

THE CHINA AND EURASIA FORUM QUARTERLY

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Narcotics



*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
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Dear Colleagues and Friends,

The previous issue of The China and Eurasia Forum (CEF) Quarterly addressed energy security in the region and explored how growing energy demand affects states' strategic considerations, regional cooperation, and integration. As outlined by the contributors to the last issue, the fierce competition over energy resources generates not only winners and losers, but also significant areas for cooperation that can lead to sustainable and positive results.

The use and trafficking of narcotics, the security topic of this Quarterly, produce no legitimate winners, only losers. Apart from a few scrupulous individuals who profit from narcotics trafficking and production, the booming drug trade threatens to undermine and destabilize the entire region. The heavy costs are primarily borne by an increasingly young user population in risk of overdoses, exposure to HIV/AIDS, and lives in misery. Apart from the demographic disaster that Russia and Central Asia are likely to face, the drug trade is attacking the governmental, economic and social structures of the weak Central Asian states, as well as China.

Of all the multifaceted security threats Eurasia is facing; from military aggression to terrorism, arms proliferation, organized crime and other soft security threats, the illegal trade in narcotics impacts each of these security threats to different degrees. Narcotics abuse, HIV/AIDS, and corruption linked to the drug trade have increased in all affected states. Rampant transnational crime as a consequence of drug trafficking penetrates governments and prevents further economic and social development in the region.

There have been several attempts to increase cooperation, but in many cases the narcotics threat is not properly addressed, either due to a failure to acknowledge the problems, failure to attack root causes, or direct criminalization of governments and/or parts of government structures. Indeed, some governments have taken the issue more seriously than others; Iran and China have, for example, declared 'wars against drugs'. There is evidence that increasing the transaction costs of the narcotics trade in Iran and China have led to a shift of the problem elsewhere. The Northern Route is competing with the route transiting Iran for Afghan heroin, and Afghan heroin increasingly replaces Burmese heroin in China. Even though a significant amount of drugs transiting these routes end up in the European consumer market, the European Union and the European states have not seriously addressed the narcotics problem outside Europe; it's source or transit route.

Today, the main source of heroin and opium is Afghanistan, a state that has increasingly become one controlled by narcotics money and rivaling producers. The shift in production to north Afghanistan and transit through Central Asia towards Russia, Europe, and China have dire consequences for narcotics related problems in Central Asia. Trade in narcotics has become an international phenomenon where interest groups from all major consumer states have Afghan contacts monitoring the trade and market-shares. The impact of the Afghan production is devastating and seen in states as far away as Sweden and Ireland, and the problem is more transnational than ever. Banks in Central Asia have also provided further opportunities for laundering of illicit proceeds and profits from the drug trade, even if the majority of profits most likely are laundered in countries with more developed banking systems.

Russia seems to face some of the most devastating consequences of the trade, but China and Europe are next in line as the Russian and Iranian markets mature. Despite the urgency of the problem, many states and regions have done little to decrease production, increase transaction costs for traffickers, or to use preventive measures to stem domestic drug abuse. This may be due to disinterest and state complicity, but could also be an effect of low economic development and lack of national stability in many of the production and transit states.

The economic and social instability in many states have made the consequences of the narcotics trade devastating. Criminality, HIV/AIDS, prostitution, broken families and social deprivation follow the footsteps of the trade, and in both China and Eurasia these consequences are apparent. Actions have been taken by the international community, NGO's and governments in the region, but each year the number of users increases, the value of the trade skyrockets and more financial and other resources are needed to combat the trade and its consequences.

State failure is a possibility in a few of the most affected states in the region if the narcotics problem is not dealt with properly. Drug traffickers thrive in states weakened by domestic conflicts as the government's ability to address the narcotics problem is subverted. Increased corruption and the direct complicity of state officials and sections of the government undermine state legitimacy and threaten the very fabric of the society. The alliance between criminal elements in state power and the drug trade represents an even more worrying development than affiliations between terror networks and organized crime. The links between crime and terrorism in Central Asia seems to have been replaced or reinforced with ever increasing ties between criminal networks and the state. This will foster even more opportunities for criminal organizations to operate in the region without state interference. In lieu

of effective measures, political might, and resources, opiate production in Afghanistan and its trafficking will have global repercussions.

There is a need for a coordinated international response that targets producers, consumers and financial institutions in an effort to reduce profits of traders. Profit is what runs the narcotics trade and if profits are reduced some progress can be achieved. The articles presented in this Quarterly provide insights and detailed analyses about the above mentioned narcotics problems and associated issues. The articles also suggest what can be done by the international community to help curb the illegal drug trade in the region.

A further note: To increase the usefulness of the journal, we need your assistance. After two issues of special topics, we are very interested to receive your feedback on the format of the Quarterly. We will soon send out a questionnaire by e-mail to our subscribers and hope that you will find time to assist us by filling it out. The questionnaire will also be posted on our webpage.

Finally, on behalf of the CEF team, we hope you enjoy your read!

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The Drug Crime Threat to Countries Located on the ‘Silk Road’

*Vladimir Fenopetov**

Core Problem: Drug Production in Afghanistan

The efforts by the international community and by the Afghan government have finally resulted in some progress in the eradication of illicit opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. As an indication of effective efforts, we have seen a 21 percent decrease of areas under cultivation in 2005 compared with the previous year. However, Afghanistan still produced 4,100 metric tons of illicit opium in 2005, the year in which, due to favorable climatic conditions, the average yield increased by 7 kg and reached 39 kg per hectare. Consequently, Afghanistan in 2005 continued to be the world’s largest source of illicit opium, accounting for 87 percent of global production.

The nascent progress achieved in 2005, mainly in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan can, however, be offset by possible resumption of cultivation unless the local farmers urgently receive financial assistance to avoid starvation and a humanitarian crisis. The situation may also worsen if cultivation increases further in western Afghanistan. The illicit opium economy continues to flourish in Afghanistan. Its estimated value of \$2.7 billion is equivalent today to 52 percent of the country’s licit economy. As in previous years, the ‘lion’s share’ (\$2.14 billion) went to the traffickers, while the combined total profit of all opium poppy growers (\$0.56 billion) was in the range of 20 percent of the volume of the Afghan illicit opium economy.¹

Conversion of local opium into heroin is increasingly common in Afghanistan, mainly for the following reason. All Afghan-based drug traffic is destined today to the lucrative illicit markets in Europe where the street price of heroin is 20-fold higher than in the areas close to the Afghan borders. The abuse of opium has no tradition in Europe whereas

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¹ United Nations, *The Opium Economy in Afghanistan*, Sales No. E.03.XI.6, January 2003, 61 – 70. See also the subsequent UN studies in 2004 – 2005.

heroin is a rather well-known commodity for the addicts in Western Europe and — increasingly — in Central and Eastern Europe.

Consignments of heroin are also less bulky and thus easier to transport. Consequently, heroin processed inside Afghanistan makes up a large portion of the overall illicit drug traffic out of the country: 500 metric tons of heroin against 970 metric tons of opium. High demand for opium exists mainly in the Islamic Republic of Iran and about 900 metric tons of Afghan opium is annually bound for the illicit deliveries to Iran, both for local consumption and for conversion into heroin, either in Iran, or Turkey, and for further trafficking of this heroin to Europe. As a result of this, opium seizures in Iran remain the world's largest and have reached 160 tons in some years.

Drug Trafficking along the 'Silk Road'

For decades, the opiates were trafficked from Afghanistan to Europe either via Pakistan, or Iran. However, in early 1990s the traffickers started to use a new transit conduit for Afghan drugs to Europe via Central Asia and the Caucasus, that is, along the 'Silk Road'. Due to the inadequate border controls between the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, the 'Silk Road' route is increasingly used for the illicit drug transit from Afghanistan to Russia, Ukraine, Eastern and Central Europe, the Baltic states and the Nordic countries. Based on the seizure-reports from the countries bordering Afghanistan, it is estimated that approximately 20 percent of all Afghan opiates, mainly heroin, are trafficked to Europe through Central Asia and the Caucasus.

A considerable portion of Afghan drugs passing through the 'Silk Road' is first trafficked into Tajikistan. The Tajik Drug Control Agency and other Tajik law enforcement agencies have increased their efforts against the Afghan-based drug traffic and jointly seized close to 4 tons of heroin in 2005. However, despite the strenuous efforts by the Tajik authorities, their Russian counterparts have lately been reporting a substantial increase in the transit drug traffic to Russia via Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. This increase could be attributed to weaker counter-narcotics efforts on the Tajik-Afghan border caused by the departure of the Russian border guards in 2005.

To fill this vacuum, the Government of Tajikistan is now strengthening controls along the Tajik-Afghan border, and is cooperating with the Afghan authorities to improve cross-border cooperation, while the Tajik Drug Control Agency has established liaison offices in Afghanistan and Kazakhstan. The Russian Federal Border Service (RFBS) and the Tajik Border Guards Service have also agreed that several advisors from RFBS will remain in Tajikistan and advise the Tajik border guards on control operations.

Turkmenistan also continues to be actively used by the traffickers for the transit of Afghan drugs to Europe as the country's extensive borders with Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are inadequately controlled. Afghan opiates are not only smuggled by land (in trucks and cars), but also by sea (on vessels passing through the Caspian Sea) and by air (on cargo planes bound for Azerbaijan and Turkey). In 2004, the volume of drugs seized in Turkmenistan reached 1.3 tons, almost tripling the figure for the year before. The seizures of heroin (266 kg) and opium (656 kg) reported by the local authorities, each represented a fourfold increase over the figures for 2003.

Uzbekistan is another transit country for consignments of Afghan opiates destined for Europe. Afghan drugs are smuggled into Uzbekistan mainly from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. According to the information provided by the Uzbek officials, the volume of heroin seized in Uzbekistan increased by almost 100 percent, from 336 kg in 2003 to 670 kg in 2004.

A rapidly increasing problem is the trafficking along the 'Silk Road' of precursor chemicals, but in the opposite direction. The traffickers are diverting precursors from the chemical enterprises or from licit trade in some countries with an advanced chemical industry, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, and China, for use in the conversion of opium into heroin inside Afghanistan. The problem is aggravated by the establishment of numerous clandestine laboratories in the northern parts of Afghanistan, closer to the border with Central Asia, to facilitate both the export of drugs and the acquisition of precursors. The 'Silk Road' is also increasingly used for the trafficking of amphetamines and other synthetic drugs from the industrialized countries to Central and West Asia where these drugs are relatively 'new' for the drug users.

Local Use and Impact along Smuggling Route

So far, the domestic sales of Afghan opiates in Central Asia amount to no more than \$30 million compared to profit from their 're-export' to Russia and the rest of Europe which is estimated at \$2.2 billion, including the \$1.8 billion net profit of local organized traffickers' groups.

The above proportion may however change since drug abuse is rapidly growing in Central Asia due to the 'spill-over' effect of the transit traffic. A similar phenomenon was observed two decades ago in Pakistan. Here, the transit route for heroin from the Northwest Frontier Province to the southern ports of the country for further deliveries by sea to international markets resulted in 1.5 million local addicts to heroin, a drug of infrequent use in Pakistan up to that point in time. The incessant flow

of Afghan opiates to the Islamic Republic of Iran has also significantly increased the level of domestic drug abuse.

A similar phenomenon is being observed in Central Asia as part of the heroin smuggling route where the main drug of abuse has shifted from cannabis and opium to heroin. It is estimated that close to 1 million people in Central Asia currently use Afghan heroin. The growth in Central Asia of heroin abuse through injection has already contributed to the spread of the HIV/AIDS infection. Needle-sharing remains the main mode of transmission of HIV in the Central Asian countries, with Kazakhstan being worst affected. In 2004, over 70 percent of new HIV/AIDS cases in Kazakhstan were injecting drug users. In the case of Tajikistan, in response to the HIV/AIDS threat, the government in April 2005 endorsed a five year national program to prevent drug abuse and the related HIV/AIDS epidemic among injecting drug users.

The 'Silk Road' routes for the trafficking of Afghan heroin, *inter alia*, via Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan-Georgia and the associated implications, are also affecting the South Caucasus where borders are still porous. Recent epidemiological surveys conducted in Azerbaijan and Georgia revealed a significant increase in drug abuse in these two countries. Although the volume of drug seizures remains low in countries of the South Caucasus, drug abuse is increasingly becoming a problem. In 2003, there were over 17,000 registered drug abusers in Azerbaijan, with opiates being the main drugs of abuse. About half of the persons infected with HIV/AIDS in Azerbaijan are injecting drug users. In Georgia, official estimates indicate that there were 275,000 drug users in the country in 2004, an increase of 80 percent compared with the figure for 2003.

In general, the countries located along the 'Silk Road' in Central Asia and the South Caucasus continue to experience economic and social difficulties associated with the post-Soviet transition: chronic budgetary deficits, galloping inflation, slow industrial growth, and high unemployment rates. As a result of this downward spiral in economic and social development, people have increasingly relied on drugs as a refuge from reality or as a source of financial survival.

The growing spread of drug trafficking, abuse, and crime has significantly worsened the problems faced by the countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus, such as institutional decay, political instability and corruption. Specifically, drug-related activities impede the establishment of sound economies and nascent democracies in the following ways:

- Illicit drug supply and the related abuse endanger the health of populations. For instance, the health costs of a drug addict appear to be some 80 percent higher than those of an average citizen;²
- The health costs to the society have tremendously increased with the current HIV/AIDS epidemic in Central Asia and the Caucasus due to the spread in early 2000s of heroin abuse through injection;
- Drug crime has serious negative implications for legal, political, economic, and social stability and the process of democratic reform. Connections between drug traffickers and organized crime and huge profits from illicit activities enable them to promote corruption, reduce the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts, and de-stabilize the process of creating democratic 'law-governed' states.
- Drug-related crime in countries located along the 'Silk Road' undermines the positive results of economic and political change, spawns extraordinary levels of violence, causes general public political and economic insecurities. Drug dealers attempt to penetrate and influence vulnerable economies, national politics, and, in some cases, foment nationalist strife and ethnic tensions, which was what happened in the Ferghana Valley. The drug traffickers, through their illicitly acquired profits, are able to nourish separatist ambitions and armed conflicts where they deem it advantageous to do so. Many commodities, including firearms, are bartered for drugs, particularly in Tajikistan and the South Caucasus countries, which are affected by military confrontation and instability;
- Societies in Central Asia and the Caucasus, in which drug trafficking and drug abuse are getting widespread, tend to be less productive economies with higher levels of violence, and distorted economies and political systems. As more resources are allocated to deal with drug-related problems, less are available for building a modern economic infrastructure and for addressing other social problems;
- The boundaries between legal business and criminal activity in Central Asia and the Caucasus are often very hazy. The mushrooming of private banks and the emergence of uncontrolled commercial enterprises provide many opportunities for drug dealers to launder money. Not only does this have significant implications for the local economies, it also undermines efforts for greater regularization and domestic controls of the commercial and banking sectors;

² UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs, 38th Session, document E/CN-7/1995/3.

- The outcome of international assistance to countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus is also being challenged by organized drug crime. This creates constant obstacles for launching modern market-oriented economies, reduces the effectiveness of the newly-established social welfare systems and increasingly infiltrates the economic, social and political texture of these societies. All in all, this has a negative impact on development and reduces the efficiency of international assistance to countries located along the 'Silk Road';
- Drug trafficking usually flourishes where state capacity is weakened—therefore, the traffickers have a vested interest in ensuring that the state remains weak. The result is the growth of corruption, which undermines the public's trust in government and breeds a loss of faith in democracy and the national economy. Drug trafficking can also hinder progress to democracy by providing justification for the maintenance of authoritarian forms of government, as a means to provide security;
- Uncontrolled profits from drug crime create a new segment of newly-rich citizens who combine ostentatious wealth with undue power. They are becoming so powerful that they can undermine state authority and legitimacy.

There exists a distinct linkage between drug crime and socio-economic problems, particularly the economic, social and political consequences of drug-related crime for the process of healthy reform, transformation and social cohesion. In short, organized drug crime in Central Asia and the South Caucasus — whether indigenous or imported — poses threats to democratic values and public institutions, to the national economy, to financial institutions, to development, and to the international community at large.

Strategy Against the Drug Trade

Counter measures against the drug problem at the national level, should include the development of new institutions and also the strengthening of existing ones. Emphasis is to be placed on the strengthening of drug control capacities through:

- Promotion of operational contacts against illicit drug trafficking activities;
- Support for the national inter-ministerial drug control coordinating bodies;

- Creation of national drug intelligence units and national mechanisms for control of drugs used for licit medical purposes and for control of precursor chemicals;
- Improvement of national forensic laboratory services;
- Development of modern training techniques and other initiatives to strengthen law enforcement capabilities to interdict illicit drug traffic;
- Organization of regional workshops to promote drug control cooperation with neighboring countries;
- Elaboration of modern approaches to prevention of drug abuse.

Under the auspices of the Paris Pact — a consultative mechanism for countries affected by trafficking in opiates from Afghanistan — several round table meetings of experts were held between 2004 and 2005. These meetings brought together representatives of donor countries, assistance agencies and government representatives and focused on border controls, drugs and precursors and on the countries most affected by the Afghan-based transit drug traffic.

Russia hosted the Paris Pact Expert Round Table in June 2004. Followed by Pakistan in March 2005, and Iran in September 2005. Turkey hosted the Round Table in Istanbul in October 2005, and presented proposals for the “Istanbul platform”, which contained, *inter alia*, the creation of a regional coordination and analysis unit for Turkey and its neighbors and also the setting up of a regular dialogue between drug and police liaison officers from several countries stationed in Turkey, other Balkan countries and in some countries of the South Caucasus.

Under the auspices of the Paris Pact, the Central Asian countries and donors organized several coordination meetings to improve provision of data on drug seizures and the local drug situation. New regional initiatives have started in Central Asia with international support. These include regional cooperation to intensify laboratory development and forensic analysis, controlled deliveries, regional law enforcement training, and improved control of precursor chemicals. Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have already initiated new cross-border cooperation action.

The countries located on the ‘Silk Road’ have also focused on stronger national and regional measures to combat the growing threat of illicit opium poppy cultivation and opium production in Afghanistan. The legal basis for concerted counter-narcotics action by the Central Asian countries was first established with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Subregional Drug Control Cooperation signed by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on May 4 1996 in Tashkent. Russia and the Aga Khan Development

Network (AKDN) committed itself to the MOU in January 1998, and were followed by Azerbaijan in September 2001.

During the last 10 years, the MOU has been very instrumental for launching various cross-border and other cooperation measures by the Central Asian countries, Azerbaijan and Russia. The MOU has also promoted policy-level cooperation in countering the drug-related problems in the 'Silk Road' countries. According to the MOU, the parties periodically host, on a rotational basis, high-level meetings to review the evolving drug situation in Central Asia, the South Caucasus and Russia and in identifying priorities for coordinated responses.

The Afghan-based drug crime threat to the 'Silk Road' countries as well as the need for an effective response was the main subject reviewed at the sixth high-level meeting of parties to the Memorandum hosted by Russia in Moscow in December 2004. The participants jointly discussed measures to strengthen drug control security belts around Afghanistan and to suppress the supply of precursor chemicals used for the heroin production inside Afghanistan. They also reached an agreement on the creation of the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) and on strengthening joint activities against the illicit trafficking of precursors through their territories to Afghanistan. Following these agreements, the creation of CARICC is well underway in Central Asia and a meeting of the Central Asian Support Group for Precursors Control, established under the ongoing UN technical assistance project addressing all five Central Asian countries, was held in 2005.

The Central Asian countries also plan to create a Regional Resource and Training Centre on drug demand reduction and HIV/AIDS prevention and care among injecting and other drug users, based on the significant progress already achieved in Kazakhstan. This Centre will facilitate the exchange of expertise, experience and scientific knowledge on drug abuse and HIV/AIDS prevention among professionals from the Central Asian countries, Russia and Azerbaijan.

The emerging evidence on the links between organized crime and terrorist groups in Central Asia has led to a renewed effort in counter-terrorism at the regional level. A workshop on the national legislation of the Central Asian countries, Russia and Azerbaijan was arranged in relation to the legal provisions of the 12 universal conventions and protocols against international terrorism, as well as Security Council Resolution 1373. The workshop also provided training for national judicial and law enforcement practitioners from agencies involved in extradition and money laundering casework. The workshop resulted in recommendations for new assistance requirements in counter-terrorism areas.

Conclusions

There is still a large gap between design and implementation of the drug control programs in most of the countries located along the 'Silk Road', partly because of the continued weaknesses in the legislative framework, but even more because of lack of resources. The main requirement, therefore, is to close the gaps between the declaratory and operational levels and between needs and capabilities, through the provision of further resources. The drug problem needs to be given a much higher priority in all countries affected by the Afghan-based traffic along the 'Silk Road'.

All in all, the real success of the remedial measures taken, or to be taken, in the 'Silk Road' countries will largely depend on the full recognition, both at the domestic and international levels, of the severity of the problem, including its implications for economic and social stability, as well as on the political will to act by the governments of the Central Asian and the Caucasus countries.

The Drug Trade in Contemporary Russia

*Louise Shelley**

Russia has had one of the fastest growing drug problems in the world in the past five years. With its limited border controls and large illicit migration, it is now integrated into the global drug market with links to the synthetic drug markets of Western Europe and the Far East, as well as the booming heroin trade from Central Asia. Drugs are now trafficked in all regions of Russia and their use is affecting the youthful population. Russia is primarily a transit country but many of the drugs entering the country are now consumed domestically as well. The country once consumed drugs of local production but it is now tapping into imports. Russian prevention programs are almost non-existent and law enforcement has proved ineffective in dealing with the phenomenon despite the development of specialized law enforcement units.

In the initial years of the post-Soviet Russian state, organized crime was mainly focused on extracting profits from the licit economy. In recent years however, organized crime activities have begun to resemble those in other regions of the world, with the drug trade being a primary source of profits.

Russia's Growing Drug Problem

The rise of the drug trade as a proportion of Russia's overall organized crime problem is a consequence of the same forces observed elsewhere in the world. Due to weak state institutions, ineffective law enforcement and border controls, high levels of corruption, and not least geographical location, the states of the former Soviet Union have been disproportionately affected by the globally increasing problem of drug trafficking and consumption.

Russia has truly entered the international drug trade. In the early 1990s, 30 percent of the drugs in Russia came from abroad, this figure has doubled since the beginning of the 21st century. In several regions of

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Russia, including Moscow, St. Petersburg and Khabarovsk, 80 percent of the confiscated drugs were produced abroad. While poppy-based drugs from Central Asia and the Caucasus are the most pervasive in Russia and much of the drug trade lie in the hands of ethnic groups from Central Asia and the Caucasus, Russians are increasingly integrated into the global drug market through networks with other international organized crime groups. As a result, different forms of drugs have also entered the Russian markets. Drugs flow into Russia from Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Synthetic drugs enter Russia from the east and west alike, be it ephedrine from China or ready-made synthetic drugs from Poland or the Netherlands.¹ Small quantities of ephedrine also enter the Russian Far East from North Korea.² Cocaine smuggled from Latin America primarily via Spain and the Baltic countries into Russia has also become a problem of late.³

Russia's vulnerability to the drug trade increased with the opening of its borders, the collapse of economies in neighboring countries and the rise of regional conflicts throughout the 1990s. During this period, the so-called 'Northern' route of heroin smuggling linked Afghanistan via Central Asia to Russia and Europe. In addition, criminal groups from other countries became active in Russia. It was around the same time when millions of illegal immigrants poured into Russia. Some turned to the drug trade as a means of survival since they were unable to support themselves via the licit economy.

Perhaps initially intended as a trans-shipment country, Russia has since developed into a major drug consumer itself with several million heroin users. Many of these consumers are youth and also military personnel formerly deployed on the borders in Central Asia and in the Chechen conflict.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has come to acknowledge that the drug trade and widespread abuse in Russia poses a threat to national security. However, although the Russian situation resembles the Colombian situation as drug trafficking is often used to finance violent non-state actors, including separatist and terrorist movements, the drug problem has not been integrated into the national security debate as has occurred in the United States and to a lesser extent in Europe.

¹ Federal Narcotics Control Service, Press Release, *Masshtaby ugrozy* [Scopes of a Challenge], January 19 2004; Andrei V. Fedorov, "Narkomania v Rossii: ugroza natsii" [Drug Addiction in Russia: A Threat to the Nation], Analytic Report, Working Group in the Council of Foreign and Defense Policy (2000), 6.

² Letizia Paoli, "The Development of an Illegal Market: Drug Consumption and Trade in Post-Soviet Russia," *British Journal of Criminology* 42 (2002): 23.

³ U.S. State Department, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2005*.

The Drug Trade and Organized Crime

The actors in this illicit economy range from Russian military personnel, to law enforcement officers, Soviet ethnic-based crime groups, ordinary criminals and illegal immigrants from Asian countries. The corrupt relationships which exist between the drug traffickers and local and regional officials allow these crime groups to operate throughout Russia, including its capital, Moscow.⁴

Russian law enforcement sources point to the enormous and rapid rise of the drug trade within Russia as reflected in the number of users, the geographical spread of the problem and the variety of drugs used. As the market grows, there appears to be increased involvement of large and more powerful organized crime groups, although no monopolization of markets has yet emerged.

According to the head of the Russian Federal Service for the Control of Narcotics, there has been a fifteen-fold rise in the number of drug related crimes and a ten-fold increase in the number of drug users in the last decade.⁵ These statistics reveal an alarming trend in the quantity and the distribution of the drug trade. For example, in 1985, the Ministry of Internal Affairs identified only four regions in Russia with over 10,000 serious abusers of drugs. By the beginning of the 21st century, this figure had climbed to over thirty regions.

At the present time, there is hardly a city in Russia without a drug addiction problem.⁶ The problem is particularly acute in the Russian Far East where there are 542 addicts per 100,000 people compared to the Russian national average of 310 per 100,000 according to January 2004 figures.⁷ The high rate of drug addiction in the east has been attributed to the east's proximity to Asian organized crime through ports, the highly

⁴ Many foreign groups operate in Russia. There are those from the neighboring states of the former USSR, Eastern Europe, Japan, China, Korea, Vietnam and Latin America. Russian women are also recruited by Nigerian organized crime groups to act as couriers.

⁵ Viktor Cherkosov, "Otvechaet na voprosi glavnogo redaktora almanakha 'organizovannaya prestupnost, terrorism, i korruptsiya', Professor V.V. Luneev," [Professor V.V. Luneev Answers to Editor in Chief's Almanac 'Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Corruption'], *Organizovannaya Prestupnost, Terrorism, i Korruptsiya* [Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Corruption] 4 (2003): 8.

⁶ Boris Tselinsky, "Sovremennaya Narkosituatsiya v Rossii: Tendentsii i Perspektivii," [Today's Drugs Situation in Russia: Tendecies and Prospects] *Organizovannaya Prestupnost, Terrorism, i Korruptsiya* [Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Corruption] 4 (2003): 21.

⁷ Based on the analysis of Vladivostok branch of the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center, <www.crime.vl.ru/docs/obzor/1104.htm> (February 20 2005).

criminogenic situation in the region and the criminalization of the local and regional government.⁸

The complicity of security personnel in the trade is especially problematic. Besides military personnel, the police, border guards and the customs service — possibly the most corrupted part of Russian law enforcement — are all deeply involved in the burgeoning drug trade. Although arrests have been made, these are almost always limited to the lowest links of the drug chain and not enough effort has been made to target those involved in higher level operations.

The drug business appears to be employing an ever larger number of Russian citizens to serve as drug couriers. In 2003, Russian governmental sources estimate that the number of organized criminal groups involved in the drug trade increased by 85 percent when compared to 1993 figures.⁹ There are said to be an estimated 950 criminal groups involved in the drug trade as of 2004.¹⁰ With approximately 450,000 registered drug users in Russia and approximately 4 to 5 million users in total, according to the latest Russian figures (2 to 4 percent of the Russian population), narcotics now assume a notable share of the estimated \$9 to \$10 billion Russian shadow economy.¹¹

The profits of the Russian drug trade are disposed-of in different ways. They are laundered through legitimate businesses in Russia such as restaurants, bars, and casinos—sectors controlled by organized crime. They are also sent abroad through complex money laundering operations, mainly to Western European countries. Profits are also used to support the illegal immigrant communities within Russia from Central Asia and the Caucasus as well as those from Afghanistan and Pakistan. They are also used to fund the conflict in Chechnya, insurgencies in adjoining regions, and possibly terrorist activities supported by remnants of the Taliban.

Based on the above information, it would appear that not only has Russia developed one of the world's most serious drug abuse problem in a

⁸ M.Iu Semeniuk, "Problemy protivodeistviia nezakonnomu oborotu narkotikov v Primorskom krae," [Problems and Countermeasures to Illegal Drugs Turnover in Primorskii Region] <www.crime.vl.ru/docs> (March 1 2005).

⁹ Federal Narcotics Control Service, Press Release *Narkobiznes – ugroza natsional'noi bezopasnosti* [Narcotics Business – A Challenge to the National Security], July 15 2003.

¹⁰ Vladimir Vorsobin, "Putin prizval bortsov s narkotikami rabotat' 'na polnuyu katushku,'" [Putin Called for Maximum Effort to Fight Narcotics] *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, March 31 2004.

¹¹ Viktor Cherkesov, "The Economic Consequences of HIV in Russia," Report for the World Bank Group, May 15 2002, 8-9, <www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2005/voll/html/42368.htm> (March 16 2005).

very short period of time, the drug problem has come to be a threat to Russia's national security.¹²

Drug Abuse and the Impact on Russia's Population

The highest concentrations of drug abuse, measured in part by rates of HIV infection, are in the major cities along the Transiberian railroad—Vladivostok, Irkutsk, Ekaterinburg and Moscow. St. Petersburg, a major city and transportation hub, is also a center of drug abuse. Irkutsk, the Siberian city, has a particularly acute drug problem according to the analyses of the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) in Irkutsk. This reflects the fact that the internal trade within Russia relies heavily on travel by rail.

Drug abuse trends in Russia have changed over the past decade, in the direction of increasing intravenous use and drug abuse at increasingly low ages.¹³ Six percent of 15 and 16 year olds in Moscow are reported to have used heroin at least once — nowhere in Western Europe was the figure over 2 percent.¹⁴ The total number of opiate addicts in Russia is unknown. Forcible incarceration, fear of imprisonment and blackmail, as well as the limited availability of health care, are the main reasons why few addicts register with the authorities.

Seventy thousand people in Russia were reported to have died as a result of drug use in 2003 alone.¹⁵ The problem is exacerbating as the number of people infected with HIV increases, 80 percent of whom are intravenous drug users. A quarter million of HIV cases have been registered, but the real number is much higher. UNAIDS estimated the number of cases at one million in December 2003.¹⁶ In 2002, the U.S. National Intelligence Council estimated the figure to be between one to two million.¹⁷ The epidemic has not culminated yet, and depending on its

¹² Writing in the *Jane's Intelligence Review* in late 2003, Mark Galeotti suggests the problem to be even more severe, estimating there to be over 6 million drug users, of which 2 million are addicts. Mark Galeotti, "Russia's Drug Crisis," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (October 2003).

¹³ John Kramer, "Drug Abuse in Russia: Emerging Pandemic or Overhyped Diversion?" *Problems of Post-Communism*, (November/December 2003): 12-27; Fedorov, "Narkomania v Rossii: ugroza natsii" [Drug Addiction in Russia: A Threat to the Nation], 1.

¹⁴ Paoli, "The Development of an Illegal Market: Drug Consumption and Trade in Post-Soviet Russia", 23.

¹⁵ "FSN: v Rossii ot upotrebleniya narkotikov v minuvshem godu pogibli okolo 70 tysyach chelovek," [FSN: About 70,000 Died from Narcotics in Russia Last Year] *ItarTass*, June 3 2004.

¹⁶ UNAIDS, "AIDS Epidemic Update 2003," December 2003, <www.unaids.org/wad/2003/Epiupdate2003_en/Epi03_05_en.htm#P118_26729> (July 2004).

¹⁷ U.S. National Intelligence Council, "The Next Wave of HIV/AIDS: Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, India, and China," September 2002, <www.odci.gov/nic/other_nextwaveHIV.html> (July 1 2004).

development, demographers predict that between 5 and 9 million people will contract HIV in Russia by 2010. Nick Eberstadt writing in *Foreign Affairs* estimates that if only 2 million people were affected, any expected improvement in life expectancy between 2000 and 2025 would be eradicated. Even in the case of a mild epidemic, the working age population would be reduced by 15 percent, since the disease primarily affects young people.¹⁸ Forty percent of recruits to military service, of whom 20 percent are found to be drug users, have been sent home due to poor health conditions.¹⁹

Conclusions

The rise of the Russian drug trade has an enormous negative impact on Russia's demographics and the future of its economy. The drug trade threatens the labor force because it disproportionately affects the young and the working-age population. The rise of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other diseases associated with the spread of drug use is having a significant demographic impact on a Russian population that is already below replacement level. The health costs to businesses and the loss of labor force capacity is an enormous drain on Russian competitiveness not sufficiently recognized by the Russian state. The vulnerability of Russia's youthful population to drug abuse raises severe problems for the country's future development.

¹⁸ Nicholas Eberstadt, "The Future of AIDS," *Foreign Affairs* 81, 6 (2002): 22-45; U.S.-Russia Working Group Against HIV/AIDS, *On the Frontline of an Epidemic: The Need for Urgency in Russia's Fight Against Aids* (New York: Transatlantic Partners Against Aids, 2003), 6.

¹⁹ Murray Feshbach, *Russia's Health and Demographic Crisis: Policy Implications and Consequences* (Washington: Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute, 2003).

Afghanistan's Opium Production in Perspective

*Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy**

Afghanistan has been the world's primary opium producing country since 1991, when it surpassed Burma (Myanmar) in total annual production. Both the Taliban regime and the Karzai government inherited an illicit drug economy that has been stimulated by two decades of war and also fuelled the country's war economy. However, just as the Taliban government successfully, but counterproductively, prohibited opium production in 2001, their regime was toppled by U.S. military intervention in response to the September 11 attacks in the United States. Then, in a rather chaotic Afghanistan, opium production resumed and grew back to normal. Now, the illicit drug economy in Afghanistan is said to fuel terrorism. The Afghan government, the U.S.-led coalition and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime consider that "fighting drug trafficking equals fighting terrorism."¹

However, in Afghanistan as in other parts of the world, in Burma for example, opium has long been at stake in armed conflicts as its trade has allowed these conflicts to be prolonged. As the complex history of opium in Asia demonstrates, opium production and trade have been central to world politics and geopolitics for centuries and the role of the opium economy in Afghanistan does not represent a new trend. In many ways, history reinvents itself.

A Brief History of Opium

Opium is one of the world's oldest pain-relievers. It is a narcotic drug that is obtained from the unripe seedpods of the opium poppy, *Papaver somniferum* L. It is difficult to pinpoint the geographic area of origin of the opium poppy. Although the oldest opium poppy capsules have been found in Switzerland, the plant itself is thought to have originated

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¹ Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of UNODC, Kabul, February 2004.

somewhere between the eastern Mediterranean and Minor Asia. However, the opium poppy has proven its ability to adapt to most ecological environments and, thus, has spread across Europe and Asia, and, even to the Americas, Australia and Africa. Very early on then, the opium poppy grew around human settlements and has most likely thrived in a symbiosis with early human activities along transcontinental migration routes. Indeed, historically, human societies have widely used opium as an analgesic and a sedative. Its cultivation was also a way to finance empires, colonial ventures, and wars.

It was not until the British Empire started organizing and commercializing opium production in the 19th century that the opium poppy became entrenched in the world economy. The opium produced in British India was the first drug to become integrated into the then emerging globalization. Tea, which was then only grown in China, was bought by British merchants with silver extracted from South American mines. This triangular trade went on at least until the British Empire, together with the East India Company it had set up, created a thriving opium market in China, first through illegal smuggling and then through forced imports. The two so-called “opium wars” (1839-1842 and 1856-1860) waged by the British to impose their opium trade onto China resulted in “unfair treaties” that not only made Hong Kong a British colony but also provoked, in China, the biggest addiction ever to happen in world history. Eventually, opium consumption and addiction also spurred tremendous opium production in China. In response to the Chinese national consumption that drained its silver reserves, China became the world’s foremost opium producer.

China did not succeed in suppressing both national opium consumption and production until after World War II. Opium production then moved to the hills and mountains of Southeast Asia, where the so-called Golden Triangle quickly became the primary opium-producing region in the world. As Alfred McCoy revealed in his 1972 seminal book *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (reedited in 1991 as *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*),² the Cold War clearly helped the illicit opium-heroin economies thrive in Asia. This trend emerged first in Laos and in Burma, then in Afghanistan in what came to be known as the Golden Crescent. In both Southeast and Southwest Asia, the Central Intelligence Agency’s anti-Communist covert operations and secret wars benefited from the participation of some drug-related combat units or individual actors who, to finance their struggles, were directly involved in drug production and trade. To cite just two, the Hmong in Laos and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in Afghanistan.

² Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (New York, Harper & Row, 1972) and Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* (1972; reprint 1991, Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991).

Opium Production in Afghanistan (and Asia)

Today, Afghanistan's opium production is the direct outcome of Cold War rivalries and conflicts waged by proxies who helped develop a thriving narcotic economy in the country. Afghanistan has been the world's leading opium-producing country for years now, with Burma and Laos ranking second and third respectively.

However, the spread of drug trafficking in Asia and elsewhere is also clearly linked to the international prohibition of *certain* drugs of which the two most significant events occurred in 1961, when the United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs was adopted, and in 1971, when the administration of U.S. President Richard Nixon declared a global "war on drugs." However, the U.S.-led push for global prohibition had unintended local and regional consequences. In Iran for example, the 1955 prohibition stimulated production in Afghanistan and Pakistan and even in the distant Golden Triangle. Turkish prohibition of opium production in 1972 spurred the Golden Crescent's production and further linked together Asia's two main poppy-growing areas.

After the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the illicit drug trade continued to fuel Asian conflicts, and Afghanistan and Burma became the world's two main opium-producing countries. Their national economies have now been affected for decades by an illicit agriculture that, to some extent and in some areas, grew detrimentally to food crops such as wheat and rice, even though most farmers grow the opium poppy as a cash crop to cope with extreme staple crops shortages. Various political and economic factors have favored or still favor the resort to the illicit drug economy in both countries: internal or transnational conflicts, the disintegration of the state, ethnic contentions, religious strife, oppressive regimes, lack of economic development projects, low international prices of food crops and droughts, just to name a few.

