

**CONFLICT IN CENTRAL ASIA: AN ANALYSIS OF DISTRUST IN
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

BY

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Abstract

The paper examines the five former Soviet states in Central Asia and how they share a great deal of similarities in the region. The paper also analyses how these states are logically connected, considering conflict potential and conflict prevention, given their similar experiences in regard to political and economic development since the fall of the Soviet Union. The paper adopts the secondary descriptive method as methodology and uses content analysis to analyze the data obtained. Findings show that Since 1991, the states in the region have, however, developed in different directions and their individual situation is to a different level of uniqueness. Tajikistan is by far the weakest state, with low political and economic cohesion and appears increasingly as a developing state rather than a state in transition. Turkmenistan is isolated and ruled by a Sultanate regime and not much is aware about its internal political and economic development. Kazakhstan is on its part different from the other states through an economic development unparalleled in the other states, but still suffers from many of the political, economic and social problems that the region at large suffers from. The paper concludes that, Central Asian states have been characterized by the lack of political change. Only Tajikistan changed its ruling elite after independence, followed just recently by Kyrgyzstan. Hence, over a decade, Central Asia passed without a change of regime, and both of these regime changes took place through the use of force. The paper recommends engagement of the international community with the region in general and in particular Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to produce meaningful change and development.

Keywords: Central-Asia; Conflict; Distrust; International Relations; Soviet Union; Economic Development.

Introduction

The concept Central Asia is normally used to ascertain the republics under the former Soviet Union, south of Russia and East of the Caspian Sea; they are Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The accuracy of this definition is disputed, both from a historical and modern point of view since it intersects with the former Soviet colonial borders and not necessarily with the historical borders or with modern economic, cultural and political realities. Historically Central Asia, as defined in recent terms, has strong cultural, political and economic ties to areas south and east of the current five states. The northern part of Afghanistan and the Xinjiang province in western China are today largely populated by groups that are closely tied to the Central Asian cultural and linguistic groups. For instance, Uighurs are the second largest ethnic group in Central Asia after the Uzbeks, the largest ethnic community in the region with large minority groups and political interests in all Central Asian states. There are also more Tajiks in Afghanistan, where they are the second largest group, than in Tajikistan. This ethnic diversification and spill-over into other regions has important implications for the situation in Central Asia, especially the smaller states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Jane, 2000).

The most important links between the former Soviet states in the region are mainly among, but not limited to, border, energy, resource and environmental issues and in these areas both factors prone to conflict as well as to cooperation are found. Unfortunately, there is a lack of cooperation between the regional actors that has created a negative trend and increased isolation from each other's problem, but also trans-national problems and conflicts such as water, terrorism, minorities and energy. The region is today characterized by non-cooperation and increasing hostility, even of not inter-regional military conflict lines exists in the region. As the bloody ethnic riots between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh in 1990 indicated, though, ethnicity has a potential to provide a source of conflict.

Regionalism is tightly connected to the low level of legitimacy and popular identification with the present-day boundaries in Central Asia – identities are formed more on a regional than on a national level (Lintner, 2003).

Conceptual clarification

Since its inception, international relations have been defined in many ways. Writers differ greatly upon the definition of the subject. It appears quite natural, as Stanley Hoffman says, "How could one agree once and for all upon the definition of a field whose scope is in constant flux, indeed, a field whose fluctuation is one of its principal characteristics". As such, international relations cannot be defined in any generally acceptable way. International relations are the study of the interaction of nation-states and non-governmental organizations in fields such as politics, economics, and security.

Charles Schleicher defines international relations as the relation among States. Quincy Wright defines international relations as "relations between groups of major importance in the life of the world at any period of history. According to Morgenthau, international relations is a struggle for power among nations. Norman Podelford and George Lincoln define international relations as the interaction of State politics with the changing pattern of power relationships. Padelford and Lincoln define it as the "Interactions of state policies within the changing patterns of power relationships" (Reto, 2005).

However, a good working definition of international relations is given by Harold and Margaret Sprout. They define international relations as "those aspects of interactions and relations of independent political communities in which some element of opposition, resistance or conflict of purpose or interest is present." According to Hartman "International Relations as a field of study is focused upon the process by which states adjust their national interest to those of other states". Palmer and Perkins opine that International politics is essentially concerned with state system. Sprout and sprout also defined international politics as those aspects of the interactions and relations of

independent political communities in which some element of opposition, resistance and conflict (Stephen, 2004).

