



# THE IMPACT OF EXTERNAL FACTORS ON SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA

Published by the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA)

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The publication represents the final report as well as a compilation of presentations and other relevant materials of the international seminar "The Impact of External Factors on Security and Development in Central Asia". Speeches and presentations contained in this publication cover a broad range of issues related to the analysis of external factors affecting security and development in Central Asia. This publication is expected to be of interest to diplomats, Government officials, academics and expert community.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>AISS</b>	Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies
<b>ANSF</b>	Afghan National Security Forces
<b>CA</b>	Central Asia
<b>CAR CRDF</b>	Central Asia Regional Collective Rapid Deployment Force
<b>CASA</b>	Central Asia- South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project
<b>CBM</b>	Confidence Building Measures
<b>CICA</b>	Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
<b>CIS</b>	Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>CSBM</b>	Confidence-building and security measures
<b>CSTO</b>	Collective Security Treaty Organization
<b>CRRF</b>	CSTO Collective Rapid Response Forces
<b>CVE</b>	Confronting violent extremism
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EEAU</b>	Eurasian Economic Union
<b>FSU</b>	Former Soviet Union
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>IK</b>	Imarat Kavkaz
<b>IMESS</b>	Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies in Tehran
<b>IMU</b>	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
<b>IRA</b>	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
<b>IS</b>	Islamic State

<b>ISAF</b>	International Security Assistance Force
<b>ISIL</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<b>ITO</b>	International Transparency Organization
<b>JCPOA</b>	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NGO</b>	Non – Governmental Organization
<b>“OBOR”</b>	“One Belt, One Road”
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>PRIO</b>	Peace Research Institute Oslo
<b>PhD</b>	Doctor of Philosophy
<b>RATS</b>	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
<b>RCTS SCO</b>	Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure of the SCO
<b>SCO</b>	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
<b>SIGAR</b>	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
<b>SIPRI</b>	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
<b>TAPI</b>	Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline
<b>TURKPA</b>	Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries
<b>Turksoy</b>	International Organization of Turkic culture
<b>TPP</b>	Tehreek-e-Taliban
<b>TV</b>	Television
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates

<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNRCCA</b>	United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<b>VD</b>	Vienna Document
<b>WGA</b>	Working Group on Afghanistan

## PREFACE

The United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) organized an international seminar entitled "The Impact of External Factors on Security and Development in Central Asia", on 9-10 December, 2015, at the Plaza Hotel in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic. It brought together representatives of institutes of strategic studies and other government institutions of Central Asian states and neighboring countries, such as Russia, Iran, China, Azerbaijan and Turkey as well as a number of international think tanks and embassies based in Bishkek. Most of relevant regional organizations, such as the OSCE, SCO, CSTO and OIC participated in the seminar. Additionally to UNRCCA, the UN was represented by UNAMA, UN Women, UNDP and UNHCR. Well-known local and international experts also took part in the seminar.

The event was held within the framework of the UNRCCA's Strategic Dialogue Series carried out since 2009. The purpose of these activities is to analyze together with Institutes of Strategic Studies, other state institutions, international and regional organizations, academia and experts, security-related developments and to recommend preventive measures. The strategic dialogues are also aimed to look for ways to boost interaction among countries in order to address threats and challenges facing the region as well as to identify a possible role of different actors.

The two-day seminar commenced with the organizers giving an in-depth introduction and guiding statements. This was followed by a scientific and expert overview of the state of the external threats and challenges facing the region. The impact of the external factors was also reviewed from the political, socio-economic, demographic and security lens.

In the afternoon of the first day of the seminar, international and regional experts presented information about the rise of the Islamic State and other extremist groups and the impact of the latter on the stability in Central Asia. This was followed by an open discussion and a reception.

The second day was dedicated to the impact of the developments in Ukraine and Middle East on the region of Central Asia and the strategies of key partner-states. The final session presented information about regional cooperation and the role of regional organizations in this process, as well as the prospects for cooperation and best practices utilized among Central Asian states.

## INTRODUCTION

Post 2014 scenario in Afghanistan remains a serious concern for Central Asian states that fear a spillover effect. There is a potential threat of terrorist and extremist actions related to lesser control over the Afghan territory after the drawdown. Also, illicit drug trafficking and smuggling could be feeding even more organized crime in the region. The growth and development of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other extremist groups in the Middle East and North Africa has had consequences for Central Asia. A number of Central Asians have become ISIL fighters. There are concerns that after returning home they could use their combat experience for subversive activities. Developments in Ukraine also negatively echoed on the Central Asia region. At the same time there are positive factors such as increased cooperation among some Central Asian states due to the expansion of the Eurasian Union, cooperation with the new partner-states as Far and South- East Asia, Arab Monarchies and reinforcing the established cooperation with the US, China and Russia.

Taking into consideration that external factors, which affect the situation in Central Asia, are on the rise, UNRCCA decided to focus on these factors in the strategic dialogue event in



December 2015. The purpose of the seminar was to analyze security-related developments and recommend preventive measures. The seminar also aimed to look for ways to boost interaction among countries in order to address external threats and challenges facing the region as well as to identify a possible positive role of international actors.

Participants looked at the historical perspective of the rise of the Islamic State and other extremist groups threatening stability in Central Asia. They exchanged views and ideas regarding internal and external factors influencing regional cooperation, including the impact of the developments in Ukraine on the Central Asian region. The main issues referred to by participants as requiring increased and systematic regional cooperation were fight against terrorism and extremism and inter-regional economic development. The importance of social and cultural ties in regional contacts as well as the youth factor was also emphasized.