Illicit opium production thrives on war economies and poverty. Impacts and consequences of such economies vary according to time and location. Opium production threatens alimentary self-reliance and subjects growers to repression and even harsher life conditions. Trafficking destabilizes producing and neighboring countries by stimulating the corruption of authorities. Trafficking also spreads consumption of opium and especially of heroin, both creating and increasing drug addiction along trafficking routes, as is the case in Central Asia and China. Production, trafficking and consumption also nurture armed violence across international borders and spread scourges such as the HIV-AIDS epidemic that is transmitted by way of intravenous drug use in most of Asia.

Conclusions

Thus, illicit opium production can be assessed to be a national, regional, and global problem. This problem is deeply rooted in local as well as global histories and may only be addressed in various and specific cultural, political and economic contexts. However, any solution to the problem of illicit drug production in Asia, as in the rest of the world, has to be achieved through a global and coordinated approach. If opium suppression is to be achieved, if it is to be sustainable and not counterproductive, it has to be implemented progressively, through use of a long run strategy, as has happened in Pakistan and Thailand. Afghanistan has suffered two decades of war and economic and political disintegration. Although the role of law enforcement is necessary to rid the country of its drug economy, concrete results will not be achieved without political stability and economic development. It is only when these conditions exist that opium suppression becomes possible in Afghanistan. This is to be achieved through a broad program of alternative livelihood development, mainstreamed into national development strategies.

“Who Needs Protecting?” Rethinking HIV, Drugs and Security in the China Context

*Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch and Nick Bartlett**

In early 2004 China began implementation of a national Methadone Maintenance Therapy (MMT) program where opiate-addicted drug users could access methadone on a daily basis as they needed it. As of December 2005, 58 clinics in 10 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities had provided voluntary outpatient treatment to more than 6500 opiate-addicted drug users. Funded with money earmarked for HIV programs, the program hopes to eventually reach 105,000 individuals.¹

The creation of this new service has sparked lively conversation among policy-makers, many of whom frame their support of or opposition to the program in terms of its potential effect on national security. The Chinese Vice-Minister of Health argued that the program is important because such efforts “not only control the spread of diseases, but also bring us a stable society.” Meanwhile, a police officer wrote that MMT creates an environment where “drug users will eventually fear nothing” and may threaten non-drug using populations.²

China’s Response to HIV/AIDS and Drug Abuse

In recent years, discussions framing HIV as a security issue have become increasingly common. In Russia, for example, the increase of HIV among conscripts is alarming army generals and politicians. Adult HIV prevalence rates that surpass 20 percent in Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe have convinced some that the AIDS epidemic could

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¹ Unpublished Notes from MMT Experience Sharing Meeting, December 2005; Drew Thompson, “People’s war against drugs and HIV,” *China Brief* 5, 14 (2004): 8.

² Police officer Yu Sheng and Vice Minister of Health Wang Longde, “Drug Users Get the Point,” *Beijing Review Forum*, 2004, <www.bjreview.com.cn/200418/Forum.htm> (January 23, 2006).

eventually lead to collapsed states and regional instability. The programmatic responses made in the name of protecting security are not necessarily helpful if they treat people who are HIV positive, using drugs, or both as a security threat to their own society. The evolving, at time contradictory, policies towards drug users in China provide an example of how variations of security discourses can justify dramatically different interventions.

The current controversy around MMT stems from China's past policies towards drug use and HIV. After decades during Mao's reign when drugs were virtually unobtainable, twin injecting drug and HIV epidemics emerged with the country's economic and social liberalization in the 1980s. The government's early response to these new threats was to set up "lines of defense"³ to keep drugs (and, by association, HIV) from entering along the trafficking routes of Southeast Asian heroin producing neighbors. When this strategy failed to stem drug use in China, the government waged a "battle against drugs", which attempted to limit not only the movement of drugs but also the people who used them. Spearheaded by the Ministry of Public Security and gaining momentum over time, the "war on drugs" enlisted 17,000 anti-drug squad police who in 2004 detained 273,000 drug users through arrests made on streets, raids on people's homes, and other coordinated activities.⁴ If tested positive for illicit substances, suspected users were institutionalized for up to three years in ever-expanding network of government detention facilities.

This hard hitting, incarceration-focused approach to controlling drug use and HIV was meant to "protect the physical and mental health of Chinese citizens, maintain public order, and wipe out once and for all the scourge of drugs."⁵ In this formulation of public safety, drug users are seen as a potential security threat to the national population. This argument invokes programmatic responses, including the physical separation and marginalization of drug users, which quickly become forms of social control rather than means to assist those in need.

The crackdown approach in China to date has not produced the results that many had hoped. While policing budgets and arrest figures have skyrocketed over the past 15 years, the number of people using illicit drugs and infected by HIV also continue to climb, reaching five million and 288,000, respectively.⁶ Many of the compulsory rehabilitation and

³ Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *White Papers: Narcotics Control in China*, 2000.

⁴ Xing Bao, "Drug war intensifies," *Shanghai Star*, June 24 2004; Drew Thompson, "The People's War against Drugs and HIV," *China Brief* 5, 4 (June 21 2004).

⁵ *White Papers: Narcotics Control in China*, 2000.

⁶ The number of drug users registered by the public security organs has increased from 148,000 in 1991 to 1.05 million in 2005. The five million figure comes from the country's application to the Global Fund. *White Papers: Narcotics Control in China*, 2000; Drew Thompson, "In Search of Harm Reduction," *The Standard*, June 23 2005; Country

reeducation-through-labor centers that house arrested drug users are overcrowded and under-funded and may provide sub-standard psychological and pharmacological care to those in treatment. The relapse rate among individuals leaving these state detention facilities has been officially reported to be between 90 percent and 95 percent, but NGO workers claim that the real number may be closer to 99 percent.⁷ A less publicized aspect of the country's war on drugs has been the lost opportunities of those mired in a cycle of arrest, detoxification, release, relapse and arrest. Many drug users live their lives in constant fear of police raids, endure difficult conditions and long periods away from friends and family while in confinement, and suffer high rates of unemployment and discrimination when they are not in government facilities.

Over the years, a growing number of observers have argued for an alternative approach to preventing illicit drug use and HIV in China. By emphasizing individual choice, the MMT program represents both a programmatic alternative to compulsory detention and a challenge to a security discourse that sees drug users as a threat to public health. The case for MMT is strengthened by the pragmatic argument that attention to drug users' needs, rather than those of an abstract public, ultimately ensures community security by more effectively reducing the transmission of HIV, increasing the likelihood of addicts' long term abstinence from illicit drugs, and helping to minimize drug-related crime.

By providing voluntary, demand-based services that minimally disrupt participants' daily lives, MMT avoids stigmatizing roundups and allows drug users the opportunity to lead productive lives in society while undergoing treatment. Services offered by the MMT may reach populations that escape police raids or fail to thrive in government detention programs. In Kyrgyzstan, a rare example of a country in Central Asia that has implemented a national MMT program, patients were far less likely to participate in criminal activity and reported enhanced happiness and health.⁸

Initial reports from Beijing confirm that methadone can be effective in the China context. Stories of individuals breaking drug habits and participating in work and social activities featured in a range of media

Coordinating Mechanism, *China Round Four HIV/AIDS Global Fund Proposal: Reducing HIV Transmission Among and From Vulnerable Groups and Alleviating its Impact in Seven Provinces in China*, 2004; Jim Yardley, “New Survey Reduces Estimate of AIDS and HIV Cases in China,” *New York Times*, January 25 2006.

⁷ Authors were unable to confirm figure. “Locked Doors: The Human Rights of People living with HIV/AIDS in China,” *Human Rights Watch* 15, 7 (2003): 44; Interview, NGO employee in Kunming, November 8 2005.

⁸ Daniel Wolfe, “Pointing the Way: Harm Reduction in Kyrgyz Republic,” (Bishkek: Harm Reduction Association of Kyrgyzstan, 2005).

outlets over the past two years. A national seminar reviewing preliminary data from pilot sites found that heroin use, intravenous injection, and drug-use related crime had diminished in participating areas.⁹

Despite these positive signs, the China program to date has been constrained by rules defining how it operates and who it is able to serve. Current regulations mandate that all potential participants must have a stable residence in the area where they are treated, be at least 20 years of age, and have spent time, generally a minimum of six months, in state detention facilities before entering the program. In addition, clinics require that potential participants register and receive approval from local police. The cost of the treatment, over \$30 a month at most sites, is also a significant barrier to those without a steady source of income. These limitations have resulted in disappointing enrollment numbers and high drop out rates in certain sites.

2006 will be a crucial period in the development of China's MMT program. While there is talk of eliminating user fees and easing eligibility requirements, the program in its current incarnation fails to serve a significant number of the most vulnerable portion of opiate-addicted individuals across the country. Securing funding for future expansion may also be a problem, as 70 approved clinics at the end of 2005 were still not operating due to delays in money transfers. The long-term viability and effectiveness of the program are still to be determined.

Rethinking HIV, Drugs and Security

MMT in China has been closely watched by neighboring governments, many of whom are considering similar programs. Recently, a Russian delegation visited China with an aim of assessing the appropriateness of methadone for its own drug users. While Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have considered implementing substitution treatment programs for over five years, substitution medication is still not registered in either country. In this context, a thriving, best-practice MMT in China could help build momentum for similar initiatives in the region, while a rigidly controlled or stalled effort could make other countries more likely to put the breaks on their own fledgling programs.

Decisions around MMT also have implications for the ongoing debate in China over how to balance harm reduction versus criminalization approaches to drug control. The Chinese government has expanded its portfolio of harm reduction activities to include pilot needle exchange

⁹ State Council HIV/AIDS Working Committee Office and UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS in China. *A Joint Assessment of HIV/AIDS Prevention, Treatment and Care in China*, 2004, 17.

sites and peer education programs. However, it has also announced another round of the “people’s war on drugs” with a renewed commitment to locking up every drug user in the country. This uncomfortable blend of policies can be seen in recent public campaign messages displayed on adjacent billboards, where a policeman toting a gun with flaming contraband behind him urges the public to participate in the “people’s war on drugs” shares space with two smiling actors who ask the same population to “love life and prevent AIDS.”

China is not the only country where anti-drug activities have turned anti-drug user. Officially launched in February of 2003, a violent state-sponsored “war on drugs” in Thailand resulted in the unexplained killing of more than 2,000 persons, the arbitrary arrest or blacklisting of several thousand more, and the endorsement of extreme violence by government officials at the highest levels.¹⁰ The United States, which bans the use of federal funds for needle exchange, currently incarcerates half a million of its citizens for non-violent drug offences. With the highest per capita execution rate in the world, Singapore also continues its own prosecution of drug traffickers and users.

A rethinking of national security discourse can shift governments away from regressive, brutal policies towards drug users. Human security, defined as “protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of our daily lives — whether in our homes, our jobs, in our communities or in our environments”¹¹, complicates traditional national security arguments that minimize the human costs of crackdowns and mass incarcerations. Adopting a human security perspective re-figures the level of analysis on which security is defined and reminds governments that they are morally obligated to consider the individual safety of those affected by their policies, regardless of their social or health status.

A human security perspective not only resonates with the values of a liberal humanist community, it also rings true with the lessons learned from over 25 years of studying HIV prevention efforts. In a variety of contexts worldwide, social scientists have found that the virus spreads most quickly among groups that are economically and socially marginalized. Moreover, experience teaches us that government attempts to step up criminalization generally only serve to push undesirable behavior further underground and exacerbate associated harms. Successful prevention programs in Australia, Brazil, and Senegal have all focused on reducing harm rather than stigmatizing people at risk for contracting the virus. Community-based, voluntary services that are

¹⁰ “Not Enough Graves: The War on Drugs, HIV/AIDS, and Violations of Human Rights,” *Human Rights Watch* 16, 8 (June 2004).

¹¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.

designed with broadly defined needs of drug users in mind will be most effective in reducing the spread of the virus.

Conclusions

In the name of keeping the nation secure, China has, like a number of other countries in recent times, developed an incarceration-focused response to its drug use and HIV problems. There is a moral, as well as pragmatic, imperative to build alternative programs that reduce the harms associated with intravenous drug use while treating drug users with dignity and respect. The debut of the national MMT program is an important initial step towards a drug-user centered, human security approach to prevention and treatment. However, Chinese leadership needs to do more. Without strong coordination and support among implementing Ministries at all levels, there is potential for the clinics themselves to become targets in the country's ongoing war on drugs. If the project sites are rigidly controlled and operate within a coercive environment, a lack of honesty and trust between service providers and participants could derail an otherwise valiant effort.

In addition, to successfully stem the looming HIV epidemic the Chinese government must make a range of community-based services, including needle exchange, peer education, and employment services, available to anyone who needs them. Collectively, these interventions would give drug users handholds to pull themselves out of drug addiction and HIV vulnerability. With nearly 80 percent of the world's 13 million injecting drug users living in developing countries and intravenous drug use fueling a "second wave" of infections across the globe,¹² China and its neighbors have much to gain from making the right security choices.

¹² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *2005 World Drug Report: Volume 1: Analysis* (Vienna, Austria: UNODC, 2005), 148.

Revolution, Repression and Re-election in 2005: China's Response to Political Developments in Central Asia

*Zamir Chargynov**

Three significant events took place in Central Asia in 2005. The March Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan led to the overthrow of former President Askar Akayev; the May Andijan upheaval in Uzbekistan led President Islam Karimov to break ties with the West; an election in Kazakhstan reinstated incumbent President Nursultan Nazarbayev in December. The main beneficiary of these political developments is China which managed to further consolidate its influence in the region as a result.

The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan

The sudden and unforeseen change of power in Kyrgyzstan on March 24, 2005 resulted in the ousting of President Askar Akayev, who had good relations with China. For a period of more than a decade, Akayev's regime fruitfully cooperated with Beijing on issues of border delimitation, military training, the fight against the three evils of terrorism, separatism, extremism, and trade. However, the so-called 'Tulip revolution' brought uncertainty as to how the new post-Akayev government, made up of opposition party members, would regard China. Reacting swiftly, China closed its borders with Kyrgyzstan right after March 24 and evacuated many Chinese businessmen on special charter flights as there were reports of looting incidents that threatened their security and business interests.

With Kyrgyzstan bordering China's problematic Xinjiang region, concern over a quick stabilization of the situation in Kyrgyzstan was clearly observable in the official statements of the Chinese Ministry of

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Foreign Affairs: “China hopes the situation in Kyrgyzstan turns stable [at] an early date (...) As a friendly neighbor of Kyrgyzstan, China is paying close attention to the development of the situation and wishes social order there restored to a normal state as soon as possible.”¹

Analysts and government officials in China feared the western orientation of the new Kyrgyz regime, not least because of recent similar popular revolts in Georgia and Ukraine that were believed to have been influenced by western interests. China was especially concerned because the Kyrgyz revolt was instigated by people widely and publicly critical of Akayev’s lands transfer agreement with Beijing in 2001.

These concerns were finally allayed as the new Kyrgyz leadership pledged adherence to and continuation of the former regime’s foreign policy. China was the second country after Uzbekistan to which an official delegation under the Acting Foreign Minister Roza Otunbaeva made its visit. In her meetings with top Chinese officials, Otunbaeva, whom many saw as pro-western, assured Beijing of the new Kyrgyz leadership’s commitment to the preservation of good and friendly relations with China. She also stated that the new leadership regards China as an important friend and economic partner.²

In return, the Chinese Embassy in Kyrgyzstan sponsored some charity activities in Bishkek, supposedly to improve China’s image in the post-revolutionary Kyrgyz Republic. As an expression of support to the new Government, China also provided Kyrgyzstan with fireworks on the inauguration day of the Kyrgyz President and had it announced through local Kyrgyz media.

Overall, the change of power in Kyrgyzstan on March 24 did not result in the deterioration of Sino-Kyrgyz relations as China had initially feared. Beijing continued to receive Kyrgyz hydro-electric power for western China. It also received a continued Kyrgyz commitment to fight the three evils of terrorism, extremism, and separatism with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The Andijan Uprising in Uzbekistan

Unlike the Tulip Revolution, China did not maintain a wait-and-see attitude towards the Andijan incident. Indeed, Beijing’s quick response in this case was no less than that of Moscow, which is traditionally regarded as the most involved (or dominant) foreign power in the region.³ Only a

¹ Matthew Oresman, “Assessing China’s reaction to Kyrgyzstan’s ‘Tulip Revolution,’” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, April 6 2005.

² *Ibid.*

³ For example, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov has stated that the operation in Andijan was planned and prepared with local dissidents and Islamists from the Ferghana Valley region and Afghanistan “from the Taliban camp and external extremist forces of the Taliban-type”, see Martin Walker, “Analysis: Uzbek leader escapes

week later, Chinese President Hu Jintao invited Karimov to visit China as a sign of solidarity towards the Uzbek leader following the repression of the Andijan uprising.⁴ In his first foreign trip after the violence in Andijan, Karimov reportedly received not just praise, but also expressions of delight for his handling of the uprising.⁵ China gave him a 21-gun salute upon his arrival in Beijing, an expression of the highest respect for any foreign guest. China also refused to support an international investigation into the Andijan events.

China's lack of criticism of the repressive methods of Karimov goes beyond an adherence to the principle of non-interference in others' internal affairs. Uzbekistan is an important and influential country in Central Asia with significant gas and oil resources. Furthermore, before spring 2005, it was the most pro-American among all four Central Asian Republics, having been the first to allow an American airbase on its soil after September 11. Thus, China seized the moment to curry favor with Uzbekistan while the latter was heavily criticized by western countries for its handling of the Andijan upheaval. By giving explicit political support and concluding economic agreements during Karimov's visit to Beijing, China demonstrated its friendly intentions. Indeed, China's courtship of Uzbekistan, a country of utmost strategic importance, was very successful. China managed to improve its relations with a regime that had previously shown reluctance towards developing deeper Sino-Uzbek relations.⁶

The ousting of Akayev made the remaining members of the 'Post-Soviet Presidential Club', wary of the United States' influence in their countries. This wariness was further compounded by the subsequent heavy western criticism levied against Karimov's repressive methods during the Andijan upheaval. This distrust of the West, in particular the U.S. found its most explicit expression in the joint declaration issued at the July 5, 2005 Astana summit of the SCO which called for the removal of U.S. military bases from Uzbekistan by January 2006. This development marked another victory for Chinese (and Russian) interest

isolation," *United Press International*, May 27 2005, <<http://uyghuramerican.org/phorum/read.php?3,3888,3927,quote=1>> (February 15 2006).

⁴ On June 29, 2005, Karimov made an official visit to Moscow where Russian officials stated that the violence in Andijan was planned in advance by terrorist groups abroad. Claire Bigg, "Uzbekistan: Karimov, Putin say Andijon Violence was Planned Abroad," *Radio Free Asia/Radio Liberty*, June 29 2005, <www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/6/EAD4764D-584A-4E4B-992C-C087982C0930.html> (February 12 2006).

⁵ Stephen Blank, "Islam Karimov and the Heirs of Tiananmen," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, June 14 2005, <www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2369877> (December 5 2005).

⁶ M.S. Ashymbaeva, *Politika KNR na sovremennom etape: realii i perspektivi* [PRC's Politics Today: Realities and Perspectives] (Almaty: Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of RK, 2005), 127.

in Central Asia since it meant a decrease of U.S. influence in the region and arguably amounts to being the biggest achievement of their foreign policy efforts in the region for 2005.⁷

December 4 Kazakh Elections

In light of the year's other developments, the December 4 presidential elections in Kazakhstan represent the third major event possessing important implications for China's interests in the region. Although the event took place amidst political stability and the victory of Nazarbayev was widely expected, China, alarmed by the two earlier events in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, nevertheless kept a wary eye on the possibilities of instability after the elections.

Kazakhstan has close strategic ties with China. This is reflected in China National Petroleum Corporation's (CNPC) purchase of Petro-Kazakhstan in 2005. In addition, the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline linking Kazakh oil fields to western China started operation in December 2005. The continuation of Nazarbayev's rule is therefore a guarantee of an energy supply to China for the next seven years.

In addition, Nazarbayev's continued rule is important for the SCO as Kazakhstan has been a consistent pillar of support for the organization. This is in contrast to Uzbekistan, which was the last of the four Central Asian countries to join the 'Shanghai Five', and remained as the main U.S. ally in the region up until the Andijan events. Similarly, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan openly denied support to the SCO Astana Declaration of 2005. When it comes to Kazakhstan, it has however remained loyal to the 'Shanghai spirit' throughout the whole process of its establishment and the life of the organization.

Astana under Nazarbayev also contributes greatly to the fight of SCO against the three evils of terrorism, extremism and separatism; Kazakh security services keep a close eye on Uighur diasporas in the country. Kazakhstan has also extradited Uighurs accused of terrorism to China, despite fierce opposition from human rights NGOs.

The results of the December 4 presidential elections are even more crucial to the SCO in terms of the role Kazakhstan can play in the establishment of the Free Trade Zone announced at the Tashkent summit of 2004. Kazakhstan is the third largest SCO nation and borders all SCO members except Tajikistan. The strategic location of the country puts Kazakhstan in an important position in promoting a free flow of goods. In addition, increases in the standard of living in the second most populated Central Asian country makes it a lucrative consumer market.

⁷ However, it has to be noted that while Russia's efforts are resulting in a re-gaining of lost influence, China's overtures in Central Asia are leading to new strategic advancements. In this sense, Beijing can be seen as a bigger winner than Moscow.

In sum, Nazarbayev's re-election means support for the SCO's agenda for at least the next seven years. SCO Secretary-General Zhang Deguang, who personally headed the SCO International Observer mission to Kazakhstan during the elections, outlined in his Astana press conference that "Presidential Elections in Kazakhstan have a great meaning to the stability of the region and the cooperation within the framework of SCO, therefore they are at the center of organization's attention."⁸

Indeed, with its rich energy resources, a prospering economy and rising regional influence, Kazakhstan is regarded as China's most favored ally in Central Asia. Therefore, it would be a severe setback for China and the SCO if Nazarbayev loses power as a result of revolution or instability following the elections. In this regard, the undisputed re-election of Nursultan Nazarbayev to the Kazakh Presidency marked another victory for China and its Central Asian strategy.

The ever-growing ties between the two countries were reflected during the swearing-in ceremony in January 2006 where a Joint Communiqué was signed by Deputy Chairman of the PRC and the re-elected Kazakh leader. A principal aspect of the communiqué involved the affirmation of their bilateral cooperation and the continuation of an active promotion of the interests of the SCO. The Joint Communiqué attached significant importance to the upcoming summit in Beijing in June 2006, where new strategic goals will be defined.⁹

Conclusions

The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, the Andijan events in Uzbekistan and Nazarbayev's re-election in Kazakhstan have pushed many experts and strategists to re-evaluate the positioning of Russia, the U.S. and China in the region. The developments in Central Asia suggest that China has managed to strengthen its influence in Central Asia. Specifically, the Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan did not end in the deterioration of Sino-Kyrgyz relations as initially feared by Beijing. The consequences of the Andijan events have forced Uzbekistan to move closer towards China at the expense of U.S. interests, and finally, the December 4 Kazakh presidential elections reaffirmed Nazarbayev's

⁸ SCO Secretariat, Main Events of SCO Secretariat in 2005, Secretariat Chronicles, December 3 2005, <www.sectSCO.org/html/00039.html> (February 15 2006).

⁹ Joint Communiqué of Kazakhstan and China, January 11 2006.

power which is of crucial importance for the Chinese and the SCO's long-term interests in Central Asia.

The Chinese exercise of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic tools in response to political developments in Central Asia in 2005 indicates the importance it places on its western front. Significantly, the Chinese diplomacy reflects a growing level of engagement in responding to changes and challenges in the region. Such behavior underlines China's growing confidence in its relations with Central Asia.

The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration?

*Svante E. Cornell**

ABSTRACT

This article traces the changes in the threat posed by narcotics production and trafficking in Greater Central Asia, over time and across the four major parts of this region. The article argues that the crime-terror nexus posed the greatest threat to security in 1995-2001; but that since then, the challenge has grown more complex and that different parts of Greater Central Asia have developed in different directions: in Afghanistan and Central Asia, the crime-terror nexus has been eclipsed by the rapidly growing infiltration of state institutions by organized crime. In the South Caucasus, change has been less dramatic: the consolidation of states, especially in Georgia, has gradually put increasing pressure on both elements. In the North Caucasus, a synthesis between the crime-terror and crime-state nexuses can be observed, threatening to make the region a black hole comparable to Afghanistan in the 1990s.

Keywords • crime-terror nexus • Caucasus • Central Asia • narcotics • organized crime • corruption

The end of the Cold War brought about a number of unintended consequences. An unforeseen consequence of the collapse of the bipolar system that was understood only belatedly and gradually and still remains to be fully comprehended, was the growth of transnational organized crime and its increasing relevance to the security of states and populations alike.¹ Only with the widening of the concept of security, and growing understanding of 'soft security threats' among policy-makers

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¹ See Svante E. Cornell and Niklas L.P. Swanström, *Transnationell Brottslighet: Ett Säkerhetshot?*, [Transnational Crime: A Security Threat?] (Stockholm: Swedish Crisis Management Agency, 2006).

and academics was organized crime reluctantly incorporated into the understanding of security.

Among various forms of organized crime, the trade in illicit drugs arguably carries the largest societal, political, and economic consequences. It threatens the fabric of societies through addiction, crime and disease. It exacerbates corruption in already weak states, impairing their economic and political functioning. Moreover, through its linkages to insurgency and terrorism, the drug trade is an increasing threat to regional and international security in a most traditional, military sense.² As such, the drug trade affects both “hard” and “soft” security.³

For several reasons, Greater Central Asia has been one of the regions whose security has been most negatively affected by organized crime. To begin with, the region was geographically positioned between the production and consumption areas of narcotics, Afghanistan and Europe. Secondly, the lack of functioning basic state institutions in the region made it an ideal smuggling route at a time when Turkey and Iran were tightening border controls. Third, the weakness of state institutions facilitated the growth of corruption as well as the capture of state institutions by private interest groups. Fourth, the lack of consensus over the borders or political systems of several regional states and ensuing armed conflict over both territory and government further weakened the states and created violent non-state actors that had a potential gain from involvement in the drug trade.

As a result, the Greater Central Asian region from the mid-1990s onward saw a rapid increase of narcotics trafficking. Within several years, this had created huge social and political problems. On the societal level, addiction levels grew rapidly, exacerbating an already precarious social situation. More alarmingly, non-state violent actors across the region managed to consolidate their position by financial gain from involvement in the drug trade and other emerging criminal operations – endangering the very survival of several states and weakening others. In parallel, state institutions in every state of the region, and beyond, were affected by criminal infiltration – through corruption or the more serious

² Tamara Makarenko, “Terrorism and Transnational Organised Crime: the Emerging Nexus,” in *Transnational Violence and Seams of Lawlessness in the Asia-Pacific: Linkages to Global Terrorism* ed. Paul Smith (Hawaii: Asia Pacific Center for Strategic Studies, 2004); Kimberley Thachuk, “Transnational Threats: Falling Through the Cracks?” *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* 10, 1 (2001); Sabrina Adamoli et. al., *Organized Crime Around the World* (Helsinki: HEUNI, 1998); Barbara Harris-White, *Globalization and Insecurity: Political, Economic and Physical Challenges* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2002); Ian Griffith, “From Cold War Geopolitics to Post-Cold War Geonarcotics,” *International Journal* 30, 2 (1993-1994); Richard Matthew and George Shambaugh, “Sex, Drugs, and Heavy Metal: Transnational Threats and National Vulnerabilities,” *Security Dialogue* 29 (1998): 163-175.

³ See Svante E. Cornell and Niklas L.P. Swanström, “The Eurasian Drug Trade: A Challenge to Regional Security,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, 4 (July 2006).

practice of state capture, the willful takeover of state institutions by individuals or groups connected to organized crime. By the early 2000s, it had become reasonably clear that the security of the region could not be understood without accounting for the role of the drug trade and organized crime.⁴

While this realization is gradually growing in academic and decision-making structures, the years since September 11, 2001 have seen a divergence in the patterns by which narcotics and organized crime affect security across the region. The purpose of this article is to trace the changes in the threat posed by narcotics production and trafficking in Greater Central Asia, over time and across the four major parts of this region. The article argues that the crime-terror nexus posed the greatest threat to security in 1995-2001; but that since then, the challenge has grown more complex and that different parts of Greater Central Asia have developed in different directions: in Afghanistan and Central Asia, the crime-terror nexus has been eclipsed by the rapidly growing infiltration of state institutions by organized crime. In the South Caucasus, change has been less dramatic: the consolidation of states, especially in Georgia, has gradually put increasing pressure on both elements. In the North Caucasus, a synthesis between the crime-terror and crime-state nexuses can be observed, threatening to make the region a black hole comparable to Afghanistan in the 1990s.

Crime, Terror and Politics: Conceptual Issues

As odd as it may sound, the criminalization of an insurgent movement or the criminalization of a state institution may fulfill the same purpose for a criminal network: both serve to weaken the rule of law, facilitating the conduct of criminal operations. The criminal involvement of units in a political system is the more subtle way of going about this aim, weakening state institutions from within. The criminal involvement of insurgent and terrorist groups, on the other hand, is a more violent and direct way of reaching the same purpose, weakening the state and its rule of law by directly targeting its institutions, sowing unrest, sometimes to the point of denying the state control over portions of its territory. Where organized criminal interests are powerful and states comparatively less so, one or both of these processes are likely to occur. The strength of the state, the existence of violent challengers to the state, and the external circumstance surrounding a given region/country are likely to determine the extent to which these two phenomena occur. Interactions between crime and insurgencies have been witnessed on

⁴ This argument is made in Cornell and Swanström, "The Eurasian Drug Trade".

practically all continents, with the Burmese separatist groups and Colombia's guerrillas being among the earliest examples.⁵

The Crime-Terror Nexus

Insurgent/terrorist and criminal groups have traditionally been seen as separate categories, owing to the perceived difference in their motivational structures and aims. In this view, the former seek to achieve political change through violence, while the latter solely pursue selfish ideals such as power and profit. This understanding is cemented in the state responses to them: national security and law enforcement have traditionally been separated, be it in terms of intelligence collection or in terms of operative action.⁶ Nevertheless, this traditional division into mutually exclusive ideological and criminal ideal types is becoming a thing of the past, owing to the new threats posed by terrorism and organized crime, and not least the link between them.⁷

The sudden reduction of state financing for insurgency and terrorism resulting from the end of the Cold War forced armed groups to seek funding elsewhere; while the ever greater opportunities provided by globalization had begun to boost organized crime across the world. Ideologically motivated movements increasingly involved in organized crime, primarily the very lucrative drug trafficking; and moved into other areas, such as human trafficking and arms smuggling. In fact, as Tamara Makarenko has noted, a more accurate way of understanding these organizations is as a security continuum, placing organized crime on one end of the spectrum and ideological groups on the other. Between these two extremes, a "gray area" with all possible variations and combinations of the two exists, whether it be alliances between criminal and ideological groups, criminal groups involving in politics, or ideological groups involved in organized crime.⁸

The Crime-State Nexus

Organized crime, and the drug trade in particular, hold a considerable corrupting power over the political spectrum, with substantial implications for the functioning and legitimacy of the state. Organized crime is attracted to conflict areas due to the weakness of state power to uphold law and order. But conflict is unnecessary if criminal networks can preclude government intervention through the subversion or

⁵ Svante E. Cornell, "Narcotics and Conflict: Interactions and Implications," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (2006).

⁶ Phil Williams, "Transnational Criminal Organizations and International Security," *Survival* 36, 1 (1994): 96.

⁷ Thachuk, "Transnational Threats: Falling Through the Cracks?," 51.

⁸ Tamara Makarenko, "Crime, Terror, and the Central Asian Drug Trade," *Harvard Asia Quarterly* (Spring 2002).

infiltration of the state by means of corruption and/or violence. Organized crime as a matter of practice seeks to corrupt state authorities, since that is necessary to facilitate business, reduce risk, and thereby also costs. This process has been best illustrated by David Jordan in *Drug Politics*.⁹

Low-level corruption may impede the state's capacity to withstand and combat smuggling operations, but hardly constitutes a threat to state security by itself. But as Thachuk notes, "corruption is no longer simply greasing the wheels of commerce, the paying off of government officials to expedite matters quickly. Rather, criminal organizations and terrorists use corruption to breach the sovereignty of many states and then continue to employ it to distort domestic and international affairs."¹⁰

Officials and civilians on a lower level are involved in drug smuggling mainly due to poverty and their low or non-existent salaries. A Tajik economist has estimated that 60 percent of the Tajik population lives off money earned by their relatives in Russia (*Gastarbeiter*), 25 percent live off drug trafficking and 15 percent live off loans and grants allocated by international community.¹¹ If exaggerated, these estimates still point to the immense economic destitution that affected large tracts of the Tajik population due to the civil war and therefore provided the ground for the mounting economic influence of organized crime.

But corruption goes beyond paying off low-level functionaries, and exists in higher levels of sophistication than its typical form of greasing a system through bribery. The criminalization of an institution implies not a passive taking of bribes to allow crime to occur, but the active facilitation of criminal enterprises by that institution or its leaders. There is ample evidence that criminal organizations seek to assert influence, if not control, over crucial government institutions in weak states. The judicial system and security, police and border structures, as well as the financial sector, are especially targeted. When successful, this amounts to the *de facto* criminalization of the state, in other words pushing corruption from the passive accepting of bribes to direct state involvement in and supervision of organized crime. The worst-case scenario, which Jordan terms 'narcostatization', occurs where organized crime is perpetrated in an institutionalized form by the state.

⁹ David C. Jordan, *Drug Politics: Dirty Politics and Democracies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); Louise Shelley, "The New Authoritarianism," in H. Richard Fridman and Peter Andreas, eds., *The Illicit Global Economy and State Power* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

¹⁰ Thachuk, "Transnational Threats: Falling Through the Cracks?," 56.

¹¹ Dodojon Atovulloyev, "Pamir: Khronika bespredela," *Charogi Ruz*, 110, 1 (2005): 3.

Narcostatization or wholesale state capture is rare, with the main example being non-systemic rogue states such as North Korea.¹²

More common is the penetration of law enforcement and particularly counter-narcotics units, which pose the most direct threat to criminal networks. Mexico in the 1990s had to dismantle its entire counter-narcotics unit three times, after it had been co-opted by drug cartels.¹³ In all drug-producing countries, there is a comprehensive body of evidence implicating the highest levels, including some heads of state, in corruption or collusion with the narcotics industry.¹⁴ Such high-level complicity constitutes a clear-cut threat to the security of weak states. The growth of criminal influence over state institutions changes the impetus for decision-making and implementation of laws. Institutions gradually cease to perform the functions for which they were instituted, and are instead 'privatized', serving the purposes of the criminal enterprise into which they are co-opted. Although these concrete effects of organized crime on political security are significant enough, the most debilitating and indeed existential threat it causes may be to undermine both the domestic and international legitimacy of ruling elites. Domestically, the criminalization of a ruling elite poses a danger for its survival in the face of public protests. Internationally, it may cause economic sanctions and other forms of threats, including military action by states threatened by the resulting unrest.

Crime and Terror in Greater Central Asia, 1991-2001

The phenomenon spread rapidly in Greater Central Asia in the 1990s, on account mainly of two factors: first, the surge in opiate production in Afghanistan in the 1990s, and second, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of new, weak states on its southern rim.¹⁵ In Central Asia, it took mainly the form of a link between radical Islam and drug trafficking in Central Asia, a form also present in the North Caucasus; in the Caucasus, however, another form was present: the link between

¹² Jordan, *Drug Politics*; Raphael F. Perl, "State Crime: The North Korean Drug Trade," *Global Crime* 6, 1 (2004): 117-128; Balbina Y. Hwang, "Curtailling North Korea's Illicit Activities," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder, no. 1679, August 2003.

¹³ Jordan, *Drug Politics*, 142-157.

¹⁴ For Burma, see Alan Dupont, "Transnational Crime, Drugs and Security in East Asia," *Asian Survey* 39, 3 (1999): 433-455; Richard M. Gibson and John B. Haseman, "Prospects for Controlling Narcotics Production and Trafficking in Myanmar," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 25, 1 (April 2003): 1-19; For Colombia, see Patrick L. Clawson and Rensselaer W. Lee III, *The Andean Cocaine Industry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 171-4; Jordan, *Drug Politics*, 158-170; for Lithuania, see Arunas Juska and Peter Johnston, "The Symbiosis of Politics and Crime in Lithuania," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 34, 4 (2004): 346-359.

¹⁵ Svante Cornell, "Narcotics, Radicalism and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, 4 (2005): 619-639.

separatist territories, primarily in Georgia and Chechnya, and a much wider form of organized crime including the smuggling of consumer goods, arms, as well as drugs and people. By the turn of the millennium, the link between crime and terror was perhaps the leading threat to Central Asia's security.

Afghanistan

During the 1979-89 resistance to Soviet occupation, opium production grew rapidly in Afghanistan. Insurgent groups are initially not known to have been involved in drug production, being mainly funded by external assistance. Nevertheless, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami, the perhaps strongest and most well-organized force among the Mujahideen groups, benefiting from the lion share of American and Pakistani funds for the resistance,¹⁶ gradually became deeply involved in opium production as well as heroin processing as the group sought to reduce its dependence on Pakistan's Intelligence Services, which distributed the funding.¹⁷ America's disengagement from Afghanistan led to an abrupt cut in funding for the Mujahideen factions, pushing Hekmatyar, and others, to rely ever more on the drug trade for financing their struggle for power.¹⁸

Afghanistan's conflict turned from a resistance to the Soviet Union to a civil war between the various Mujahideen factions. While the economy was dilapidated, the drug economy became the major source of funding available for the diverse groupings vying for power. In the civil war that continued through the Taliban takeover of most of the country in 1994-98, most Afghan factions were implicated in the drug industry in one or another way. Aside from Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami, these include the groups that would later merge into the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, including the Shura-i-Nazar based in the Panjsher valley and led by Ahmad Shah Masoud; the Jumbush-e-Melli of Uzbek warlord Abdurrahman Dostum; and the Taliban itself. All spent time in opposition as well as in government during the civil war. Nevertheless, the Taliban time in opposition was very short, as it conquered Kabul less than two years after its emergence in late 1994. The Taliban pre-9/11 are therefore discussed in the next section, as a state actor.