The concept of conflict

Conflict is difficult to define, because it occurs in many different settings and in various ways. The essence of conflict seems to be disagreement, contradiction, or incompatibility. Thus, conflict is refers to any situation in which there are incompatible Goals, Cognitions, or Emotions within or between individuals or groups that lead to opposition or antagonistic interaction. Conflict exists in many forms other than the form that can result from competition, and managers should understand the different ways of conflict resolution. Thus, examines conflict from a variety of viewpoints (Stephen, 2004).

The success of the organization as a whole depends upon the hormonal relations among all interdependent groups, even though some intergroup conflicts in organizations is inevitable. The idea is to study intergroup behaviors within an organization so that any conflict can be recognized and dealt with by the management. Except in very few situations where the conflict can lead to competition and creativity so that in such situations the conflict can be encouraged, in all other cases where conflict is destructive in nature, it should be resolved as soon after it has developed as possible, but all efforts should be made to prevent it from developing (Reto, 2005).

Theoretical framework

With the level of contestation in Central Asia, there are all forms of conflict with various levels of intensive and violence, we may think of war as conflict. Conflict is a general social form that isn't limited to society apart. Conflict theory is the theory that emphasizes the role of coercion, conflict, and power in society and that social inequality will inevitably

occur because of differing interests and values between groups, particularly the competition for scarce resources. Conflict theory has a long history in sociology. Without question, Karl Marx's work in the early to mid-1800s formed the initial statements of this perspective. As you know, Marx was centrally concerned with class and the dialectics of capitalism. He argued that capitalism would produce its own gravediggers by creating the conditions under which class consciousness and a failing economy would come into existence. In this juncture between structure and class-based group experience and the working class revolution would take place (Luthans, 1998).

In general, conflict theory seeks to scientifically explain the general contours of conflict in society: how conflict starts and varies, and the effects it brings. The central concerns of conflict theory are the unequal distribution of scarce resources and power. What these resources are might be different for each theorist, but conflict theorists usually work with Weber's three systems of stratification: class, status, and power. Conflict theorists generally see power as the central feature of society, rather than thinking of society as held together by collective agreement concerning a cohesive set of cultural standards, as functionalists do, where power is located and who uses it (and who doesn't) are thus fundamental to conflict theory. In this way of thinking about things, power isn't necessarily bad: it is a primary factor that guides society and social relations.

Conflict will also tend to have greater levels of violence when the goals of a group are seen to be transcendent. As long as the efforts of a group are understood to be directed toward everyday concerns, people will tend to moderate their emotional involvement and thus keep conflict at a rational level. If, on the other hand, we see the goals of our group as being greater than the group and the concerns of daily life, then conflict is more likely to be violent. Most social conflict is based on the unequal distribution of scarce resources. For instance, there are various power contestations in Central Asia over undefined borderline, scarcity of resource, seat-tight syndrome of the ruling class etc.

Concretely, the single most conflict prone sub-region in Central Asia today is the intersection area of eastern Uzbekistan, northern Tajikistan, and southern Kyrgyzstan, specifically the Ferghana valley area. Most of the conflict lines that will be discussed below are present in the Ferghana valley and are related to the artificial borders, economic decline, environmental crisis and rapid population growth

Findings and Discussion on some of the conflicts in central Asia

Indeed, regionalism was at the heart of Tajikistan's civil war, and is a strong political risk factor in Kyrgyzstan as well as Uzbekistan. Resources constitute a third category, mainly due to the abrupt division of the region's resources long geographical lines, with hydrocarbons almost exclusively in the western half and water equally exclusively originating in the eastern parts. More so, the control over government is an important conflict line in the region at present, given the fact that no peaceful change of government has taken place in the region since independence, and the development of an international order increasingly intolerant of authoritarian rule. Religion has developed into an important issue, with radicalized forms of Islam developing in the region. These contributed to the Tajik civil war, and led to armed insurgencies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that fundamentally affected the region's security. Organized crime has grown immensely in size over the past years and transcends the other categories of conflict (Don, John and Richard, 1989).