Experts agreed that strengthening of governments in Central Asia and information war against radicalism and jihadism is highly important. Improvement of economic situation in the region was identified as a catalyst in order to keep the citizens in the country and prevent their turning into foreign fighters. In addition, importance of the inclusion of society and intra-religious dialogue within Islam were emphasized. Recommendations included the formulation of comprehensive counter-terrorism strategies with a strong implementation mechanism. Potential spread of ISIL to the Central Asian region was considered a concerning factor due to the new opening fronts in neighboring Afghanistan. In addition, gaps between politics and action were regarded as a major hindering factor in the regional cooperation to fight against the threat of ISIL.

The role of international and regional organizations, in particular the UN, in facing the common regional threats was underlined. Most of the speakers stressed the usefulness of such platforms, which bring together a broad spectrum of state institutions, regional organizations and independent experts to find common denominators among different strategies. It was suggested that these discussions should continue either in the current format of strategic dialogues or in a more permanent setting.

The final report with conclusions and recommendations was included into this publication to be available to a broader audience including those involved in policy making in respective state structures in the region.



Russia

Kazakhstan

Caspian  
Sea

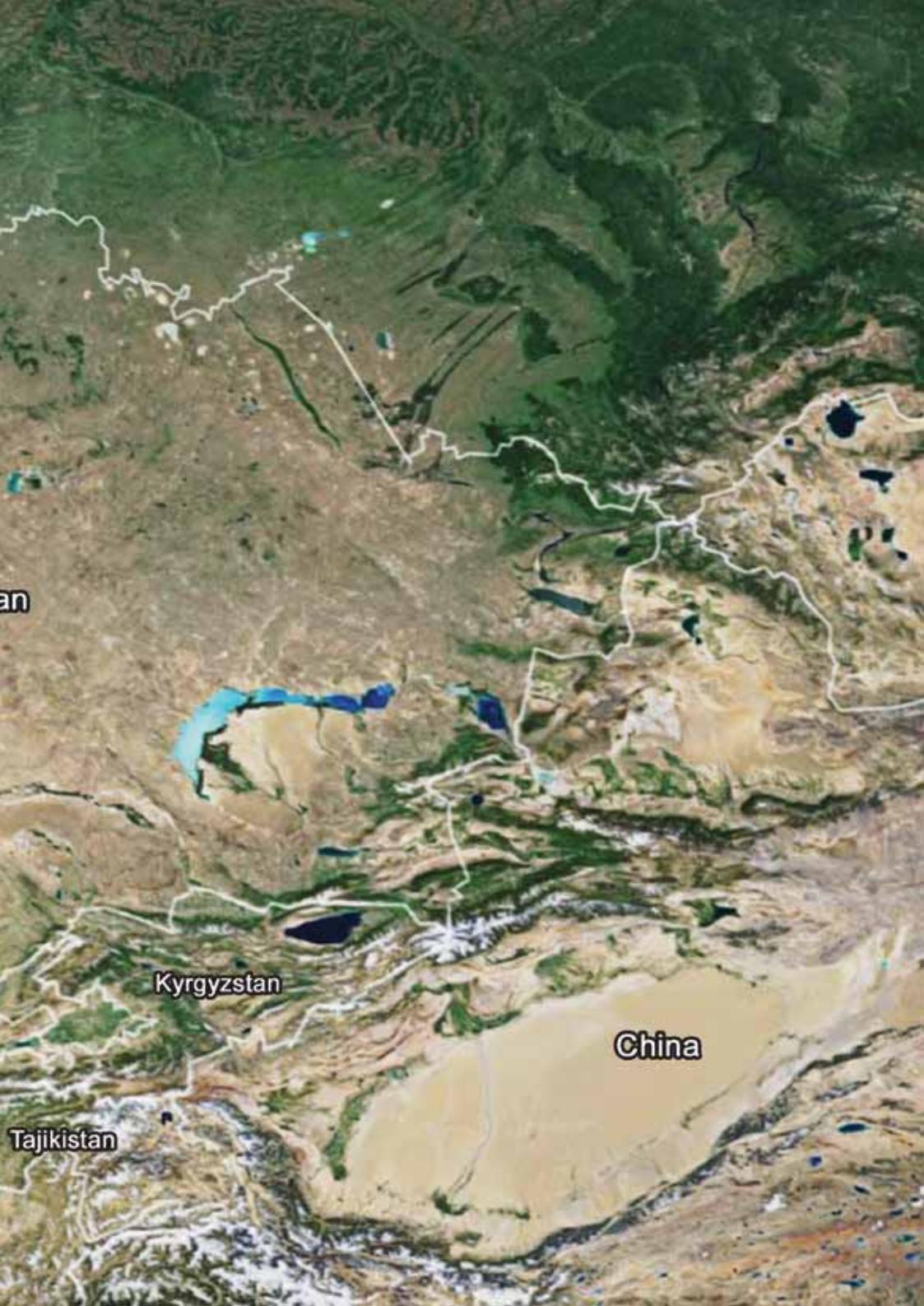
Azerbaijan

Uzbekistan

Turkmenistan

Iran

Afghanistan



Kazakhstan

Kyrgyzstan

China

Tajikistan

# **Soft Power as One of Central Asia's Regional Security Factors in the Globalization Context**

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In the globalization context most of the regional and local problems tend to acquire global importance. More often than not they cannot possibly be solved by the efforts of any sole country single-handedly. One of such problems is security and its various aspects, which are currently experiencing drastic changes due to the growing uncertainty and instability not just at the regional level but worldwide. Uncertainty and instability in terms of relations, systems and balances of power have given rise to global challenges and threats, including terrorism, separatism and extremism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, drug trafficking, and trans-border organized crime. These challenges and threats have become transboundary in their nature and require particular attention of the international community. Many regional and local conflicts are yet to be settled.