The Northern Alliance is another matter. From 1996 to 2001, it was continuously in opposition to the *de facto* Taliban government,

¹⁶ Michael Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Taliban Movement in Afghanistan* (London: Pluto, 2001).

¹⁷ John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Ikramul Haq, "Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective," *Asian Survey* 36, 10 (October 1996): 945-963.; Ishtiaq Ahmad, *Gulbuddin Hekmatyar: An Afghan Trail from Jihad to Terrorism* (Islamabad: STEP, 2004).

controlling only the Panjsher valley and the northeastern areas of the country. The movement was directly involved in overseeing the production of opium as well as, gradually, in the setting up of laboratories for its transformation into heroin, hence greatly adding to the value of the product.¹⁹ When the Taliban government banned and eradicated opium production in 2000-01, production in Taliban-controlled areas practically disappeared. However, in the Shura-controlled Badakhshan province, it surged by 158 percent from 2000 to 2001.²⁰

Likewise, Dostum's Jumbush-e-Milli was known to be strongly implicated in the drug trade, extorting a share of farmer's production of opium as well as other crops.²¹ In southern Afghanistan, where a larger number of minor warlords controlled pockets of territory, the involvement in the drug trade was systemic.²² Hence in Afghanistan, the triple collapses of state authority, economic production, and external finances combined to make the booming drug trade the major source of finance for non-state violent actors. The fact that some of them intermittently controlled the capital matters little in analytical terms; until the advent of the Taliban, controlling Kabul did not mean that a state was in place, since the militia groups hardly altered their behavior, and in any case neither sought to rebuild or control the state institutions that existed, particularly in the provinces. There was for most practical purposes no state.

Central Asia

Parts of post-Soviet Central Asia would witness a similar development as that in Afghanistan. This concerns primarily Tajikistan, chiefly due to the 1992-97 civil war there; but also the transnational Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which has operated across southern Central Asia since its foundation in 1998.

The civil war in Tajikistan pitted the opposition warlords of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) against forces of the Popular Front of Tajikistan (PFT), nominally loyal to President Imomali Rakhmonov, which the PFT helped put in power. With the gradual disintegration of the state in Tajikistan, following the lines of what was happening at the time in Afghanistan, Tajikistan emerged as a new chief smuggling route

¹⁹ Jonathan Goodhand, "From Holy War to Opium War? A Case Study of the Opium Economy in North Eastern Afghanistan," *Central Asian Survey* 19, 2 (2000): 265-280.

²⁰ UNODC, *Global Illicit Drug Trends 2003*; Anthony Davis, "Afghan Drug Output Wanes – But Only Under Taliban," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (October 1 2001).

²¹ *Asia Times*, 27 August 1997; "Ruthless Dostum a Rival for Karzai," *Toronto Star*, September 22 2004.

²² "US Turns to Drug Baron to Rally Support," *Asia Times*, December 4 2001; also Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair, *Whiteout: The CIA, Drugs and the Press* (New York: Verso, 1999), 255-276.

for Afghan opiates. The remote and mountainous eastern region of Gorno-Badakhshan, largely outside state control, supported the opposition while staying out of the actual hostilities; here, a surge in the production, trafficking as well as consumption of drugs was noted in the mid-1990s.²³ The main fighting arm of the UTO, led by the Islamic Renaissance Party, operated from bases in northern Afghanistan, chiefly areas controlled by the Shura-i-Nazar in the Takhor and Kunduz provinces.²⁴ From there, UTO warlords also built a bridgehead for opiate trafficking through Tajikistan northward.

This involvement of the opposition leaders continued after the 1997 peace accords, which gave the UTO a 30 percent share in government and ensured its leaders *de facto* control over important stretches of Tajikistan's territory, including parts of its border with Kyrgyzstan, which would be used by the IMU in 1999. For example, Mukhammadshokh Iskandarov, an erstwhile brother-in-arm of deceased IMU leader Juma Namangani and brother of Democratic Party of Tajikistan head Makhmadrusi Iskandarov was in charge of the border between Tajikistan's Rasht valley and Kyrgyzstan's Batken region, the scene of IMU attacks in 1999. Since then, the UTO has gradually been marginalized and numerous of its warlords killed or exiled, but they remain important actors on the regional and local areas in Tajikistan.²⁵

A major element of the crime-terror nexus in Central Asia is the IMU.²⁶ The organization emerged out of radical Islamic movements in Uzbekistan's Ferghana valley in 1989-91, but were evicted from the country just as the Tajik civil war was picking up pace. The Uzbek groupings, under their military leader Juma Namangani, joined the Islamic wing of the UTO, while its spiritual leader, Tohir Yoldash, toured the Islamic world for support, including meeting with Osama Bin Laden in Kabul. The IMU opposed the 1997 peace accords that ended the Tajik civil war, as it worked against their stated purpose of creating an Islamic state across Central Asia based in the Ferghana valley. But the Taliban were gradually expanding their control over Afghanistan's north,

²³ See "Tajikistan", in U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, March 1996*.

²⁴ Sergey Gretskey, "Civil War in Tajikistan: Causes, Development and Prospects for Peace", in Roald Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower, eds., *Central Asia: Conflict, Revolution, and Change* (Washington: CSPS, 1995), 231.

²⁵ International Crisis Group, "Tajikistan's Politics: Confrontation or Consolidation," *Asia Briefing*, May 19 2004, 3-4 <www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2757&l=1> (February 1 2006).

²⁶ For a detailed overview of the IMU role in drug trafficking and background on the organization, see Svante Cornell, "Narcotics, Radicalism and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, 4 (2005): 619-639.

and Namangani moved to Afghanistan, where the IMU was formally founded in 1998.

The next two years would see a terrorist and insurgent campaign on the part of the IMU. In early 1999, a series of bomb explosions rocked the Uzbek capital Tashkent and almost killed President Karimov. Hundreds of IMU militants then moved back into Tajikistan, taking up positions in the Tavildara valley bordering Kyrgyzstan's section of the Ferghana valley. In August, the IMU launched a first military incursion into the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan, catching the Kyrgyz military by complete surprise and prompting a mobilization of the Uzbek army. The IMU detachments took several villages and numerous hostages, including the commander of the Kyrgyz Interior Ministry Forces.²⁷ Namangani extracted a reported \$2 million ransom for four Japanese hostages, with the assistance of mediation by Kyrgyz parliamentarian and drug lord Bayaman Erkinbayev, discussed below. The IMU then retreated to Tajikistan, aided by Tajik minister of emergencies Mirzo Zioev, an old ally from the civil war times. After heavy Uzbek pressure, Tajik authorities convinced Namangani to leave for winter in camps in Kunduz and Mazar-i-Sharif.²⁸

In August 2000, the operation was repeated: Namangani arrived back in Tavildara with several hundred men, and launched a series of significantly more sophisticated attacks, with a much larger scale and geographical spread that included areas in Uzbekistan. But crucially, the main thrust was the simultaneous launching of several coordinated diversionary offensives of units of 50-100 men each across the mountains separating Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, toward Batken and the Sokh and Vorukh enclaves, small pockets of Uzbek territory in Kyrgyzstan. Again, Namangani eventually escaped to Afghanistan through helicopters belonging to the Tajik Ministry of emergencies.²⁹

From a military point of view, these operations made little sense, if their purpose was to create an Islamic state: they were too small, served only to sow unrest and especially to wake up the Central Asian militaries, leading to a much greater preparedness for future incursions. IMU detachments apparently did not seek to enter the Ferghana valley, although Kyrgyz National Security Minister Misir Ashirkulov conceded that "the Uzbek militants could have easily penetrated into Uzbekistan

²⁷ Vitaly Naumkin, "Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series, 2003, 40.

²⁸ Ahmed Rashid, "They're Only Sleeping – Why Militant Islamicists in Central Asia Aren't Going to Go Away," *The New Yorker*, January 14 2002.

²⁹ Rashid, *Jihad*, 176-178.

using mountain tracks”.³⁰ The Kyrgyz army in 1999 was in no condition to stop the well-armed militants had they chosen to continue into Uzbekistan instead of occupying Kyrgyz mountain villages for weeks.³¹ Also, had the IMU had serious political intentions, it would likely have held on to the hostages instead of quickly surrendering them for ransom. The geographical areas targeted, the timing of the attacks, as well as the tactics used indicate that the IMU was motivated to a significant extent by facilitating the drug trade. Moreover, evidence indicates that IMU militants established routes for crossing the border with the help of the major “drug barons” of the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan,³² including Erkinbayev. The August 1999 incursion occurred during the very narrow time frame between the harvesting of the record batch of opium in Afghanistan in June, and the closure of the mountain passes due to snow from late September onward.

Indeed, the IMU was singularly well-placed to control the drug trade from Afghanistan to Central Asia: it had well-established links with the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and the former Tajikistan opposition (now in government) which in turn had close links with the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. In a situation where opposing political forces were controlling the main producing areas of drugs and the transit countries in Central Asia, the network of contacts built up by the IMU enabled it to freely move across Afghanistan and Tajikistan unlike any other known organization.

An increasing consensus has indeed developed that the IMU was strongly involved in the drug trafficking from Afghanistan toward Osh in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz Security officials and drug control experts concur that the IMU by 2000 were involved in the majority of the heroin entering Kyrgyzstan, and drug control experts concurred with this figure.³³ Interpol labeled the IMU “a hybrid organization in which criminal interests often take priority over ‘political’ goals”, adding that “IMU leaders have a vested interest in ongoing unrest and instability in their area in order to secure the routes they use for the transportation of drugs.”³⁴

³⁰ See Naumkin, “Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan”, 42.

³¹ *Moya Stolitsa*, Bishkek, August 30 2002. Also discussion in Naumkin, “Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan”, 42.

³² See Mahmamin Mahmadaminov, *The Development of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Turkestan)* (Washington: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2003).

³³ “Narcotic Flood Threatens to Wash Away Central Asian Stability,” *Times of Central Asia*, December 30 2000; Personal communications from international drug control officials, Washington, May 2001; Tamara Makarenko, “Crime and Terrorism in Central Asia,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review* (July 2000).

³⁴ Ralf Mutschke, “The Threat Posed by the Convergence of Organized Crime, Drugs Trafficking and Terrorism,” Testimony to the Subcommittee on Crime of the Judiciary

The South Caucasus

The growth of armed ethnic separatism and ensuing uncontrolled territories in the South Caucasus following the wars of the early 1990s has been a facilitating factor for the development of crime. In fact, the ethnic conflicts that have plagued the South Caucasus since 1988 and remain unresolved contributed to the booming role of transnational crime in several ways. Ethnic conflicts meant the loss of state control over large parts of territory and the creation of unaccountable and often criminalized regimes in the secessionist states. They also led to the weakening of state authority and the consolidation of semi-authoritarian rule in the central governments, and to an economic collapse more severe than elsewhere in the former Soviet Union: Armenia's economy had contracted to 30 percent of its 1989 levels by 1993; Azerbaijan's to 35 percent by 1995, and Georgia's to 25 percent by 1994.³⁵ While some recovery has taken place, the region is barely returning to 1989 levels of production.

The territorial problem concerns Georgia and Azerbaijan in particular. In Georgia, the central government in the course of warfare between 1990 and 1993 lost control of the entirety of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and roughly half of the territory of the Autonomous Province of South Ossetia. These territories remain under the control of self-appointed separatist authorities, with little to no accountability and remain virtually isolated islands where international treaties do not apply and official international presence is absent. In addition to these areas, Georgian governmental control over the remainder of its territory in 1991-2003 weakened to the point where it was nominal in many areas. The Autonomous Republic of Ajaria was controlled by a local strongman for a decade, who ruled Ajaria as a *de facto* independent entity until being unseated shortly after the 2003 Georgian Rose Revolution.³⁶ The Pankisi Gorge in north-central Georgia was for most of the late 1990s a no-go zone in which armed Chechen groupings and criminal networks based themselves with impunity.³⁷

Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, December 13 2000. Also testimony to the same hearing of Donnie R. Marshall, Drug Enforcement Administration administrator.

³⁵ See e.g. Giovanni Andrea Cornia and Vladimir Popov, *Transition and Institutions: The Experience of Late Reformers* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁶ Monica Duffy Toft, "Two-Way Mirror Nationalism: the Case of Ajaria," in Moshe Gammer, ed., *The Politics of the Caspian* (London: Frank Cass, 2002); Georgi M. Derluguian, "A Tale of Two Resorts: Abkhazia and Ajaria Before and Since the Soviet Collapse," in Beverly Crawford and Ronnie D. Lipschutz eds., *The Myth of Ethnic Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California, International and Area Studies Research Series, 1998).

³⁷ Pavel Baev, "Could the Pankisi Gorge Decide the Fate of the Caucasus?" *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, April 24 2002, <www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=25> (February 1 2006); Khatuna Salukvadze, "The U.S. on the 'Silk Road' of Expansion to Eurasia?" *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, March 13 2002, <www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=39> (February 1 2006); "Islamic Radicals from Afghanistan

Only as a result of intense international pressure and American assistance did Georgia's national security ministry through the efforts of Deputy Minister Irakli Alasania succeed to bring the Gorge back under control in 2002.³⁸ The predominantly Armenian-populated Javakheti region in southwestern Georgia is another area to which the central government's writ only barely extends. Likewise, the northwestern region of Svaneti is not under government control, and its rule of parts of Mingrelia such as the Zugdidi-Senaki area in the west is tenuous at best.

Forces within the secessionist authorities in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and formerly Ajaria are deeply involved in organized crime, specifically smuggling activities. Particularly revealing was the unseating of Abashidze in 2004, which allowed law enforcement agencies and researchers from American University's Transnational Crime and Corruption Center to unveil the systematic nature of the leadership's direct involvement in smuggling operations.³⁹ It should be noted, of course, that the domination of the shadow economy by officials occurs not only in unrecognized republics but in the recognized states as well: only, the lack of oversight into the affairs of unrecognized states ensures the impunity of such action.

While the self-declared government of Abkhazia does appear to have a modicum of popular legitimacy among the ethnic Abkhaz population, the self-styled government of South Ossetia in the late 1990s developed into the leading channel of contraband goods from Russia into Georgia. In particular, the Ergneti market in territories controlled by the South Ossetian *de facto* government developed into a giant illicit free trade zone where all kind of legal as well as legal merchandise was readily available.⁴⁰ This provided a crucial income to the separatist government; but would not have been possible without the participation of Georgian law enforcement structures. Indeed, with the consolidation of power of Mikheil Saakashvili's government, the Ergneti market was blockaded and disbanded in Georgia's 2004 confrontation with South Ossetia.⁴¹ It is clear

Active in Georgia – US Diplomat,” *Eurasianet*, February 15 2002, <www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav021502.shtml> (February 1 2006); Jaba Devdariani, “Georgian Security Operation Proceeds in the Pankisi Gorge,” *Eurasianet*, September 3 2003, <www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav090302a.shtml> (February 1 2006).

³⁸ Ariel Cohen, “Moscow, Washington and Tbilisi Wrestle with Instability in the Pankisi Gorge,” *Eurasianet*, February 19 2002, <www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav021902.shtml> (February 1 2006).

³⁹ Personal communications, 2005.

⁴⁰ Alexandre Kukhianidze, Alexandre Kupatadze, and Roman Gotsiridze, *Smuggling through Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region of Georgia* (Tbilisi: American University Transnational Crime and Corruption Center Georgia Office, 2004).

⁴¹ See reporting by Theresa Freese in the *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, Summer 2004, and Theresa Freese, “Georgia's War against Contraband and its Struggle for Territorial Integrity,” *SAIS Review* 25, 1 (2005): 107-121.

that criminal enterprise has become, together with Russian support, a major factor sustaining the separatist republics on Georgia's territory.

The case of Nagorno-Karabakh, the secessionist Armenian territory in Azerbaijan, is somewhat different. Numerous allegations of criminal activity in Karabakh has been advanced by Azerbaijani sources, even reaching the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. But while evidence of such activity exists, the systemic nature of crime has not been proven to an extent similar to the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This partly has to do with opportunity: while Georgia's secessionist regions are on the Russian border and in Abkhazia's case on the Black sea, Karabakh is landlocked and only connected, through occupied Azerbaijani territories, to Armenia and Iran. It is hence less lucrative in terms of location. Secondly, Karabakh benefits from substantial subventions from diaspora Armenian communities, and its political system is more tightly linked to that of Armenia.

The North Caucasus

Affected by poverty, corruption, war and mismanagement, the Russian North Caucasus has seen an increasing criminalization of its state and society. This affected state authorities, but also the separatist fighting forces in Chechnya. Indeed, much as in the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the undefined status of Chechnya's territory in 1991-94, before the Russian invasion, made the region a free-trade zone for all type of contraband including drugs and weapons. This signified the inability or unwillingness of General Jokhar Dudayev's government to provide order in Chechnya; but it was also an illustration of the use that Russian elites had for an ungoverned territory through which they could conduct illicit activities.

The criminalization of the Chechen resistance occurred in part as a result of the difficulties the rebels have had to seek funding for their struggle. Indeed, in the mid-1990s, a large portion of the Chechen resistance's funding came from semi-legal or illegal Chechen business in Russia, including the notorious Chechen organized crime groups. However, the Chechen situation differs from that of the IMU: in Chechnya, the criminal connections between the various elements of the resistance and Russian military or law enforcement units are numerous, something that has not been the case in Uzbekistan, but has been taking place in the civil war in Tajikistan. Moreover, a trend could be seen where Chechen separatists had for long relied on links to Chechen organized crime and not moved to self-involvement in criminal activities; but by the turn of the millennium, a higher degree of self-involvement has been observable. Shamil Basayev, the notorious Chechen designated terrorist, is thought to have been involved in narcotics trafficking in the inter-war period of 1996-99.

The Crime-State Nexus, 1991-2001

If the discussion above highlights the increasing involvement of non-state violent actors in organized crime, the same is true for governments in the region. Everywhere, the phenomenon has its roots in the same problem: the rapid growth of organized crime, led by drug trafficking, in an environment of heavily weakened state authority due to the collapse of communist state structures, warfare, or a combination of both. All states of the region have seen the unveiling of corruption scandals and the involvement of state officials in crime. While this evidence is fractional, the similarities that exist make the trend clear: an alarming increase of criminal infiltration of state authority, that has been exacerbated by the stagnation of political reform in the region.

Afghanistan

For much of the 1990s, the concept of 'state' meant very little in Afghanistan. Until the Taliban movement seized Kabul in 1996, there arguably was no state: varying constellations of mujahideen groups, consecutively fighting with and allying with one another, laid claim to the seat of power but never exercised state authority in the most fundamental definition of the term: controlling the state's territory, or exercising basic state function in regard to the population. This nevertheless changed with the advent of the Taliban. A movement emerging as a reaction to the lawlessness and anarchy of southwestern Afghanistan in the civil war period, the Taliban were obsessed with authority and control. Indeed, bringing order to the country and ending anarchy through draconian measures was the main achievement the Taliban credited itself with. If these policies were very much the reason large tracts of the country's population welcomed the Taliban, it would also rapidly lead to its losing legitimacy. But the fact is that contrary to conventional wisdom, the Taliban regime was the most of a government that Afghanistan had seen in decades. This was most clearly illustrated in the Taliban eradication of opium in 2000-2001, when in one year the production was slashed by over 97 percent – to contrast with the failure of the present western-supported Afghan government to bring about a fall in poppy cultivation.

From the beginning, the Taliban had a complex attitude to drugs. On the one hand, the Taliban from the beginning of its power stated its opposition to drugs on principal, religious grounds; while continuing to accept, and indeed to tax, opium cultivation as they did any other crop. The Taliban are variously estimated to have made between \$10 million and \$50 million on the trade through taxes, and likely much more through individual commanders' involvement.⁴² In the absence of a functioning

⁴² Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 119; Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 154.

economy, the opium trade was by far the most significant economic activity in Afghanistan and the largest income source of the Taliban government, together with taxes on the transit trade. Yet Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar in 2000 issued a religious edict that forced the eradication of opium on all territories controlled by the Taliban. It was swiftly implemented, and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and American officials concluded that over 97 percent of opium under Taliban-controlled areas had been eradicated.⁴³

In this sense, the Taliban were intimately linked to the narcotics production in the country, deriving a large amount of income from it. But no evidence proves a large-scale institutional involvement on the part of the Taliban in the refining and trafficking of drugs. In this sense, while individuals in the Taliban hierarchy were certainly involved, Taliban Afghanistan cannot be compared to North Korea, where there is systemic and institutional involvement in organized crime on the part of the state. The Taliban movement, as the eradication shows, was not motivated by criminal profit, and was eventually prepared to jettison this income, whether for religious purposes or in a bid to achieve international recognition, as western agencies had promised this as a quid pro quo for eradication.⁴⁴

Central Asia

In the states of former Soviet Central Asia, a rapid process of infiltration of state authorities has taken place. This process has been taking place across the region, though clear variation among the regional countries can be observed. The stronger, larger countries with a more varied economy, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, have experienced this problem but at a level that is unlikely to risk taking over the entire state bureaucracy. In Kazakhstan, the oil wealth of the country implies that even if criminal connections to government exist, the relative value of the drug trade is lower compared to the total economy of the country; the incentive to involve in the drug trade is hence lower. Likewise in Uzbekistan, the country's economy is more varied and provides other opportunities than the drug trade. That said, both countries have seen an increasing criminalization especially of lower and middle level bureaucracy, especially in the countryside.

Turkmenistan in the late 1990s seized substantial quantities of illicit drugs and precursors, with heroin seizures peaking at nearly 2 metric tons

⁴³ UNDCP, *Afghanistan: Annual Opium Poppy Survey 2001* (Islamabad: UNDCP, 2002).

⁴⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the episode, see Svante E. Cornell, "Taliban Afghanistan: A True Ideological State?" in Brenda Shaffer ed., *The Limits of Culture: Islam and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006).

in 1997.⁴⁵ This suggests that smuggling networks were built up in the country and that a substantial quantity of Afghan heroin did transit Turkmenistan, even though little or no production took place in the vicinity of Turkmenistan's borders at the time. But since 2000, Turkmenistan has refused to provide data on drug seizures. There is no evidence that the smuggling of drugs through the country has abated since, however. Quite to the contrary, evidence from police cases of heroin smuggling in Western Europe have uncovered links to Turkmenistan.⁴⁶ Anecdotal evidence of grave heroin addiction problems in the country also indicate that smuggling continues to be a growing problem.⁴⁷ In December 2003, Chief Prosecutor Kurbanbibi Atajanova was arrested after 15 kg of heroin were seized from her husband in a border region. She was nevertheless present at a government meeting shortly afterwards, indicating that she was not released from her duties, let alone charged. While this indicates the presence of heroin in the country, it is also a rare example of direct information on government corruption. Allegations by exiled former government officers pointing to high-level collusion with the drug trade abound, but the objectiveness of the sources is doubtful.⁴⁸ Incidentally, Turkmen President Saparmurad Niyazov has publicly stated that smoking opium is good for health.⁴⁹ Given the lack of reliable information on Turkmenistan, the specific situation in Turkmenistan is nevertheless very difficult to ascertain.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are another matter. In these two small, poor and remote countries close to Afghanistan's borders, the economic and political influence of the drug trade have been strongly felt.

The Central Asian state most directly affected by state infiltration appears to be Tajikistan. The Tajik civil war led to the growth of the power of the Kulyab clan, which opposed the democratic and Islamic movements in the opposition in cooperation with the Hissar and Khodjent clans, resulting in the bloody civil war that lasted from 1992 to

⁴⁵ In 1996-1998, 77 percent of heroin seized in Central Asia was apprehended in Turkmenistan. UNODC, *Illicit Drugs Situation in the Region Neighboring Afghanistan and the Response of ODCCP* (New York: UNODC, 2002).

⁴⁶ As communicated to the authors by the Swedish police's criminal intelligence division.

⁴⁷ "Turkmen Addiction Rising," *IWPR Reporting Central Asia* 64, 10 (August 2001). Also numerous personal communications from western researchers in non-political fields visiting Turkmenistan.

⁴⁸ Rustem Safronov, "Turkmenistan's Niyazov Implicated in Drug Smuggling," *Eurasianet*, March 29 2002, <www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav032902.shtml> (February 1 2006); Alec Appelbaum, "Turkmen Dissident Accuses Niyazov of Crimes," *Eurasianet*, April 26 2002, <www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav042602.shtml> (February 1 2006); "Russia Turns its Back on Turkmenbashi," *Gazeta*, May 27 2003.

⁴⁹ International Crisis Group, *Cracks in the Marble: Turkmenistan's Failing Dictatorship*, (Brussels/Osh: International Crisis Group, 2003), 27-28.

1997. During this war, which saw the economy depress more than any other former Soviet state, the illegal economy became an increasingly important source of financing for political forces on both sides. Following the peace agreement of 1997, President Rakhmonov has sought to emulate the other states of the region and build a presidential system of government, marginalizing the opposition. Importantly, many of the Popular Front warlords that Rakhmonov built his power on in the 1990s had a strong history of involvement in crime.⁵⁰

Cohesion in the government camp is weak, and individual leading figures as well as entire groupings appear to be heavily financed by the drug trade. The divisions within the ruling elite themselves increase the need for financial resources on the part of informal structures allied with the President. Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloev, the speaker of the Majlisi Milly and the Mayor of Dushanbe, was long considered the gray eminence in the country and a chief ally of Rakhmonov's. He is also a native of the Kulyab region, but part of the Parkhar grouping. Starting in 2001, signs increasingly emerged of a rivalry between Rakhmonov and Ubaidulloev. Allegations and leaks that portrayed Ubaidolloev as a narco-baron began to emerge, especially in the Russian media and parliament but also in western circles.⁵¹ Ubaidulloev was known to have built his own connections in Moscow, particularly with Moscow's mayor Yuriy Luzhkov and the former Speaker of the Russian Duma Gennadiy Seleznev. In December 2004, Rakhmonov himself indirectly accused Ubaidulloev of drug trafficking, shortly after a published rumor that Nuriddin Rakhmonov, the president's elder brother, was implicated in the drug trade.⁵² During the standoff that was reported by reliable sources to exist between Rakhmonov and Ubaidolloev at the time, Rakhmonov seems to have pre-empted a coup d'état orchestrated by Ubaidulloev with the help of Ghafor Mirzoyev, who had been appointed Director of the Drug Control Agency (DCA) in March 2004. The appointment of Mirzoyev, a warlord widely believed to have been involved in the drug trade in the civil war era, nearly ended western contributions to the DCA and led to a loss of both morale and of seizures during Mirzoyev's short tenure. Only months later, he was arrested and jailed on unrelated charges. These and other examples clearly indicate that warlords from the civil war era, absorbed into the government of Tajikistan, have had close ties with the trafficking of narcotics from Afghanistan. Indeed,

⁵⁰ Gretsky, "Civil War in Tajikistan", 232-234.

⁵¹ "Tajikistan - na poroge novoi grazhdanskoi voiny", *Agenstvo politicheskikh novostei*, June 25 2001.

⁵² In October 2003 the Russian border guards intercepted heroin at the Moskovkiy point and allegedly the owner of the heroin was son of Nuritdin Rakhmonov. Pairav Amirshoev, "Chem vyzvana voina kompromatov," *Centrasia*, November 12 2003, <Centrasia.ru> (November 13 2003).

there is every reason to believe that ties to drug trafficking are endemic in the state structures of Tajikistan.

Kyrgyzstan in the late 1990s developed into a major transit corridor for Afghan drugs smuggled northward through Tajikistan. In particular, the southern areas of the country were badly hit by this development. However, few indications existed that the highest political levels had been seriously affected by organized crime networks. At the lower level, there is widespread involvement of law enforcement agents in underreporting drug seizures or selling confiscated drugs, especially among the counter-narcotics forces of the Ministry of Interior. Field research indicates that most drug dens in the country are known to the law enforcement authorities, and that previously confiscated drugs are sold there. But at this lower level of the state authorities, the problem is mainly related to the dismal working conditions and compensation obtained by officials. Indeed, local officials bluntly argue it is immoral to ask them to fully invest in their job considering the extremely low salaries, the lack of backup and resources of all kinds including fuel for cars, and the dangers involved in this line of work. Indeed, both the Kyrgyz state and the international community have grossly disregarded the law enforcement agencies. As a result, as in other former Soviet states, they remain the most unreformed and corrupt institutions of the state.

In the 2000 parliamentary elections, drug control experts estimate that a handful of individuals connected to the drug trade in the southern areas gained immunity and influence by being elected to parliament. Among these was Bayaman Erkinbayev, accused of being the leading drug kingpin of southern Kyrgyzstan. Erkinbayev had been elected first already in 1995, making a fortune apparently out of nothing and beginning to deliver social services in remote areas where the government was practically absent. As individuals such as Erkinbayev stepped in where the state was absent and distributed welfare, built roads and mosques and provided electricity, they enjoyed significant popularity among the local population – which, together with the intimidation of potential rivals explains their repeated election to parliament. Erkinbayev also played a key role in the 1999 IMU incursions into southern Kyrgyzstan and the ensuing hostage crisis. Erkinbayev, with links to the UTO and allegedly to Namangani himself, was chosen by the Kyrgyz leadership to mediate the crisis. Erkinbayev then delivered the ransom paid by the Japanese government to the IMU for the release of Japanese hostages – or at least a portion of it. This episode illustrates the ultimate juncture between politics, crime and terror: a Kyrgyz drug lord elected to parliament, utilizing on the urging of his government his links with an equally drug-dealing Islamic terrorist movement to release foreign hostages and mutually profiting from the ransom.

The South Caucasus

The South Caucasus has been affected substantially by the infiltration of organized crime into governments. The country most affected by this process has been Georgia. In Georgia, the situation deteriorated to such a degree that the Ministry of Interior in 1999-2001 allowed organized criminal groups to base themselves in the Pankisi gorge bordering Chechnya in return for large sums of money, from where they engaged in drug smuggling, abductions, and other forms of crime. Lawlessness in the gorge contributed to credible Russian threats of military intervention and eventually the deployment of American forces to train and equip the Georgian military. Evidence of high-level government collusion with organized crime developed into an existential threat to the governing elites of the state, as former ministers in President Shevardnadze's cabinet were credibly alleged to be directly involved in organized crime. The collusion between organized crime and politics grew to an extent that affected the survival of the government, especially given the relatively high level of education and exposure to the west of Georgia. Indeed, such allegations contributed directly to the governmental crisis of 2001 that forced Shevardnadze to fire his interior and national security ministers. Subsequently, the continued problems relating to the crime-state nexus were a factor in the overthrow of the Shevardnadze regime in 2003.

In Armenia and Azerbaijan, the government structures were already from the mid-1990s considerably stronger than was the case in Georgia. As such, the infiltration of criminal groups into state structures has occurred at a lower intensity than in Georgia. Such collusion has occurred, but in a less chaotic and blatant manner, and taken place in a more controlled form. In other words, much less is publicly known about the particularities of government collusion with organized crime in these states. Nevertheless, it is clear that in both countries, the state authorities or individuals in official positions have control over the movement of both legal and illegal goods across state borders.

Taken together the interior ministries in the states of the South Caucasus remain heavily unreformed, corrupt, and linked with organized crime albeit to varying degrees. However, it is unclear how high in the hierarchy this problem reaches.

The North Caucasus

The situation in the republics of the North Caucasus gradually deteriorated during the 1990s. Many republics, such as Dagestan on the Caspian coast, received up to 80 percent of the republican budget in Soviet times in form of subsidies directly from the central government. As these funds began to wither with the new Russian government, the economic standards in the region fell rapidly. Meanwhile, the

destabilizing factor of Chechnya – either in its unruly times of independence in 1991-94 and 1996-99 or during the wartime – exacerbated the situation in the entire region.

Organized crime grew like wildfire in Chechnya both through the criminalization of elements within the Chechen insurgency, but also through the criminalization of the Russian military in Chechnya. The increasing criminalization of all sides of the conflict has been readily observable since the first Chechen war. The Russian military is implicated in abductions of civilians, plunder, drug smuggling, weapons smuggling, and not least oil smuggling.⁵³ In fact, the conflict is no longer a military confrontation between two opposing forces: some Russian units, under different command structures, fight against some Chechen irregular units, but engage in smuggling with other Chechen units. In many ways, the war has degenerated into a large criminal operation with numerous players with varying interests; paradoxically, the cooperation between nominal enemies in this conflict has become a *sine qua non* for the continuation of conflict, since it is primarily from the Russian forces that Chechen insurgents acquire their weapons, food, and other commodities.⁵⁴ By 1997, twenty Russian generals had been arrested on various corruption charges, while impunity remained widespread.⁵⁵

Given the presence of the Russian military across the North Caucasus, similar involvement by Russian authorities in organized crime has been seen. State authority and stability in the North Caucasus has rested on the role of informal structures of authority based on kinship or regional ties. The conditions in Russia in the 1990s invariably meant that politics and economy interlinked; and with time, a number of very wealthy individuals unifying economic and political power emerged in the North Caucasus, just as was the case in Russia. In 1998, a leading Russian law enforcement officer observed that “there is no longer any doubt that there is a layer of corrupt state officials in all the North Caucasus republics who trade in their power and classified information.”⁵⁶ Indeed, deputy Russian prime minister Ramazan Abdulatipov, sent to the North Caucasus to remedy the situation there in 1997, stated that police in Dagestan were “working hand in hand with

⁵³ Stephen Shenfield, “Chechnya at a Turning Point,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 8, 1 (Winter-Spring 2001): 63-71; “Russian Journalist Accuses Federal Troops of Exploiting Chechen Oil Plants,” *BBC Monitoring*, June 29 2001.

⁵⁴ On the Russian military, see Dale R. Herspring, “The Continuing Disintegration of the Russian Military,” in Michael H. Crutcher, ed., *The Russian Armed Forces at the Dawn of the Millennium* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Center for Strategic Leadership, 2000), 133-46; Richard F. Staar, “Russia’s Military: Corruption in the Higher Ranks,” *Perspective* 9, 2 (November-December 1998).

⁵⁵ “North Caucasus Military District General Arrested on Corruption Charges,” *BBC Summar of World Broadcasts*, July 15 1997, citing Interfax.

⁵⁶ *Argumenty y Fakty*, April 6-12 1998, 6.

crime groups to the extent that criminals always knew of operations beforehand.”⁵⁷ Appointments to state authority in Dagestan, and to a lesser extent in the entire region, were routinely given to the highest bidder. Since organized criminal networks grew to control large financial resources and had a clear interest in infiltrating government, this system implied a systematic way into state office for these groups.

Hence across the region, a similar pattern with minor variations could be observed in the 1990s. The factors of poverty, economic collapse, dismal wages for government officials, weak state institutions, absence of rule of law, and growing transnational organized crime all combined to lead to a gradual criminalization of the political system across the region.

Evolution in the Post-9/11 Era

The September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States are credited with having changed much in world politics. Their aftermath also strongly affected the course of organized crime and its security impact in Greater Central Asia. Four specific processes, originating in whole or in part from 9/11, deserve special mention. These are the effect of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) on Afghanistan and Central Asia; the changes in the North Caucasus occurring from President Putin’s centralization policies; the Georgian Rose Revolution and its consequences; and the Kyrgyz change in government of March 2005.

Enduring Freedom: Consequences for Afghanistan and Central Asia

OEF, leading to the fall of the Taliban regime, dramatically changed the political situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia. This had twin implications for organized crime and the drug trafficking business: first, it meant an instant blow to the crime-terror nexus in the region, but second, it opened the way for the growth of criminal infiltration into politics in Afghanistan.

Western engagement in Afghanistan did not reduce opium production in the country; it was actually restored to the pre-eradication levels and then grew gradually to new record levels. But OEF did remove the sanctuary that Afghanistan had formed for various terrorist movements, including Al Qaeda, the IMU, as well as Chinese and Pakistani groups. Most importantly, the IMU was physically decimated and its leader Namangani killed while joining Al Qaeda and Taliban forces defending Kunduz in northern Afghanistan; Al Qaeda was forced on the run, disrupted and many commanders apprehended. As a result, the well-established link between insurgency/terrorism and crime in the region was disrupted.

⁵⁷ “Corruption, crime threatening stability of Dagestan region: Official,” *Agence France Presse*, October 13 1997.

Much of the IMU's infrastructure inside Central Asia remained unscathed by the war in Afghanistan, and two detachments of the IMU likely remained in Afghanistan: one group in the Paktia and Kunar provinces, areas where the anti-U.S. forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar are influential, and in several mountain passes of the Badakhshan province, bordering Tajikistan. Intelligence reports and observers in the region suggest that minor armed groups and sleeper cells remain in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.⁵⁸ The IMU-head Tahir Yoldash spent most of his time in Peshawar and the South Waziristan Agency of Pakistan for most of 2002-2004, as a guest of the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam, a Deobandi extremist party.⁵⁹

Events in the Spring and Summer of 2004 indicate that the movement has survived, though battered. In March 22, a Pakistani army offensive against 'foreign terrorists' South Waziristan nearly caught Yoldash.⁶⁰ A week later, a series of explosions in Bukhara and most importantly in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent took place, killing over 44 people.⁶¹ On 30 July 2004, suicide bombers blew themselves up outside the U.S. and Israeli embassies in Tashkent, killing six people.⁶² This suggests that the while the IMU is not dead, neither is it at present a military threat to the regimes of Central Asian states, though it remains 'a disruptive but manageable force' in the region. Had the IMU been a simply ideological group, this would have been reassuring news. Devoid of its military leader, without Al Qaeda funding, and scattered, the limited public support that the IMU once enjoyed has evaporated, given its violent approach that most even radical Muslims in Central Asia disapprove of.

The question is whether the elimination of Namangani's detachment has shifted the nature of the IMU away from the criminal and back towards the ideological. Tensions between Yoldash and Namangani on this issue are rumored to have taken place, and Yoldash seems to have reemerged as the undisputed leader of the group. However, the IMU appears splintered into groups that may not necessarily be in contact with one another, nor obey orders from Yoldash. Indeed, it is a legitimate question whether the IMU – as a coherent organization – even exists

⁵⁸ Mahmaminov, *The Development of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Turkestan)*, 8.

⁵⁹ James Purcell Smith, "The IMU: Alive and Kicking," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, September 24 2003, <www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=1761> (February 1 2006).