Conflicts over resources have been pointed out as one of the most important potential for conflicts in the region. The water issue is accentuated in the Ferghana valley which is an important agricultural region for all parties involved. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are heavily dependent on oil and gas from the other states and have proposed exchanges, but there has

been a strong reluctance to change the status quo on the part of the downstream states. Uzbekistan has conducted training exercises that look worryingly appropriate for attacking the Toktogul water reservoir in Kyrgyzstan. It would moreover be strange if Uzbekistan's military did not plan for defending what they consider to be their legitimate right to water, due to their historical access to water and, moreover, the country's heavy reliance on water (Don, John and Richard, 1989).

Furthermore, land issues and so-called territorial enclaves are important reasons for possible tension, but they do not seem to be of immediate concern, although access to enclaves and their governance has been a neglected issue for the past 15 years. The border conflicts are however political, economic and military issues that needs to be dealt with. This can best be seen in the increased militarization of order areas, such as land mining, which creates increased tension. Part of the problem is that some of the poorest regions are in the border areas and the cross-border trade is imperative for economic development (Niklas et.al, 2003).

Again, the greatest regional threat at the military level is the militant Islamic fundamentalism that has increased in strength after independence. Most important in this case is the IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) which in 1999 and 2000 conducted military operations in three states of the region and is believed to bear the responsibility for terrorist actions in Uzbekistan in both 1999 and 2004. The IMU was heavily decimated after the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, but is still important and resurgence should not be ruled out. Hizbut-Tahrir has emerged as another Islamic organization with the goal of overthrowing the Central Asian governments, even if they claim that this will be accomplished with non-violent means (Don, John and Richard, 1989).

Narcotics and organized crime come up as one of the more important questions when dealing with conflict prevention at the regional level. Organized crime has not only penetrated all economies of the region, but also increased beyond border violence due to

the criminality that risks increase the tension between the different states. Specifically, narcotics trafficking has functioned as a financing source for the IMU. The political co-option from the narcotics networks has made political and legal economic interaction between the states more difficult. In addition, funds from organized crime can be used to mobilize and bankroll popular unrest, as seems to have been the case in Southern Kyrgyzstan in March 2005. Despite some attempts to deal with the narcotics trade, it is a tremendous problem that has increased corruption to levels that are unprecedented in Central Asia. Linked to this is the health problem that threatens to create severe problems in the region, especially in relation to women that have less access to medical care. There has also been a increase in national and trans-national petty crime and violence related to organized crime and narcotics abuse (Niklas et.al, 2003).

Finally, the lack of interaction between different actors through closed borders and arbitrary border regimes increases the tension between the different states and reinforces the existing conflicts. It is by the day more difficult to create regional security mechanisms, as cooperation between states of the does not seem to improve, in spite of hope to the contrary (Niklas et.al, 2003).

The power vacuum in Central Asia that resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union's overlay over the region led to an opening for a number of powers to pursue political, economic and cultural interests with the local states. With different degrees of success, China, Iran, Turkey, India, and Pakistan as well as other states have sought to make a mark on the region. Of these, China has undoubtedly been the most successful in developing an economic and political presence in Central Asia. Turkey, Iran and Pakistan have been successful in pursing economic and cultural linkages, while their political roles in the region remain circumscribed— Turkey's influence in the South Caucasus being an exception. The problem with the external actors is that all value their bilateral relations more than their multilateral, for example the major powers in the Commonwealth of Independent States, partnership for Peace and Shanghai cooperation organization, i.e.

Russia, the US and China, have bilateral agreements that overrides all multilateral agreements. Moreover, the simple fact that no state views Central Asia as being crucial for its security or economic interests makes the Central Asian states exposed to changes in foreign policy changes of the larger states to a much higher degree. This has prevented any predictability of the development of the region and created a structural instability of Central Asia's regional politics (Don, John and Richard, 1989).

The most important changes in the region are, on a multilateral level the war against terror and the placement of American troops in the region. This has brought China, Russia and the US into the same playfield again and in the quest of fighting terror all three states have developed security cooperation with the Central Asian states. The commitment from the major powers will vain if the war against terror decreases in importance or the battlefield changes (Don, John and Richard, 1989).

There are several conflict lines in Central Asia but on a more structural level the militarization of society, the internal weakness of the states in the region has increased the military expenditure is threatening the peaceful development of Central Asia. The increase of weapons among states and on the streets is a tremendous problem. The aim for the central governments has been to combat internal groups as IMU, separatists or political dissidents but a large degree of the focus has also been on external threats, i.e. its neighbors. This has led to a militarization of the society that leads resources away from economic development with increased tension and crack/down on peaceful movements that protest against the lack of economic development as a result (Niklas et.al, 2003).