All countries irrespective of their geographical position increasingly have to deal with similar security threats. Our region is no different. There are no interstate conflicts in Central Asia but the remaining contradictions may still develop into a conflict.

The balance of power at both global and regional levels has changed dramatically thus increasing the importance of the global and regional security mechanisms and compelling countries to more frequently resort to the policy of soft power, information and psychological technologies impacting public consciousness and conduct, as well as information and psychological means of persuasion such as conceptual attitudes and ideas. The recent wave of religiously motivated extremism and terrorism in Central Asia may be a consequence of such practices. For instance, last July the Kyrgyzstan law enforcement agencies captured four ISIS-affiliated terrorists who

had intended to commit an act of terrorism during a mass prayer at the central square of Bishkek. Thanks to the preventive action taken by law enforcement no civilians got killed. In October this year, a group of nine extremely dangerous criminals, all with life sentences, broke out of prison killing four guards in process. Seven of them were members of *Zhayshul Magdi* extremist organization, one of the prisoners kept an ISIS banner while another one maintained contact with Kyrgyzstan citizens fighting for the ISIS in Syria.

In countries of Central Asia a religiously motivated conflict is a very real – and affordable – manifestation of a powerful ideology that adds meaning to their lives. This is particularly true for the outcast migrant workers from Central Asia being a target audience for the terrorist recruiters.

However, it would be safe to assume that there are some other motives for young people to join terrorist organizations because human behavior varies greatly under the same economic, social and other conditions. We have been witnessing people becoming involved, to some extent or another, in the activities of such terrorist organizations as ISIS. As a matter of fact, this happens not only in countries boasting their loyalty to Islam but in far less religiously enthused European states as well. Had it not been for the ever-growing number of ISIS members and the increasing number and expanding geography of other terrorist organizations this problem could be still falling under the freedom-of-faith category.

The number of foreign insurgents participating in the Syria–Iraq conflict has exceeded 20,700 and Kyrgyzstan already accounts for over 500 of them.

The foregoing made the Kyrgyzstan society take another hard look into the threats of terrorism and religious extremism that are tangible and are exported from the war zones – Syria and Afghanistan.

The Military Doctrine of the Kyrgyz Republic approved by the country's President in 2013 says that both the magnitude and possible consequences of developments in various regions, and especially in the Middle East and Afghanistan, are unpredictable. The threats of international terrorism, extremism and separatism are still present in Central Asia, and terrorist groups waste no time in adapting to the counteractions of law enforcement bodies and devising new insurrection tactics and methods.

These forecasts and conclusions set out in the Military Doctrine of the Kyrgyz Republic were largely prompted by so called Batken incident sixteen years ago when radical Islamic insurgents invaded the Batken District of the Osh Region in the Kyrgyz Republic but were surrounded and either killed or pushed back as a result of a special operation of the Kyrgyzstan armed forces, military and law enforcement units.

We have reasons to believe that globalization is in fact an endless process of modernization, which has notably accelerated over the past 30 years in the late 20th and early 21st centuries owing to the intellectual climate of the globalizing world. Development of high technologies, new cultural, linguistic and religious trends led to the creation of a new balance of forces, political systems and the concepts of "soft power", "hard power" and "smart power".

With the challenges and threats now being global in nature the soft power concept appears to be the best choice for tackling them. The soft power imperative is based on traditional, historically evolved values, ideas, views and beliefs. At the system level such values are regarded, on one hand, as a result of human activity, and on the other hand, as its regulators. Consequently, the traditional values have always been used as tools of persuasion aiming at altering the views and underlying political principles of society.

According to the soft power concept everything should be done "gradually" meaning no quality criteria, quantitative milestones, discontinuity of actions and values.

In the meantime, the soft power resources enable the market, trade, banking and other institutions to establish and propagate a belief that the lifestyle of a country that represents the interests of another country is "right," "normal," "progressive," "civilized," thus encouraging society to partially revise its traditions and ways and focusing on the generally acceptable features such as economical systems, language, communications, institutions of marriage, and ethnicity.

For instance, the recent trend for self-identification of the Turkic peoples, including a search for language origins and religious marriages, overlooks the historical and cultural background of the people and the contingencies that have significant influence or impact on the development of society per se, because the life of people, social order, its institutions, beliefs and arts are tangible fruits of the principle of continuity.

In this context soft power should be viewed as a multidimensional and multifaceted process determined by such factors as the lifestyle and behavior of society actors. There is a symbiosis of randomly changed beliefs and the laws of societal development. The changed beliefs trigger the emergence of new needs and the setting of common goals leading to spontaneous development of new social standards and rules of conduct which begin to be applied in practice and are ultimately accepted. This causes dysfunction of a social institution and a drop of its prestige and reputation as a result its poor performance and failure to meet social needs.

Belief motivates the convergence of various ideas underlying a semantic action. The subjects of soft power actively respond to external changes taking into account the level of prevalence of the belief. As such, the substantive aspect of soft power is normally believed to include:

- social structure;
- the full combination of social customs;
- specific frame of mind and feelings, common features of various cultures predetermining the behavioral stereotypes and general manner of reaction and subsequently leading to conclusions concerning the need to introduce any changes.

The concept of "pattern" plays an important role in the policy of soft power. Pattern (model) can be defined as a relatively fixed way in which ideas and goals become active. A pattern can be universal, special or designated for a particular category of people. As opposed to the patterns of civilizational development of society and culture, the soft power pattern can be actually implemented as it employs the methods of persuasion that may cause a person to change his/her views, opinions, attitudes. It should be noted that the soft power pattern is the least explored concept.