⁶⁰ Mike Redman, "Central Asian Militant Group Remains Active in Pakistan," *Eurasia Insight*, March 24 2004, <www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav032404.shtml> (January 3 2006).

⁶¹ Scott Peterson and Peter Boehm, "Uzbek Unrest Shows Islamist Rise," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 1 2004, <www.csmonitor.com/2004/0401/p06s01-wosc.html> (February 1 2006); Richard Weitz, "The Bombs of Tashkent," *United Press International*, April 15 2004.

⁶² "Uzbek Blasts Hit U.S. and Israeli Embassies," *Reuters*, July 30 2004.

anymore, or whether its remnants have disintegrated and joined with other and diverse forces.

On the other hand, OEF led to a remarkable upsurge in the production of opiates in Afghanistan and continuously growing smuggling through Central Asia. Given the pro-opium proclivities of the Northern Alliance, this should have come as no surprise as the Shura-i-Nazar in particular asserted its dominance over the post-Taliban interim government. In 2002, the U.S. State Department noted that the Northern Alliance had “taken no action against cultivation and trafficking in the area it controls”, an understatement given that cultivated area in Badakhshan had grown without exception in 2000-2003.⁶³ While in Government, the Shura leadership was heavily compromised by the drug trade. Over 2003-2005, the drug industry in Afghanistan is estimated to constitute the equivalent of over 52 percent of the country’s legal GDP. Given the infiltration of the drug trade in Colombia where the coca industry never exceeded five percent of the GDP, the effects of this value on impoverished Afghanistan’s politics can easily be imagined.

Clearly, the drug trade influences the decisions taken by numerous individuals in high positions involved directly or indirectly in the trade, involving most obviously Afghan warlords whose private militias are undoubtedly costly to maintain. In February 2006, Afghanistan’s counter-narcotics minister Habibullah Qaderi stated that several members of President Hamid Karzai’s cabinet are deeply implicated in the drug trade.⁶⁴ The international community has not taken on the drug trade seriously, knowing the short-term destabilizing effect this could have, even as the same warlords are useful for the U.S. in hunting down Taliban and al Qaeda remnants and keeping a modicum of stability in remote areas. But in the long term, the consolidation of the drug trade that can be seen among other in the increased geographic spread of opium cultivation across the country since 9/11 will have profoundly negative consequences. The emerging drug ‘cartels’ in the country have a vested interest in keeping the country from developing full stability, a fully grown licit economy and full integration into the world economy since that would automatically make Afghanistan less hospitable to the drug trade. As former Minister of Interior of Afghanistan Ali Jalali has noted, accommodating the drug trade in the name of stability would amount to creating a ‘pax narcotica’ or ‘pax warlordiana’.⁶⁵

⁶³ U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2001*.

⁶⁴ Toby Harnden, “Drug Trade ‘Reaches to Afghan Cabinet,’” *Daily Telegraph*, February 5 2006.

⁶⁵ Ali Jalali, “Afghanistan Beyond Bonn,” address to the W.P. Carey Forum, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, December 7 2005, <www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/forum/WPC_2005_1207.htm> (December 28 2005).

The 'Afghanization' of the North Caucasus?

The first international casualty of the September 11 events was Chechnya. The event immediately changed the calculus of the Russian government, which began a campaign to portray the war in Chechnya as part of the global war on terrorism. Soon thereafter, President Vladimir Putin moved to effectively abolish federalism in Russia, as local governors, including the presidents of autonomous republics such as those in the North Caucasus, became appointed figures instead of elected. What followed from this was the removal of local leaders with local backing in the republics of the North Caucasus, and the appointment in their place of nominally native officials with a history in the Federal Security Services. This is most blatant in Ingushetia: From 1991 until 2003, during General Ruslan Aushev's tenure as President of Ingushetia, Ingushetia managed to maintain its neutrality in the conflict between Russia and Chechnya and remained mainly stable. However, the advent to power of Murad Zyazikov, an FSB officer handpicked by the Kremlin to the republic's leadership, brought mismanagement, insensitivity and repression that alienated considerable parts of the population and led some young Ingush not only to sympathize with Chechen separatists but to join forces with them.⁶⁶ These problems are not isolated, but part of a trend. Presently, the frequency of rebel military action in Dagestan has come to equal that of Chechnya.⁶⁷ Violent clashes between apparently isolated Islamic radical groups or cells and law enforcement is occurring on a regular basis in the region. In Summer 2004, the government of Karachai-Cherkessia imposed unofficial martial law, citing the presence of radical Islamist militant groups in the mountains in the south of the republic.⁶⁸

Most Russian and international experts now agree that the Russian government is losing control over the North Caucasus, and that its policies there have proven extremely counter-productive. The 'steamroller' tactic of resolving problems by increasing the level of repression while failing to address local sensitivities or to improve the socio-economic conditions of the region, is clearly failing. It is the region in the Russian Federation with the highest population growth; and is plagued by sky-high unemployment, radicalism, and unrest. What began

⁶⁶ Matthew Evangelista, "Ingushetia as Microcosm of Putin's Reforms," *Global Dialogue* 7, 3/4 (Summer/Autumn 2005).

⁶⁷ Murad Batal Al-Shishani, "From Grozny to Nalchik: Is the North Caucasus Heading Back to the Nineteenth Century?" *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, October 19 2005, <www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=3739> (February 1 2006).

⁶⁸ Andrei Smirnov, "Authorities in Karachaevo-Cherkessia Fear Union of Basaev and Local Islamic Separatists," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 9 2004, <http://jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2368383> (February 1 2006)

as the 'Afghanization of Chechnya'⁶⁹ is now turning into the 'Afghanization' of the entire North Caucasus: a societal and governmental meltdown in which government control over territory withers away, giving way to a myriad of insurgent, terrorist, and organized criminal forces with contradictory and changing relations to one another. Hence the region between the Black and Caspian seas north of the Caucasus mountains is gradually deteriorating into an uncontrolled territory that criminal groups, insurgents and terrorist native or foreign to the region can use as a transit area or as a base of operations.

The worst element of this quagmire is the fact that the international community is more or less powerless. Unable to influence Russian policy in the North Caucasus and unable to intervene directly there as it is Russian territory, the western powers are forced to merely take precautions to exercise damage control over the fallout likely to arise from this area. As the European Union expands westward and the Black Sea basin becomes a security hub for the new Europe, the developments in the North Caucasus risk undermining the efforts of the international community to stabilize the other corridor to the Caspian sea – the South Caucasus.

Georgia's Revolution: Turning Tables Around

When Mikheil Saakashvili came to power in early 2004, his two main priorities for his presidency were defined as reunification of Georgia and the eradication of corruption and crime. As Saakashvili correctly concluded, these two seemingly divergent goals were intimately connected. Indeed, the existence of the separatist territories of Abkhazia, Ajaria and South Ossetia was strongly connected to the illegal economy and to organized crime. South Ossetia, in particular, virtually lived on smuggling between Russia and Georgia, aided by its close proximity both to Tbilisi, and to North Ossetia, the most industrialized republic of the North Caucasus. As such, smuggling kept the separatist government functioning; while also greasing corruption and crime inside Georgia. Eradicating corruption could hence not take place without intervening in the separatist territories which were *de facto* outside Georgian control; while reuniting Georgia could not take place without fighting smuggling and organized crime. Small surprise, then, that Sakashvili considered Georgia to be completely free only when the Georgian flag flew at the Roki tunnel and Psou – the border points connecting South Ossetia and Abkhazia, respectively, to Russia.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Svante E. Cornell, "The 'Afghanization' of Chechnya," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, February 28 2001.

⁷⁰ Freese, "Georgia's War against Contraband", 107.

In practice, Saakashvili initiated a complex anti-corruption program that has not yet completed the momentous task of eradicating corruption in Georgia, but has definitely halted the slippage of Georgia into the category of 'failed states', into which it was increasingly seen as heading in the late Shevardnadze era. Saakashvili began by aggressively attacking corruption and crime from the top, arresting several high-level officials and offering them a 'plea bargain' option: repay the state monies they were known to have stolen for their freedom, even though the evidence was occasionally sketchy.⁷¹ While this policy raised eyebrows in the west as it showed less than full respect for due process, it was certainly effective in ending the climate of impunity that had reigned in Georgia. Indeed, without these moves against high-level corruption, Saakashvili's measures to halt low-level corruption would probably not have been met with the same acceptance from the public. Secondly, Saakashvili moved against the notoriously corrupt traffic police, and gradually reformed Georgia's police force into a more professional one. Other subtle but important measures include reforming the university admissions system, which will for the first time create a generation of Georgian intellectuals and leaders beholden to no one but their merit for their entry into university.⁷²

The government also moved strongly to cut off the Ergneti market in South Ossetia, by targeting the roads leading into Georgia from the area. This gradually led to the disbanding of the market. While not ending smuggling from South Ossetia, this clearly increased the cost of smuggling and affected its systematic character, pushing it underground instead of fearlessly taking place in the open. Finally, by December 2005, Saakashvili had mustered the courage to go after the so-called 'thieves-in-law', organized criminal networks with strong social roots and dating back from the Soviet era. Georgians were heavily over-represented among the thieves-in-law in the Soviet era, and Georgia is likely the republic in the former Soviet Union where these networks are the strongest.⁷³ Legislation signed by Saakashvili aimed at going after the networks themselves rather than prosecuting individual crimes.⁷⁴ The law makes membership in the networks itself criminal, irrespective of whether an individual himself is tied to a crime, and allows for the seizure of the property of the network members. While again, problems

⁷¹ See for example, Whit Mason, "Trouble in Tbilisi," *The National Interest* (Spring 2005).

⁷² I am thankful to Temuri Yakobashvili of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies for pointing this out to me.

⁷³ See the study by Georgi Glonti and Givi Lobjanidze, *Professionalnaia prestupnost' v Gruzii (vory v zakone)* [Professional Crime in Georgia: Thief-in-Law] (Tbilisi: American University Transnational Crime and Corruption Center Georgia Office, 2004).

⁷⁴ "Legislation to Crack Down on Organized Crime Goes into Force," *Civil Georgia*, December 29 2005.

related to due process may be raised, the law seeks to do what most attempts to crack down on organized crime have failed to do: first, go after the money, and second, target the leaders instead of the couriers and foot soldiers.

These measures combined are about to make Georgia an increasingly inhospitable place for organized crime. Clearly, it will take a long time to uproot practices with long histories and significant social rooting, and it will remain to be seen whether these policies are successful. Nevertheless, President Saakashvili's policies have already scored significant success in retaking the initiative and pushing organized crime on the defensive. In this sense, the trend in Georgia is definitively a de-criminalization of the state at least on the central level, even though lower levels of the bureaucracy still remain problematic. In the regional context, this is already an accomplishment.

Kyrgyzstan: Tulips or Poppies?

If Georgia represents hope for fighting the criminalization of the state in Eurasia, Kyrgyzstan unfortunately represents the opposite: a change in power that has led to a worsening of the situation: the 2005 parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan and their violent aftermath increased the power of organized crime leaders in the country's politics. To begin with, the parliament that was elected consisted of cronies of former President Askar Akayev and local potentates who simply bought themselves seats in parliament. Hence a number of figures with links to illegal business and organized crime were elected to parliament, partly since it provides a source of influence and partly since it provides immunity from prosecution. But southern Kyrgyzstan's drug barons in fact also played a key role in the emergence of the popular movement that ended up overthrowing the Akayev government. Organized crime kingpins are known to operate paramilitary forces, under the guise of martial arts sport clubs such as the "Alysh" (traditional wrestling) clubs.

In the aftermath of the 2005 elections, 2,000 young people from the Alysh clubs were gathered and fed for 25 days, stormed state offices in Jalal-Abad and Osh, and later reached Bishkek. Initially, the opposition movement in Kyrgyzstan did not want to align themselves with these organized criminal figures. But they lacked substantial funds and a wider popularity among the important informal networks of the south of the country. Furthermore, the lack of a clear structure within the opposition movement made it possible for criminal leaders to infiltrate the movement and provide financial support. Again surfaced Bayaman Erkinbayev, one of the richest and most influential men in southern Kyrgyzstan whose control of martial arts clubs was crucial in the initial phases of the protests in southern Kyrgyzstan. Erkinbayev was a presidential candidate who eventually endorsed President Kurmanbek

Bakiyev, but was later assassinated in Summer 2005 in an apparent drug-related controversy.⁷⁵

Overall, Kyrgyzstan's political situation has deteriorated since the revolution, and the influence of organized crime over politics has increased. This is illustrated by the increasing number of political assassinations in the republic.⁷⁶ Several government appointments have also created consternation: most importantly, the appointment by president Kurmanbek Bakiyev of officials known for their past high-level involvement in gold mining business scandals, including the disappearance of large quantities of gold revenues.

In countries such as Afghanistan, Tajikistan and now Kyrgyzstan, voluminous accusations of high-level participation in the drug trade by high government officials raises the question whether these states are infiltrated by criminal interests to an extent that merits the use of the term "narco-state".

Conclusions

The discussion above highlights the complex evolution of organized crime as a security challenge in Eurasia. On the whole, the situation cannot be said to have improved, even though two major successes have been scored: the decimation of the IMU and the anti-corruption trends in Georgia. These are encouraging elements that have helped fight the crime-terror nexus in Central Asia and the crime-state nexus in the South Caucasus. Even then, however, it is too early to count the IMU out or to qualify Georgia as a mission accomplished. Even if, as Central Asian security services estimate, the IMU only consists of some 300 scattered fighters,⁷⁷ the continuing and increasing production of opium in Afghanistan implies that the IMU may acquire access to funds that could help it rebuild military strength, especially if conditions in Uzbekistan deteriorate. Likewise in Georgia, the future of anti-corruption measures is tied to the future of the current government. Under tremendous pressure from Moscow, which seeks to systematically undermine the Saakashvili administration and prop up separatist regimes that are very much a part of the problem, the Georgian government is receiving precious little political support from the west. Its success can by no means be taken for granted.

⁷⁵ "'Drug Link' in Kyrgyz MP's Death," *BBC News*, November 29 2005; Erica Marat, "Erkinbayev's Assassination Provokes Controversy in Kyrgyzstan," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* September 27 2005, <http://jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2370267> (February 1 2006).

⁷⁶ Anara Tabyshaliev, "Political Violence on the Rise in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, January 25 2006.

⁷⁷ Khamidov, *Countering the Call*, 9.

Meanwhile, negative developments elsewhere are a distinct cause for worry. Among these, the situation in the North Caucasus is the most worrisome especially for Europe, given the proximity of the region to Europe and the inability of the international community to do something about the situation even if it had the will to do so. As the North Caucasus slips into a black hole of crime, insurgency, radicalism and terrorism, a quagmire is being deepened that will have no easy solution.

Afghanistan must be considered an equally if not more crucial problem. President Karzai has repeatedly warned that Afghanistan is turning into a narco-state. Nevertheless, no clear strategy has yet been adopted by the international community to handle this problem; in particular, despite being directly affected by the drug trade from Afghanistan, Europe has taken very few measures to fight the drug trade there. As the drug industry consolidates its grip over the state and no serious decrease in opiate production can be expected, the prospects for a stable and democratic Afghanistan are being systematically undermined.

The degradation of the situation in Kyrgyzstan, finally, has potentially far-reaching consequences. First of all, it risks undoing the relatively stable, open, and moderate polity that Kyrgyzstan in spite of its weaknesses and faults actually was until 2005. The fact that this process is tied to the revolution of 2005, in turn, provides a powerful argument for opposing political change and openness in its neighboring republics.

The pervasive state weakness in Central Eurasia has enabled the gradual criminalization of state authority in the region. The crime-terror nexus in the region has been paralleled and largely supplanted by a crime-state nexus. This development has very significant interests for the Euro-Atlantic community. It undermines the prospects of building stable, prosperous states in Central Asia with a participatory political system. As the example of Erkinbayev shows, the processes taking place in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are empowering criminal forces with connections to terrorist organizations such as the IMU. There is a risk of a 'black hole' scenario developing where individuals in important state positions are connected not only to organized crime, but also to militant religious extremism and terrorism. The increasingly influential role of criminal figures in government in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and the continued strength and influence of Tajik warlords with connections to the IMU, is a distinct cause for concern. Meanwhile, this development underlines the failure of western policies in Central Asia. Concentrated upon building a vibrant civil society, western assistance has failed to realize the need to build statehood, in particular functioning law enforcement and judicial organs. The idea that political development can be accomplished by circumventing the state has reached the end of the road. As the Georgian case shows, it is now clear that only the arduous task of building state institutions can rollback the advances

of organized crime in the region and reduce the security challenges arising from it.

The Logistics of Opiate Trafficking in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

Jacob Townsend *

ABSTRACT

Based on fieldwork in Central Asia, the article details the routes and methods of smuggling that make up the northward flow of opiates out of Afghanistan and through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Information obtained from Central Asian officials is used to discuss trends in the composition, organization and practice of opiate trafficking groups. Key among these is their growing professionalism and their degree of specialization by product and trafficking route. These trends and the growing potential for trafficking from these trunk routes into Xinjiang highlight the challenges to Central Asian law enforcement agencies: to match the level of professionalism of traffickers; and to cooperate internationally, including with China and possibly through engagement with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Keywords • Central Asia • trafficking • smuggling routes • narcotics • Tajikistan • Kyrgyzstan • Kazakhstan • organized crime

This paper investigates how criminal groups organize opiate trafficking from Afghanistan through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. These three countries were chosen because they are a geographical axis of the Central Asian drug trade, taking heroin directly from the source in Afghanistan and moving it north to the Russian border. While Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are also transit countries, transport options through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are less numerous and therefore more amenable to analysis and interdiction. The article draws on four months of fieldwork in Central Asia that included meetings with approximately 100 local law enforcement officials as well as numerous interviews with staff from international organizations and residents in key trafficking regions. It begins by describing the routes through each country and trafficking groups' modes of operation at different points on the journey north, from swimming and walking to car and train. This is followed by an analysis of broader trends in trafficking and a discussion of the implications of these trends for regional law enforcement agencies.

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Map 1. Opiate Trafficking Routes through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan

Note: Routes transiting Uzbekistan are not shown; routes over the Tajik-Afghan border are essentially uncountable.

Trafficking Into and Through Tajikistan

As Afghanistan's northern route has flourished since the mid-1990s, Tajikistan has become the heaviest transit country for opiates in Central Asia. It shares a 1,200 km border with Afghanistan and its capacity for border policing is low. The border follows the Panj river from a high

altitude, rugged terrain close to China down to open plains near the nexus of the Tajik-Afghan-Uzbek borders. In recent years Tajikistan has faced the challenge of reclaiming responsibility for this border from Russian troop contingents that have gradually been withdrawing. This process is now complete and although Russia still keeps a garrison in Tajikistan its commanders no longer have control over troop activity on the Afghan border.

As heroin processing capacity has shifted into Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran, facilities in northern Afghanistan have sprung up that are dedicated to serving the northern route via Tajikistan.¹ Dedicated heroin processing in Afghanistan and a porous border has resulted in very large flows of a variety of opiate grades into and through Tajikistan. The logistics of trafficking opiates across the Tajik-Afghan border present little challenge and the probabilities of law enforcement interdiction are firmly in favour of the traffickers.

A successful crossing for individual traffickers can be made by swimming and wading across the Panj river. This is the simplest form of trafficking whereby one, sometimes two to three men, typically carry a few kilograms each across the border.² Since the surveillance abilities of border guards are extremely limited individual traffickers can easily make the trip across the river undetected. The main challenge for the traffickers is the climate, which makes swimming unlikely in autumn and winter, or even spring along the elevated sections around Khorog. However, boat crossings are common and enable year-round trips.³

The area around Moscovsky and Shurobad has also witnessed more large-scale incursions by traffickers. In discussions with a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) border assessment mission in 2004, Tajik Border Guard units reported smuggling groups consisting of “up to 120 persons with armed escorts and communications units’ backing.”⁴ While these reports may be somewhat exaggerated, it is also apparent that there are occasional crossings of sizeable, well-armed groups who are willing to rely on self-defence capabilities as much or more than stealth.

The real risk of failure in this type of trafficking is posed by border guard patrols within the first few kilometres inside Tajik borders. There is a degree of luck in this, since an individual trafficker or group can be

¹ Brian Iselin, *The Afghan-rim's Heroin Economy*, Stockholm, 2004; UNODC, *Central Asia Strategic Framework 2004-2007*, 2004.

² Women are unheard of in this form of trafficking

³ In 2005 a further method was discovered – micro-light aircraft. Shot down in August with 18 kg of heroin aboard as it crossed into Tajikistan, it is unknown whether the aircraft had made previous successful deliveries.

⁴ UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia, *Tajik-Afghan Border Assessment Mission August 2004*, 1.

spotted at random by troops. Generally, however, the limited mobility of border guards and the difficulties in their communication systems give the advantage to the trafficker, who is usually knowledgeable regarding the areas in which troops can easily and often patrol. Furthermore, even when detected, smugglers often have enough warning of the approach of border guards to escape, occasionally dumping the opiates and leaving troops with a seizure but no arrest.⁵

In the medium term, the balance of risks is likely to change somewhat as border guard capacity improves. For example, UNODC has been providing equipment and training to mobile troop units, who will become active in early 2006 and will create greater uncertainty for traffickers. Similarly, support from a number of other donors such as the European Union, will improve communications and general troop effectiveness. However, in the short term, the risk level for traffickers using illegal immigration as their method will remain largely unchanged.

Another method of bringing opiates from Afghanistan to Tajikistan is via legal crossings. These are economically and socially important for both countries, particularly for communities on either side of the border. The volume of traffic using these crossings has risen rapidly in recent years and Tajik border officials expect this trend to continue, creating a significant challenge for Tajik border control at fixed checkpoints.⁶

Smuggling methods through these checkpoints vary from the very simple to the very sophisticated. At the Tajik-Afghan bridge in Khorog, for example, it is possible to carry drugs without any great effort at concealment, since body checks or inspection of goods are very rare on what are predominantly foot crossings to markets in Khorog.⁷ However, such simple methods are becoming more risky at the majority of Tajik-Afghan crossings as a result of more stringent Tajik controls, mostly the result of international assistance in response to the Russian handover and increasing trade. Particularly important is the common use of drug-sniffing dogs; these are now crucial to Tajik counter-narcotics efforts and account for around 40 percent of all drug seizures (both inland and at the borders).⁸ They are quite effective at detecting the more sophisticated efforts at hiding drugs, such as within car panels and engine parts. However, the potential of dogs cannot be exploited entirely in Tajikistan because unfavourable local conditions (such as temperature, altitude,

⁵ It is quite regular for local press to report the seizure of drugs but not the escape of the smuggler(s).

⁶ Author's interview with the Chief of Tajik Border Guard Intelligence and the Tajik Border Guard Analysis Centre, September 12, 2005; and with the Chief of Customs and the Chief of Border Guards at the Tem (Khorog) crossing, September 13, 2005.

⁷ Author's interviews with the Chief of Customs and the Chief of Border Guards at the Tem (Khorog) crossing, September 13 2005.

⁸ This estimate was provided by the Tajik DCA's Analytical Centre in Dushanbe – author's interview, September 12 2005.

kennel conditions) reduce the duration in which they can be used. This is particularly the case at higher eastern altitudes.

Traffickers using vehicles and legal crossings are more likely to continue further into Tajikistan before connecting with the next link in the smuggling chain. By contrast, incursions by foot, swimming or boat require the trafficker to make contact in settlements close to the border. Thus, the next link in the trafficking chain is likely to be a resident of these settlements, receiving those who have crossed successfully and serving as a storage depot. Those in control of these depots are the same people who organize onward trafficking through Tajikistan, while the couriers return to Afghanistan.

As the abilities of Tajikistan's border guards improve and as trade between Tajikistan and Afghanistan expands, traffickers are likely to increase their use of legal border crossings and decrease their reliance on river crossings and illegal immigration. The likelihood of growing legal flows of traffic across the Tajik-Afghan border will create pressure on Tajik checkpoints that already struggle to monitor the goods and people passing through them. With facilities improving, any trend that increases the preference of traffickers for using legal crossings will encourage a greater reliance on corruption in order to avoid random inspections or detection by sniffer dogs.

Drug trafficking through Tajikistan towards Kyrgyzstan occurs via both the east and west of the country. The Deputy Director of the Khorog Drug Control Agency (DCA) office sees the town of Darvaz as a fairly clear dividing point, with everything crossing the border to the west travelling via western Tajikistan, probably transiting Dushanbe. To the east, the vast majority of opiates trafficked over the border are destined for centralization in Khorog in preparation for the Pamir Highway to Osh.⁹ The possible exceptions to this rule are crossings from Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor into the southeastern corner of Tajikistan, which may bypass Khorog – according to locals, Afghans cross the border in all seasons¹⁰ and the Khorog DCA has begun to investigate the possibility.¹¹

Trafficking through both the east and west of Tajikistan relies overwhelmingly on car and truck trips and opiate seizures on roads accounted for 70 percent of the total in 2004,¹² since rail and air links are

⁹ Author's interview, September 13 2005.

¹⁰ Author's interviews in Shaymak and Tokhtamish, September 15 2005.

¹¹ Specifically, they took advantage of my fieldwork to conduct a drive-through investigation of trafficking routes across the south-eastern section of the Tajik-Afghan border.

¹² 13 percent by railway, 8 percent by air and 7 percent by off-road tracks – Drug Control Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, *Report on Drug Control Situation in the Republic of Tajikistan in 2004*, Dushanbe, 2005.

not well-developed. Trafficking east from Khorog and along the Pamir Highway through Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO – capital Murgab) mostly occurs in private cars. Due to its remoteness, altitude and poorer condition, the Pamir Highway does not receive as many large trucks as roads in western Tajikistan. Car drivers are typically either Tajik or Kyrgyz citizens, although the majority leaving Khorog are Tajiks. It takes a car at least eight hours in good conditions and significantly more in the lengthy periods of bad weather to drive the 311 km to Murgab.

Depending upon the trafficking group and the security of its connections, there may be a change of car and driver in Murgab. The Chief of the Tajik KGB in Murgab is aware of six or seven groups that organize opiate shipments from Khorog to Osh in Kyrgyzstan via Murgab.¹³ The high proportion of ethnic Kyrgyz that live in eastern GBAO and around Murgab is conducive to trafficking into Kyrgyzstan, but more important is the economic dependence of Murgab upon Osh,¹⁴ which creates a high flow of traffic (relative to population size) across the Tajik-Kyrgyz border at the Bor Dobur crossing.

Opiate addiction in GBAO has been decreasing over the last couple of years and the DCA in Khorog reports that the general population is intolerant of dealers and will pass on information about their activities.¹⁵ This is a first step towards monitoring traffickers, to whom locals are more indifferent, or at least cautious. Despite decreasing consumer demand in GBAO, Khorog DCA does not agree with the belief of outside observers that the volume of drugs travelling the Pamir Highway has decreased.¹⁶ Instead, both the DCA and the KGB regional office feel that they are increasingly disadvantaged in terms of equipment and useful connections when compared with the traffickers. Trafficking groups are becoming smaller, more cohesive and more professional, specializing more strongly in trafficking and becoming less concerned with selling to local consumers. This is something of a return to historic trends, since demand for heroin grades in GBAO was never high until large quantities began transiting the region in the late 1990s, spilling over and creating addiction. Now, it seems, trafficking groups are relatively less interested in retail sales.

¹³ Author's interview, September 16 2005.

¹⁴ Traditionally, almost all consumer goods and a significant proportion of eastern GBAO's food came from Osh. Dependence on Osh is still high, but is increasingly complemented by imports directly from China via the crossing at the Kulma Pass.

¹⁵ Author's interview with the Tajik DCA's Analytical Centre in Dushanbe, September 12 2005; author's interviews with Khorog DCA officers, September 13-14 2005.

¹⁶ It should be noted that this view also conflicts with Khorog DCA's own headquarters in Dushanbe, where the DCA Director was in agreement with UN assessments on the decreasing importance of the GBAO route.

The flow of drugs through western Tajikistan is greater than through GBAO. There are myriad routes by which traffickers can move opiates through southwestern Tajikistan. In terms of crossing the Afghan border, the area around Moscovsky has become the biggest concern when measured by the quantity of seizures and in 2004 it accounted for 78 percent of all opiate seizures.¹⁷ However, these figures may be misleading since the Moscovsky Border Guard unit is the best-equipped of any along the Afghan border and therefore better at effecting seizures.

Almost all opiates destined for Kyrgyzstan via western Tajikistan transit Dushanbe and use the M34 north to Ayni and onwards to the Ferghana Valley and Khudjand. The tangle of borders between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan means that some traffickers go to Khudjand via Uzbekistan while others take less developed roads that keep them within Tajikistan. Crossing into Uzbekistan and back again requires clearing additional border checkpoints, but bribery at these is standard and vehicles inspections uncommon. As one example of the fluidity of borders and corruption between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, a Tajik DCA officer related a case in which he had tracked an Uzbek policeman crossing the border repeatedly to facilitate drug shipments. During preparations to arrest him, however, the DCA officer was pressured into abandoning the case by members of his own office.¹⁸

From Khudjand, there are several routes to Osh. The Kyrgyz border is near to Khudjand and crossing this border is simple, as is bribing or circumventing official crossings further east in the Ferghana valley, leading to Batken in Kyrgyzstan. Alternatively, the more direct route of trafficking requires going through Uzbekistan, via Kokand and then either Andijan or Ferghana. The road network and terrain here allow for many variations in routing, including the ability to avoid the major cities. However, this is unnecessary as the risks do not increase significantly by entering settlements. Furthermore, the handover from one driver to the next generally occurs in or on the outskirts of cities, sometimes with a division of the load in order to serve the local consumer market (more on this below).

There is also a central route through Tajikistan that joins with the Pamir Highway at Sary-Tash in Kyrgyzstan. The road from Garm to the Kyrgyz border is in very poor condition but is navigable by four wheel drive in spring and summer. During Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) actions in 1999 and 2000, it appeared that mountain crossings into Kyrgyzstan from this area were regular. Currently, opiate trafficking

¹⁷ Drug Control Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2005.

¹⁸ Author's interview, September 15 2005.

flows here are unknown but likely to be tiny, although the feasibility of trafficking will improve as the local infrastructure is upgraded.¹⁹

The many internal checkpoints present in Tajikistan in Soviet times are now unused for drug detection. Law enforcement officers see the removal of checkpoints as a positive development in general, but lament its effect on their ability to intercept opiate trafficking. This is a questionable comparison since intercepting drugs was not the purpose of these checkpoints in the pre-independence era. Having said that, it is nevertheless true that the movement of traffic is freer.

Trafficking Into and Through Kyrgyzstan

In contrast to Tajikistan, where over half the opiates seized are intercepted on its borders²⁰ (primarily with Afghanistan), few seizures take place at Kyrgyz borders. Whereas the greatest hurdle for traffickers in Tajikistan is the Tajik-Afghan border, the equivalent in Kyrgyzstan is the avoidance of law enforcements' intelligence collection within the country.

Smuggling into Kyrgyzstan via the Pamir Highway in eastern Tajikistan is considered easy, as border controls are not stringent. Despite the difficult terrain around Kyrgyzstan's Bor Dobur crossing, Customs and Border Guard officers both report that it is possible to circumvent their post via foot or pack animal.²¹ For traffickers however, the more appealing method is to continue with the vehicles organized in Khorog and/or Murgab, particularly because the distance between settlements on either side of the border is problematic given the terrain. The distance from the border to Osh is 229 km, which also is a major trade route for goods arriving from China. The risks of detection are minimal and the feasibility of trafficking is likely to increase further with the rehabilitation of stretches of this road by an Asian Development Bank loan.²²

From western Tajikistan directly into Kyrgyzstan or via Uzbekistan, opiate trafficking groups are able to take advantage of Kyrgyzstan's Osh *oblast's* weak border controls. Its borders are very porous, subject to huge

¹⁹ The main road to the Kyrgyz border is the subject of an Asian Development Bank rehabilitation project. Asian Development Bank, *Technical Assistance to the Republic of Tajikistan for Preparing the Second Road Rehabilitation Project*, Document TAR:TAJ 32531, 2001.

²⁰ Drug Control Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2005.

²¹ Interview with Chief of Bor Dobur Customs, September 18 2005; interview with Commander of Bor Dobur Border Guards, September 18 2005.

²² "ADB to help upgrade 124 km stretch of former southern Silk Road," *Asia in Focus*, September 28 2005, available: Factiva; <<http://global.factiva.com/sb/default.aspx?NAPC=S&fcPil=en>> (September 30 2005).

amounts of smuggling of all categories of goods²³ and are pervaded by corrupt law enforcement officials on both sides. With regard to direct crossings from Tajikistan, the border near to Khudjand and further east near Kyrgyzstan's Batken are both permeable and were given notoriety by IMU successes in the area in 1999 and 2000; Kyrgyz Customs and Border Guards rate the area a high concern and consider its borders very porous.²⁴

With a number of feasible routes, there are a variety of trafficking methods. Compared with crossing the Afghan-Tajik border however, opiate trafficking from Tajikistan into Kyrgyzstan involves a greater use of vehicles and greater effort at concealment. Where opiate stockpiles in Afghanistan can be kept close to the Tajik border and then ferried across to nearby settlements, the priority destination for trafficking from Tajikistan into Kyrgyzstan is Osh, which is 417 km from Murgab and 299 km from Khudjand. The preference of traffickers is therefore to use vehicles to cross borders and there is also a growing preference for eschewing vehicle changes. Along the Pamir Highway, it is the norm to have a single driver and vehicle from Murgab to Osh, generally carrying passengers because concealment and convenience are improved by conflating the trafficking journey with a normal trading trip.

Osh is the staging post for trafficking further north and a city of significant drug addiction in its own right.²⁵ The estimated flows of heroin through Kyrgyzstan make Osh one of the world's heroin trafficking capitals. The Osh City Police identify two types of groups involved in the drug trade in their jurisdiction. The first type consists of wholesale receivers who purchase drugs for distribution to their retail networks, generally including the area to Jalalabad but centred upon Osh. The second type of group sits more firmly in the international trafficking network and generally avoids retail sales. Instead, its profits arise from receiving drugs from Tajikistan and organizing their onward transport to Bishkek, most of which is intended for Kazakhstan and beyond.²⁶

For onward transportation, the Osh-Bishkek road is dominant, since options through central Kyrgyzstan are very limited. As through Tajikistan, the risks of detection along this major artery are small and seizures within Kyrgyzstan are overwhelmingly concentrated in Osh and Bishkek. Most loads are hidden with varying degrees of sophistication in

²³ For example, the Head of Osh Customs Counter-Smuggling Department estimated that some 85-90 percent of the goods imported from China into Osh are smuggled onwards to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan – author's interview, September 19 2005.

²⁴ Interview with Deputy Head of Osh oblast Customs, September 19 2005; interview with Deputy Commander of Kyrgyz Border Guards Southern Command, September 19 2005.

²⁵ The Osh area has 3,457 registered addicts, with UNODC estimating the real number at 16,000-20,000 – correspondence with UNODC Tashkent, January 2006.

²⁶ Author's interviews with the Chief of Osh City Police and the Head of Osh City Police Counter-narcotics, September 19 2005.

vehicles, with a mixture of private cars and trading trucks. The latter carry legitimate trade goods simultaneously, with the profit on these raised by the fees from drug trafficking, which more than pay for transportation costs. In northern Kyrgyzstan, the DCA has observed that the secondary road running parallel to the major highway from Kalininskoy/Kara-Balta to Bishkek is popular for opiate transportation in private cars since the road is in good condition but traffic is light.²⁷

Bishkek is the final centralisation point in Kyrgyzstan. As in Osh, there is a significant division between groups that focus on retail sales and those that re-pack shipments for transport into Kazakhstan. However, some consignments leaving Osh have no need to make contact in Bishkek and simply carry on over the Kazakh border. For those that feed dealers in Bishkek, supply networks from Osh might be characterized better as national retail distribution organizations than as international trafficking chains.

Trafficking Into and Through Kazakhstan

The Kyrgyz-Kazakh border is very porous. Not only is it easy to walk across undetected, but large vehicles also cross illegally, such as in the regular smuggling of fuel from Kazakhstan in large trucks.²⁸ It is likely that opiate couriers in Kyrgyz trucks that use illegal crossings would prefer a handover in Almaty, since they will be unregistered in Kazakhstan's Customs and Border Guard systems which are computerized nationally. Here, private cars offer more flexibility but the driver still faces problems with the immigration system, should he or she ever be challenged.

If a trafficking group has invested effort in concealing a shipment in a vehicle before setting out from Osh or Bishkek, it is then more likely to use official crossings. For opiate smuggling from Kyrgyzstan northwards, the most important of these are to the north and to the west of Bishkek. However, these crossings are not major venues for opiate seizures, which suggests two possibilities: traffickers are avoiding these crossings; or the volume of legitimate traffic and/or the level of corruption has rendered trafficking invisible. The latter explanations seem more likely, given that inspections of the large flows of traffic are very rare and drug-sniffing dogs are not regularly used.

The majority of opiates coming from the Bishkek area pass through or near Almaty. This is due to both the layout of the road network and the significant consumer market in Almaty *oblast*, now one of the largest

²⁷ Author's interviews with DCA officers from Bishkek, September 20-21 2005.

²⁸ Author's interviews with DCA officers and local UNODC staff, September 22-24 2005.

in the country.²⁹ Almaty had the largest volume of heroin seizures in Kazakhstan in 2004 and this situation is likely to be repeated in 2005.³⁰ According to the Almaty Drug Combat Unit, opiate stockpiling occurs on the outskirts of the city and retail groups break this down for supplying low-level dealers. Again, there is apparently a division between local receivers and onward traffickers, since following the trail back from street dealers only leads to small stockpiles dedicated to retail sales.³¹

From Almaty, Kazakhstan's transport infrastructure offers many options for trafficking further north and into Russia. The country's combination of long, porous borders and relatively well-developed infrastructure makes it a huge challenge to track and intercept opiate trafficking routes. It is therefore difficult to pinpoint particular transport corridors as necessary,³² although it seems likely that the Almaty-Taldyqorgha-Georgievka and Almaty-Balkash-Astana roads are popular – both these routes have witnessed sizeable seizures in recent years. While the general direction of routes towards Europe encourages heading west through Kazakhstan from Kyrgyzstan, Almaty nevertheless remains a link in the international trafficking chain, with significant groups based there.