Political weakness and instability characterize Central Asia, and before 1991 there had not existed any independent state with the current names or current borders. The five Central Asian states were created in the 1920s with little consideration to geographical, cultural or ethnic composition; or even possibly with the deliberate purpose to divide the region. This has created states whose borders fail to correspond to ethnic division, especially in the

Ferghana valley, and significant ethnic minority populations as a result. This affects other conflict lines as well, as discussed below (Don, John and Richard, 1989).

Composition of Central Asia

Inasmuch as some regions use their composition as advantage, the ethnic composition in the region is problematic as all states have major minority groups that belong to one or several of its neighbors. The most extreme is Tajikistan where most of its titular people live either in Afghanistan or Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan on the other hand has the largest Diaspora groups in the other states. This is a result of the Soviet policy to divide and rule, which aimed at creating pockets of other people in different republics. These “islands” of minority groups are a central problem for the Central Asian states today. This is especially true in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan where large populations of Uzbeks live in compartmentalized regions in the border areas with Uzbekistan. Currently, these two states have the largest conflict potential with minorities, as discussed in the specific country chapters (Renee, Chinara, Jeniffer, Kathryn and Anara, 2001).

On a political level, the Central Asian states have had a number of border conflicts. One important example has been the Uzbek-Kazakh border, whose demarcation has been practically concluded only in the past two years (96 percent of the border has been delimited), following significant tensions and protracted negotiations. Border delimitation between Uzbekistan-Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is under process, but it is slower. Part of the problem is the Ferghana Valley. Ferghana Valley is painting a picture of the situation in Central Asia at large with diversified ethnic, cultural and linguistic communities divided by artificial borders. The cross-border trade is significant and continued border conflicts in the region threaten to cut off the most important trade route that connects these three states. If national identities have failed to secure the strong allegiance of significant parts of Central Asia’s population, a main reason is the strength of sub-national identities. These have historically differed depending on the people in question. Central Asian states differ

strongly in terms of historical social structure (International Crisis Group, 2002). Turkmens, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz are Turkic populations of nomadic origin, where tribal structure is strong and geographically based identities for obvious reasons weak. On the other hand, Tajiks is a settled, agricultural Persian-speaking society, with stronger attachment to territory and concomitantly higher levels of regional identity. Finally, Uzbeks are Turkic and of historically nomadic origin, but settled centuries earlier than their northern and western cousins and hence social structure there has gradually become more settled and heavily influenced in both linguistic and cultural terms by interaction with Persian society (Stephen, 2004).

The Kyrgyz revolution in 2005 began in the Southern, impoverished and marginalized regions of the country, which have long felt discriminated against compared to the wealthier North. Here, a regional conflict line was mitigated by the general unpopularity of the ruling elite even in the North, and by the decision by President Akayev not to seek to stay in power by force. In Uzbekistan, regional divisions are more complex given the size and population of the country, which is roughly five times that of Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan. A half dozen regional units including Tashkent, Samarkand, Ferghana, Jizzakh, Surkhandarya, and Urgench exist, which all play important roles in the political balance of the country (Renee, Chinara, Jeniffer, Kathryn and Anara, 2001).

Despite formally adopting a democratic system, the traditional ways of life of Central Asian societies are determining political decisions. In the framework of the failure of states to become legitimate governing bodies, so-called ‘clans’, (referring to regional or kinship-based networks) that traditionally were the most important political identities, have regained importance. Clans are nevertheless not formal but informal structures that support selected leaders in their political ambitions. Kazakhstan’s leaders owe much of their support to the Zhus (horde), and the current leaders belong to the UluZhus (Great horde). Turkmenistan has five major political groupings, based on clans (tribes) and the three leading are the Akhalteke, Iomun Yomud and Ersary (Lufthans, 1999).

The resource base in Central Asia is skewed and all states have a strong dependency on one or a few resources. As noted initially, Central Asia's western half possess the near totality of oil and gas resources, whereas water, a scarce resource in this arid region, originates almost entirely from the mountains of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (International Crisis Group, 2002).