The soft power pattern can be described using three major categories:

- versatility;
- indirect impact;
- goal-oriented beliefs.

When defining the soft power pattern it is important to keep in mind the historical development specifics of a certain ethno-cultural community and the borrowing of skills, beliefs, rituals as a result of cultural contacts.

In today's globalized world codified law (consciousness), the provisions of which can be revised and modified in accordance with the established procedure, is seen as the dominant regulating force of the soft power pattern. Moreover, the system of codified rules may be subjected to major changes as a result of fundamental social transformations. In traditional societies (or within the boundaries of a traditional culture) the soft power pattern uses the regulating force of persuasion engrained precisely in tradition, i.e. a code of norms and rules of a certain ethno-cultural community formed in the past and deemed rock-solid and subject to no changes. In this case, the soft power pattern should contain the elements of an unchangeable tradition as a guarantee of positive outcome.

The ways of settling social conflicts and challenges and, hence, behavior patterns are also codified. Importantly, even in countries with a well-developed system of social life in all its aspects the direct-action approach to the settlement of conflicts through resources of soft power does not yield positive results. For instance, the principle of direct action implemented within a certain community of people via a special code of conduct can be viewed as a form of application of soft power by the institutions of family and economy. Therefore, the unchangeable soft power patterns do interact penetrating one another. A specific soft power pattern is dependent upon the historical traditions of a given community or country and is closely tied to human psychology, being embedded into the ethno-psychological human behavioral stereotypes.

Soft power should be *constructive* i.e. use some or other method of persuasion, from a primitive to an evidently manifested form.

Beliefs exist wherever the methods of their construction are known.

Constructivism is clearly a departure from simplicity. Therefore, the methods of persuasion are implemented and described in a cultural language, which is a language of tradition and customs, norms and principles of relationships. All Central Asian countries are also interested in maintaining internal stability, both at home and in their neighboring countries. It would seem appropriate to dwell on the threat of spread of religious extremism and terrorism in the region

in the context of the deteriorating situation in Central Asia and its influence on the security climate in Kyrgyzstan.

It is necessary to emphasize the importance of the method of forming public consciousness through soft power today as it is critical for the security status of our country and the region as a whole. We must spare no effort to put the resources of soft power such as the media, culture, traditions and religious beliefs to good use so that our society can finally choose a social order that is consistent with our culture, values, traditions and where priority has been always given to security of both our country and the neighboring states.

# The Rise of the Islamic State and Regional Instability

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## The IS in the Levant

The rise of the so-called Islamic State (IS) in the Middle East and especially in the Levant region shows a great deal of connectivity between the spread of regional crises and the emergence of Jihadi radicalism. The most significant experience out of IS' activities in the Levant region is its attempt to connect intra-state sectarian politics with inter-states geopolitical rivalries in the region. Spread of this situation can endanger the stability and security in the broader region, in North Africa, the Levant and Central Asia.

As the third generation of Al Qaeda (first Bin Laden in Afghanistan and second Zarqawi in Iraq), the IS emerged and expanded as a result of the current political crisis in Syria in the aftermath of the Arab Spring spreading to Iraq thereby intensifying sectarian politics between Shiites and Sunnis. This situation has triggered a new round of geopolitical rivalries between regional and trans-regional actors such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey on the one side and America and Russia on the other, to fill the power vacuum through replacing their favorite regimes and regional policy to preserve national and security interests.

## Geopolitics of the IS

The experience of the rise of the IS in the Levant region shows how the process of the creation, recruitment and continuation of the terrorist organization is related to the increased identity politics and states' geopolitical rivalries in a specific region. At present, the IS continues its activities in three separate regions with different ideological and geopolitical characteristics:

20 The Levant, North Africa and Yemen, and Central Asia. The IS claims that its main goal is to create an ultra-state Islamic caliphate. Yet, the regional cultural-societal characteristics and political-security realities restrict the terrorist organization to fulfill such a goal. For instance, the geopolitics of North Africa, Sahel and Sub-Saharan region, between Egypt and Libya or down to

Sudan or with all the cultural connections between this region and Europe, etc., somehow force the IS to differentiate its activities and strategies with that of the Levant area or Central Asia. Aside from the Levant region which is already mentioned above, the IS activities in Central Asia, are extensively related to the ethnic geopolitics of Islamic movements in Tajikistan, Afghanistan and South Asia, the Taliban issue and overall the backgrounds of the jihad movements in the region.

## Battling the IS

Although defeating the IS and establishing security and stability is a common request at the regional and international levels, the geopolitical rivalries between the regional and trans-regional actors have led them to follow their individual containment policy on battling the IS. At present, there exist three coalitions in this regard. First, the American-led coalition which includes a few conservative Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, etc., along with some European countries such as France and Britain. Second, the Iranian/Russian coalition, which includes Iraqi and Syrian governments. And third, the so-called Islamic Coalition initiated by Saudi Arabia, which includes some Islamic countries. This situation while ineffective to suppress the IS, has generated a new round of sectarian politics in the region, an impetus for the terrorist group to recruit new forces and continue their activities.

In such circumstances, defeating the IS requires a regional/trans-regional cooperation with a leading role of the United Nations to be able to reduce the current political tensions at the intra-state level such as diminishing sectarian politics by supporting the state system in Iraq and Syria and inter-states level specially the reducing tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Regional/trans-regional cooperation is key to cut the IS inter-regions' connecting points in the Levant, North Africa and Yemen and Central Asia and Afghanistan.