Southeastern Kazakhstan is also where traffickers can access a rail network. From Almaty, two routes are available - the first travels north-west to Astana, from where there are a number of rail links into Russia. The second follows the road north to Taldyqorgha, Georgievka and into Russia. It seems that these options are not heavily used by opiate traffickers and few seizures occur on trains relative to those by road.³³

The Professionalization of Trafficking

The Deputy Director of the Tajik DCA Khorog sub-office summed up the evolution of trafficking groups by noting that “they are becoming smaller, their members are becoming more stuck to each other and they are becoming more professional.”³⁴ This trend is also prevalent in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where professionalization has proceeded further. It is therefore more obvious in Tajikistan and is noted with alarm by many officials. Instead of a disparate network consisting of a

²⁹ UNODC estimates the number of heroin users as 24,000–27,000 – correspondence with UNODC Tashkent, January 2006.

³⁰ UNODC, *Country Profile: Kazakhstan*, 2005.

³¹ Author's interview with the Chief of the Almaty Drug Combat Unit, October 20 2005.

³² UNODC is currently organizing support to Kazakhstan for creating internal checkpoints trained and equipped for trafficking detection, a project which requires identifying these corridors if it is to be efficient.

³³ Author's interview with the Chief of the Almaty Drug Combat Unit, October 20 2005; correspondence with UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia, January 2006.

³⁴ Author's interview, September 13 2005.

large number of low-level traffickers, trafficking networks that link through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are becoming more streamlined.

This is not to suggest that they are becoming overarching transnational groups organized with strong hierarchies, although efforts to establish these have been observed in other types of organized crime in Central Asia.³⁵ Nor is this trend at odds with the readily observed phenomena that those carrying drugs between points in the network are rarely knowledgeable about their 'superiors'. Each driver still operates on a delivery-based contract that does not require him or her to know much about the group of which he or she is a part. However, it does seem that each node in the network is becoming more tightly-knit, with repetitive contracting of low-level drivers and a hardening of criminal group membership at the middle levels as criminality becomes their core occupation (more on this below). Drivers are rarely self-motivated entrepreneurs but instead rely on the contacts between groups at a level above them. To give a (legal) business analogy, it is as though small-scale, local companies are evolving into medium-sized nationally federated organizations, with greater capacity for cross-border distribution. In one case in early 2005, Kazakhstan's Committee for National Security reported the arrest of members of an all-Tajik group operating out of south Kazakhstan, organizing couriers and supplies from Tajikistan with the intent (and presumably the capability) to move these on to Russia.³⁶

The professionalization of opiate trafficking groups poses significant additional challenges for Central Asian law enforcement. Most importantly, it indicates that enforcing the law against the middle and upper levels of trafficking groups will become even more difficult. Doing so is already a huge challenge given the entanglement of politicians and law enforcement officials with organized crime (if not their direct involvement in it). The majority of operational officers interviewed by the author could relate a story in which they felt pressure to halt an investigation, sometimes coming from within their own agency and sometimes from another agency. Significantly, the warning or 'advice' rarely came from outside the law enforcement community.

As members of organized criminal groups in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan become more devoted to professional criminality, their incentive to cultivate and maintain relationships with officialdom becomes stronger. At the middle levels of such groups, personnel evolve from being 'moonlighters' to 'day-jobbers', from criminality as a parallel

³⁵ UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia, *Organized Crime in Central Asia*, 2003.

³⁶ "Drug trafficking route is closed," *Khabar News*, January 26 2005, via the Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agency, relayed January 27 2005.

income to criminality as a livelihood.³⁷ Moreover, if the degree of specialization perceived by Central Asian officials is accurate, then the professionalization of criminals in a particular business, such as opiate trafficking, makes it more essential for them to insulate their business from law enforcement action, since they do not have an immediate second occupation. As groups become more professional, so does their interest in professionalizing the corruption of security agencies, reducing their incentive to gamble on ad hoc corruption in the event of detection.

At the level of couriers, the vast majority have traditionally been unemployed, at least in the formal economic sense, but the view of Central Asian officials is that involvement in opiate trafficking is increasingly seen by some as a first option rather than a final one.³⁸ As with the relationships between law enforcement and the middle levels of trafficking groups, the relationships between carriers and wholesalers are becoming more regularized and mutually dependent. In the words of the Chief of the Tajik KGB in Murgab, “these people now do nothing except for moving drugs.”³⁹

Professionalization raises the skill requirements for successful counter-trafficking efforts. First, it becomes more difficult to infiltrate groups as their membership becomes less diffuse and more focused on their speciality, something mentioned specifically by the Chief of Osh City Police,⁴⁰ the Chief of the Almaty Drug Combat Unit⁴¹ and the Chief of Tajikistan’s Border Guard Intelligence.⁴² Low-level couriers are more expensive to buy off because they anticipate a stream of future income and mid-level organizers become harder to identify because group cohesion increases and the regularity of contact between group members for the purposes of organization falls. The Head of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Security’s assertion that trafficking flows vary with the arrest of particular opiate smuggling professionals⁴³ stands in contrast to the findings of Icdyugu and Toktas on human trafficking through Turkey, where a primary characteristic of the trafficking network was its flexibility and lack of dependence on particular nodes.⁴⁴ As per the

³⁷ This appears to be a tendency in Central Asian organized crime in general - UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia, 2003.

³⁸ The Deputy Director of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure commented that a “scary” sign of professionalization is when drug trade occupations are passed down in a family, “father-to-son” – author’s interview, December 5 2005.

³⁹ Author’s interview, September 16 2005.

⁴⁰ Author’s interview, September 19 2005.

⁴¹ Author’s interview, October 20 2005.

⁴² Author’s interview, September 12 2005.

⁴³ Author’s interview, September 21 2005.

⁴⁴ “How do smuggling and trafficking operate via irregular border crossings in the Middle East?” *International Migration* 40, 6 (2002): 26-54.

discussion of specialization below, this seems to indicate that trafficking coordination modalities vary significantly with the smuggled product.

Second and related to this, the value of informants rises and therefore their handling by law enforcement is more crucial. While the impunity with which opiate traffickers operate in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan is still striking by western standards, the professionalization of trafficking groups is reducing the surrounding community's knowledge of the specifics of criminal activities. For example, while the DCA in Khorog has identified a significant number of active traffickers in their jurisdiction, collecting intelligence on the timing of their contact with opiate shipments is becoming more difficult.⁴⁵ In all three countries, the need for care in handling informants is growing, something that has been acknowledged recently by UNODC in its assistance to the Tajik DCA.⁴⁶ In general, the capacity of Central Asian agencies to handle delicate information and protect sources is low because of corruption and the generally low level of professionalism in law enforcement institutions.

Third, there is a growing need for effective cooperation between law enforcement agencies that share responsibility for counter-trafficking. If intelligence becomes more fragmented as trafficking groups become more professional, it reduces the ability of any single agency to form a useful profile of group membership or to triangulate operational intelligence fragments in order to make significant interceptions. Corruption is once again a problem here in compromising the willingness of officers to share intelligence, but also relevant is the institutional rivalry that currently affects inter-agency cooperation, particularly in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.⁴⁷

Last, the effectiveness of counter-trafficking regimes at specific points on popular trafficking routes becomes more important. As groups become more professional and concealment techniques become more sophisticated, the need for intelligence collection and analysis grows relative to the effectiveness of random checks. Nevertheless, identifying bottlenecks and bolstering their detection capacity – such as through the use of sniffer dogs – would raise the risk to trafficking groups investing in a long-distance, high-profit shipment.

Overall, the challenge for Central Asian law enforcement is to improve their own professionalism in order to combat the professionalization of opiate trafficking groups. However, the financial incentives are much stronger for the latter. That this is important is acknowledged in UNODC's DCA projects in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan,

⁴⁵ Author's interviews with Khorog DCA officers, September 13 – 15 2005.

⁴⁶ This has, for example, included training sessions on advanced informant handling.

⁴⁷ Jacob Townsend, "Counter-narcotics Competition and Cooperation in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, October 19 2005.

where bonuses are available to officers that make substantial seizures. Since professionalism is mostly induced from expected prestige and/or payment, the differing expectations of law enforcement officers and opiate traffickers make this a difficult imbalance to address.

Possession of Arms

The prevalence of arms-possession by traffickers varies geographically and between levels within the trafficking group. When crossing the Tajik-Afghan border, it is common for traffickers to carry their own weapons, generally a pistol or semi-automatic machine gun. Gunfights between traffickers and border guards occur frequently and regularly involve more than one smuggler. When smugglers are caught, press reports often refer to a seizure of drugs and arms, although the view of Tajik law enforcement agents is that arms seizures are only incidental to drug trafficking, since smugglers usually do not intend to trade the weapons they are carrying.

Beyond the Tajik-Afghan border, armed confrontation between traffickers and law enforcement is much less common. Individual drivers do not regularly carry weapons and their ability to use these successfully to avoid arrest is very limited. According to Kyrgyz and Tajik DCA officers, the possession of arms by traffickers operating away from the Tajik-Afghan border is more for protection from other criminals and for security during a handover of drugs than for protection from law enforcement. Instead, the first device a trafficker deploys against officials is the offer of a bribe. In the first instance, this might be in the context of the regular but random extortion situations initiated by police officers on the side of the road. In the unlikely event that a vehicle inspection is carried out, a substantially higher bribe is required and will more often prove ineffective.⁴⁸ At the extreme end, where law enforcement agents are already aware of the shipment, neither bribe nor weapon is likely to be effective unless the arresting officers act with the intention of securing a payoff.

Above the lowest level of the trafficking group, the possession of arms is ubiquitous, which fleshes out the observations of Macfarlane and Torjesen in Kyrgyzstan, where they found that gun ownership in the general population was low despite an apparent increase in organized crime.⁴⁹ In the words of the Deputy Director of the DCA in Bishkek, “organized crime has its own rules, including having a nice car and a nice

⁴⁸ Author's interviews with: Kyrgyz DCA officers, September 19-22 2005; Tajik DCA officers from the Khorog sub-office, September 13-15 2005; UNODC Bishkek staff, September 22-25 2005.

⁴⁹ S. Neil Macfarlane and Stina Torjesen, “Awash with Weapons? The Case of Small Arms in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 24, 1 (2005): 5-19.

weapon.” However, he also added that “they are not afraid of us”, reiterating that if traffickers expect to use arms, it is more often against one another than against law enforcement.⁵⁰ The greatest significance of weapons for members of trafficking groups at the middle and higher levels is as a status symbol. Eschewing violence is their optimal logistical strategy and it is far more productive for them to deploy corruption rather than weapons to ward off encroachment on their business by the authorities.

Concealment Techniques and Specialization

A trend observed by law enforcement officers in all three countries is the increasing sophistication of concealment techniques. For example, Kyrgyzstan’s Ministry of National Security mentioned a case in 2005 in which a “significant quantity” of heroin was hidden in the expertly-modified rear axel of a BMW, stowed in Kyrgyzstan with the intention of driving the high-grade product through Kazakhstan for unloading in Russia.⁵¹ Seizures in Afghanistan of loads in preparation for the northern route have shown even greater sophistication and in some notable cases traffickers have packed heroin into coffee and cat food packages, disguising them as internationally-recognized products such as Nescafe and Kitekat, complete with labels in different languages (mostly European).⁵²

These cases highlight two features of traffickers’ investment in concealment: it varies with the grade of heroin being smuggled; and related to this, with the distance over which the trafficking network intends to deliver. Generally, higher purity heroin is destined for Europe and the greater expected profits from these shipments justify more effort in organizing sophisticated concealment. The trend towards better methods of concealment and the preparation of these shipments closer to the source hints at the international links enjoyed by trafficking groups in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Their investment in concealment so early in the illicit journey implies that they have received orders from, or organized distribution for, a long way down the trafficking chain, in some cases Western Europe.

Air links create another opportunity for long-distance delivery and require less complex logistical arrangements. In the majority of cases, intercepted drugs are found in the possession of a citizen from a Central Asian republic and the flight is bound for Russia. Concealment in body

⁵⁰ However, he did report two recent cases of traffickers firing on DCA officers - author’s interview, September 21 2005.

⁵¹ Author’s interview with the Ministry of Security’s Head of Counter-Narcotics, September 21 2005.

⁵² Drug Control Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2005.

cavities is common. Such shipments usually consist of a small amount of high-quality heroin and although there is an up-front investment in the airfare, when compared with the costs and logistical challenges of overland trafficking from Central Asia to Russia, the profit margin is still attractive. To the author's knowledge, there have been no bulk seizures of opiates on commercial aircraft, which suggests either that trafficking via air consists exclusively of small loads or that any large loads have been well concealed, physically and/or through corruption.

It is common for western analyses of trafficking groups around the world and in Central Asia to include the assessment that they are involved in smuggling a variety of illicit goods, because groups or individuals that smuggle narcotics would be well-placed to traffic in weapons, drug-producing precursor chemicals, or even human trafficking.⁵³ There seem to be good reasons to believe that any smuggling group can distribute a range of illegal goods, since their abilities in one illicit industry should be easily carried over into another. Their corrupt contacts within government authorities have the potential to be particularly important, since we would not expect these to be focused on facilitating the movement of specific goods, but more on facilitating smuggling in general.⁵⁴

However, most Central Asian law enforcement officials interviewed by the author contradict the view that groups trafficking opiates also smuggle other goods. The biggest gap between western and local views is on trafficking in precursor chemicals, which the International Narcotics Control Board believes has significant synergies with drug trafficking⁵⁵ but which Central Asian officials believe is a separate business. Similarly, they believe that groups trafficking drugs will rarely get involved in trafficking arms, except on a small scale in order to supply members of the group. Human trafficking is quite a different business again and given the logistics of drug trafficking described here, it is difficult to believe that the same groups moving opiates would also be

⁵³ UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia, 2003; Bobi Pirseyedi, *The Small Arms Problem in Central Asia: Features and Implications* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2002); Gerben Bruinsma and Wim Bernasco, "Criminal Groups and Transnational Illegal Markets," *Crime, Law & Social Change*, 41 (2004): 79-94. This view is often expressed with the brevity of assumption at conferences dealing with security issues in Central Asia, or on organized crime more generally. For a discussion of the accuracy of these views, see Nicole Jackson, "The Trafficking of Narcotics, Arms and Humans in post-Soviet Central Asia: (Mis)perceptions, Policies and Realities," *Central Asian Survey* 24, 1 (2005): 39-52.

⁵⁴ As one example, in a different region - the Finnish-Estonian border - Junninen and Arimaa observed that professional criminals are involved in a variety of smuggling businesses, which suggests a propensity for criminality in general rather than a devotion to particular crimes - Mika Junninen and Kauko Arimaa "Professional Crime Across the Finnish-Estonian Border," *Crime, Law & Social Change* 34 (2000): 319-347.

⁵⁵ INCB representative at a meeting of the Central Asian Support Group for Precursor Control, Tashkent March 2-4 2004.

optimized for organizing illegal immigration.⁵⁶ The Chief of Osh City Police summarized the Central Asian assessment by observing that there are a few broad organized crime businesses, but any group that can be identified as engaged in repetitive trafficking will usually specialize in a particular product.⁵⁷ In addressing the causes of involvement in organized crime, it may be useful to view all smuggling activities from a single perspective, but for the purposes of disrupting the logistics of opiate trafficking it is more useful to address these groups separately.

Central Asian analyses of the geographical specialization of opiate trafficking groups vary. General opinions are evenly split between those who believe that prior connections mandate continuing adherence to particular smuggling routes and those who believe that traffickers can switch rapidly between routes. However, the geography of smuggling through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan creates a tendency towards specialization at some points and a freedom of movement at others.

Groups in Tajikistan that source opiates directly from Afghanistan essentially have an unlimited number of options for crossing the border if the courier is travelling by foot. Geographical specialization occurs within Tajikistan around the point at which individual loads are gathered together. In and around Moscovsky and Shurobad is one prominent area for this; Khorog is another. Travelling through GBAO is therefore the specialization of some groups, while others only work in western Tajikistan, the latter category divided further into those that aim for Uzbekistan and those smuggling into Kyrgyzstan.

The Osh-Bishkek road forces all traffic heading north to use the same route as far as Kara-Balta, from where options open up again in reaching and traversing Kazakhstan. Geographical specialization is therefore possible through Kazakhstan, although as the discussion above presaged, the preference for particular routes depends upon whether there is an intention to sell retail in Kazakhstan or to continue to Russia/Europe. For those with links beyond Kazakhstan, the number of possible routes is large and specialization occurs only in relation to the terminal points. For example, the Chief of the Almaty Drug Combat Unit described a group operating in his jurisdiction that specializes in trafficking to the North Caucasus and believed that the number of Kazakh-Russian border crossings and the transport options heading west in Kazakhstan means that detection and monitoring of their activities could only occur in Almaty and their destination city in southwestern Russia.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Jackson, "The Trafficking of Narcotics, Arms and Humans in post-Soviet Central Asia: (Mis)perceptions, Policies and Realities".

⁵⁷ Author's interview, September 19 2005.

⁵⁸ Author's interview, October 20 2005.

The primary implication of these trends is that the most efficient deployment of detection resources can only occur following the identification of transport corridors that are difficult for traffickers to substitute. The concentration of detection capacity raises the risk that major routes will be overlooked and remain open, but with the importance of intelligence rising relative to the importance of random detection, a focus on bottlenecks is the most efficient policy,⁵⁹ accompanied by an effort to ensure that intelligence on changing routes is disseminated rapidly. The preceding discussion highlights the Osh-Bishkek road and the Pamir Highway as two such bottlenecks, where a single effective checkpoint would significantly raise the risk to traffickers along these routes.

For the Pamir Highway, any such effect would likely accelerate the shift to more numerous options in western Tajikistan.⁶⁰ On the Osh-Bishkek road, alternative routes are extremely limited and therefore increased detection capacity there could have an impact on trafficking logistics through Kyrgyzstan. As Map 1 in this article shows, trafficking routes through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan form an hourglass shape with the Osh-Bishkek highway as the pinched waist. Internal checkpoints are technically outlawed in Kyrgyzstan, but two are still in operation, one of which is in Sosnovka on the Osh-Bishkek road.⁶¹ However, it is only used on an ad hoc basis, often for police extortion but also for DCA interceptions.⁶² The flow of traffic is quite high and a commitment to inspecting every vehicle would probably be unfeasible, yet a (semi-)permanent post conducting random inspections would be justified.

The apparent professionalization and specialization of groups around opiate trafficking also suggests the nature of their possible links with extremist/terrorist groups. Since the regression of the IMU, which appeared to spend substantial resources on drug trafficking in order to fund its terrorist activities,⁶³ the cross-over between the opiate trade and terrorism have been more circumscribed in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Most Central Asian officials see the two phenomena as

⁵⁹ Trafficking by commercial air links is subject to bottlenecks in the form of airports, something currently being addressed by the European Union and UNODC, who are funding the training of drug profiling units in every Central Asian international airport.

⁶⁰ Contradictory opinions on the magnitude of this shift were noted above.

⁶¹ The other is near Sary-Tash, on the Murgab-Osh road.

⁶² Author's correspondence with UNODC's Bishkek sub-office, January 2006.

⁶³ Tamara Makarenko, "Crime, Terror and the Central Asian Drug Trade," *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 6, 3 (2002); Justin L. Miller, "The Narco-Insurgent Nexus in Central Asia and Afghanistan," *The National Interest*, May 7 2003; Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

symbiotic.⁶⁴ However, when asked to describe how terrorists are involved in drug trafficking, it seems that groups in Central Asia such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (which all officials consider a terrorist organization) overlap with opiate trafficking groups only at the fringes.⁶⁵ They do so not because terrorists ship the drugs, but rather because members of terrorist cells deal opiates to fund themselves. This view suggests it would be inaccurate to believe that terrorists are traffickers but justified to see the drug trade as one of the criminal activities that terrorism feeds off.⁶⁶ It would also show significant correlation with terrorism operations in western countries, where local drug dealing is apparently a significant source of funds.⁶⁷

Opiate Trafficking into China

A significant trend that will affect trafficking routes through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan is the increasing feasibility of supplying China's western province of Xinjiang. Heroin retail prices are 4-5 times higher in Xinjiang than in the Central Asian countries it borders⁶⁸ and the province has a sizeable and growing drug addict population.⁶⁹ The primary supplier to this market has been Myanmar via lengthy routes across China but the logistical challenges to Central Asian suppliers are diminishing quickly. This issue has been discussed elsewhere⁷⁰ and the

⁶⁴ "They stand back to back," in the words of the Deputy Director of the Tajik DCA Khorog sub-office – author's interview, September 13 2005.

⁶⁵ It must be said that not many officials could give a clear picture of the overlap between terrorist groups and drug trafficking groups. The more detailed opinions came from the following interviews: Chief of Tajik Border Guard Intelligence, September 12 2005; Deputy Director of the Tajik DCA Khorog sub-office, September 13 2005; Chief of Osh City Police, September 19 2005; Kyrgyz Ministry of Security's Head of Counter-Narcotics, September 21 2005; Deputy Director of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure, December 5 2005. The last interviewee also mentioned terrorist cells in Xinjiang in the same analysis.

⁶⁶ In the view of the Deputy Director of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure, within Afghanistan it is more likely that traffickers (as opposed to dealers) are also promoting, funding or engaging in terrorism – author's interview, December 5 2005.

⁶⁷ Chris Dishman, "The Leaderless Nexus: When Crime and Terror Converge," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28 (2005): 237-252; Javier Jordan and Nicola Horsburgh, "Mapping Jihadist Terrorism in Spain," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28 (2005): 169-191.

⁶⁸ Taking averages from information available to UNODC's Regional Office for Central Asia, the price per gram of heroin in Tajikistan is \$7, in Kyrgyzstan \$15 and in Kazakhstan \$17. The average price in Xinjiang, estimated by a Chinese law enforcement officer in the province in late 2005, is \$70.

⁶⁹ China National Surveillance Center on Drug Abuse, *Report of Drug Abuse Surveillance 2003, 2004*.

⁷⁰ Jacob Townsend, *China and Afghan Opiates: Assessing the Risk* (Uppsala: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2005); Jacob Townsend, "All Quiet on China's Western Front? Xinjiang and Afghan Opiates," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*,

primary contextual factors that are increasing feasibility of opiate trafficking across the Central Asian-Chinese borders are the rapidly expanding trade and community links. For trafficking groups in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, the longstanding economic enticement in Xinjiang is growing because cross-border contacts are available and trade flows make the detection of illicit shipments unlikely given current facilities and attitudes at the border posts.

To date, there have only been a small number of arrests in relation to opiate trafficking across the Central Asian-Chinese borders but those that have occurred have included citizens from all three Central Asian countries. Currently, this trafficking appears to involve sporadic illicit shipments rather than the ongoing distribution that occurs on routes to Russia and Europe. In terms of logistics, these shipments have utilized a range of methods, including foot crossings over an unguarded section of the Tajik-Chinese border⁷¹ and more sophisticated concealment of drugs in an attempt through Kazakhstan's Bakhty checkpoint,⁷² but the quantities seized have only been a few kilograms each.

It is likely that more regular opiate flows into China will develop over the medium term. Given the location of the established trunk flows of heroin northwards through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, the use of Kyrgyzstan's Irkeshtam crossing and Kazakhstan's Khorgos and Dostuk crossings with China seem particularly likely. These have little capacity for detecting opiate trafficking and officials at the posts are generally unconcerned with the possibility.⁷³ The distances from Central Asian hubs to retail markets in Xinjiang are not great, particularly compared with the profit-distance ratio of trafficking through Kazakhstan and into Russia.

The demands for effective international cooperation that potential trafficking into China place on Central Asian law enforcement add to those already felt for addressing trafficking within Central Asia.⁷⁴ The professionalism and internationalization of opiate trafficking through these countries, including the pursuit of new markets in China, creates pressure for an official response at the level of the threat. The exchange

December 15 2005; Hayder Mili, "Xinjiang: An Emerging Narco-Islamist Corridor?" *Terrorism Monitor* 3, 8 (2005); see also Jacob Townsend, *A Single Security Space on the Central Asian-Chinese Borders: Assessing the Risk from Integration*, publication forthcoming (available from the author upon request).

⁷¹ Author's interviews with the Chief of Irkeshtam Border Guards, September 18 2005; and with the Deputy Director of the Kyrgyz DCA, September 19 2005.

⁷² Author's interview with the Chief of Khorgos Customs, October 21 2005.

⁷³ Author's interviews with: Chief of Irkeshtam Customs, September 18 2005; Chief of Irkeshtam Border Guards, September 18 2005; Chief of Khorgos Customs, October 21 2005; Deputy Chief of Dostuk Customs, October 22 2005; Head of Dostuk Customs Counter-Smuggling, October 22 2005.

⁷⁴ Iselin, *The Afghan-rim's Heroin Economy*.

of intelligence between countries and their facilitation of joint operations will become ever-more important in maximizing law enforcement effectiveness – these are threats present in each jurisdiction but animated by their international links.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) will likely become an important catalyst for a regional response to this demand. It has noted drug trafficking as a major threat to its members, although to date the primary security preoccupation has been terrorism. The most visible manifestation of this is the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), which is also concerned with opiate trafficking insofar as it overlaps with terrorism. According to the Deputy Director of RATS, the SCO is now considering the establishment of a similar institution for counter-narcotics, either to be combined with RATS or modelled on its structure.⁷⁵ Cooperation on terrorism is likely to foreshadow the SCO response to opiate trafficking and it is therefore significant that although RATS is yet to be enabled by national legislation in all members, it is already parasitizing bilateral intelligence exchange agreements for its own purposes. As the Deputy Director describes it, “agreements are still in finalization but in practical terms information collection still occurs.” Currently, RATS acts more as an observer of intergovernmental efforts than as a coordinator, although it intends to develop a capacity for sharing a full array of intelligence products, from direct operational information to broad assessments. As part of this there are plans to expand the current anti-terrorism database to include information on opiate trafficking and trafficking groups. However, this might duplicate to a significant extent the work of UNODC in attempting to establish a similar database, accessible to Central Asian governments and law enforcement agencies.⁷⁶ While UNODC has proceeded further, the RATS Deputy Director points out that the advantage of his putative database would be that it includes China.⁷⁷ With both sides aware of the inefficiencies of parallel efforts, effective regional cooperation will in part depend upon the implementation of an efficient solution.

Conclusions

The logistics of opiate trafficking through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are fairly simple and routes are fairly clear but for the most part difficult to police. Central Asian law enforcement capacity for detection is generally low in most geographical and logistical areas, from boating across the Panj River to concealing drugs in the car while driving

⁷⁵ Author's interview, December 5 2005.

⁷⁶ Under its *Establishment of the Central Asia Regional Information and Coordination Center* project.

⁷⁷ Author's interview, December 5 2005.

through central Kazakhstan. The use of more sophisticated techniques for concealing opiate loads compounds this problem. The efficient improvement of detection capacity depends upon the identification of priority regions and the inculcation of professionalism in law enforcement officers.

However, the professionalism of traffickers is simultaneously increasing. Groups are becoming more difficult to infiltrate and more cohesive. Professionalism at lower levels is also increasing, with repetitive contracting of couriers and a growing commitment by couriers to the drug trade as one of their major means of economic and social advancement. The separation of courier from trafficking group patron is almost absolute and the nodes of trafficking networks are protected by surrounding webs of corruption. Furthermore, Central Asian officials believe that specialization by smuggling product is common for criminal groups, such that many individuals have become focused on opiate trafficking, making their operations more effective and more difficult to combat. However, specialization by trafficking route varies with the location of the group and the options it has for distribution further along the chain.

Finally, the (re-)integration of Central Asia with Xinjiang complicates further the counter-narcotics programs of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. It highlights even more strongly the need for effective international cooperation in combating opiate trafficking. As the economies and societies of these countries are internationalized, it is the traffickers, driven by the profit incentive, who are adapting quickly. Central Asian law enforcement officers need to respond operationally in terms of international cooperation and mentally in terms of professionalism. Their ability to do so will have a significant impact on what remains a potent regional security threat.

Impact of Drug Trade and Organized Crime on State Functioning in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

*Erica Marat**

ABSTRACT

This article explores implications of drug trade and organized crime on state functioning in post-March 24 Kyrgyzstan and post-civil war Tajikistan. First, the connection between a weak state and rise of competing local authorities profiting from the shadow economy and drug trade is explained. Such authorities flourish in the peripheral and border areas, where state-power is weak. Over time small gangs involved in drugs trade, shuttle trade, and smuggling, have grown into more coherent groups with internal hierarchies and identifiable leaders. Second, illegally accumulated capital by individual actors has permitted them to establish their own micro-political, economic, and security regimes in the peripheries. Besides playing merely an economic role at local precincts, these actors have shifted to the political level, creating a parallel authority to the government. A number of such actors have been able to win overwhelming majority of votes for representation in the parliament, thus entering politics on the state level with some even reaching the ministerial level.

Keywords • drug trade • organized crime • state-building • Kyrgyzstan • Tajikistan

Political changes in spring 2005 in Kyrgyzstan showed how organized criminal groups can pose an open threat to the government, directly participate in state politics, decrease legitimacy of the ruling elite, and escape legal persecution. Likewise, roughly a decade ago, civil war in Tajikistan illustrated how the drug trade rapidly expanded as a result of state weakness and produced lasting effects on the government's functioning in the political, economic, and social realms. The connection between organized crime and the problem of drug trafficking in the Central Asian states has been attracting increasing attention from regional and international scholars as well as policy analysts, who saw an alarming trend in the ability of drug-barons to influence the functioning of the national governments. It has been argued that along with secular

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and religious political opposition to the Central Asian governments, illicit drug dealership creates a direct threat to states' sovereignty.¹

Amid weak state institutions, poverty in rural areas, and chaotic privatization processes in the post-Soviet space, drug dealership is one of the ways to quick accumulation of capital. Drug trade leads to fast enrichment among individual actors and groups of people, especially in areas where state authority is the weakest. Like in other post-Soviet transitioning states, the Central Asian governments have not been capable of reinforcing the Soviet institutes of social welfare, security and economy ever since their independence. The Soviet financial and ideological instruments that used to perpetuate public sphere were no longer in the states' disposal after the communist bloc's collapse.

The historical context of the Soviet past in the Central Asian region is thus important to consider. Decisions made on creation of the Central Asian states by the Soviet leadership in the early twentieth century have enduring consequences on developments today. Processes of Soviet border delimitation, establishment of national governments, building urban and rural infrastructures, as well as forceful shipment of ethnic groups across the states must be taken into account while analyzing the current problems of drug trade and organized crime. Geopolitical factors and geographical conditions play an important role in the rapid expansion of drug dealership in the Central Asian states.

This article examines the link between drug trade, organized crime, and state-building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Taking these two countries as examples, I aim to illustrate how post-Soviet governments are susceptible to challenges posed by competing local criminal authorities. The article focuses on financially empowered criminal elements, be that organized groups or individual actors, that seek political influence and, sometimes, legitimacy, to reinforce their own status. Political aspirations of such elements instigate corruption among state institutions, border troops, militia, and other law-enforcement agencies. In addition, such local criminal actors also expand ties on a transnational level, creating movements trespassing state borders and therefore require consolidated interstate approaches.

Defining the Link between Drug Trade, Organized Crime, and State Performance

There are various ways to assess the extent of the drug trade problem in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and its impact on political processes in these states. The situation can be observed from the ratio of crimes connected

¹ For example, Olga Olikier and Thomas S. Szayna eds., *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asian and the South Caucasus. Implications for the US Army* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003).

with illicit drugs against other types of crime, people detained for cultivating and transporting drugs, people susceptible to drug usage, number of addicts, and the amount of drugs extracted by law-enforcement structures. Since the quantitative data on organized crime and drug trade often contains a great deal of estimates and generalizations, it is important to pay attention to the analyses by Central Asian experts from the NGO sector, mass media, and academic circles. In the following sections I depict the implications of the criminal world on the political life in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan by incorporating analytical material on organized crime and drug trafficking published in local newspapers and expressed by local experts in each country.

It is possible to divide factors leading to the growth of the illicit drugs trade into those based on the analysis of historical context on the one hand, and explainable through geographical traits of the region on the other. Historical factors contributing to the amplification of the drug trafficking problem have roots in the administrative decisions made in the early twentieth century by the Soviet power. Territorial delimitation, planting of large agricultural sectors, and building heavy industries to construct a system of interdependence from the central power in Moscow and among constituencies of the Soviet Union have enduring effects for the independence period. Soviet planned economy, as well as projects on creating administrative units based on ethnic identities inevitably caused multiple cleavages within the region. The Central Asian population was divided along ethnic identities that largely corresponded to administrative borders and along socio-economic that matched geographical conditions across the region.

The economic gap between the small educated urban class and the majority agriculture-based rural population was sizeable in the Soviet planned economy. Although the urban population was dependent on the performance of the agricultural sector during the Soviet times, the picture inverted with independence. The large agricultural sector was severely hit with the cut down of government subsidies after the collapse of the communist bloc. The rural population, which comprises roughly 60 percent of the Central Asian population, was the primary victim of rapid impoverishment. In the Central Asian region, where agriculture, and not industry, was especially developed, farmers, shepherds, and peasants suffered from the dissolution of the socialist economy. The new governments were not able to re-establish transnational economic ties with the former Soviet states or provide the usual subsidies to *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* (state owned collective farms).

Against the background of disintegration of the Soviet agricultural sector, suspicions were raised with regards to the emergence of a class of neo-businessmen in rural areas and the sources of rapidly accumulated wealth. The governments' inability to provide sufficient welfare to an

impoverished rural population and geographical proximity to Afghanistan created possibilities for fast accumulation of private capital from illicit businesses, including drug trafficking. Growing transnational migration of people and capital, and the increased transportation options in the 1990s created favorable conditions for faster, larger, and more frequent smuggling of drugs. With the massive migration of the Central Asian population to Russia and Kazakhstan in search for better labor markets, Afghan drugs also became predominantly transported to and via Russia and Eastern Europe. Estimates point that about 75 percent of Afghan drugs are smuggled through the Central Asian states.² The production of opiates and marijuana is expanding in Issyk-Kul and Osh oblasts in Kyrgyzstan, southern Kazakhstan, and the mountainous Badakhshan region in Tajikistan. Since the early 1990s the problem of drug trafficking has only been getting worse.³ According to expert assessments, the price for heroin increases between sixty to eighty times after being exported from Tajikistan to European states.⁴ The supply of drugs from Afghanistan and Central Asian states has been growing over the years due to increased demand in Russia and Eastern Europe. The number of drug addicts grew within the Russian population in particular resulting in numerous economic and social problems. As smuggling of heroin and opium from the Central Asian states became relatively inexpensive, they substituted cheaper drugs in Russia.

Drug dealership networks that once had local origins in Afghanistan and parts of South Asia, found their clientele in Russia and East European states. The problem of drug trade has a transnational direction due to mobilization of drug dealers along ethnic identities. Alignment of drug dealers based on ethnic identities secures higher level of trust between them. Several mafia groups strengthened their positions in Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s. According to the analysis by Tamara Makarenko, these groups are identifiable through ethnic traits, namely, the Russian, Afghan, Turkish, Azeri, Chechen and Kyrgyz mafia.⁵ The ethnic Russian bond in this problem is especially strong. Most Russian dealers operating on the Russian territory control drug trade in the Central Asian states.

² "75% of Afghan Drugs Pass through Central Asia," *Interfax*, November 21 2003; "Transit Narkotikov Cherez Kirgiziu Sprovociroval Rost Chisla Narkomanov" [Increase of Drug-Addicts Encouraged Drug-Transit through Kyrgyzstan], *Kyrgyz-Press*, January 16 2004; Albert Bogdanov, "Kto Postavit Zaslou Narkotrafiku?" [*Who Will Prevent Drug-Trafficking?*], *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* 27 (2003).

³ Kairat Osmonaliev, *Developing Counter-Narcotics Policy in Central Asia* (Uppsala: Central Asia Caucasus Institutes and Silk Road Studies, 2005).

⁴ Aleksei Matveev, "Moskva i Dushanbe Pytautsya Ostanit' Afganskije Narkopotoki" [Moscow and Dushanbe Seek to Stop Narcotics Inflows], *Gazeta SNG*, August 28 2003.

⁵ Tamara Makarenko, "Kyrgyzstan and the Global Narcotics Trade," *Eurasia Insight* (December 8 1999).

The transnational dimension of the drug trade makes it especially difficult for the Central Asian law-enforcement agencies to deal with drug barons operating on foreign territories. The number of detained people from the local population, many of whom act as couriers, substantially exceeds the number of captured narco-barons who mastermind the trade and receive the largest profit from such activities. Against the backdrop of increased transnational flows of money, goods, and people, the post-Soviet Central Asian states have yet to develop corresponding mechanisms to oversee these processes, let alone generate institutional responses. None of the Central Asian states have been capable of advancing a reactive system of investigation and persecution of illegal businesses carried out by organized criminal networks, such as money laundering, trafficking in humans, drugs, and arms. In effect, transnational criminals' smuggling methods gained sophistication much faster compared to the Central Asian states' development of security institutions in the post-Soviet period.

Organized Crime and State Performance

Expansion of organized crime in the post-Soviet space attracted intensive attention of western scholars starting from the 1980s. Most of the analyses then focused on how the Soviet-controlled economy and accumulating budgetary deficits inevitably inspired the black market, the emergence of criminal networks and, eventually, the development of specific, mutually beneficial relationships between criminal elements and state institutes and government officials.⁶ The authors claimed that the exchange of illegal goods and services between criminals and public employees created a group of individuals interested in the continuity of such informal networking.⁷

According to Albini *et al.*, this trend further intensified with the collapse of the Soviet Union as Soviet state institutions lost their social and political control over the population.⁸ When the Soviet central power weakened, criminal networks were able to fill in the political gap at the regional level and increase own activity in localities where the state was not able to exercise its authority because of budgetary constraints or lack of necessary institutional basis. Criminal elements across the post-Soviet space were able to permeate state politics through local elections, recruitment in the government structures, including institutes of state security.

⁶ Mark Galeotti ed., *Russian and Post-Soviet Organized Crime* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002).

⁷ Joseph Albini et al., "Russian Organized Crime: Its History, Structure, and Function," in *Russian and Post-Soviet Organized Crime*, ed. Mark Galeotti (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002).