The heart of the problem is that this problem – the need for water in the west for agriculture and the need for hydrocarbons in the east for winter time heating and industry was solved by Soviet planned economy through simple transfers between the republics. With independence, that system collapsed as oil and gas-producing states began to demand payment for deliveries while refusing, for historical and cultural reasons, to accept the notion of paying for water (Lufthans, 1999).

However, the possession of oil and gas has not been a recipe for economic development, only Kazakhstan has created an oil fund that is set to secure the development of other sectors and it has today a GDP twice as high as the other states. Water pointed out as one of the most threatening factors for regional disputes, and nowhere is that conflict potential more apparent than in the Ferghana valley and the Khorezm region near the Aral Sea. Agriculture is the backbone of the regional economy and water-intensive crops as cotton and rice require intensive irrigation. In Uzbekistan, the largest consumer of water, 90 percent of agricultural production is produced on irrigated lands. Since all states in the region are heavily dependent on agriculture, water resources are under constant dispute. The situation is further complicated as more than 90 percent of the water resources in Central Asia are derived from only two river systems, the Syr Darya (from Kyrgyzstan through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan) and Amu Darya (from Afghanistan and Tajikistan through Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan). There is, contrary to conventional wisdom, no water crisis in the region, but it is much more a question of the poor management of water resources and faltering infrastructure, which results in the region consuming half as much water than it needs (Lintner, 2003).

In general, the region has seen a stalling and backsliding development of political reform, with high levels of corruption and low levels of civil liberties and political participation. As Stephen Blank notes, “talk of prospects for democratization in Central Asia seemingly represents the triumph of hope over experience”. This is reinforced by Freedom House’s ratings of post-communist states (Lufthans, 1999). Kyrgyzstan’s recent revolution is an example of the political potential of dissatisfied and destitute masses. Yet it also shows the volatility their political use: indeed, the opposition forces that swept into government did so not by inciting and controlling the masses as Viktor Yushchenko and Mikheil Saakashvili had done; but rather by riding on and benefiting from a popular wave they could not control. The result was the looting of Bishkek, the influence of narco-barons that financed parts of the rebellion, and the disorder that developed after the take-over of power (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2005).

Since before the collapse of the Soviet Union, a religious revival has undoubtedly taken place, which is potentially benign and stabilizing, filling a void created by the collapse of the Communist value system. Governments initially embraced the religious revival, while trying to keep religious activity under state supervision. Islam itself suffered heavily from the Soviet experience and young and middle-aged people have a much weaker knowledge of the tenets of the religion than their parents, due to forced Soviet atheism. This considerably contributed to the secularization of society, but also created a moral and spiritual vacuum among the youth (Lintner, 2003).

The Hizb-ut-Tahrir and IMU are likely to continue to be problematic but probably of a manageable magnitude in Central Asia for the foreseeable future. Organized crime affects wakened states – states that lack a strong legal system, stable political processes and a legitimate state- in several different ways. The most serious from a traditional perspective is the connection between guerilla and terrorist movements and organized crime. The link between armed groups that aims at overthrowing the state or to control parts of its territory. Organized crime has increased the military capacity for these groups by providing for

economic support and military competence. The direct result is that the states capacity to effectively control its territory decreases and its legitimacy diminishes. Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan uses the weakness of Tajikistan and operates from its southern provinces to attack targets in Uzbekistan (United Nations Office on Narcotics and Crime, 2003).

Corruption and Conflict in Central Asia

Corruption and political co-option emerge as a result of the interest of organized crime to control or decapitate states ability to fight organized crime. When corruption reaches certain level, it can control the state or destroys the state institutions through its attempts to corrupt and control. Organized crime has increased the levels of political corruption and in some cases, it is even possible to speak about political co-option of the political structures in Central Asia. All five states end up among the most corrupted societies in the world, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan are number 8 and 9, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are all among the 30 worst affected states in the world and no state scores more than 23 which indicates rampant corruption according to the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index. This is partly, but not limited to, the narcotics trade and the illegal networks that work to take over vital sections of the state. Kazakhstan remains least affected by the narcotics trade and Tajikistan is by far the most affected, despite increased seizures of heroin (Lintner, 2003)

The social development in the region is facing a negative future in which the worsened health situation, increased organized crime, decreased resources to education and a system that in general is failing women. When dealing with the health sector in the region, the situation is quickly worsening with decreased resources to the health sector and a situation where the population at large cannot afford to see a doctor. This is in a situation where addiction and intravenous related diseases such as AIDS/HIV and Hepatitis C is spreading with tremendous speed through the region. Naturally, the worst cases are to be found in the transit regions of narcotics. A World Bank study estimates that among more than 500,000

drug users in Central Asia many share needles that leads to high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS (The U.N System, 2003).