## JCPOA and the IS

In this respect, the implementation of the Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), struck between Iran and six world powers July 14, 2015, consequently solving a strategic discrepancy between Iran and the West especially America, could provide the grounds for regional cooperation to battle the ISIS. The nuclear deal helps to break the conventional view in the West on the necessity of containing Iran as the main source of instability in the region. This development will gradually remove the main justification for

continued geopolitical rivalry between main regional actors namely Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Much of the current regional rivalries in Syria and Yemen and even Iraq, supported by the West, are aimed at sustaining Iran's regional influence. Indeed, the main reason behind the Saudis' opposition on Iran's nuclear deal and even bombing Yemen or Turkey's taking side with Saudi Arabia in the Yemeni or Syrian crises is based on Iran's containment.

# Expansion of the Terrorist Organization Islamic State and Other Extremist Groups as a Threat to Stability in Central Asia

**Farhad MAMEDOV**  
Director

**The Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

In recent years, we have been witnessing continuous growth of the role of Islam in social life, the public sphere and politics of Muslim countries. The events dubbed the Arab Spring have again made the relationship between Islam and politics a topical issue. In some countries, Islamic parties come to power and enter into conflict with the old political elites, new social and political movements appear on the arena and new transnational terrorist organizations (first and foremost, the Islamic State) emerge and they successfully use the Islamic heritage and the historical memory of Muslims in their ideological struggle against Arab national states.

In other countries, for example, in Azerbaijan and some former Soviet republics, the process of the “Islamic revival” continues. On the one hand, this process relates to the revival of the so-called traditional forms of Islam, which were persecuted in the Soviet period. Special committees or religious institutes supported by the state are trying to revive the traditional forms of Islam and help the state formulate its policy toward religion. On the other hand, new Islamic movements have started penetrating the territories of the former Soviet republics since the disintegration of the USSR. These movements have already gained foothold today, have a certain number of followers and are viewed by many Muslims as quite “traditional.” However, even what is considered as traditional Islam in society, for example, Shi’ism in Azerbaijan or Hanafi Islam in some Central Asian republics, is also going through a constant process of transformation.

In Azerbaijan, globalization and the development of information technologies have led to the spread of Islamic knowledge and an increase in the number of young people who have received

Islamic education in the main centers of Shia learning and facilitated the free circulation of ideas, books, fatwas and prophecies. All this has made Azerbaijani Shi'ism more diverse imparting strongly pronounced transnational features to it.

Considering these factors, the trans-nationalization of religion, the mutual influence of local and global forms of Islam, which are intensifying in the context of globalization and migration processes, are bringing new challenges to national states. The state faces the task of elaborating a new policy, taking into account the changes in the ideology of Islamic movements, as well as the aspirations and problems of their followers.

## **Specific Features of the Organization Islamic State: Policy and Strategy**

The Islamic State is a completely new form of a transnational jihadist organization, which came into existence amid the collapse of the national state in Syria and Iraq. Two basic factors are behind the emergence of this organization: the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and events of the Arab Spring resulting from the crisis of the Arab national state.

The Islamic State is based on the organization established by famous jihadist, Afghan war veteran Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In 2003, he set up the organization called al-Tawhid wal-Jihad to mobilize Muslims against the invasion of Iraq by American troops. This organization was one of the armed groups fighting against the US troops and their allies in Iraq and, initially, had no links with Al-Qaeda. However, in 2004 al-Zarqawi made a strategic decision to pledge allegiance to Osama bin Laden. This was done by many jihadists as the oath of allegiance to bin Laden gave popularity to an armed group and raised the prestige of its leader. After the pledge of allegiance, al-Zarqawi became Al-Qaeda's official representative in Iraq. It should be noted that Al-Qaeda's central leaders – bin Laden, al-Zawahiri and various field commanders and muftis of that organization – were displeased with al-Zarqawi's policies. The matter is that his group was distinguished by particular cruelty both towards the Shia population of Iraq and the dissenting Sunnis. Al-Qaeda urged to focus on the fight against the Americans (the "distant enemy") whereas the al-Zarqawi group considered it as a priority task to destroy Shi'ites, political opponents among Islamists and the Iraqi authorities who cooperated with the Americans (the "close enemy").

In 2006, al-Zarqawi was killed in a US air strike but precisely his organization gave rise first to the Islamic State of Iraq, which was eventually headed by al-Zarqawi's close associate Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Ibrahim Awwad al-Badri). Later, the Islamic State in Iraq served as the basis for establishing the ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and then the IS (the Islamic State).

The ideological contradictions between the organization founded by al-Zarqawi and Al-Qaeda subsequently led to their final separation in April 2013 when al-Baghdadi announced the creation of the ISIL. The serious conflict between the two groups emerged after al-Baghdadi started demanding full subordination from Mohammad al-Julani, a leader of the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda. Al-Julani refused to swear allegiance and decided to stay loyal to Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. After this conflict, Al-Qaeda's most well-known ideologists issued fatwas and addresses, denouncing al-Baghdadi's decision to proclaim the caliphate and his pressure on al-Julani. Moreover, Al-Qaeda leader al-Zawahiri said that it was not an appropriate time for creating an Islamic state amid the war with Syria's President Bashar Assad.

This conflict grew into tough confrontation between Al-Qaeda's central organization and its regional affiliates, on the one hand, and the IS, on the other hand. Today, IS armed groups and Al-Qaeda's representative in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra, are fighting each other in northern and north-eastern Syrian provinces. Fierce fighting is underway not only in the battlefield but also in the ideological sphere.

The conflict that split the jihadist movement has shown that the Islamic State is conducting the information war far more effectively than Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups. Firstly, the IS has intensified its propaganda in social networks and at various Islamic web-forums. IS ideologists are spreading propaganda both in all the basic languages of the Islamic World and in the European, Russian and Chinese languages. Secondly, the declaration of a caliphate in the context of military successes in Syria and Iraq (especially the seizure of Mosul and the announcement of the formation of the caliphate on June 29, 2014) was an important strategic decision that drew many fighters both from the zone of the conflict and from beyond.