⁸ *Ibid.*

Involvement of criminal elements in politics further undermined states' ability to cope with organized crime. Not only did local criminal authorities substitute the state in providing social welfare in peripheries, they also served as security providers on a micro-level.⁹ Such security was maintained in parallel with the criminal elements' personal interests. Notably, a number of organized crime networks in northern Kyrgyzstan were able to operate while maintaining cooperative relations with the militia. To give one example, the Kyrgyz parliamentarian Tynychbek Akmatbayev was elected to head a parliamentary committee on organized crime, despite his criminal reputation.

Towards the late 1990s Russia was largely able to crack down on small and medium-sized organized crime networks - who were then distinguished as a separate "social class" of *vorovskoi mir* (thieves' world) - which had undermined the law-enforcement agencies. While such networks still largely exist in Russian cities and regions, their activities have since been forced underground away from the public eye. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the increase and strengthening of criminal networks became noticeable in the late 1990s, early 2000s. Small criminal gangs existed in the 1990s, but significant sophistication in conspiracy, networking, and the ability to operate locally without fearing law-enforcement agencies only developed a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Kyrgyzstan

Most observers of the March 24 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan last year would agree that while criminal networks had a marginal role in the events that precipitated the change of political regimes, they gained unprecedented autonomy as a result of weakened central power.¹⁰ Following the change of political regimes a number of figures with widely known criminal reputation displayed interest in participating in state politics by aggressively appropriating state economic sites, ignoring warnings from the law-enforcement structures, and collecting crowds in protest against the president or prime minister. Furthermore, the Kyrgyz public was shocked by the frequency of political assassinations and increased lawlessness.

Although the former Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev was able to reach a high level of domestic stability, criminal networks were nevertheless active in illegal businesses. Through various means, from

⁹ Frederico Varese, "Is Sicily the Future of Russia?: Private Protection and the Rise of the Russian Mafia," in *Russian and Post-Soviet Organized Crime*, ed. Mark Galeotti (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002).

¹⁰ Presentation by Edil Baisalov, leader of the NGO "Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society," George Washington University, November 7 2005.

imposing a high burden of taxation to direct threatening, legally registered business organizations were under a predominant control by Akayev's family members or his political allies. The government could manipulate legal businesses through the gears of law-enforcement agencies. In contrast, the shadow economy was a more challenging area for the government. Illicit trafficking in drugs, humans, and arms fell outside of state control.

At the same time, Akayev was able to maintain an image of a liberal leader by permitting greater freedom of speech and association compared to other Central Asian states. Akayev's means of regulating the activity of political opposition were not as blunt as, for instance, in Uzbekistan. Akayev dealt with his opponents in a more sophisticated manner by establishing indirect control over major economic resources in the country and barring opposition forces from access to large businesses.¹¹ As a result, political opposition to Akayev's government was economically inferior and therefore politically weaker.

Thus, with the Akayev government unable to oversee the shadow economy but capable enough to neutralize its political opposition, business elites, often with criminal records, were able to penetrate the political arena in the parliamentary elections in February-March 2005. Shortly after the March 24 change of political regimes, the leading "revolutionists", then acting president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, and, then acting prime minister, Felix Kulov, opposed the idea of dissolving the parliament comprised predominantly of pro-Akayev figures. Calling off the parliament formed during the Akayev leadership could entail rapid deterioration of domestic security due some of the lawmakers' connection with the criminal world. In fact, the Tulip Revolution was perceived by most experts to be a mere reshuffle of political elites and not a genuine transformation of the state power because parliament was not dissolved and a strong authority of criminal elements remained in office.

The Kyrgyz parliament elected in 2005 is often referred to as a "criminal parliament" with a majority consisting of well-established businessmen with criminal reputations. At least 18 out of 75 members of the parliament are representatives of the business sector, owners of large industrial, transportation, and private enterprises. About a dozen of the parliamentarians are former government workers from various echelons.¹² These parliamentarians are often suspected by the local experts and mass media in large scale corruption for their ties in the business sphere. To

¹¹ Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2002): 5-21.

¹² Vyacheslav Schekunskih, "Zolotye Gory Issyk-Kulya. V Tenevoi Ekonomike Kirgizii Soperrichali 'Sem'i' Bermet i Askara Akaeva" [Golden Hills of Issyk-Kul. Families of Bermet and Askar Akayev Competed in Kyrgyzstan's Shadow Economy], *Novoe Pokolenie* 14, 358 (2005).

name a few, Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev, Bayaman Erkinbayev, and Tynychbek Akmatbayev have a reputation of being criminals. All three lawmakers were assassinated within a six month period after the elections.

The course of actions leading to the three parliamentarians' involvement in the state politics is somewhat similar and illustrative of the general relationship between organized crime and state performance in Kyrgyzstan. Each of slain lawmakers gained a majority of votes at their respective electoral districts in the 2005 parliamentary elections. However, neither of them presented a viable economic or political program. Moreover, all three had only vocational training and no university education. But lack of a political program and weak educational background did not prevent them from scoring high electoral support. For instance, Akmatbayev prior to engaging in politics worked as a chef at one of the Issyk-Kul's tourist resorts. Erkinbayev headed a local community of sportsmen before he was elected in the parliament and appointed to chair the National Olympic Committee (NOC). He had served in the parliament since 1995. Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev had a record of scandalous business affairs. He was openly accused by the Tulip Revolution's major leader, Roza Otunbayeva, for hiring aggressive provocateurs against peaceful demonstrators on March 24 and organizing lootings in Bishkek after the former president Askar Akayev fled Kyrgyzstan. Each lawmaker had ties with local sportsmen communities whom they recruited for mass protests against Bakiyev's government. A number of Kyrgyz parliamentarians spoke against Surabaldiyev, Erkinbayev, and Akmatbayev accusing them of fueling domestic instability to pursue their own economic interests.¹³

There are numerous reports by international organizations, as well as commentaries by local and foreign analysts on Erkinbayev's enrichment from drug dealership.¹⁴ Quite often, Erkinbayev was identified as being the major figure in illicit businesses and in particular drug trafficking in southern Kyrgyzstan. Erkinbayev's family owns a regionally significant market "Khalmion" in Batken oblast and hotels in southern Kyrgyzstan. "Khalmion" is an economically and politically important market due to its close location to the densely populated Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. Along with a number of other Kyrgyz political figures, Erkinbayev denied any allegations of involvement in drug trafficking or any other illicit businesses.

¹³ "Neskol'ko deputatov pokinuli zasedanie parlamenta Kirgizii v znak protesta" [Several deputies left parliamentary session to express protest], *Fergana*, March 30 2005.

¹⁴ Svante Cornell and Niklas Swanström, "Kyrgyzstan's 'Revolution': Poppies or Tulips?" *Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst*, May 18 2005; "Drug links to Kyrgyz MP's death," *BBC News*, November 29 2005; "Kyrgyzstan: A Faltering State," *International Crisis Group*, December 16 2005.

A month after the revolution, Bayaman Erkinbayev declared his intentions to run for presidency, thus openly challenging Bakiyev. In return, Bakiyev indirectly accused Erkinbayev for his involvement in the drug trade and expressed concerns that a range of criminal elements, including drug dealers, are striving to acquire presidential power.¹⁵ Almost a year after the change of political regime, the ability of Bakiyev's government to dominate over the criminal networks proved to be weak, while he also lost public approval and his political legitimacy eroded. If this trend continues and Bakiyev is unable to gain authority over criminal elements operating within the state structures, the likelihood of a coup d'état will become dangerously high.

Tynychbek Akmatbayev's brother Rysbek Akmatbayev is the most known mafia chief in northern Kyrgyzstan. Having a criminal reputation among the local public, the appointment of Tynychbek to head the parliamentary committee on security, rule of law, and information policy was controversial. Tynychbek's prolonged conflict with leaders of other criminal groups based in Kyrgyzstan's Chui oblast, made him especially keen on occupying the position related to law-enforcement structures. Tynychbek died during his visit to a prison in Bishkek to calm riots among inmates and his assassination was allegedly organized by the imprisoned mafia-boss Aziz Batukayev. Surabaldiyev's relatives joined the open protests against the government and the Prime Minister organized by Rysbek following his brother's death.

All three parliamentarians gained popularity at their electoral districts by actively contributing to the local infrastructure, supporting Islamic clergy, mosques and religious schools, and financing trips to Mecca. During the Islamic holy month of Ramadan Erkinbayev's family organized a series of charity events. Just like Erkinbayev, another parliamentarian Muratbek Malabayev organized charity events at his electoral district prior to the parliamentary elections in February-March 2005. Malabayev provided computers to local schools, built roads, and financed local orphanages, handicapped, war veterans, students and sportsmen.¹⁶ As a result, Malabayev gained 97 percent of the vote in a 98 percent turnout at his Kara-Suu district. He has previously occupied the top position at the Ministry of Finance's department of custom control. Being arrested for corruption, forgery of documents, and appropriation of state property in 1998, Malabayev was released under amnesty shortly

¹⁵ Arkadii Gladilov, "Kurmanbek Bakiyev: Vybory budut svobodnymi," [Kurmanbek Bakiyev: Elections will be free] *Vechernii Bishkek*, April 29 2005; *Kabar News Agency*, April 29 2005.

¹⁶ "Chem jivet yuzhnyi gorod Kara-Suu" [How the southern city of Kara-Suu lives], *Obschestvennyi Reiting*, January 15 2004.

after the trial.¹⁷ Malabayev's case proves the incapacity of the Kyrgyz law-enforcement agencies to persecute large-scale corruption.

By winning votes through enhancing local communities and thus replacing the functions of the state in rural areas, wealthier candidates undermine chances of their competitors with weaker financial capabilities. In effect, the wealthier is the political candidate in a rural area, the greater are his or her chances to win representation in the parliament or local elections. There have been numerous cases where several members of one family are elected. Only in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek candidates with backgrounds in academia, journalism, or other fields not associated with the private sector are able to win parliamentary seats. The Bishkek residents are more politically active because of higher level of education and greater access to various mass media.

Popularity gained through solving the needs of the impoverished rural population by financial means as opposed to proposing a viable economic and political program has long-term disadvantages. Candidates who "sponsored" their electorates are likely to pursue their own business interests before representing their voters' needs. This is usually reflected in legislations dealing with privatization, energy import and export, and custom control regulations. The laws are designed to enrich the various members of the government or parliament who have a stake in the particular sector. The extent of influence imposed by political figures with criminal ties is reinforced by their ability to dominate over other state institutes, judicial power, and ministries.

Though the March 24 political changes brought hopes for greater democratization of politics, the domestic stability was significantly shaken by the state's weak responses against increased criminality in the country. From the post-March 24 developments it is possible to identify state institutions that were especially susceptible to influence of organized crime. The Ministry of Finance and the parliament were indeed the foremost examples when criminal elements could benefit from associating with the state structures. The NOC in Kyrgyzstan is another common stage for intrigues for figures with criminal backgrounds. Local sportsmen communities' connection with organized crime is peculiar to the post-Soviet states. As explained by Anara Tabyshalieva, a Kyrgyz expert, the sports sphere was highly developed during the Soviet period and represented a strong institution, with many champions on a world-wide scale. Controlling communities of sportsmen in the post-Soviet period became prestigious for two main reasons. First, international success of national sportsmen was a source of vast financial inflows. In

¹⁷ "Golumi rukami tamojnu ne voz'mesh" [You can't take customs barehanded], *Vechernii Bishkek*, October 19 1999.

Kyrgyzstan athletes from wrestling and combative sports were especially successful in international contests.

Second, the sports domain also represents a significant source of money laundering. Local athletes were used in racketeering and contract murders by business and political elites. Erkinbayev and Surabaldiyev mobilized sportsmen communities on March 24 to promote their own political interests, while Tynychbek Akmatbayev chaired the NOC previously headed by Aidar Akayev, the son of the former president Askar Akayev. The chairing of the NOC or various sports federations thus became a symbol of prestige and at the same time corruption. Central Asian sportsmen were involved in many criminal investigations connected with drugs, contract murders, racketeering and ransoms.¹⁸

Tajikistan

There are certain similarities between the processes of gradual, but steady spread of local criminal authorities in Kyrgyzstan's rural areas with the Tajik expansion of the shadow economy in the mid 1990s. Similar trends of criminalization in rural areas and expansion of the drug trade unfolded in Tajikistan, but with a greater intensity and speed, eventually leading to a civil war. The civil war made Tajikistan economically and politically one of the weakest states in the post-Soviet space. Civil war field commanders with strong military authority and access to weapons were the most common actors to gain local authority in rural areas due to their ability to broker drug deals between Afghan and Tajik producers, and interested parties beyond the Central Asian region.

There is a range of viewpoints about the origins of the civil war in Tajikistan in the early 1990s. Intensified rivalry over the state power between the country's northern and southern clans is the most common explanation of the war's origin.¹⁹ A stark divide between communist and religious ideologies is another interpretation. An explanation of the causes of the civil war that sees the Tajik state's lack of sufficient military capacity to establish control over the national territory and borders is less studied. Tajikistan's weak economic capacity in the early 1990s and a virtual absence of state-controlled armed forces after the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a swift criminalization and militarization of non-state actors. After receiving independence in 1991, the Tajik state had no military capacity to form border troops or other security units but weak militia. Unconstrained by government forces,

¹⁸ Anara Tabyshalieva, "Political Violence on the Rise in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst*, January 25 2006.

¹⁹ Shirin Akiner and Catherine Barnes, "The Tajik Civil War: Causes and Dynamics," *Accord* (March 2001).

Tajik non-state armed gangs strengthened and expanded by smuggling Afghan opium.

While Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were able to develop stronger mechanisms to administer national borders and territory in response to the drug trafficking, Tajikistan lacked even the basic instruments to enter its independence from the Soviet regime as a sovereign entity. The interrelation between drug dealership and other forms of illegal activities combined with the fragile security situation in Tajikistan is evident. With more than one million predominantly male population residing in Russia and Kazakhstan as labor migrants, the problem of drug trafficking encompasses all layers of the Tajik society – from the young to the old, males and females. Amid a devastated economy, high rates of unemployment and deficit of convertible currencies in the early 1990s, illicit drugs in Afghanistan and Tajikistan were bartered for clothing, footwear, and household items. Such spontaneous micro-economic activity among the impoverished population increased the influence local mafia chiefs who acted as coordinators of contraband and received commissions.²⁰

By the mid-1990s the impact of the drug trade and organized crime on state functioning in Tajikistan turned from alarming to critical. Involvement of criminal political and military figures in the state politics created competition among drug dealers over control of drug-routes, border areas, means of transportation and local population engaged in smuggling. During the Tajik civil war in 1992-1997, neighboring Central Asian states found their sovereignty vulnerable to Tajikistan's insufficient control of drug trafficking from Afghanistan. Conflicting regional gangs in Tajikistan and increasing turnovers from drug trafficking, in combination with the Tajik government's inability to control most of its mountainous territory made Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan especially cautious about security along their southern borders with Tajikistan. In 1998 the Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev identified three main security problems that Kyrgyzstan faced, all of them connected with the ongoing war in Tajikistan: the expansion of the drug business and trafficking; the increase in Tajik refugees; and the spillover of radical religious groups into the Kyrgyz territory.²¹

A strong and rather decentralized authority of the military structures in Tajikistan obstructs the economic development in the country. Large state expenditures are spent on maintaining the military at the expense of other state sectors such as education, health care, and agriculture. The inability of the state to provide professional training or civilian

²⁰ Aleksandr Zelichenko, *Istoriya afganskoi narkoekspansii 1990h* [The History of Afghan Narco Expansion in the 1990s], (Moscow: Samizdat, 2003).

²¹ Asad Sadulloyev, "Kuda Vedut 'Narkovozhdi?'" [Where Do Narcobarons Lead?], *Centrasia*, November 16 2003, <www.centrasia.org> (January 25 2006).

employment to former militants after the end of the civil war forced many abroad as labor migrants. Largely as a result of the dominance of military structures in management of national borders and loose regulations on import and export, Tajikistan has the highest prices for imported goods, although being the poorest state in the region. Since the early 1990s, the gap between the wealthy class of society and the population living in extreme poverty is by far the widest in the post-Soviet space.

Tajikistan's problem with narcotics has affected the country's relations with the neighboring states, especially Russia. Because of large flows of narcotics to Russia by Tajik labor migrants and individual dealers, the two states' immigration regulations and economic cooperation remain troublesome. Despite the fact that the growing industrial sector in the Siberian Far East combined with decreasing population urgently requires inflows of mid-level specialists that Tajikistan is able to provide, the drug problem associated with the Tajik migrants complicates this arrangement. Moscow suspended the adoption of appropriate legislature that would facilitate legal registration of Tajik citizens in the city. According to Tajik specialists, preventing Tajik labor migrants from attaining legal status in Russia, allows local law-enforcement agencies to follow more spontaneous rules of controlling foreign citizens.²²

For the Tajik labor migrants, the illicit transportation of drugs en route to Russia or Kazakhstan is often only an accompanying factor in their search for jobs in the neighboring states. Labor migrants seek longer term profits from more stable employment, but are forced into smuggling business by organized criminal networks.²³ In fact, the drug trade provides incentives for the illegal trafficking in people. Young men and women from impoverished areas are forced to smuggle and retail heroin and opiates into Russia and the Baltic states. They also are detained more often by militia and border guards.

The Tajik society and government are dependent upon remittances sent by labor migrants. Annually, migrants' remittances comprise roughly the size of the country's GDP, or \$6-8 billion. The remittances fill the gap of social welfare that the Tajik government is not able to provide its citizens. Virtually every household in the country relies on family members working abroad, predominantly in Russia. Checks imposed on the Tajik citizens by the Russian government, border guards,

²² Author's interview with Dilovar Munavvarov, representative of the Open Society Institute in Dushanbe, March 2004.

²³ Aleksandr Zelichenko, *Analiticheskii Obzor Narkosituatsii V Zone Deistviya Mejdunarodnogo Antinarkotikovogo Proekta Oon "Oshskii Uzel"* [Analytical Review of Narco-Situation inside the UN's International Anti-Drugs Project the "Osh Knot" Activity], (Moscow: Samizdat, 2003).

and local militia units in response to the illegal drug trade typically result in the imprisonment and extradition of migrants. In a number of cases known Tajik political, military, and business figures have also been detained by Russian and Kazakh security structures.

Russian border troops along the Tajik-Afghan frontier were accused of involvement in drug dealership in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The Russian military, experiencing internal financial and logistical hardships, was unable to regularly and sufficiently finance its personnel on the Tajik-Afghan border, forcing border guards into corruption. The involvement of Russian troops in the drug trade was suspected not only by the local scholars, but also by Russian analysts. As commented by Muzaffar Olimov, a Tajik political and economic analyst, the Russian side and the international community criticized the Tajik government for its ineffectiveness against narcotics smuggling, however there was little information available on the activities of the Russian troops.²⁴ The Russian military operated autonomously, without reporting to the Tajiks the number or frequency of international air flights with Russia by Russian military personnel located on the Tajik-Afghan border.²⁵

A similar strain of criticism was expressed by the Russian side towards the Tajik government. According to Russian analysts, Moscow carried out an enormous effort in halting the civil conflict in Tajikistan, establishing a legitimate government, and controlling the troubled Tajik-Afghan border. Moscow's presence in Tajikistan entailed vast financial spending and human losses over the years. In return, not only was the Tajik side unable to pay back Moscow's expenditures, but promptly sought to decrease Russia's involvement on its territory.²⁶ As a Tajik expert, Asad Sadulloyev, commented, criticism arose from the fact that the Tajik military representatives' interest to expel the Russian Federal Security Service and Federal Border Guard Service from protecting drug-routes was to increase their own ability to manage the Tajik-Afghan border.²⁷

Several intra-governmental showdowns between the Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov and influential political figures provoked speculations that money laundering from drug business was the main reason for the confrontation between the president, military and business elites. The case of Gaffor Mirzoyev, General-Lieutenant and former

²⁴ Author's interview with Muzaffar Olimov, director of "Sharq" research institute in Dushanbe, March 2004.

²⁵ Turko Dikayev, "'Absolutnyi Bred' Generala Manilova" [Generals Manilov's 'Absolute Rave'] Vladivostok Center of Organized Crime, May 27 2004, <www.tribune.uz> (January 26 2006).

²⁶ Viktoriya Panfilova, "Voennaya Baza - Za Golovu Salimova" [Military Base - for Salimov's Head], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 26 2004.

²⁷ *Ibid.*; Sadulloyev, "Kuda Vedut 'Narkovozhdi?'".

Commander of the President Guard, is illustrative of how organized crime in Tajikistan has a strong leverage over the government structures. Leading governmental troops during the civil war, Mirzoyev gained a reputation as a cruel field commander with strong connections in the criminal world in Tajikistan and Russia. Mirzoyev was known for staging contract murders of political and business figures in Tajikistan and Russia, illegal maintenance of weapons, drug trafficking, and control of prostitution.²⁸ Despite such a reputation, the government was unable to persecute Mirzoyev as at that time he served in the Tajik parliament and was part of a parliamentary committee on legal order, defense and security.

In the summer of 2004 after large stocks of heavy armament were uncovered in the Dushanbe suburbs, Mirzoyev was accused by Rakhmonov of attempting to organize a coup d'état. However, Rakhmonov was not able to strip Mirzoyev of a government position due to the latter's military authority. The accusation led to Mirzoyev's reappointment from the Commander of President Guard to become the head of the State Counter-narcotics Agency. Mirzoyev publicly stated that he accepted this position and would not succumb to the president's intrigues.²⁹ He was also able to choose a suitable government post, by first declining the president's offer to head the NOC. Mirzoyev's legal persecution was stalled for eighteen months until a new round of legal proceedings was set off in January 2005.

Coming from Kulyab, a southern Tajik city close to the border with Afghanistan, Mirzoyev was nicknamed a "Drug Czar" due to his alleged engagement in the drug business.³⁰ As with other Kyrgyz politicians with criminal backgrounds, Mirzoyev was involved in a parliamentary committee dealing with criminal and law enforcement issues and later sought to chair NOC in Tajikistan so as to control the country's sportsmen community. Influential in military circles and having connections with criminal organizations in Russia and Tajikistan, Mirzoyev's legal case was kept confidential as a significant number of Tajik government officials were associated with the investigation. Along with Mirzoyev, 15 people were arrested, however about 60 civil servants, including top governmental officials are reported to appear in his legal

²⁸ Parvina Khamidova, "V Dushanbe Otkrylsya Zakrytyi Sud Nad Generalom Mirzoyevym" [a Public Trial Began in Dushanbe on General Mirzoyev's Case], *Asia-Plus*, January 11 2006.

²⁹ "Tadjikistan: Gaffor Mirzoyev Naznachen Direktorom Agenstva Po Kontrolu Za Narkotikami" [Tajikistan: Gaffor Mirzoyev Appointed a Director of Counter-Narcotics Agency], *RIA Novosti*, January 30 2004.

³⁰ Bruce Pannier, "Tajikistan: What's the Political Message Behind Drug Czar's Arrest?" *RFE/RL*, August 10 2004.

case for involvement in illegal activities.³¹ If Mirzoyev's case is given more transparency, it risks causing a substantial political crisis among state institutes and question the legitimacy of the government.

The former Tajik Minister of Interior, Yakub Salimov, is another example of an aggressive confrontation between the Tajik president and military officials. Salimov, a native of Kulyab clan in southern Tajikistan, headed one of the squads of the Popular Front, the army formation recruited by the Tajik government. In 1993 he was appointed Minister of Interior and later head of the Customs Committee. Starting from 1997, Salimov went into alliance with the opposition parties and was persecuted by the Tajik government. When detained in 2003, Salimov was charged for organized crime, drug trade and homicide, and sentenced for fifteen years.

Similar to Mirzoyev and Salimov, a number of known political figures were scandalously caught by Kazakh, Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Russian security forces. A gang headed by the Tajik president's nephew, Nuritdin Rakhmonov, was caught in Moscow by the Russian security service for drug contraband in October 2003. Former Tajik Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Sadullodjon Negmatov, was detained by the Kazakh security service with 62 kilograms of heroin and \$54,000 in cash in his car in May 2000.³² The Head of the Counter-narcotics Agency of the Zarafshan region, Kholikh Zakirov, was arrested for transporting more than 30 kilograms of narcotics in 2004. Gangs headed by the Mayor of Dushanbe and Parliament Chair Ubaidulloyev Makhmadsaid; General-Mayor Saidsho Shamolov; former field commander Cholov Kurbonali; and deputy Commander of Border Troops Nuralisho Nazarov were intercepted by the Uzbek and Russian security services.³³ There are many other cases of former field commanders and opposition camps engaged in the drug trade.

Weak Regional Responses

The impact of the drug trade is more difficult to assess than other forms of illegal trade. In the latter case, Central Asian experts are able to make better estimates of the impact of such shadow economies on state functioning partly due to relatively easy ways of tracing illegal transportation of goods such as copper, nonferrous metals, automobiles, cigarettes and alcohol. The local non-governmental research institutes

³¹ Nurullo Muhtorov, "'Zasekrechennyi' Komandir Tadjikskoi Gvardii. Rossiiskii Advokat Sedomu Ne Pomozhet" ['Classified' Commander of the Tajik Guard. Russian Attorney Unable to Help 'Sedoi'], *Vremya Novostei*, November 5 2004.

³² Marat Mamadshoyev, "Tajik Drugs in Kazakh Capital: A Victory for the Special Services or for Diplomatic Intrigue?" *Eurasia Insight*, June 15 2000, <www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav061500.shtml> (February 1 2006).

³³ *Ibid.*, Sadulloyev, "Kuda Vedut 'Narkovozhdi?'".

can examine the share of the shadow economy in states' GDPs and the annual amount of natural resources illegally exported. There are also more possibilities to persecute illegal transactions of goods other than drugs *post factum*, when actors involved in crimes, destination or origin of goods are identifiable. However, assessment of the drug trade is a more challenging task as drug smuggling involves greater numbers of people with various backgrounds, from businessmen and political figures to farmers, labor migrants, and border guards. Since the drug trade creates sophisticated networks between different people across states, it requires a coordinated response by national and transnational security structures. Any allegations against specific political figures' previous or current engagement in illegal drug deals are often difficult to prove.

Thus far, regional cooperative measures to counter drug-trafficking systematically are lacking. The Central Asian Community Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Collective Security Treaty Organization – all define the fight against drug trade as vital to the regional security. However, each Central Asian state has developed its own strategy to cope with the problem. Differences are seen in the amount of funding the states allocate to anti-drug policies, systems for tracking drug addicts, and establishing cooperative links with other states or international organizations. Domestic state institutions influenced by the drug trade in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan undermine interstate cooperative initiatives. Corrupt national counter-narcotics agencies and law-enforcement structures decrease trust between the states. Due to the absence of financial means and mechanisms to implement regional counter-narcotics agreements, organizations such as the Interstate Drug Control Commission of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan lack efficiency in the long run.³⁴

On a domestic level, although the involvement of criminal elements in the political realm in Kyrgyzstan rapidly intensified after the Tulip Revolution, it is now scrutinized by local activists through the mass media and direct participation of NGO representatives in the development of state policy. The Kyrgyz public has greater access to information concerning the criminal and political worlds through a number of local newspapers, wide internet access, and newsletters produced by various political parties. There are many NGOs and activists whose opinions are regularly cited by both local and international media outlets. In such an environment it is nearly impossible for the government to suppress the voices of civil society or fully ignore its critique.

By contrast, in Tajikistan the government continues to impose hurdles for its opposition and mass media, thus preventing transparency

³⁴ *Ibid.*; Osmonaliev, *Developing Counter-Narcotics Policy in Central Asia*.

of the political process. Local NGOs warn about the continued existence of strong ties between the political sphere and organized crime in Tajikistan, but these voices seldom make it to the broader public. But besides a weak civil society, Tajikistan is indeed more dependent on developments in Afghanistan and is more reliant on external help compared to any other Central Asian state. Post-Soviet Tajikistan is simply unable and unprepared to build a state strong enough to resist spillovers of instability, militant groups, and drugs from Afghanistan.

Conclusions

Based on the existing empirical evidence, this article sought to build a link between the drug trade, organized crime, and implications on state functioning. This has been done in two ways. First, the connection between a weak state and the rise of competing local authorities profiting from the shadow economy and drug trade was explained. Such authorities flourish in the peripheral and border areas, where state influence is weak. Over time small gangs involved in drugs trade, shuttle trade, and smuggling, grew into more coherent groups with internal hierarchies and identifiable leaders.

Second, illegally accumulated capital by individual actors permitted them to establish their own micro-political, economic, and security regimes in the peripheries. Besides playing merely an economic role at local precincts, these actors shifted to the political level, creating a parallel authority to the government. A number of such actors were able to win an overwhelming majority of votes for representation in the parliament, thus entering politics on the state level with some even reaching ministerial level.

An open and unprecedented confrontation between known mafia bosses and the Kyrgyz government shows that criminal elements are not afraid of legal persecution. Three assassinated lawmakers and a number of other figures from the national sportsmen community increased public anxiety about domestic stability. In Tajikistan, Rakhmonov accused his former allies who were in control of military troops and involved in drug trafficking for plans of a coup d'état. The Tajik president sought to eliminate influential figures from the political scene through legal charges in organized crime and drug dealership.

In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan criminal elements engaged in drug dealership and other spheres of the shadow economy penetrate state structures, making efforts to combat illicit businesses impossible. However, the main difference between the impact of organized crime on the government's functioning in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan lays in the degree of development of the local civil society. While Kyrgyz civil society activists are perhaps the most successful in terms of impacting the

policy on a state level compared to the Central Asian neighbors and even to the rest of the post-Soviet space, years of civil war in Tajikistan considerably undermined the development and activity of local NGOs.

Narcotics and China: An Old Security Threat from New Sources

*Niklas Swanström**

ABSTRACT

Narcotic threats to China have changed in form and structure and most visibly geographically, from being primarily a problem from Southeast Asia (Golden Triangle), with imports from Laos and Burma (Myanmar), to a more multifaceted threat. The origin of the world's largest exporter of heroin is today Eurasia, more specifically, Afghanistan, while other products are domestic in origin. This will not only create a need for greater diversion of China's police, customs officials and military polices to meet the challenge, it will also create common interests between some of the major transit and consumer states in Eurasia, such as Iran, European Union (EU) and Russia, all of whom suffer from narcotics transit and sales. The traditional assumption of Southeast Asia as the only point of origin for narcotics trafficked into China is not longer true. This is a major concern as the Chinese law enforcement agencies still have too strong a focus on the border areas of Burma and leaves many regions open for smuggling.

Keywords • China • narcotics • drug routes • Afghanistan • Central Asia • Southeast Asia

In today's environment, internal conflicts and external military threats are no longer the only national security challenges facing nation-states. "Soft" security threats have come to dominate current affairs as well. However, this transformation has not been acknowledged by policy institutions in all states to an appropriate degree.¹ The changes have not only transformed threats from those in the military sector to threats of economic, environmental and societal security; security threats of a transnational nature that involves more than one single state, such as environmental or economic security have also emerged. To name a few, the list of soft security threats range from environmental, societal, economic, among which, the threat from the narcotics trade is

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¹ Steve Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11," *International Studies Quarterly* 48, 3 (2004): 504-507.

increasingly proving itself to be an extremely serious one. Transnational drug trafficking threatens to throw many states into deep trouble. In extreme cases the drug trade has the potential to exercise full control over state functions, through the creation of so called narco-states. The complexity of the narcotics trade involves not only the more serious aspects of trans-regional security threats posed by transit routes and criminal gangs operating over national borders, it also presents the worst scenarios for national threats namely, social and economic degradation and possible political co-option. The scale of the threat that the narcotics industry poses is devastating in many states, especially in Central Asia, and unless the narcotics trade is eradicated or minimized, there is little potential for sustainable socio-economic development that would benefit the general population.

China's Drug Problem

The narcotics problem in China is age-old and peaked during the Opium Wars, when China fought against the British over the sale of opium to its population, or at least for the control of the financial revenues of the sales. In 1931, China's narcotics dependency (primarily opium) peaked with approximately 20 percent of the Chinese population involved in opiate consumption. It is estimated that during the time, 90 percent (72 million) of China's addicts used opium and the rest (10 million) used morphine or heroin.² Opium was, at the time, primarily provided by the British although the trade eventually diversified to incorporate Japanese, American, and Southeast Asian traders by the end of the Second World War. This diversification of drug traders was accompanied by a greater diversity of narcotic substances. When the Communist regime came to power under Mao Zedong, the usage of narcotics was almost abolished, despite active involvement in the trade during the civil war. The simultaneous prescription of some heavy-handed measures in the form of punishments, executions and effective closure of borders from the 1950's onward resulted in China's status as a "clean" patient according to international standards by the 1970s. Abuse of narcotic substances was seen as a bourgeois, western problem, an attitude, which, during the period of Mao, prevented China from acting quickly and effectively in drug prevention.

The situation in regards to the narcotics problem has changed dramatically over the last two decades. Change began in the 1980's, with China's policy of Reform and Opening, and has continued over the last few years as the narcotics trade has once more emerged as one of the

² Kathryn Meyer and Terry Parssinen, *Webs of Smoke* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 3.

greatest threats to China's internal stability and external relations.³ Abuse of narcotics has spread to all regions of China and affects all different social groups. The China of today is facing its worst drug problem since 1931, and the number of addicts registered at the public security organs have increased dramatically to more than a million registered users in 2003 from 560 000 in 1995.⁴ If this number can be trusted, it is not a high percentage of the Chinese population. However, the current figure is most likely to be a result of under-estimation. There are unofficial estimates that indicate as many as 10-12 million users in China, even so, these are still considered relatively moderate figures and the true figures could be significantly higher.⁵ There is the risk of a tremendous increase in substance abuse with the introduction of new forms of drugs in China and the decreasing prices of methamphetamine and other newly introduced substances. The situation in China is therefore increasingly troubling. An increase in drug abuse within China and the potential involvement of other states in the Chinese narcotics trade indicate internal and external tensions that exist based on social, economic and trans-national factors.

The narcotics threats have changed in form and structure and most visibly geographically, from being primarily a problem from Southeast Asia (Golden Triangle), with imports from Laos and Burma (Myanmar), to a more multifaceted threat. The origin of the world's largest exporter of heroin is today Eurasia, more specifically Afghanistan, while other products are domestic in origin. This will not only create a need for greater diversion of China's police, customs officials and military polices to meet the challenge, it will also create common interests between some of the major transit and consumer states in Eurasia, such as Iran, European Union (EU) and Russia, all of whom suffer from narcotics transit and sales. The traditional assumption of Southeast Asia as the only point of origin for narcotics trafficked into China is not longer true. This is a major concern as the Chinese law enforcement agencies still have a too strong focus on the border areas of Burma and leaves many regions open for smuggling.

Afghanistan is the most important actor of the narcotics trade today, producing 86 percent of the world's heroin and cultivating 67 percent of the world's opium. In 2004, Afghanistan produced 4850 metric tons of

³ Anh-Thu Phan, "China's drug nightmare," *South China Morning Post*, October 18 2003.

⁴ White Papers of the Chinese Government [中国政府白皮书], *Narcotics Control in China*, 2003 [中国的禁毒], 146; Ting Chang [延长], *China Always Says "No" to Narcotics* [中国对毒品永远说"不"] (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2004), 20.

⁵ Interviews with drug enforcement personnel, security forces and police in China 2004-2005.

opium, dwarfing Burma which only produced 370 metric tons of opium.⁶ The transit trade to Northeast Asia, Australia and the U.S. that Chinese criminal organizations have traditionally operated can no longer be serviced by imports from Burma. As a result of decreased production, prices in Southeast Asia have increased to \$218-234 per kilo compared to \$92 per kilo in Afghanistan.⁷ Burmese prices have increased by 80 percent since 2003, while Afghan prices have dropped by 69 percent due to excess in opium production. The financial benefits and the decreasing availability of opium and heroin supply in Southeast Asia proved to be an incentive for shifting imports to Afghanistan,

Central Asia is increasingly used as a transit route for heroin and opium at the expense of Southeast Asia into China.⁸ The Chinese government does not appear to be aware of the changes in trafficking patterns. Many in the Chinese drug enforcement agencies continue to regard the Golden Triangle as the primary production site, oblivious to the growing problem from Afghanistan and Central Asia. It is evident that China's main problem continues to come from Southeast Asia, but this is rapidly changing. The failure to recognize such new trends will inevitably create new problems in the fight against narcotics trafficking in China.

The Chinese government has repeatedly indicated that it views the international narcotics trade as one of its most pressing trans-national threats. However, many other questions seem to be more pressing for the Chinese government, especially at the local level, such as corruption, economic development and social stability. While China has actively sought to address the narcotic problem, it remains to be seen whether this effort would be successful in decreasing the trafficking and consumption of narcotics in the country. This article will primarily deal with the changed structure of the narcotics threat in China and the origin of the scourge. It will point out the changed pattern of transit, production, consumption, effects, and what has and could be done to deal with the problem.

Effects on China

The effects of the narcotics threat on China have been direct and in many cases devastating, even though the true extent of damage largely remains unknown. Information about the impact of the drug trade is sketchy and the real impact on the economy has to a large degree been "guestimates"

⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *2005 World Drug Report* (New York: UNODC, 2005), 10, 191.

⁷ *2005 World Drug Report*, 10.

⁸ Niklas Swanström, "Central Asia: A Transit Region for Drugs," *Asia Times*, August 29 2003.

and the full extent is unknown. Despite these shortcomings, the impact of the narco business is very much visible and can in a few cases be expressed in numbers.

When estimating the impact, it is crucial to know that heroin is used by 71.5 percent of China's one million registered users.⁹ This effectively defines heroin as the drug of preference in China, but this figure is in all likelihood misleading. Doubtless, heroin is the most popular narcotic in China; however, the increased use of ecstasy and amphetamines in large cities and coastal areas has not been registered in the statistics. The statistics only reflect those caught by the police. Heroin users' health often deteriorate faster and they are probably more often recognised by the authorities while the usage of "party" drugs, like ecstasy, kefamine and ice, can be hidden longer.¹⁰ "Party" drugs are also more prominent in wealthy circles and less connected to heavy criminality. According to Chinese officials, kefamine is as popular as heroin was 20 years ago, especially among the younger generation and there is a risk that kefamine will be as popular as heroin is without decreasing the number of heroin users.¹¹

Few arguments contradict the belief that the million registered users represented in China's statistics is a gross underestimation. Indeed, many in China estimate the true figure to be far higher with some even arguing it to be 12 times higher. Even this figure is probably a severe underestimate, especially since Chinese officials state that the use of party drugs and marijuana is severely underestimated. According to official Chinese statistics in 2005, 70 percent of registered narcotics users are under the age of 35.¹² Given that the use of party drugs and marijuana is prevalent among younger people, it is likely that these are the drugs least represented in Chinese statistics. Thus, it may be assumed that these statistics are misleading and that the users are in reality younger and more than estimated. The age factor points to the rapid growth in the number of users over the last few years, and indicate a future problem of narcotics abuse in tomorrow's working population. Social problems related to narcotics abuse are on the rise in China, especially in traditional regions of consumption in southern China, especially Yunnan, and in the western province of Xinjiang. Social exclusion of narcotics abusers is common and many suffer from the social stigma of

⁹ *Narcotics Control in China*, 2003, 146.

