 17, August 1997)
- U.S. Responses to Self-Determination Movements: Strategies for Nonviolent Outcomes and Alternatives to Secession*, by Patricia Carley (No. 16, July 1997)
- Creative Approaches to Managing Conflict in Africa: Findings from USIP-Funded Projects*, edited by David R. Smock (No. 15, April 1997)
- Police Functions in Peace Operations*, by Roxane D. V. Sismanidis (No. 14, March 1997)
- Can Foreign Aid Moderate Ethnic Conflict?* by Milton J. Esman (No. 13, March 1997)
- Training for Peace Operations: The U.S. Army Adapts to the Post-Cold War World*, by Colonel J. Michael Hardesty and Jason D. Ellis (No. 12, February 1997)
- Zaire: Predicament and Prospects*, by J. C. Willame et al. (No. 11, January 1997)
- State and Soldier in Latin America: Redefining the Military's Role in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile*, by Wendy Hunter (No. 10, October 1996)
- Peace Operations and Common Sense: Replacing Rhetoric with Realism*, by Denis McLean (No. 9, June 1996)
- Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis*, by Vesna Pestic (No. 8, April 1996)

## OF RELATED INTEREST

Many other publications from the United States Institute of Peace address issues of direct relevance to regional stability in Central Asia and the former Soviet Union.

## RECENT INSTITUTE REPORTS INCLUDE:

*Sovereignty after Empire: Self-Determination Movements in the Former Soviet Union*, by Galina Starovoitova (No. 19, October 1997)

To obtain an Institute report (available free of charge), write United States Institute of Peace, 1200 17th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036-3011; call (202) 429-3828; fax (202) 429-6063; or e-mail: [usip\\_requests@usip.org](mailto:usip_requests@usip.org).

## RECENT BOOKS FROM USIP PRESS INCLUDE:

*The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms: Market Bolshevism against Democracy*, by Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski (Fall 1999)

*Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry*, by Anatol Lieven (May 1999)

*Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security*, by Martha Brill Olcott (1997)



United States  
Institute of Peace

1200 17th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20036

Peaceworks 28