It should be noted that the IS incorporates characteristic features of both a state and a transnational movement as distinct from Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

For example, as compared to the transnational organization Al-Qaeda, which doesn't control a specific territory but operates through its regional cells, the IS controls large territories in the center of the Arab world – eastern regions of Syria and northern and western areas of Iraq. At present, the IS is an organization disposing of a territory, a population, a government, an army, ministries and sustainable income sources.

At the same time, unlike the Taliban, for instance, which has declared the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan as a state, or the movement of the North Caucasian Mujahedeen, Imarat Kavkaz, the IS has strongly pronounced transnational features. First of all, the idea of a worldwide caliphate, which the IS is professionally advocating, attracts a large number of people across the world. Foreign citizens are currently still migrating into the IS territory. Also, armed formations operating in various parts of the world are swearing allegiance to the IS attempting to get financial and information support. In a word, although the IS controls a specific territory, it is transnational by nature as it claims the status of a worldwide caliphate, and the ideology, fighters and finances of this organization cross the borders of other states.

### **Islamic State Threat to Central Asia: Formulating the Problem**

We can look at the IS threat in Central Asia in two contexts: (1) the emergence of Taliban groups in Afghanistan who have announced joining the IS; (2) the spread of the IS influence to local Muslim communities.

It goes without saying that any deterioration in the security situation in Afghanistan poses a threat to the other Central Asian countries in one way or another. Information started spreading in the winter of 2015 about the creation of a new IS province, Wilayat Khorasan, in Afghanistan. It should be noted that detailed and more or less reliable information about the activity of the Islamic State in Afghanistan is quite scarce and hard to verify. The first reports about the appearance of formations fighting under the IS flag in Afghanistan were received at the end of September 2014. The Afghan authorities started reporting about the presence of groups in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan, handing out discs and books with IS propaganda and attacking the police and beheading captives (for example, in the Ghazni province). However, this information was contradictory and scanty.

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It is known that one of the Taliban leaders in Pakistan, Khafiz Saeed Khan, the commander in the Orakzai tribal region, entered into a conflict with the Taliban command in early January 2015.

To all appearances, he was dissatisfied that Mullah Fadlallah had become the Taliban leader. Further on, he declared his allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to strengthen his positions and urged the tribes in Orakzai, and also Taliban followers both in Afghanistan and Pakistan to take an oath of loyalty to the “caliph.” After that, IS official spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani made a speech on January 26, in which he recognized the oath of allegiance of Hafiz Saeed Khan and appointed him the governor (Amir) of the IS province (*wilayat*) of Khorasan, which notionally embraces Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asian countries. Abu Talha Abdur Rauf Khadim was appointed Khan’s deputy, and long-standing preacher of jihadism in Afghanistan and Pakistan Abu Rahim Muslimdust the mufti of the IS’s Khorasan province.

To all appearances, the main goal of the IS in Afghanistan is to recruit fighters and send them to Iraq and Syria. At the moment, the IS is attempting to gain foothold in the east, south and south-west of Afghanistan. Saeed Khan’s groups are recruiting fighters for the IS in the provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar (the regions bordering on Pakistan). As for Abdur Rauf Khadim, he was dealing with mobilization in the Afghan provinces of Helmand and Farah (he was killed in a US drone strike in February 2015).

The clashes with Taliban formations occurred precisely in these parts of Afghanistan. For example, in June 2015 Taliban groups were fighting against IS supporters in various districts of the province of Nangarhar, specifically in the city of Jalalabad.

To gain access to human resources in Afghanistan and Pakistan the IS had to discredit the leaders of local Islamic organizations. It has to be mentioned that discussions in social networks and on Islamic web forums suggest that the IS had been preparing the ideological grounds for a conflict with the Taliban already since 2014. In December 2014, the online magazine Dabiq posted an article sharply criticizing Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. In principle, while criticizing Al-Qaeda as its main adversary, the IS could not avoid the criticism of the Taliban as Al-Qaeda considered non other than Mullah Omar as the Taliban’s legitimate ruler (and now considers Mullah Akhtar Mansour as such) and spoke about al-Baghdadi as a usurper. The IS’s conflict with the Taliban can be regarded as part of the ongoing conflict with Al-Qaeda.

The IS accuses the Taliban of collaboration with the Pakistani intelligence, reluctance to establish a transnational Islamic state and the recognition of the borders of Afghanistan. The IS considers the recognition of the state borders of Afghanistan to be an indicator of how far the Taliban is from the idea of a single caliphate. In addition, the new Taliban leader, Mullah Akhtar Mansour,

said quite recently that the Taliban fighters were not a threat to the Central Asian republics and other neighbors of Afghanistan and they had no territorial claims to them. In his opinion, such ideas were being spread by enemies of the Taliban to legitimize their military presence in Afghanistan. Naturally, the IS is following the Taliban's political activity and denounces all its talks with representatives of the international community as manifestations of "opportunism" and recognition of the "rules of the game for the infidels." Also, the IS ideologists never miss the opportunity to remind the Taliban leaders of their cooperation with Qatar, portraying them as a marionette of that state. The IS doesn't see a difference between the Afghan authorities and the Taliban. Moreover, the IS considers the Taliban leaders as renegades (as they have refused to swear allegiance to the "caliph") and, therefore, legitimizes violence against them from positions of Sharia law.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that the IS has entered into a conflict with the Taliban. The IS, which possesses huge resources, is gradually edging out other jihadist groups, trying either to take them over or destroy them in case of their resistance. For example, the same was happening with Imarat Kavkaz (IK), which had become much weaker and lost its control of several armed groups in North Caucasus. Since November 2014, several North Caucasian jamaats have pledged allegiance to the IS. Former IK Amir Abu Muhammad (Aliaskhab Kebekov) and the organization's other leaders sharply criticized such acts (as did the Taliban leaders) and recognized the oath of allegiance as illegal.