¹⁰ In interviews with medical staff and police in China 2004-2005 it was recognized that the statistics gives a slightly skewed picture even if heroin is by far the most dangerous drug.

¹¹ Martin Wong, "Kefamine 'is new generations heroin' Addiction levels are rising, warns narcotics chief," *South China Morning Post*, July 23 2004.

¹² "Chinese mass media mobilized for "people's war" on drugs," *Xinhua News Agency*, May 18 2005.

being branded as an addict. Users are often forced to sustain their habit through criminal activity. Chinese statistics claim that approximately 80 percent of funds that sustain drug use are earned through illegal activities such as prostitution, burglary, extortion, smuggling etc. Once an individual enters the criminal element, it is difficult to return to legal forms of employment.¹³ The stigmatization of addicts and the high degree of criminalization of the users have effectively created a criminal sub-culture in China that is increasingly difficult to deal with.

The negative economic consequences of narco trafficking, production and consumption are great for China. The Chinese economy is not dominated by narco trafficking, but the illegal economy competes with the legal economy. In certain regions of Yunnan and Xinjiang the narco business is one of, if not the most, important component of the local economy. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that money made through transnational crime world-wide constitutes between \$500 billion and \$1.5 trillion – equivalent to 1.5-4.5 percent of the world's gross world product – and this illegal money is washed through the international banking system via money laundering schemes.¹⁴ It cannot be assumed that the Chinese economy has less problems than the international average, as it has been and continues to be a transit route for Southeast Asian opium and recently for Afghanistan heroin. In fact, the economic consequences are probably more devastating. Currently, 9 percent of the police force in China is preoccupied with the narco problem and this is a tremendous strain of resources for the Chinese government. The U.S. State Department claims that the narco business in China was worth at least 24 billion in 2005.¹⁵ Money laundering and criminalization of legal assets through investment of illegal assets in the legal economy is an increasing problem for China. The Governor of People's Bank of China, Mr Zhou Xiaochuan, has pointed out the need for better anti-money laundering measures in China, especially in regard

¹³ Josephine Ma, "Drug abuse threatens public orders, says narcotics bureau 80 pc of the heroin produced in the Golden Triangle is destined for addicts on the mainland," *South China Morning Post*, March 2 2004.

¹⁴ Tony Kellett, "Transnational Organized Crime: The Next Big Threat?" DND Policy Group, December 23 2002, <www.dnd.ca/admpol/eng/doc/strat_2001/sa01_26_e.htm> (February 1 2006); UNODC, *Global Program Against Money Laundering*, <www.unodc.org/unodc/en/money_laundering.html> (October 20 2005). The assessments are incomplete and if the refinements have improved or if the smugglers are more effective than I have estimated, which is highly likely, the value of the narcotics trade will sky rocket (interviews in China, Central Asia and Iran during 2004-2005). However, it has been argued that the estimates are political tools created to stir up the public and more seriously that the methodology to make the calculations is seriously flawed or even absent which makes any calculation of the value of the narcotics trade useless.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report -2005*.

to the criminal networks that deal with narcotics.¹⁶ Macau, Fujian and Dalian are examples of cities that have been identified to have severe problems with criminal activity.¹⁷ Criminal activities such as money laundering, investment of narcotics money in legal assets, prostitution have increased rapidly in the footsteps of the establishment of the criminal organizations engaged in narcotics trade.

The low level of medical assistance to users and possibilities of rehabilitation are problematic as well and so is the growing cost of rehabilitation. There are some very successful cases of rehabilitation of the users, but the majority have neither access to these programs, nor would they like to admit their drug use by becoming participants. It is also estimated that 90 percent of people who underwent rehabilitation relapse.¹⁸ It would be financially prohibitive for China, especially in the poorer regions that have the largest narco problems to engage in large programs as it would exhaust local economies. Countering the narcotics problem requires large educational programs in schools, businesses, public places and broader rehabilitation programs. This is in no way a problem that is confined to China, the United States and Europe also suffer from a similar lack of resources. In the Chinese case however, this may further eat into limited resources that are needed in other social drug preventing programs such as education about drug abuse. The increasing number of un-productive individuals in China's population create problems as the narcotics abuse is found predominantly among the younger generation. However, it should be noted that the problem is far from the tragedy that Russia presently is experiencing. The situation in China is still manageable for the authorities. There are very few medical and social safety nets available and China has yet to develop a social security system that could accommodate the coming increase of abusers.

HIV/AIDS has emerged as one of the primary problems related to the narco-business in China. The Chinese government officially claims that in 2005, 840 000 people were infected by HIV and many through intravenous drug use and some 80 000 have developed AIDS. This is an improvement in transparency over the figures from early 2003 that limited the number to 40 000; still the true figures are likely to be much higher. There are estimates that the real number would rise to between 10-15 million by 2010 unless the Chinese government adopts stronger

¹⁶ "Anti-Money Laundering in China: The Status Quo and Prospects," Speech of Mr. Zhou Xiaochuan, Governor of the People's Bank of China at the first meeting of the Ministerial Joint Conference on AML, August 27 2004, Beijing, China.

¹⁷ *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report -2005*. This is confirmed by interviews with senior officials in China 2004-2005.

¹⁸ Shi Jintao, "Drug Crackdown Targets Guangdong: Campaign will Focus on Seven Main Trafficking Routes and 10 Counties Notorious for Narcotics Abuse," *South China Morning Post*, July 30 2004.

prevention measures.¹⁹ One of the reasons for the rapid growth is the close association between prostitution, narcotics abuse and the “floating” population (流动人口).²⁰ The Chinese government has estimated that 80 percent of female addicts are engaged in prostitution, and they spread the virus outside of the ordinary circles of narcotics abusers.²¹ Another problem is that needle-sharing is very common in the border areas of Burma and Central Asia. The speed of the epidemic of HIV/AIDS in different groups is hard to determine, but the predicted explosion of HIV/AIDS is directly associated with narcotics, the very young user population, sexual transmission and the spread to non-intravenous groups.

The Chinese government has taken a strong stand against the sale and production of narcotics, especially in traditionally strong trafficking areas in the south and southwest of China.²² According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s 2004 World Drug Report this stand has resulted in China’s status as the fourth largest state seizer of heroin (9,291 kg), seventh largest of opium (1,219 kg), seventh largest of ecstasy (300 kg) and second largest of amphetamines (3,190 kg).²³ Between May and November 2004, the Chinese authorities claimed that they had arrested 34 719 suspects and 2186 criminal gangs involved in the narcotics trade. This led to the seizure of 6.66 tons of heroin, 1.14 tons of ice and methamphetamine, 1.42 tons of marijuana, 62 tons of precursors and 159.46 million yuan.²⁴ The bulk of heroin seizures originates in Burma, while ecstasy and amphetamines are to a large extent domestically produced. Excluding marijuana, there are relatively few seizures in northeast and western China, which could indicate a lower level of narcotics abuse in these regions. However, lower prices and an increasing number of users clearly indicate new inroads by smugglers to these areas. The border area with Burma is much more secured today and the Chinese initiatives against the trade in this area have been effective. To this success, several strong local initiatives have been added; some

¹⁹ Ed Lanfranco, “U.S. and China cooperating on HIV/AIDS,” *United Press International*, June 9 2005; Andrew Thompson, “HIV/AIDS Epidemic in China Spreads into the General Population,” *Population Reference Bureau* (April 2003); Andrew Thompson, “International Security Challenges Posed by HIV/AIDS: Implications for China,” *China: An International Journal* 2, 2 (2004).

²⁰ The floating population consist of the between 120-130 million unemployed population that travels through China in search of work. Drew Thompson, “HIV/AIDS Epidemic in China Spreads Into the General Population.”

²¹ Ma, “Drug Abuse Threatens Public Orders.”

²² Chang, *China Always Says “No” to Narcotics; Narcotics Control in China*, 2003.

²³ United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, *2004 World Drug Report* (New York: United Nations, 2004), 76, 77, 167, 173.

²⁴ “Chinese Police Seizes 11.1 Tons of Drugs in Campaign of 2004,” *Xinhua News Agency*, January 24 2005; “Burma Sends Back Captured Drug Boss,” *China Daily*, January 25 2005.

regions have almost become drug free due to intense local initiatives.²⁵ The seizures and initiatives are, however, localized around southern China and the traditional routes. Chinese authorities have been less successful in responding to potential domestic, Central Asian and Northeast Asian sources of narcotics.

New and Old Transit Routes

This change in production patterns has had a tremendous impact on both consumer and transit states in the region. It is well known that criminal networks focus on transit routes where the states are in direct complicity with the criminals, destabilized by internal conflicts or corrupt.²⁶ In cases where states, or regions, address the threats from the narcotics industry, there is a rapid increase of transaction costs and a decrease of profit for criminal organizations. In the case of China, it has sealed its formerly porous border against Burma which has led to an increase in costs for traffickers. The profitability of the criminal networks has decreased significantly in the border areas between China and Burma leading to a rapid increase of heroin prices in the area. Thus, shifts in production are a blessing for Chinese criminal networks, as well as for Russian and European networks. The Chinese networks have now opened up trade on several other fronts, and increased or initiated domestic production. China's western border does not have the same degree of protection as its southern border as it is not seen as a threatening problem and is, therefore, easier to penetrate. The diversification of the transit routes for narcotics will be problematic for the Chinese drug enforcement authorities as they will have to address more than one possible region of penetration and attend to a geographically larger area.

Declining Importance of the South

It is reported that the importance of heroin production in the Golden Triangle is declining rapidly and that the closure of Chinese borders with Burma has made continued narcotics trade commercially unviable.²⁷ As a result, Burma and Laos heroin production declined by 23 and 43 percent respectively in 2005 compared to 2004.²⁸ Nevertheless, Burma and Laos are still the two single most important sources of heroin for China, but the networks that have traditionally controlled trade in this region have

²⁵ "Targeting Pawns Proves Success in Anti-Drug Fight," *China Daily*, January 11 2005.

²⁶ Niklas Swanström, "Multilateralism and Narcotics control in Central Asia," *CEF Quarterly* (February 2005); Niklas Swanström, "Organized Crime in Central Asia: its Impact on Europe," *Jane's Homeland Security and Resilience Monitor* 3, 3 (April 2004).

²⁷ Prasong Charasdamrong and Surath Jinakul, "Help from the neighbors," *Bangkok Post*, July 13 2003.

²⁸ *2004 World Drug Report*, 10.

expanded their operations to other lucrative locations. However, their operational bases are still in Yunnan and other provinces close to Southeast Asian production sites. Chinese authorities claim that up to 95 percent of the heroin consumed in China comes from the Golden Triangle, a figure that is hard to believe given the sharp decline of opium and heroin production in Burma and Laos and the rapid increase of users in China.²⁹ If domestic consumption and the Chinese criminal organizations external business increases, then heroin and opium supply from other regions would have to draw on to cater to the growing demand.

In 2003, it was estimated that 80 percent of the heroin from the Golden Triangle (70-80 tons) entered China, for consumption or transit.³⁰ This official figure is too low to account for both transit and consumption in China and, as noted above, the production in the Golden Triangle has further declined since 2003. However, China is the most important transit route for heroin and opium from Southeast Asia since Thailand has effectively dealt with this problem and the narcotics users have shifted to other forms of narcotic substances due to the relative lack of heroin on the market.

According to Chinese authorities, the transit trade traditionally uses Guangdong, via Yunnan as the main channel for Burmese heroin.³¹ Although transit channels through, for example, Fujian have also been crucial to traders. The main focus of the Chinese police has as a consequence been limited to these areas.³² Heroin exported to the U.S. and Japan have taken this route since the early 1980's and it is assumed that these routes are still the most important. Consequently, law enforcement goals include attempts to curb trafficking in these traditional areas resulting in lesser resources allocated to combat the problem in other regions of China and against internal production. With decreased heroin production, the importance of Burma as the primary provider of heroin has been questioned, but this does not negate the significance of the Golden Triangle in the short run. The loss of heroin in Burma is made up by increased methamphetamine production in Burma, production that is primarily consumed and transited through China and Thailand.³³ This new merchandise could sustain the significance of Burma as one of the main providers of narcotics to Chinese criminal organizations in China.

Evidence of the traditional importance of Burma as the main provider of heroin to China is visible through an examination of the HIV/AIDS

²⁹ "Burma Sends Back Captured Drug Boss," *China Daily*, January 25 2005.

³⁰ Ma, "Drug Abuse Threatens Public Orders."

³¹ "China Seizes 12 tons of Drugs in Past Five Years," *Xinhua News Agency*, August 3 2004.

³² "Crackdown Targets Drug Users, Dealers," *China Daily*, August 24 2004.

³³ "Mountains of Drugs," *Bangkok Times*, December 21 2003.

situation. In 1998, nearly 80 percent of registered HIV cases in China were found along the Burmese border.³⁴ HIV was, for a long time, closely linked to the heroin trade originating from Burma. This has changed dramatically after the decline of Burmese heroin production. The spread of HIV has taken a much more aggressive trend across China, particularly in areas that have replaced the Burmese narcotics networks, such as the border region with Afghanistan, Central Asia and North Korea. However, it is evident that the source of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is in southern China with its transit routes for heroin. This even if the complexity of the HIV situation has increased and demands a more multifaceted and costly solution that includes stronger measures of education, medical care, but also of more elaborative traditional measures against the traffickers and producers.

Looming Threats in the West?

According to Chinese sources and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), some 20 percent of the heroin in China could come from Southwest Asia (Afghanistan).³⁵ This number does not correlate with the rapid decrease in Southeast Asian production and the rise of heroin abuse in China. Zhou Yongkang has pointed out the increasing significance of Afghanistan as a future provider of heroin to China and the need to increase attention on the bordering regions to Central Asia, in addition to the Southeast Asia front.³⁶ Based on the declining production in the Golden Triangle and the increased usage in China, Afghanistan became another viable source for heroin imports. Continued instability and low socio-economic development in Afghanistan guarantees continued trade of heroin from Afghanistan which are both cheap and of steady supply. If the international community does not address the problem in Afghanistan and the country continues to remain poor, Afghanistan will remain in the tight grip of the narcotics industry.

³⁴ Soe Myint, "Health-Asia: Burma HIV Epidemic Spreads To India, China," *Inter Press Service*, November 10 1998. The Chinese government estimated 68 percent of the HIV/AIDS victims are intravenous users, 10 percent is attributed to the sex industry, 10 percent to the usage of infected blood and the remainder is unclear. See Drew Thompson, "HIV/AIDS Epidemic in China Spreads into the General Population." Other assessment has been made that claims that "approximately 45 percent of the HIV/AIDS cases in China are a result of shared needles by drug users. Another 30 percent resulted from sexual encounters, with tainted blood products contributing the remaining 25 percent" Ed Lanfranco, "U.S. and China cooperating on HIV/AIDS."

³⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, *Drug Intelligence Brief: China*, 2005.

³⁶ Zhou Yongkang, Guangdong Anti-Narcotics Network, *2002 Chinese Drug Suppression Report*, 2003.

Central Asia's growing role as a new import channel is made easy by the internal instability, corruption and, to a certain degree, the creation of a narco economy in parts of neighboring Central Asia. The "Osh knot" in Kyrgyzstan has become an increasingly important transit link utilized by Chinese criminal networks.³⁷ Moreover, Central Asia has increasingly become an important source of heroin for the Chinese market. Due to the inaccessibility of the Sino-Afghan border, most of the narcotics are transported through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and, to a lesser extent, Kazakhstan.³⁸ The border areas between the Central Asian states and China are very porous and difficult to control due to their length and the scattered populations. Moreover, direct government involvement in some Central Asian states has decreased transaction costs and risks to minimum for the smugglers.

The Chinese authorities have partly realized the importance of Central Asia and attempts to increase anti-narcotics cooperation have been initiated, even if the extent is far from satisfactory.³⁹ China has, however, failed to acknowledge changed patterns of heroin production and the increasingly monopolistic position that Afghanistan has developed into. Chinese officials continue to emphasize the role of the Golden Triangle as the world's largest heroin producer, even though its role in exporting heroin to China is expected to decline further in the coming few years. Meanwhile, Afghanistan with its transit routes via Central Asia is making the country into a significant supplier of heroin to the world.

In the case of China, a new route for heroin from Afghanistan has opened via Xinjiang. To effectively combat the growing problem of the Central Asian transit route, the Chinese authorities have to engage the regional authorities. However, since many governmental figures in Central Asia are directly involved in the narcotics trade, alternative actions might be necessary to effectively combat the narcotics trade.

Cooperation with the Central Asian states over the narcotics problem is still rudimentary in comparison to the successful anti-narcotics cooperation that China has initiated with the Southeast Asian authorities. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has initiated several programs addressing this issue, but both the practical effect of

³⁷ It should be noted that the Central Asian trade in narcotics is controlled by Central Asian networks and the Chinese are either in cooperation with the Central Asian organization or simply a buyer. There is little evidence that Central Asian networks operate within China. It seems as traditional organization in Southern China has moved parts of their operation to the west or that criminal organization in Xinjiang has taken up the trade.

³⁸ "Court Opens for Heroin Suspect," *China Daily*, April 2 2005.

³⁹ "China to Sign Anti-Drugs Cooperation Agreement with Other SCO Members," *Xinhua News Agency*, March 1 2004.

programs and bilateral attempts at cooperation remains very limited.⁴⁰ As China's influence over the region increases, it would be able to better exert its influence over the Central Asian actors, as it did previously in Burma.

Drug Trade in Northeast China

North Korea is another front in the combat against narcotics. The North Korean factor is extremely problematic in China. Many Chinese officials have either denied any North Korean involvement in the narcotics trade or claimed that this is a political problem.⁴¹ The reality is that much of the narcotics in Northeast Asia (including Russia) today originate from North Korea and states such as Australia have severe problems with narcotics originating from North Korea.⁴² It is normally assumed that the North Korean government is involved in the drug trade and there have been persistent accusations for a long time that the North Korean government is directly involved in narcotics production. However, there is no direct evidence of the North Korean government's involvement since the 1970s when several North Korean embassies were caught selling narcotics in order to sustain their diplomatic activity.⁴³

The United Nations World Drug Report does not refer to North Korea as a major producer or transit country. This is due to the lack of information about the narcotics situation in North Korea. However, there have been unofficial references to North Korea as an emerging problem in fight against narcotics. The increasing seizures of large amounts heroin smuggled by North Koreans to Australia, Japan and other important consumer states do indicate a disturbing development of major export of heroin through North Korean criminal networks. In contrast to the earlier, relatively minor exports size, this indicates a more aggressive trend and an increasingly important role of North Korean heroin on the world market.

Part of the evidence of North Korean involvement can be seen in the large quantities of heroin available in border areas close to North Korea,

⁴⁰ Niklas Swanström, "China and Central Asia: A New Great Game or Traditional Vassal Relations," *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, 45 (2005): 569-584; Swanström, "Multilateralism and Narcotics Control in Central Asia."

⁴¹ Interviews with Chinese officials 2004-2005.

⁴² "Dozens of North Korean Diplomats Caught Smuggling Drugs," *Radio Free Asia*, December 15 2004; Larry Wortzel, "North Korea's Connection to International Trade in Drugs, Counterfeiting, and Arms," *The Heritage Foundation*, May 20 2003.

⁴³ David Asher, "The North Korean Criminal State, its Ties to Organized Crime, and the Possibility of WMD Proliferation," *Policy Forum Online*, November 15 2005; Balbina Hwang, "Curtailling North Korea's Illicit Activities," *The Heritage Foundation*, August 25 2003.

such as Dalian (Port Arthur).⁴⁴ This situation may be partly due to the transit trade from Afghanistan to the eastern part of Russia, but the high concentration is more likely to indicate the existence of direct trade from North Korea. There have been several seizures of heroin from North Korea reported in Japan and Australia but very few reported by China.⁴⁵ Several Chinese police sources have, however, been very clear that North Korea is an emerging actor in the drug trade. Some even estimate the North Korean trade to be the third largest supplier of heroin into China after Burma and Afghanistan.⁴⁶ While there are neither official information nor public debate about this issue, however reports from hospitals and civil society in China do appear to second such an opinion.⁴⁷

There are strong indications that North Korean criminals are working closely with Russian and Chinese criminal organizations in the Chinese heroin trade. The size of this trade remains however unknown. It is evident that the Russian Far East is an increasingly lucrative route of transit out of North Korea and thus, it is far from surprising that the Chinese triads control much of the criminal activity in the region. Many Russians are part of the Chinese criminal organizations, but the Chinese organizations do not seem to control the narcotics trade.⁴⁸ The narcotics trade in the Russian Far East is largely dominated by Tajik, Kazakh, Chechen and other Central Asian criminal networks. This is directly connected to the already established structure they have established in the Russian Far East and Central Asia. With the combined strength of North Korean production and an open transit route from Afghanistan to Russia's Far East, it is easy to imagine that northeast China will see an increase in its narcotics supply and a decrease in prices. The strong Central Asian network in the Russian Far East confirms reports that Afghan heroin is prevalent in the northeast region, but it seems that this trade is reinforced by North Korean production. The direct trade between China and North Korea is unknown, although it is alleged by Chinese officials to be substantial.

⁴⁴ A smaller supply in areas away from the borders indicates a concentration of smuggling activities in border areas. "China seizes 12 tons of drugs in past five years," *Xinhua News Agency*; Nick Squires, "North Korea linked to heroin haul in Australia," *South China Morning Post*, May 28 2003.

⁴⁵ "N Korea 'trafficking drugs,'" *BBC News*, March 2 2004; Kim Young Il, "North Korea and Narcotics Trafficking: A View from the Inside," *North Korea Review*, February 27 2004.

⁴⁶ Interviews with drug enforcement personnel, security forces and police in China 2004-2005.

⁴⁷ Interviews in China 2004-2005 with medical staff and civil society in northern China.

⁴⁸ Bertil Lintner, "Chinese Organised Crime," *Global Crime* 6, 1 (2004).

Threats From Within

China is no longer only a transit and consumer state, as it once was but also a production area. That said, Hong Kong is the main transit route to western and to certain extent wealthy Asian states.⁴⁹ Retail prices for heroin in Hong Kong have fallen from HK \$476 (US \$ 58)/gram in 2000 to HK \$333 (US \$ 41)/gram in 2005 and this clearly speaks for a massive influx of drugs. Increased prices in Southeast Asia also indicate new sources of heroin. Hong Kong, Fujian and other coastal areas in southern China are similarly used for smuggling. This indicates that most of the concentration of the drugs is still in the south. Chinese criminal gangs, as organizers of the transit hub in Asia, continue to have strong cooperative links between Chinese criminal gangs and Colombian, Burmese, Philippine, Dutch, and Australian criminal networks. This has made it possible for Chinese criminal networks to take a more active role in the narcotics trade. There is also a strong connection between criminal organizations in China and overseas Chinese which has enabled these criminal networks to improve their distribution networks.⁵⁰ Moreover, China's recent economic development has created a strong domestic consumer base that is very much utilized by the criminal organizations. Abuse has moved out of the traditional socially marginalized user groups to the relatively affluent Chinese citizen.

Chinese criminals import large quantities of narcotics, primarily heroin and other forms of narcotics. However, they have also become important exporters of methamphetamine hydrochloride (shabu) and crystal methamphetamine (ice) to the Philippines, Japan, South Korea and other nearby states and as an important transit route for export to other states.⁵¹ Chinese criminal organizations, according to many sources, control the narcotics trade in Asia and have made important inroads in the West through the above-mentioned channels.⁵² The heroin trade has for a long time been the most important trade, although diversification of the industry to other form of narcotics have increased the profitability and decreased the possibilities for the police to control the trade. There is only a very small amount of opium and heroin produced domestically in China and heroin is imported, but much of domestic production of methamphetamine is consumed locally. The increased production is

⁴⁹ Simon Parry, "A life Turned Upside Down by Heroin Arrest," *South China Morning Post*, April 24 2005.

⁵⁰ Lintner, "Chinese Organised Crime."

⁵¹ Nailene Chou Wiest, "Drug Problem Severe, Says Narcotics Official," *South China Morning Post*, July 15 2004; John Hill, "China's Battle Against Designer Drugs," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, February 1 2006.

⁵² Ralf Emmers, "The Threat of Transnational Crime in Southeast Asia: Drug trafficking, Human Smuggling and Trafficking, and Sea Piracy," *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, May 2003.

strengthening the position of Chinese organizations as producers and exporters. Asia is by far the largest producer of methamphetamine and according to U.N. estimates, China produces 50 percent of the methamphetamine in Asia⁵³ Most of this production is concentrated in southeastern China, primarily Guangdong.⁵⁴

Pseudoephedrine and ephedrine are plentiful in China due to industrialization and the creation of a domestic chemical industry. These substances are the most important precursors for narcotics production. Thus, China has emerged as one of the more important exporters of precursor chemicals. The Chinese exports are significant with cooperation between China and several of the potential buyers already established.⁵⁵ For example, Mexico imports precursors from China to sustain the domestic meth production that is exported to the U.S.. The trade of Chinese precursors is also increasingly sustaining the production of heroin in Afghanistan.⁵⁶ Bilaterally, the Chinese government has strengthened the regulation on sales of precursors.⁵⁷ Despite efforts to tighten control of precursors, Chinese criminal organizations continue to be able to export them in substantial quantities.

All of the above-mentioned factors have made the Chinese criminal organizations effective transit production and sale organizations. Although seizures of narcotics have increased steadily in China and several criminal organizations have been stopped, the Chinese government has yet to claim victory in its fight against narcotics. As long as the demand is increasing rapidly and the production and transport structures exist, the Chinese problem will grow domestically and create social, economic and even potential, future political problems.⁵⁸

Conclusions: Implications for Chinese National Security

There has been an apparent shift in the supply of heroin from Southeast Asia to Afghanistan, Russian Far East and North Korea as well as an increase in internal production of narcotics, though not heroin. What was

⁵³ 2005 World Drug Report, 101.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 10o.

⁵⁵ "China, US Break up Drug Ring," *Xinhua News Agency*, May 22 2003.

⁵⁶ Vladimir Fenopetov, "The Drug Crime Threat to Countries Located on the Silk Road," *CEF Quarterly* 4, 1 (2006): 11, (this issue).

⁵⁷ Ray Cheung and Joseph Ma, "China's gateway to the golden triangle heroin floods across the border from Burma en route to addicts worldwide," *South China Morning Post*, June 28 2003.

⁵⁸ Chow Chung-Yan, "Alleged 'Ice King' on Trial After Record Haul Guangdong Man Produced 12.36 tons of Designer Drug, say Prosecution," *South China Post*, March 24 2005; "Head of methamphetamine plant on trial," *Xinhua News Agency*, March 23 2005. As one example, Chen Bingxi was sentenced for producing 12.36 tons of ice from October 1999 until his arrest in 2005. This ice was traded internally and through Hong Kong and he was also alleged to have smuggled large quantities of heroin the same route

previously a rather straightforward narcotics problem has become a more multifaceted challenge for the Chinese authorities that is increasingly difficult to deal with. The Chinese authorities need to expand their geographical focus and their strategies towards Eurasia besides Southeast Asia. It is evident that Burma is still the most important actor for China. However, the rapid decline of heroin production in Southeast Asia, even with an increase of methamphetamines production in the Shan area, indicates that the new heroin import states will be increasingly important. As well as the importance of internal production of methamphetamine and export of drugs and precursors are growing significantly.

The change in geographical focus of the narcotics trade and the relatively slow response from the Chinese authorities indicate that measures to deal with narcotics-related security problems remain inadequate. This is not specific to China, many other states possess criminal organizations that have developed mobile, flexible structures that can easily and often change their *modus operandi* and location of operation. Government structures are far slower or even unwilling to change their modes of operation. This is especially true of China's neighbors, like Tajikistan, North Korea, Burma, Laos, Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan, where corrupt government officials or even governments, to a certain degree, benefit from the narcotics trade. There are several political problems that China has refused to acknowledge, such as the importance of North Korea as an exporter. It has also not faced up to the growing significance of Central Asia as a major inroad for narcotics into China. This neglect has and will further simplify the task of criminal networks who seek access to China. Once the criminal networks are established, it is very difficult to exterminate them, as high profitability keeps them operating.

The narcotics trade and its negative effects pose a real security threat to China. However, this security threat cannot be resolved by military means alone. There is also a limit as to the role the police can play in dealing with the growing number of narcotics users. China needs to increase and improve its socio-economic programs and implement more direct measures against the narcotics problem in the health, information and legal sectors. Moreover, increased cooperation with the Central Asian states, North Korea and Russia is necessary if China is to be successful in curbing the influx of narcotics from Eurasia. However, it is unlikely that all these governments will be actively supportive of an anti-narcotics program. This has been seen in Central Asia where there has even been reluctance to implement effective policies in some countries

because of the involvement of government officials in this illegal but lucrative business.⁵⁹

Increased narcotics trade has led to increased criminality in China and the Chinese government has made a direct correlation between criminality and narcotics abuse. This is primarily through petty crime and prostitution, but larger criminal schemes have been connected to abuse. Criminal organizations increasingly use Chinese banks for money laundering and invest large amounts of capital in the Chinese economy which threatens to increase the criminalization of the legal economy.⁶⁰ The extent of this is unknown, but areas such as Macau, Fujian and Dalian are directly affected where the narcotics trade could be a significant part of the local economy.⁶¹

One of the most threatening security threats to China stemming from the narcotics trade is the increased prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the country. Traditionally the threat has been restricted to intravenous users, but this has now spread to non-intravenous users and threatens to gain epidemic proportions in China. So far this threat is still contained to the transit lines and production sites but it has recently begun to spread outside these enclaves. As the abuse of heroin continues to rise, it will increase the speed of infection rapidly to non-intravenous groups. This occurs especially among a young user population that is sexually active outside the traditionally most affected communities, such as intravenous users.

Corruption is on the rise in China and a growing number of mid-level officials have been connected to narcotics crimes.⁶² Prosecutions has increased and the number of arrests has grown significantly, even if the measures have been criticized by the international community for their harshness and in some cases mistrials. However, it should be noted that China has increased both its seizures and prosecutions and this is a sign that it has taken the issue seriously. Although the Chinese government still lacks the resources to fully address the challenges brought about by the narcotics problem, especially in the “new” regions of import.

It seems that the Chinese leadership is untouched by the narcotics trade and there have been no allegations that the top leadership is involved in trafficking thus far.⁶³ At the community level, the situation is getting worse with large communities being heavily dependent on profit from the narco trade. This is very closely linked to increases in drug

⁵⁹ Swanström, "Multilateralism and Narcotics Control in Central Asia."

⁶⁰ *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report -2005*, "Anti-Money Laundering in China: the Status Quo and Prospects," Speech of Mr. Zhou Xiaochuan.

⁶¹ *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report -2005*.

⁶² U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report -2003*.

⁶³ Central Intelligence Agency, *World Fact Book*, February 2 2006.

“lordism” at the expense of the national structures, in many poorer areas of Yunnan. In other affected regions, the local drug lords have taken over some of the local power at the expense of the Central government. In many villages, especially in remote areas, the transit and production trade is more lucrative than legal industry. This has created a situation where the illegal structures are more important than the official structures. Despite these challenges, the situation is far from lost. With the right resources and mandate, the Chinese government can prevent the situation from deteriorating further. A significant part of the solution is to take the lessons from the Burmese border and apply them in other regions of China together with a more strict narcotics policy internally and towards its neighbors.

The challenges of the narco business are troubling, but it can be a common denominator for cooperation between many states in the Eurasian region. Narcotics abuse is deemed to create a common interest between the Eurasian and Asian states that are affected by the production in Afghanistan primarily, but also in Burma and Laos. Increased cooperation is needed over borders to curb production, increase transaction costs in the transit regions, decrease availability for consumers and finally to jointly educate people about the dangers and provide assistance to these from rehabilitation in recovering from narcotics abuse. The European Union, the U.S. and Japan, among others, should demand stronger measures against the narcotics trade from its beneficiaries and China, India and Russia needs to seriously convince their partners to cooperate against the narcotics trade. Until this happens, most states stand alone in their fight against the narcotics trade and the best cooperation we can find is between the criminal organizations.

The Strategic Central Asian Arena

*Richard Giragosian**

ABSTRACT

Central Asia has emerged as a pivotal arena of international security, with an enhanced strategic significance that has superseded the region's geographic isolation and geopolitical marginalization. Security in Central Asia is now a key factor in the broader calculus of Russian, Chinese, and American interests. Moreover, stability in both Central Asia and along its periphery further impacts a secondary set of states, including India, Iran and Japan. This paper examines the interests of the various powers in Central Asia and the quest for stability and security in the region.

Keywords • Central Asia • China • Russia • United States • geopolitics • military security • energy • Islamic extremism

Introduction

In the wake of the dynamic shifts in post-9/11 international security, Central Asia has acquired a new strategic relevance. No longer viewed solely within the prism of broader U.S.-Russian relations, or only valued for its energy supplies, the five Central Asian states have surpassed both geographic isolation and geopolitical marginalization. Each of these five states, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, now present a disparate degree of promise and peril for security and stability well beyond the Soviet-defined borders of Central Asia. But it is the geography of Central Asia, however, that has contributed the most to making the region a complicated vector for Chinese, Russian and U.S. national interests.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization

The formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001 reflects a graduation from an early expression of shared Russian and Chinese interests with Central Asian states known as the "Shanghai Five" into an institutionalized multilateral body. The SCO adopted a

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more confrontational tone in July 2005 with the adoption of a declaration by the presidents of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan calling on coalition members operating in Afghanistan “to decide on the deadline for the use of the temporary infrastructure and for their military contingents’ presence in those countries.” In another move causing concern in Washington, the SCO granted observer status to India, Iran, and Pakistan in 2005.

Despite its graduation to a fully fledged institution, the SCO remains hampered by the dominance of national interests over any sense of multilateral cooperation and sacrifice by its members. Even more revealing is the inescapable fact that, despite the rhetoric, the fundamental strategic goals of the organization, for countering terrorism, securing borders and bolstering regional stability, are all shared by the United States. The SCO is also seriously outpaced by the scale and scope of U.S. engagement in the region, and cannot hope to match the organizational capacity of NATO’s role in Central Asia.

But the SCO seems increasingly assertive in its confrontational stand on the future of the U.S. military presence in the region and, with the recent eviction of U.S. troops from Uzbekistan, continues to be dominated by a Chinese and Russian tactic of using the SCO to pressure the U.S. and garner greater leverage. This is especially evident in the move to incorporate the Iranians, albeit in a limited capacity. Thus, it is the Chinese, Russian and, of course, American national interests in Central Asia, rather than any multilateral initiatives, like the SCO, that will determine the course of security and stability in the region.

Chinese Security Interests in Central Asia

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asia has been an important element in Chinese security. Structurally, there are three pillars to Chinese security regarding Central Asia. The first, rooted in Chinese history, is a recognition of the pivotal role of Central Asia for security along China’s western borders. This is further grounded in the centuries-old debate over Chinese strategic security between proponents of maritime power and territorial defense and land power. The deep-seated Chinese perception of vulnerability along its more remote western borders, driven by the sparse populations and distance from traditional centers of Chinese power, was further exacerbated by the emergence of an open Central Asian frontier.

But the main driver for this Chinese emphasis on security along its western borders is concern over instability in Xinjiang. With Central Asia much closer to the over seven million Moslem, ethnic-Turkic Uighurs than the ethnic Han Chinese, the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region is seen by Beijing as especially vulnerable to separatism and

“foreign, anti-Chinese influences.”¹ This view is largely warranted by history, as the nearly six-year period of an independent, Uighur-ruled “East Turkistan” was only incorporated into the People’s Republic of China in 1950. There is also an active, although still marginal separatist Uighur movement advocating an independent “Turkistan.” This group has been, according to China, linked to a series of anti-Chinese activities, ranging from local riots to a 1997 bombing in Beijing, and has some reported links to both Central Asian Islamist movements and Al Qaeda.²

Second, the economic implications of an open Central Asian region posed several new considerations for Chinese security. Specifically, there was an appreciation of the potential role of the Central Asian market in fostering greater economic development along China’s more remote and impoverished interior and border regions. Although this economic aspect was also enhanced by the clear energy appeal of the region, only magnified by China’s mounting energy needs during this period, there was an even more powerful political consideration.

Specifically, there was a new sense of urgency for ensuring economic growth as a means of political legitimacy following the Tiananmen Square episode of 1989. Thus, the economic aspect of Central Asia’s place in Chinese strategic security offered the Chinese government a significant *political* opportunity to leverage the development of economic and commercial links to Central Asia to consolidate central control over the Chinese regions and border areas.

The third Central Asian pillar of Chinese security, reflecting a more general and somewhat abstract concept, is the linkage of Central Asia to the ever-expanding Chinese sense of its role in as an important actor in global security. In the last decade, this meant a Central Asia representing both an important arena for Chinese influence and an evolving aspect of Chinese global standing in terms of its position with the United States, Russia, Europe and other lesser powers. From this perspective, China saw Central Asia as a unique opportunity to enhance its profile beyond that of an East Asian power and, in the wake of the end of the Cold War, assert a global stance crowned as “multipolarity.”

Through the 1990s, the region has also served as an integral component of a wider network of Chinese bilateral relations with several key states. It also helped to redefine the Chinese view of Russia away from a traditional role as a menacing super power to one of “needy neighbor,” thereby elevating the strategic significance of Sino-Russian relations and rebalancing the relationship. Although the 1996 declaration of a new Chinese-Russian “strategic partnership” reflected the end of Chinese inferiority in the face of the Russian shadow, it was also as much

¹ Mark Burles, *Chinese Policy toward Russia and the Central Asian Republics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), 9.

² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

about Beijing's vision for Central Asia as it was about Moscow. The declaration was also an affirmation that the Sino-Russian relationship was readjusted to reflect a new strategic parity.

At the same time, there was a degree of opportunism, rooted in the stark contrast between rising Chinese power and influence and Russian decline. This differing trajectory offered landlocked Central Asia a new alternative to decades of reliance on Russia and, in terms of Chinese economic growth and Russian collapse, the promise of an eastward revival of the fabled "Silk Road." This was aptly exploited by China which focused on redirecting regional infrastructure, trade and transport beyond the Russian orbit.

Overall, the Chinese record of engagement with the infant Central Asian states is marked by a carefully crafted and relatively cautious strategy. Starting with an important agreement on border delineation with the Soviet Union in 1991, China embarked on a dual approach of stabilizing the region while forging new direct links with the post-Soviet states in the region. It concluded a series of inaugural agreements with Russia and the Central Asian states focusing on the codification and demarcation of borders, security and military cooperation, and expanding economic and trade ties.

Despite the region-centered focus of Chinese policy in the pre-9/11 period, there was an additional bilateral focus as well. This level of Chinese policy was driven by an always present consideration of geography, with the proximity of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan comprising the true core of Chinese security. Over the last decade, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, despite offering their own unique energy, trade and transport considerations in Chinese policy, could not attain the same level of significance for Chinese security. The slight exception to this, however, is the potential clash with the Uzbek desire for regional dominance, a bid openly at odds with Chinese goals for Central Asia.

Although the importance of Central Asian energy to China is rather obvious, it is neither the most significant nor the most ambitious facet of Chinese strategy in the region. Surpassing any primary focus on Central Asia, Chinese energy security centers on securing a diversity of oil supplies and suppliers, developing both hydroelectric and nuclear power to reduce its over-reliance on coal, and most importantly militarily, address its maritime vulnerability to potential disruption of supplies through the Strait of Malacca. The latter point is particularly worrisome to Beijing, as roughly 80 percent of Chinese oil imports pass through the 600-mile long Strait of Malacca chokepoint.

But there is a place for Central Asia within this context. Westward pipelines to Central Asia represent the strategic need to offset Chinese dependence on foreign tanker traffic with pipeline supplies, but only as part of a much broader effort to forge a balance less susceptible to

external interference or disruption.³ This is also enhanced by a complementary trend of increasing oil production in western China, only further elevating the necessity for security along the western borders and in Xinjiang. Additionally, the completion of a \$3 billion, 1000-km oil pipeline connecting Atasu in Kazakhstan to Alashankou in western China will mark the first major Chinese diversification of its import routes.⁴

For long-term Chinese security, energy is everything. It is crucial for economic growth which, in turn, is essential for both political stability and geopolitical power. This pursuit of energy security is actually a pursuit of economic and, hence, political security. At the same time, the Chinese energy agenda in Central Asia also reflects its political agenda.

China's Adjustment to a New Post-9/11 Central Asia

It was the shift in the landscape of global security in the post-9/11 period and, obviously, the projection and presence of the U.S. military in the region that represented the culmination of Central Asia's strategic importance to China, however. The implications of the global war on terrorism (GWOT) on the Central Asian states not only reordered regional (and national) security, it also refined the region's position in terms of American, Chinese and Russian strategy. As highlighted by Robert Levgold, it resulted in two important developments.⁵ First, the U.S. entry into Central Asia added a new factor in Sino-American relations, extending well beyond the traditional confines of East Asia. It also threatened to diminish the returns from a decade of careful Chinese diplomacy and engagement in the region.

The second development in Levgold's view is of Central Asia as an even more central element in the dynamically evolving U.S. strategic relationship with a reinvigorated Russia under President Vladimir Putin. From a Chinese perspective, this second development was as disconcerting as the first, reflecting the possible outflanking of China's position by a new combination of U.S.-Russian moves. Chinese and Russian goals in Central Asia remain fundamentally complementary, however, as both share a priority for stability in the face of the threat of Islamist extremism. Although both China and Russia seem hesitant to

³ There has also been some discussion by Chinese analysts of the possible formation of a Chinese tanker fleet. Nevertheless, the Strait of Malacca is an obvious focus for the Chinese navy, especially in anticipation of any conflict over Taiwan.

⁴ Robert Ebel, *China's Energy Future. The Middle Kingdom Seeks its Place in the Sun* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005), 44.

⁵ Robert Levgold, "Introduction: Great Power Stakes in Central Asia," in *Thinking Strategically: The Major Powers, Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian Nexus*, ed. Robert Legvold (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2003), 37.

admit it, stability is also paramount to the United States in the region. Thus, neither China nor Russia seems likely to squander gains by jockeying for position, although the demographic component of two radically different trajectories of power in the region will continue to flare anew.

Most troubling for China is the scale and scope of American deployment in Central Asia which, although centered on operations in Afghanistan, effectively means that the United States has attained an unexpected status as a true “Central Asian power” in its own right. And as a platform for U.S. power projection, the Central Asian theater posed a startling new challenge for Chinese security. Yet it also serves to bring China and Russia closer together in attempting not to directly oppose or confront, but at least to burden and limit the course of the U.S. presence in Central Asia.

The Russian Reassertion of Power in Central Asia

In stark contrast to the generally incoherent and improvisational Russian policy toward Central Asia during the Yeltsin era, there has been a steady correct to the course of Russian engagement in the region over the past few years. This course correction has been driven by an attempt to reassert Russian power and influence within the former Soviet space, or “Near Abroad.”

Russian actions and policies among the former Soviet states, culminating in the recent confrontation with Ukraine over the price of natural gas supplies, have confirmed a Russian determination to reassert its role in areas seen as its traditional spheres of influence. And most effectively, the Russian utilization of a more sophisticated and subtle leverage based on energy dependence among the former Soviet states affirmed the new Russian commitment to regaining “great power” status and recovering its geopolitical relevance.

In the face of this Russian reassertion of power and influence, there is a further potential for a clash with deepening Chinese interests and American engagement, only magnified by the U.S. military presence in Central Asia. This potential clash of interests was symbolically demonstrated in late 2002, with the Russian Air Force’s deployment of aircraft to the Kant airbase in Kyrgyzstan. The purpose of the deployment was ostensibly not to create a Russian base in Kyrgyzstan, but to develop a joint Russian-Kyrgyz military operational airbase to support the multinational Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF), established under the Collective Security Treaty (CST) and comprising one battalion from each CRDF member state: Russia, Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.⁶ By July 2005, Russia doubled the size of its troop strength at Kant from 300 to 600.

Yet this danger is tempered by three significant factors. First, the overarching U.S.-Russian strategic partnership still imposes its own set of inherent limitations on Russia, whose broader desire for global relevance remains tied to its relationship with American power. The dynamic evolution in U.S.-Russian relations, moving from competition to cooperation on many levels, should not be underestimated. The marriage of U.S. and Russian interests has culminated in overcoming, at least temporarily, the traditional divide over many of the most daunting geopolitical issues of the day.

On a broader level, the new U.S.-Russian strategic partnership reflects a change in the traditional perspective of relations between the two powers. It is significant, for example, that September 11 has transformed the U.S. perspective to one much closer to the traditional Russian security-based approach. By elevating security concerns above all else to a core determining factor of U.S.-Russian relations, the new relationship is founded more on issues of common interest and concern, and less on the traditional Cold War period of outright competition. This new shared perspective is now serving as a bridge to several areas of cooperation, from stability in Central Asia to coordination in energy policy.

Second, the likelihood of an anti-American Russian-Chinese combination seems greatly exaggerated. Over the medium- to long-term, the vulnerability of Russia's Far East region will only be compounded by what Russians see as mounting Chinese demographic assault. Combined with the rather uneasy tactical alliance between Russian and Chinese security and energy ambitions, the outlook for deeper Russian-Chinese coordination will also be marked by division and exploitation by the increasingly confident Central Asian states themselves. This factor is especially important given the security boost for each Central Asian state from an American military presence and interest.

The third factor limiting the possibilities for an outright clash is rooted in the convergence of pressing security interests in Central Asia. These include the emergence of transnational threats, such as simmering Islamist extremism and a resurgent drug trade. Although these transnational threats are shared concerns for Russia and the United States, as well as China, they are only magnified by national challenges: socioeconomic pressure and political tension and a stark absence of good governance and legitimacy.

⁶ William O'Malley and Roger McDermott, "The Russian Air Force in Kyrgyzstan: The Security Dynamics," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, April 9 2003.

Although each of these threats is shared by Russia, China and the United States, and serves to unify, more than divide external engagement, the current Russian role and ambition to maintain dominance in Central Asia nevertheless presents its own set of challenges to the states of the region. But the unresolved threat from Islamist extremism is the paramount concern for all. For Russia, the danger stems from the nexus with Islamism in the Caucasus, and in Chechnya most clearly. For China, its control over the Xianjiang region will also depend on preventing any “spillover,” in terms of both assistance and inspiration, from Islamist movements in Central Asia.

There is also a danger to the U.S. position in the region from either an influx of battle hardened Islamist terrorists from Iraq or a new wave of home grown Islamists targeting the western and foreign presence in the region. But the most immediate threat from the Islamists is to the Central Asian regimes themselves, which are entrenched to hold their authoritarian power but not emboldened to address their underlying vulnerabilities of political misrule and economic mismanagement.

U.S. Considerations in Central Asia

For much of the first decade of Central Asian independence, the core focus of western policies and priorities has largely been driven by energy. This focus was also defined in a zero-sum, geopolitical context, with an emphasis on securing export routes along a carefully constructed strategic map aimed at bypassing Russia and isolating Iran. Through the 1990s, the promotion of Turkey as a key U.S. proxy force in the region was also designed to bolster broader geopolitical objectives of countering Russia and Iran and campaigning for pro-western, secular democratization. Widespread disappointment and frustration among the Central Asian states over Turkey’s failure to meet raised expectations significantly limited Turkish appeal and influence in the region, however.

The combination of energy and geopolitical priorities in this period was most visibly demonstrated by the route selection and eventual construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline. The BTC pipeline sought to both diminish the dominance of the existing Russian pipeline network and, countering economic logic, dismiss any involvement by Iran. On a deeper level, the pipeline project further affirmed the western focus to bolster the sovereignty and independence of the infant states of the South Caucasus, in this case, in the face of a steady reassertion of Russian power and influence.

The impact of 9/11 and the new trajectory of the global war on terrorism abruptly altered this approach, however. The long-standing energy focus was dramatically superseded by a pursuit of security and stability, with a new convergence of interests between the West, Russia

and China in confronting the threats of terrorism and extremism. But such a fundamental and sweeping change in U.S. policy in the region has actually been underway for some time, however, resting in large part on a deepening of U.S. military engagement with the Central Asian states. In the period immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent emergence of the newly independent states in 1991, for example, U.S. policy toward Central Asia centered on a security relationship with Kazakhstan. This initial focus on Kazakhstan stemmed in large part on the need to secure the Kazakh nuclear arsenal and, in December 1993, resulted in the signing of a Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) agreement to dismantle and destroy the country's over 100 SS-18 missiles.

By 1994, the U.S. cemented its bilateral security cooperation with Kazakhstan through a defense cooperation agreement that forged new cooperation in defense doctrine and training. The neighboring states of Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan also joined Kazakhstan in entering NATO's Partnership for Peace Program (PfP). Central Asian membership in the NATO PfP served as the main avenue for western security engagement and a number of officers from these states, as well as from Tajikistan, participated in PfP exercises by 1995. The U.S.-Kazakh defense relationship was expanded in 1995 to include deeper cooperation in nuclear security and defense conversion efforts.

Another core element in U.S. policy throughout the 1990s was the danger of proliferation, as well as the need for regional security. As with Kazakhstan, the U.S. entered into a bilateral security relationship with Uzbekistan in 1998. Uzbekistan also became the first recipient of a sizeable transfer of military equipment under the Foreign Military Financing program in 2000. The nature of the security threats in Uzbekistan was also slightly different than Kazakhstan, however, as the U.S. was also gravely concerned with the mounting power of an Islamic extremist network based in Uzbekistan. And although the U.S. also reached a CTR agreement with Uzbekistan based on the Kazakh CTR, the immediate threat was from the mounting Islamic insurgency in the country.

Officially, U.S. policy was even more ambitious, with longer-term goals of democratization and marketization, a consolidation of regional security and cooperation, and an open and unfettered environment to allow the development of the regional energy resources. This last goal effectively translated into an effort to bolster the territorial integrity and security of the Central Asian states mainly as a counterweight to Russian interference or manipulation.

By 1999, the U.S. Congress formally expanded its military engagement in Central Asia, and adopted legislation (and extended greater financial assistance) in support of economic and political reform

in both Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus through the Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999. There was an important stress on military-to-military cooperation, both to westernize and professionalize the regional militaries and to foster civil-military stability. The U.S. also pursued greater regional integration and cooperation, providing targeted assistance in border control and security to combat drug trafficking, nonproliferation, and other trans-national criminal activities. Counter-insurgency and rudimentary counter-terrorism also emerged as key focal points in the wake of armed incursions by elements of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) into Kyrgyzstan in the summer of 1999.

In line with containing these security threats, the U.S. formulated an extensive new Central Asian Border Security Initiative (CASI) in 2000, cemented by some \$3 million in additional security assistance to each of the five Central Asian states. As the IMU's military operations escalated in Uzbekistan in August 2000, with several Americans taken hostage, the U.S. State Department formally added the IMU organization to the official U.S. roster of foreign terrorist groups. The IMU was also linked to the Al Qaeda network of bin Laden in September 2000, adding an even greater significance to the regional security effort.

As the U.S. military engagement rapidly extended through the Central Asian region, the importance of stability in Tajikistan and its vulnerability to the nearby Islamic militancy also broadened the U.S. focus. With a symbolic visit to the country in May 2001, the then head of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), General Tommy Franks, recognized Tajikistan as "a strategically important country" and pledged U.S. security assistance.⁷ The Tajiks were later persuaded to follow their Central Asian neighbors into membership in NATO's Partnership for Peace Program.

Central Asia and the NATO Partnership for Peace Program

Designed to address the unique demands of engaging the former Soviet states, NATO's Partnership for Peace Program (PfP) provided an important vehicle for an even more ambitious U.S. (and western) military engagement in Central Asia. Through the PfP, the newly independent and still vulnerable, Central Asian nations were able to gain significant experience and contacts with the U.S. military establishment. For the U.S. and NATO, the program also offered an opportunity to foster greater integration in western security structures and the possibility for spurring regional cooperation. Central Asian involvement also promoted important civil-military reforms designed to enhance

⁷ The responsibility of maintaining relations with the five Central Asian states were formally transferred from the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) to Central Command (CENTCOM) in October 1999.

internal stability and democratization, and served to generally institutionalize relations with the United States.

Most visibly, the increasingly extensive military-to-military programs also served as a foundation for the modernization of the countries' fledgling armed forces, especially important in overcoming the legacy of decades of outdated Soviet military doctrine and training.⁸ This was especially important, as it marked the first time that the national Central Asian militaries were able to formulate and shape their own concepts of military strategy and doctrine, based on their unique needs and resources. It also fostered a new sense of vision for the development of national security beyond the confines of the region's Soviet legacy.

Central Asian participation in the NATO's multinational military exercises also played an important role in fostering greater regional cooperation and reintegration. The program's exercises provide crucial training in peacekeeping activities and develop interoperability, both of which were seriously absent in these countries. In August 1995, forces from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan participated in Fort Polk's *Operation NUGGET* exercises in peacekeeping tactics for land forces, and were later joined by a Kazakh contingent in a follow-up round in July 1997. Forces from each of the three Central Asian states also completed an international amphibious exercise in North Carolina, along with forces from Canada, the Netherlands, and sixteen other Partnership for Peace members. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan also joined with the U.S. and other NATO and Partnership for Peace countries in March 2001 for exercises in Nova Scotia.

In addition, the armed forces from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan formed a new joint peacekeeping unit in 1995. Under the auspices of U.S. CENTCOM, this new unit, *Centrazbat*, was empowered to promote stability in the region and enable these three nations to share tactical information and experience in peacekeeping and limited security patrol maneuvers. A series of multinational exercises, centering on this *Centrazbat* unit, have also been held regularly with forces from the U.S. and NATO member states providing field and command training. With the eviction of U.S. forces from Uzbekistan in 2005, however, the future of these exercises is now in question. Although NATO exercises are slated to continue, the likely Uzbek refusal to participate will only hinder their overall effectiveness.

Much of the training and mentoring of the Central Asian militaries was conducted by the U.S. Special Forces. The reliance on the Special Forces was a natural and necessary assignment, stemming from their role

⁸ The only exception in Central Asia is Tajikistan, which formed its national armed forces around the remnants of several armed groups involved in the country's civil war. All other Central Asian states reconstituted their armed forces on the inheritance of units of the Soviet Turkistan Military District.

as compact, highly trained and specialized units able to assume highly-focused and self-sufficient missions quite beyond the ordinary capabilities of the more conventional military. The task of training Central Asian units was, therefore, an appropriate assignment and best utilized the specific talents and skills of the Special Forces. Their involvement also reflected a recognition of the altered threat environment comprised by the rise of unconventional, irregular and often covert, insurgent or terrorist groups. The very nature of the U.S. Special Forces as an unconventional and highly specialized adaptive force makes them suitable for training an infant military to counter threats of insurgency and terrorism.

Central Asia as a Platform for U.S. Power Projection

For the United States, the region's proximity to Afghanistan was crucial in planning and conducting military operations in neighboring Afghanistan, endowing the Central Asian region with an elevated strategic value and specific military utility. The U.S. military presence in the region was fairly well established long before September 11, with an expanding network of military-to-military relations and an overall mentoring role in each of the Central Asian states. But it was as an important platform for the projection of U.S. military power that substantially elevated the utility of Central Asia. Its role in *Operation Enduring Freedom* was both broad and extensive, with forward basing in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, unfettered access to airspace and the use of bases in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan also allowed more limited access by coalition aircraft.

Most significantly, in terms of basing, Uzbekistan provided the full use of its airbase at Karshi Khanabad and hosted almost 1000 U.S. troops, a base for some 300 German units at Termez, and a land corridor to Afghanistan for humanitarian aid via the Friendship Bridge at Termez. Tajikistan also permitted the use of its international airport in Dushanbe for refueling and hosted a French force of about 150 troops. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan also provided overflight and related support.

It was Uzbekistan, however, that was the pivotal country. With, comparatively, the most capable and advanced military in the region, the U.S. and Uzbekistan concluded an important agreement to expand military-to-military cooperation through joint seminars, training, and partnerships with U.S. units. This also provided the Uzbeks with an important external guarantee of security and, internally, endowed their military with much greater potential for combating and eventually defeating the Islamic extremist groups.

Kyrgyzstan was also an important partner in the region and provided the U.S. with full basing rights in December 2001. The Kyrgyz formerly entered into a new one-year basing access agreement granting the U.S. full use of its Manas airport. With the addition of other coalition forces during the operations, the Manas facility served as the operational base for over three thousand foreign forces, including 1500 American troops.

The military utility offered by Central Asia is especially vital to the U.S. and underscores the future course of both its military posture and presence. But the U.S. military view of the Central Asian theater is defined by much more than simple utility. The significance lies in the region's role as platform, with a confirmation of the necessity of a "permanence of access." It is here that such factors as transit and over flight rights, status of forces agreements (SOFA), and basing considerations come into play.

In this way, the new U.S. focus on attaining enhanced rapidity of deployment and reaction and operational flexibility, combined with a greater emphasis on special operations forces, tends to only complement local security needs and address geographic and operational limitations. The new concept of minimizing U.S. force posture and presence is also better suited to the unique considerations of both the Central Asian reality and the wider global war on terrorism (GWOT). This is reflected in the lessening of a reliance on a permanent, institutionalized forward presence through expansive (and expensive) bases in favor of permanent access to military bases, sites and pre-planned locations only for crises and contingencies. Such "forward operating locations" (FOL) or operating sites are seen as the most effective means to combine direct engagement with local governments and populations with a much less visible and intrusive presence or "footprint." This also allows for greater active involvement in local "civil affairs" projects, in critical areas such as public health, potable water and school construction, by specialized U.S. military teams.

As Stephen Blank of the U.S. Army War College has noted, the U.S. strategy must go beyond traditional "nation-building" to include actual efforts at "state-building," concentrating on sectors normally neglected by the host state and maximizing the utility of American political, informational, military and economic instruments. Through the application of such a strategy, the local population can also see the immediate benefits of U.S. engagement and, over the longer term, be empower and emboldened to support broader goals of strengthening democratic and economic reform. It also serves to shape the area as a potential military theater for future crises and contingencies.⁹

⁹ Stephen Blank, *After Two Wars: Reflections on the American Strategic Revolution in Central Asia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, July 2005).

Lessons from Uzbekistan

But there are obstacles to Blank's prescription, however, as seen in the lesson from Uzbekistan. The forging of basing rights and greater cooperation with Uzbekistan represented one of the most urgent challenges for the U.S. military's operational plans for Afghanistan in September 2001. Uzbek approval, formally offered in a March 2002 bilateral agreement, contained a generic security guarantee whereby the U.S. pledged that "it would regard with grave concern any external threat" to Uzbek security and promised to intensify military cooperation, including "re-equipping the Armed Forces" of Uzbekistan. Although not unusual in such cases of fledging military cooperation, in this case, the agreement reflected the unique considerations of Central Asian security. Namely, it demonstrated the dilemma facing U.S. (as well as Chinese and Russian) engagement. This dilemma is the challenge of balancing immediate military necessity and utility against the implications of supporting an authoritarian regime with little or no regard for western concepts of human rights, the rule of law or democratization.

In the case of the Central Asian states, hosting a foreign presence was largely a product of a complicated and contradictory calculation of interests and risks. As with Uzbekistan, the U.S. was afforded basing rights and operational access only on Uzbek terms. These terms included a force mission and presence that were limited to three conditions: serving Uzbek security, providing generous financial compensation, and playing no real role in domestic issues. Each of these three conditions helped to sustain and secure the regime of Uzbek President Islam Karimov and, less visibly, discouraged or muted criticism of the country's shortfalls in reform. The financial aspect was also quite lucrative, as seen in the nearly \$16 million in American compensation paid for use of the Karshi Khanabad base alone.¹⁰

This meant that the U.S. presence was leveraged to provide regime security, reward local elites and, most crucially, was subject to the "hospitality" of the Uzbek leadership. Thus, for both the U.S. and Uzbekistan, the relationship was one of mere immediate tactical convenience, with limited opportunity for more far reaching strategic goals. This was evident through 2004, as the U.S. State Department announced that, despite some "encouraging progress" in respecting human rights, it was withholding up to \$18 million in military and economic aid to Uzbekistan due to a "lack of progress on democratic reform and restrictions put on U.S. assistance partners on the ground." In turn, \$2.4 million of the aid was redirected to fund non-governmental programs and another \$7 million was extended on health reforms, anti-

¹⁰ "United States Pays Uzbekistan for Base Use," *RFE/RL Newslines*, November 18 2005.

torture and anti-terrorism programs, ultimately freezing some \$8.5 million in assistance. The Defense Department expressed concern over the move's impact, arguing that it lessened military influence, and transferred fourteen military patrol boats to reassure the Uzbeks of continued U.S. interest.

But the final break came in the wake of the May 2005 violence in Andijon, Uzbekistan. The incident, involving the shooting of dozens or perhaps hundreds of unarmed civilians by Uzbek troops in the eastern town of Andijon, upset the delicate balance of U.S.-Uzbek relations. The Uzbek government has consistently rejected all calls for an independent inquiry and has easily withstood the reaction of the international community.

Throughout the subsequent state investigation and closed trials, the Uzbek authorities charged that the events at Andijon were an "Islamist uprising" and accused the defendants of being backed by "foreign" and American "agents." Andijon marked a turning point in the Uzbek calculation of interests, seemingly suggesting that the U.S. presence was no longer acceptable to the regime, or that there were more promising alternatives, or both. With a convenient pretext at hand for cementing this shift, Uzbekistan demanded in late July 2005 that the United States vacate the Karshi Khanabad base within six months.

The American reaction, although outwardly calm and firm, reflect an internal sense of surprise and unpreparedness. Some officials in the U.S. State Department and Pentagon initially saw the Uzbek move as a bluff, especially as it was first couched in the softer, bland declaration by the presidents of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan at a meeting of the SCO in early July 2005.¹¹ That declaration called for coalition members supporting operations in Afghanistan "to decide on the deadline for the use of the temporary infrastructure and for their military contingents' presence in those countries." Despite an apparent targeting of U.S. and coalition bases, no Central Asian leader demanded a withdrawal of forces from the bases.

But as the Uzbek eviction notice was digested by American officials, it became clear that the most immediate winner would be neither China nor Russia, but neighboring Kyrgyzstan. In the scramble to adjust to the looming loss of the Uzbek base, U.S. Secretary of State Rice met with Kyrgyz leaders October 2005 to finalize a modified agreement for the Ganci base at the Manas airfield at Bishkek. Financially, the cost for bases and access were mounting. As of December 2005, the U.S. has paid \$28 million in rent, landing, and takeoff fees at the Manas airbase, with another \$131 million for fuel and supplies. In addition, the local economy has benefited from an estimated \$4 million in expenditures by base

¹¹ Author interviews with unnamed officials in Washington, August 2005.

personnel. And even as the last America military plane left Uzbekistan in November 2005, the U.S. Defense Department paid another \$23 million to Uzbekistan the same month.¹²

The Interests of the Secondary Powers

The Central Asian states also play an important role as “security sentries” in the ongoing stabilization effort in Afghanistan and to better position U.S. forces in the medium-to longer-term for safeguarding stability in nearby Pakistan. But from a broader context, Central Asia holds a further strategic importance as a “tripwire” for monitoring the geopolitical intentions and potential conflicts inherent in the region’s location as a crossroads between China, Russia, and Southwest Asia. This inevitably leads to a corresponding reaction by other powers with vested interests in the region, however. These vested interests are clearly Chinese and Russian in the most immediate sense, but can also be seen to include Indian, Iranian and even Japanese interests over the longer-term. As an emerging regional power, Indian interests in Central Asia are largely driven by a need to plan for surging energy demand and a desire to check China. With a military presence in Tajikistan, India has also attracted some attention from U.S. military planners as an interesting mentor to promote itself as a model for the democratic, civilian control over a competent armed forces.

Iran, on the other hand, is seen as an interloper by the West and with the recent election of a “hard-line” president, is perceived as particularly worrisome for two reasons. First, the new Iranian leadership is dominated by a new elite comprised of veterans of the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. The concern is that this new group, which has replaced generational elite that rose to power from the 1979 revolution, will now be tempted to establish new nationalist credentials by adopting a more assertive and confrontational strategy in Central Asia.

Second, the relative inexperience of the new Iranian president with international affairs has only increased the power of the hard-line conservative mullahs, thereby hardening Tehran’s position regarding the continuing tension over Iran’s pursuit of nuclear technology and magnifying proliferation fears. But as J. Brandon Gentry has noted, Iran and the SCO represent “a good fit,” with its role as an SCO observer rooted in a positive sharing of interests in seeking energy security and combating drug trafficking.¹³ Nevertheless, he does warn that “considerable revenues generated from 2004’s Sino-Iranian gas and oil

¹² Jim Nichol, *Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2005), 11.

¹³ J. Brandon Gentry, “The Dragon and the Magi: Burgeoning Sino-Iranian Relations in the 21st Century,” *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 3, 3 (2005): 122-123.

deals will enable Iran to pursue a more aggressive Central Asian policy, especially in the context of a cooling U.S.-Central Asian relationship.”¹⁴

The third important secondary player in the region is Japan. With energy holding a dominant role in Japanese security for several years to come, Central Asia will remain a strategic focus for Tokyo. But just as important, Japan is clearly on a trajectory of greater regional influence as it grows beyond the limits of its previous role as a more submissive U.S. ally. Today’s Japan is finding much more of an active role and is moving quickly to shed the protective bubble of U.S. security patronage by taking on greater military deployments, including in Iraq, and a more ambitious role in meeting its security concerns from a rising China and a destabilizing North Korea.

In Central Asia, Christopher Len notes that “while we see how the objectives of the Central Asia Plus Japan initiative complements those of the SCO member states, Japan also plays a positive role in the region as a balancing force against the SCO.”¹⁵ But there are limits, because, “while Japan could play an influencing role in Central Asia via the Central Asia Plus Japan initiative and compete for the attention of the Central Asia regimes, it is unlikely that the initiative would ever have the same weight and presence as the SCO does.”¹⁶

The Centrality of Legitimacy

But Central Asian security and stability largely depends on addressing more fundamental internal challenges, ranging from an overall deficit of democracy, and the related predominance of “strongmen over statesmen,” to economic mismanagement and widespread corruption. These factors significantly impede the reform efforts of these states in transition, further contributing to a significant loss in state power. It is this set of internal factors that presents the most daunting challenge, however, as the core fragility of the Central Asian states cannot be effectively overcome simply through policies relying on enhancing their security or military capabilities.

A related challenge is the perception, both real and exaggerated, of U.S. support for the generally repressive and autocratic Central Asian regimes. First, there is a tendency for U.S. policies to be interpreted as being driven by obligations to reward the Central Asian states for their cooperation. Second, financial incentives are also seen as being aimed at ensuring or even bribing security collaboration. These two perceptions contribute to a general feeling that the U.S. has mislaid its earlier agenda

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁵ Christopher Len, “Japan’s Central Asian Diplomacy: Motivations, Implications and Prospects for the Region,” *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 3, 3 (2005): 146.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

of economic and political reform. This is further exacerbated by the deepening socioeconomic disparities and mounting poverty in the region, as well as by the dominance of small, corrupt elites defined by extended families and clans. It is also these very same elites that usually constitute the overwhelming majority of contacts with the West, and that tend to monopolize military-to-military cooperation. Central Asia is also a landlocked region in a political sense, hobbled by closed political structures and coercive political systems. The imperative here is the centrality of legitimacy and the vulnerability of illegitimate governance.

Meeting the Islamist Challenge

Extremist Islamist groups, such as the Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT), also exploit such internal weakness. After garnering a considerable degree of influence throughout the past decade, the HT pursued a campaign of recruiting based on a self-espoused “non-violent” approach, focusing more on securing grassroots support by exploiting widespread unemployment, economic disparity and political alienation. This approach also marks the distinction between its London-based spokespersons’ public platform of radical anti-western (and rabid anti-American) rhetoric with its local approach stressing indigenous needs and concerns. This distinction also allows the HT to identify with the impoverished local population on a much deeper level than any pan-Islamic or anti-western agenda could ever accomplish. This is most clearly evident in the HT’s local tactics of articulating such local concerns as the dangers of drug trafficking, prostitution and HIV/AIDS, poverty, and official corruption.

This localized strategy in the region is another means to exploit the vulnerabilities of the Central Asian states. Specifically, the HT has become entrenched in two key areas: the political and religious. The HT has effectively exploited widespread alienation among a seriously disenfranchised and polarized population to present itself as the only true grassroots or populist organizations seeking to represent (and advocate) the interests of the general population. In this regard, the HT portrays itself as a movement for economic and political justice, albeit stemming from an underlying Islamic foundation.

It has also significantly exploited the rather undeveloped nature of Islam in the region. With an already mounting hunger for information and exposure to Islam and Islamic traditions in the early years of the post-Soviet period, the HT was able to quickly offer religious instruction and non-threatening indoctrination. By establishing a network of informal Islamic teaching and semi-education, the HT emerged as the popular source for religious instruction. And by avoiding the more expensive (and more public) institutionalization of Islamic teaching

through *Madrasas*, for example, the HT soon acquired a virtual monopoly on religion and matters of faith in the region. This also meant that they became the providers of preference for pseudo-civil duties, offering Islamic marriages, divorce and even informal family court services.

Given the rise in popular support and increasing authority of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir organization, the secular governments of Central Asia recognize the HT as a serious threat to their rule. The leverage of U.S. engagement in the region may actually offer two new sets of tools to more soundly combat the appeal and resort to violence by the more radical of the region's extremist elements. Such tools also include greater pressure for democratic reform in the autocratic states of the region, with a widening of the nation- and state-building programs vital to durable stability.

The U.S. may also gain from the inherent contrast with the Russian presence in the region. Both in terms of historical legacy and by virtue of the perception of a current Russian threat to the region, ranging from the reasonable, a threat from the Russian military, to the exaggerated, a threat from the sizable Russian minority population, the U.S. stands to benefit. Additionally, the positive approach of U.S. Special Forces in the region, with successful civil affairs operations, only reinforces this contrast. In fact, the U.S. effort to combat drug trafficking actually expropriates one of the core elements of the HT platform. Once this contrast is promoted, the U.S. presence will not be seen by the local population as much of a contradiction to the HT. The test here would be to contain any new rise in anti-western rhetoric, although the rather under-developed state of Islam in Central Asia has meant that it has not become as inherently defensive or confrontational as in other regions. Given the autocratic nature of the Central Asian regimes, a comprehensive assessment of the outcomes of these effort remains limited to an improvement of relations between the U.S. military and local or, at best, regional tribal and clan leaders.

The second set of new tools relates to the nature of U.S. engagement. The counter-insurgency and strengthening of capacity of the region's militaries, already well underway, can be presented as an effort to build the infant states of the region. By focusing on capacity building that does not automatically arm or strengthen the regimes themselves, any potential fear or opposition to these programs by the HT may be countered with an appeal to nationalism. Such an appeal to national identity, whether it is Uzbek, Kazakh, or Kyrgyz pride and national feeling, is perhaps the most natural defense against religious-inspired extremism.

And by building stronger national armies and police, the resulting improvements in border security and the rule of law may become the most effective avenue towards meeting the very goals of justice and

social order espoused by the Islamic groups like the HT. In fact the debate over the nature of the HT, as agents of transition or advocates of terrorism, actually obscures the larger challenge of securing such a “region at risk.” But this larger challenge for domestic stability affects the region first and foremost, with outside actors such as the Chinese and Russians generally not impacted by local trends. Over the longer-term, however, these same trends may pose spillover effects that extend well beyond the borders of Central Asia.

In this context, the real challenge to dealing with the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and other related groups is the imperative to link U.S. security efforts to the important social and political needs of each of the Central Asian states. And central to this challenge, as recent experience in Afghanistan has revealed only too well, is the test of time: U.S. engagement must be based on the long-term, instituting sustainable policies to promote national and regional stability. Any abrupt departure or withdrawal from these regions would seriously impede the U.S. engagement and may result in the “blowback” that emerged in the Afghanistan in the wake of the Soviet retreat. This lesson also confirms the dangers posed by the “failed” and “failing” states that are now so prominent on the U.S. national security agenda. And with no real national capacity or regional security organizations able (as yet) to assume the mantle of security and stability, the U.S. has firmly entered a region necessitating longer-term stamina and endurance.

Conclusions

Thus, what is essential for Central Asia is a continued and even greater U.S. commitment, stressing shared security concerns with both China and Russia but accepting and accommodating the reality that evolutionary, not revolutionary change in the most effective and least disruptive path toward regional stability. This need for greater U.S. engagement *in* Central Asia is matched by a greater need *for* Central Asia, as stability operations in Afghanistan remain far more incomplete and inconclusive than initially expected, and the outlook for stability in Pakistan seemingly contingent of the survival of its leader. This only condemns the Central Asian role as a strategic platform for security far short of a needed role as a partner for stability.

But again, it is not the grand promenade of geopolitics, but the local street that is the avenue to true stability in Central Asia. Behind the rhetoric, the SCO is still, in the words of Central Asian analyst Daniel Kimmage, far “more of a forum than a force.”¹⁷ The SCO is inherently limited by three main obstacles. First, its mandate and mission is too

¹⁷ Daniel Kimmage, “2005 in Review: The Geopolitical Game in Central Asia,” *RFE/RL Central Asia Report*, December 29 2005.

limited. It stems from a reaction to the U.S. that attempts to artificially ignore the real convergence of interests.

Second, its multilateral approach will only be increasingly undermined by its disparate members as the Central Asian states are now driven by national, not regional concerns. This is even affirmed in the case of Uzbekistan, whose turn away from the West was not necessarily a turn eastward. It was actually more of a calculated risk assessment that also governs the Central Asian states' views and aims of dealing with China and Russia (and each other). Third, the SCO can not hope to compete with the sheer scope and scale of the U.S. military in the region, especially given the lack of viable alternatives to the still lucrative and alluring umbrella of American security patronage.

Thus, although the SCO represents the latest, and perhaps the loudest, anti-American forum in Central Asia, the overriding consideration for Beijing and Moscow, as well as in all Central Asian states, will still be its relationship with Washington. The real question is whether the U.S. will be able to sustain its commitment to the region, however. And with the pressing political, financial and military burdens imposed on the U.S. from Iraq and the global war on terrorism, there is no clear answer to that question.

Submission Guidelines and Process of Selection

Many of the articles are solicited, but authors are encouraged to send their work directly to the Editor who will suggest changes and determine the relevance of the articles for each issue. Articles can also be sent to any of our senior advisors, but the Editor has full responsibility on accepting or refusing individual articles. Shorter articles will be responded to within a week, whereas the response to longer analytical pieces could take up to three weeks. Some articles will be dealt with by the editors immediately; most articles are also read by outside referees. Copyright of articles remains with *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program*, unless another agreement has been reached.

Manuscript. Each submitted article should be sent to the Editor by e-mail attaching the word document. All correspondence will be conducted through e-mail during the process. The Editor reserves the right to edit the article to conform to the editorial policy and specifications of the CEF Quarterly and to reject the article should it not be acceptable to our editorial committee for publication.

Regular Articles: Articles should be in-depth and offer a long-term analysis of the particular problem. References are preferred to support your evidence according to the Chicago system. The articles should aim at 7000 words. Each article should be summarized in an abstract of not more than 150 words and include keywords.

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References. All authors should adhere to the Chicago reference system in their articles. These should appear in the form of footnotes. References to books and articles should be contained in the notes and not in a separate reference list. Provide translations of non-English language titles.

Articles from Journals: Phil Williams, “Transnational Criminal Organizations and International Security,” *Survival* 36, 1 (1994): 96.

Books: Patrick L. Clawson and Rensselaer W. Lee III, *The Andean Cocaine Industry* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998)

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Subsequent references: a reference to a single source in the previous note should be replaced by ‘*Ibid.*’; in later notes by author’s surname, title and page number.

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