About US\$ 1 billion would be needed for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment in Central Asia between 2004 and 2007. UNAIDS reported about a narrowing of the male-female ratio of newly detected HIV/AIDS cases from 4:1 to 2:1, that indicates women are increasingly at risk. Moreover, it has been pointed out that in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan women access to health institutions has been restricted to a higher degree than men; there is nothing that indicates that this would be different in the other states. According to recent figures the percentage of intravenous users among the HIV/AIDS cases are 88 per cent in Central Asia, this could be compared to 55 per cent in Russia, 72 per cent in China United Nations Office, 2003).

The educational systems in the region has been a negative trend with decreased participation, this is especially true for women that are excluded from secondary and tertiary level. Though, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, despite commercialization and budget cuts in education an increasing share of female students in tertiary education in the last fifteen years demonstrates a good progress in advancement of women. The increased unemployment together with decreased possibilities for education and access to profession skills will undoubtedly create discontent, especially in a region with a relatively young population (Frederick, 2004).

The ethnic conflict has been most apparent in the Osh and Jalalabad and it was also in the Southern Cities of Özbök and Osh that the largest ethnic unrest occurred in 1990, with the largest ethnically motivated killings Central Asia had seen for decades (Reto, 2005). There is little evidence that ethnic hatred is supported by the respective states. The reasons for the ethnic conflict seem to be much more local, and related to water issues, disputes over land ownership, border crossings, etc. This puts the ethnic conflicts more at the local level than a conflict between the groups at large, yet the perception of hostility between the two

groups remains. This conflict should not be confused with the cleavage between the South and the North of Kyrgyzstan. This is true even though the South is known as “half Uzbeks and half Kyrgyz” while the North is almost exclusively Kyrgyz with little or no Uzbek population. The North-South conflict is much more a conflict over political and economic power and has only modest amounts of ethnic tensions. The divisions between the north and the south should moreover not be exaggerated. There is undoubtedly competition over political and financial resources and impact, but the regional differences do not exclude cooperation (Swanstrom, 2004).

The tensions between the South and the North also has a religious touch, since the South is by far more conservative Islamic than the North, partly due to the influence of the more religious Uzbek community. This argument is problematic in areas such Talas and Yssyk Köl which have almost no Uzbeks but nevertheless a religious awakening has emerged there which Hizb-ut-Tahrir has taken advantage of. Uzbekistan has been seen as a potential adversary for Kyrgyzstan and there is some conflict potential in this relationship (Starr et.al, 2001). A first incompatibility is the dispute of water. Tashkent has repeatedly stated its determination to defend what it considers its right to water with all available instruments, and moreover the border disputes between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan involve both a significant proportion of people and potentially economically lucrative areas. Uzbekistan also accuses Kyrgyzstan of harboring Islamic militants of the IMU, which is odd given the widespread Kyrgyz fear of militant Islam. However, the feeling in Tashkent is that Kyrgyzstan, like Tajikistan, Ethnic tensions in Kyrgyzstan exist but they do not seem to be at the national level, rather much more at a local level and primarily over resources and land rights, and not in the form of age-old hatred between ethnic groups (Jane, 2000).

There have been rather strong indications that the political process is influenced or at least supported by organized crime. Increased consumption of narcotics and the more frequent use of Kyrgyzstan as a transit state have strengthened the criminal elements in Kyrgyzstan.

If organized criminal networks were, as it seems, a factor facilitating the 2005 revolution, the political development in Kyrgyzstan would be in danger of being affected and it is possible that Kyrgyzstan could become a runner up to Tajikistan in terms of political and economic co-option by criminal networks. Simultaneous improvement of the socio-economic situation there is no incitements to agree to the security reforms (European Health for all Database, 2005).

Many of the conflicts that we have seen are local and conflict prevention and resolution needs to have local solutions. Therefore, efforts need to be taken to identify local actors that could be dealing with conflicts of this kind. Women organizations seems to be one of the better structures deal with these questions through, but as women's political powers is severely limited in both states these groups have to be connected to the political elite in the region and the capital.