Let us note that the IS's confrontation with the Taliban, Imarat Kavkaz and other similar organizations should be viewed in the context of the IS's struggle against the central Al-Qaeda for the hegemony over the jihadist movement.

Perhaps, the province (*wilayat*) of Khorasan is so far a virtual project, with which the IS wants to show that it is still expanding and that Al-Qaeda is losing its supporters even in Afghanistan and Pakistan, i.e. in its strongholds. But the IS doesn't have real influence in those territories.

The latest successful attack by the Taliban fighters on the capital of the province of Kunduz in late September 2015 has shown that the Taliban still has the strength to seize towns and villages. The Taliban is still the main force fighting against the Afghan government and so far

<sup>28</sup> there is no group in the region capable of competing with it. As for IS supporters among the Taliban fighters, they are tribal leaders and commanders of small formations who disagree with the administrative policy of the Taliban's new command. In addition, many years of war have exhausted the movement and the long absence of its leader Mullah Omar has caused friction

among commanders. In this situation, cooperation with the IS gives mutinous commanders new financial and information opportunities while the Islamic State gets new centers for the supply of fighters. At present the IS needs the territory of Afghanistan and Pakistan for these particular goals. However, the IS has no real potential for anything larger, especially since it is focused on fighting in Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, the Iraqi army is constantly advancing on the IS positions, although with little success. Meanwhile, in Syria, the Islamic State is fighting on several fronts at once: with units of the Free Syrian Army, groups of the Islamic Front, Jabhat al-Nusra, Kurdish people's militia fighters and the army of Bashar Assad.

Therefore, Central Asia, like the South Caucasus, is a hub, a transit corridor for transnational jihadist movements needed for the transit of fighters to the territories that have strategic importance for the IS. This is why the IS is not interested in conducting combat operations in the transit corridor. Moreover, this organization has no material sources for that. At present, the strengthening of the IS positions in Iraq and Syria and maintaining control over the oil and gas routes are top priority for the Islamic State.

At the same time, it should be noted that the IS threat in the post-Soviet space, in particular, in Central Asia, is quite exaggerated. Some experts are inclined to overstate both the threat and the number of citizens of Central Asian republics who have left home to fight for the IS. Also, the issue of the IS threat has been fanned lately to persuade the political elites of Central Asia to join specific military and political blocs. In general, the disputes about the IS threat are also a splendid possibility for deployment of troops in the territory of a foreign state or even for military intervention under the slogan of the fight against terrorism (the conflict in Syria and the events in Iraq have vividly shown this).

It should further be mentioned that most Islamic movements or groups on the territory of the Central Asian republics, both traditional and relatively new ones, do not recognize the legitimacy of the IS and regard it as a strayed group. In addition, there is no strong and authoritative jihadist movement in Central Asia that could evoke the interest of the IS and join the IS (like, for example, in Libya or in Egypt). Therefore, the IS does not have a sufficient ideological base or material resources for expanding its influence. As was mentioned above, Central Asia and South Caucasus are more like transit centers for the IS at this stage for recruiting and transporting fighters to Iraq and Syria where the Islamic State is engaged in sustained fighting and is implementing real political and military tasks.

As for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which has recently pledged its allegiance to the IS, it has long been operating outside Central Asia – in Afghanistan and in the tribal areas of Pakistan. As a matter of fact, this organization has lost much of its power in recent years while fighting for the Taliban. In September 2014 its leader Usman Gazi (Gani) announced his support for the IS and in August 2015 the organization pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi. This oath of allegiance can be explained both by discontent with the new leadership of the Taliban and the long absence of Mullah Omar (various Taliban groups criticized the movement's leaders for Mullah Omar's failure to appear in public for a long time as it was not clear whether he was alive or not). This organization, like all similar groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan, may be of interest to the IS for the supply of fighters to Syria and Iraq. In return, these groups hope to get financial and information support. However, there is information (which needs to be additionally verified) that the Taliban has killed the mutinous rebels in the province of Zabul, including the leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

But this does not mean that the threat is completely gone. All the processes in the Middle East will have a direct impact on the Central Asian countries. The CIS Muslim republics should enhance security measures and border control until the Syrian conflict is resolved and Iraqi territorial integrity is restored. The threat of the spread of jihadism ideas including the caliphate integration project, appealing to many Muslims, still exists. The IS has managed to recruit some citizens of Central Asian republics into its ranks. The Imam Bukhari separate battalion comprising citizens of Central Asian republics, mostly Uzbek nationals, is fighting as part of Jabhat al-Nusra.

At the same time, the countries with a predominantly Muslim population should work out an effective policy in the sphere of religion to contribute to establishing trustworthy relations between the state and believers, draw local religious leaders into a dialogue and cooperation in the struggle against radicalism and help prevent a conflict between national identity and the beliefs of various Islamic groups. The policy of bluntly declaring any significant Islamic movements as jihadists would radicalize their followers, especially young ones. This was the case in Egypt, Syria and Iraq. Mistakes in a state's religious policy play into the hands of the Islamic State.