Central Asia suffers from the lack of functional regional security mechanisms. This is due partly to the role of external actors and partly to the lack of cooperation between Central Asian states. Security mechanisms exclusively for the Central Asian states have failed due to the lack of trust between the different states, as exemplified by the conflict lines, and the growing perception that Uzbekistan will dominate the rest of the region in such an arrangement. Apart from this there is a lack of incentives from the Central Asian states as they do not perceive that they share too many security concerns and finally the lack of functional infrastructure in the region to accomplish such an organization. The failure to cooperate has created a power vacuum since independence in 1991.

We discover that what is striking for the region is that there is no functional security mechanism. The Central Asian states even lack truly regional organizations for cooperation. There have been attempts but these are stalemated and the only organization that has been remotely functional is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and is controlled by China and Russia. This makes it very difficult for the regional states to engage

in constructive multilateral discussion and in the longer time span implement regional mechanisms for conflict prevention. This lack of constructive dialogue between the regional states has opened up for external influences and control over the regional development politically. This is, contrary to popular beliefs, a negative trend as there are currently no international organizations or states that view the region as their primary interest. This has resulted in a range of interesting initiatives, but the focus has more than once changed as the external actors has put their recourses and interest at other regions and questions. This has created a situation where the Central Asian regional security policy is constantly and chronically unpredictable. The SCO has been successful in solving the conflict between China and its Central Asian neighbors; similarly, CIS has been successful in solving its border disputes with the Central Asian states. Unfortunately, these border issues have been resolved in the favor of Russia and China and failed to deal with intra-regional conflicts. The lack of multilateral structures in the region, both intra-regional as well as extra-regional has made the chances of regional management, prevention or resolution of multilateral or bilateral conflicts very much more difficult. The current position is to keep status quo if possible and in most cases the conflict intensity is increasing.

Conclusion

In general, Central Asian states have been characterized by the lack of political change. Only Tajikistan changed its ruling elite after independence, followed just recently by Kyrgyzstan. Hence, over a decade, Central Asia passed without a change of regime, and both of these regime changes took place through the use of force. The lack of political participation and civil liberties is especially true regarding women, who are severely restricted from political participation. For example, since the rejection of the Soviet quota

system that allowed women to take 30% of the positions in parliament, only 7 percent of MPs in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were women, while in Tajikistan 12 percent of the parliament consists of women. There is currently no woman among MPs in the new parliament of Kyrgyzstan after the 2002 revolution, since female candidates collected less votes than men. This seclusion of women from political life is troubling and it is essential to increase political participation for women in the male-controlled decision-making and security processes in Central Asia.

Poverty and economic inequalities have exacerbated the situation in the region, and created suppressed dissatisfaction that interact with the lack of avenues for political participation to create a significant potential of social conflict. During Soviet times, Central Asia was the weakest region financially, a condition that became much worse after independence in 1991 even if the last few years have seen a more positive development. Nevertheless, the GDP of the Central Asian states remains below the level of 1990. Even if there has been an increase in the economic development the last few years the economic performance has been negative in terms of per capita income.

Engagement of the international community is a prerequisite for the region in general and in particular Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the political and economic weakness makes it virtually impossible for them to deal with these issues by themselves. The failure of the international community to engage the state and the ruling elite has made a problematic situation worse and much effort is today needed to reverse the situation. A strong recommendation for the international donors, and especially smaller ones, is to focus their resources on larger projects with high impact on the state and the security sector reform. This is best done by working together in larger projects with the state in question and improving the basic conditions for economic development, political participation and a non-corrupt society. This can be done through so called “silent partnerships” or direct joint ventures, but the current focus on smaller projects have not had an impact to make substantial change possible.

It would be a mistake to disregard their potential, however, as ethnic cleavages are present in people's minds and is used for propaganda purposes by different actors. A more troubling cleavage is the one between real or perceived haves versus have-nots, with Special emphasis on perception as the cleavage may be more perceived than real. Regardless of the recent improvements in economic development, the cleavages between the very rich and the very poor have increased, and most troublesome is that some regions, such as Naryn, Talas and Batken, are by far more affected than other regions. This regional cleavage of resources could drum up a resistance against the richer provinces.

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