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When the IS threat is discussed, it should also be borne in mind that this organization is functioning in a region where severe political struggle is underway between Iran, Saudi Arabia and their allies. The fact that this organization still exists (and even finds the strength for further

expansion) suggests that the struggle against the IS is not the top priority issue in the foreign policy of regional powers. Moreover, the international coalition set up on the US initiative in June 2014 to fight the IS has failed to accomplish its mission. Notwithstanding the air strikes, the IS has not disappeared and has even managed to capture the Iraqi town of Ramadi in May 2015 (it was partially liberated only in 2016).

In conclusion, I would like to add that any negligence of the principles of international law – and we are living at a time when this frequently happens and the law itself is in a state of a crisis – gives strategic dividends to such transnational terrorist organizations as the IS. Any form of international terrorism, irrespective of whether it is committed by a transnational actor or is supported by a certain state, must be denounced and prevented on the basis of the principles of international law. Double standards or any sort of “flirtation” in this matter would mean a strategic mistake that would eventually strengthen terrorism and give confidence to terrorists. We can cite the example of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenian terrorists committed 34 terrorist acts against Azerbaijan in 1988–1994. Armenia’s aggression has clearly shown that terrorism has no religion and the ambiguous position of the international community on the issue of denouncing and fighting terrorism eventually makes it grow stronger and destroys both national and regional security.

# The Challenge of Cooperation to Prevent Radicalization in Khorasan

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## From the Heart of Asia to the Eye of Khorasan

Much of the diplomacy stirred up around the Istanbul Process since its launch in November 2011 has tried to hail the benefits of common prosperity in the region if Afghanistan were stabilized. Yet, the Heart of Asia has once again attracted unwanted elements by becoming the seat of a new front of Daesh outside of the Middle East, and regional countries are understandably anxious as this latest group of militants has an eye on them.

Rumors of the settlement of groups of outsiders (possibly Arabs, Uzbeks or Chechens) in Helmand since early December 2014 became verified by mid-2015 when fighters calling themselves members of Daesh had expanded their presence to Nangarhar and Kunar where they supposedly established the Wilayat-e Khorasan (Province of Khorasan). By mid-January 2016, the US State Department had designated the group as a terrorist organization, and President Ashraf Ghani was repeating his mantra at the World Economic Forum in Davos: If Al Qaeda was version 1 of extremism, then Daesh would be considered version 5.

Whether Daesh members in Afghanistan have operational or financial ties to the Islamic State's home base in Syria, or they are merely inspired by the group and using its name to generate attention remains unclear. In Nangarhar province, Daesh is supposedly made up of former members of the Afghan Taliban who have become disillusioned by the revelations of the death of their leader Mullah Omar two years earlier and subsequently recruited by Pakistani Taliban. In Kunar province, the organization allegedly consists of Arabs, while in the north, some Central Asian fighters such as members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) have pledged allegiance to Daesh. In the meantime, the choice of the appellation of the Wilayat-e Khorasan for the seat of their front in Afghanistan is a calculated choice. Khorasan refers to a historic

region which includes modern day Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Central Asian republics. It was the seat of the Iranian Sassanid Empire in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century before being conquered by the Umayyad Caliphate in the 7th century, becoming home to the rule of the Arabs over non-Arabs in the Islamic Empire. Daesh associating itself with this appellation echoes the power of the Arab Umayyad Caliphates extended into non-Arab regions as well as a rejection of the modern states of the region. The capture of the appellation of Khorasan also moves it away from the prerogative of a Persian speaking space culturally associated with Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, to give it a new identity, that of an imagined territory for Sunni ideology. In essence, the newcomer non-state actors found a way to disrupt any potential reunion of Iran with its historical lands on the basis of common cultural and linguistic heritage.

Unlike the Taliban that did not have the ambition to rule over more territory than Afghanistan, Daesh has its eyes on a larger area to the north of the Amu Darya in Central Asia, over the Durand Line in Pakistan and even to Iran and China. Even if it is unable to take territory, its influence, physical or ideological, could potentially reach the disenfranchised and marginalized populations of the region. It could attract fighters from other parts outside the region, or provide inspiration for existing insurgency groups. The potential entry of Daesh in the region is also worrying for potential sectarian (Shia-Sunni) or intra-Sunni ideological (Hanafi/Deobandi versus Salafi) violence, something that the region had not seen before.

In the meantime, the group has been clashing with the Taliban over the control of illicit trade and over ideology: The Taliban combines conservative views of the Hanafi Deobandi School with the Pashtun code of honor but has avoided anti-Shia sectarian violence. Daesh, by contrast, subscribes to the more austere Wahhabi/Salafi branch of Sunni Islam and is prepared to go to ultra-violent means to achieve its goals.

For all these reasons, the neighbors of Afghanistan, Central Asian countries, Iran and China have been weary of the presence of insurgents on their borders. China fears the spread of radicalism to its restive Uyghur population in its Xinjiang province, and Central Asian countries are also cautious about the potential return of the 2500 citizens that have been recruited from the region to join the ranks of Daesh in Syria and Iraq. In the case of a Daesh takeover in Afghanistan, regional countries are also concerned about a potential humanitarian crisis at their doorstep with the forced movement of uncontrolled refugees as well as threats to the stability of economic infrastructure such as roads, bridges and pipelines transporting the wealth of the region.

## Cooperation among Skeptics

If Daesh, as a non-state actor, could pose such a variety of threats to the stability of neighbors of Afghanistan, the natural panacea would be for regional states to cooperate to defeat it. This point was reiterated at the November 2016 Ministerial Meeting of the Heart of Asia/Istanbul process held in Beijing when the need for common action to fight extremism and terrorism was included in the final communiqué. Countering radicalization in the region also became a common point on the agenda for intensified cooperation between China and Iran during President Hu Jintao's visit to Tehran on January 22nd 2016. Central Asian countries adopted a Joint Plan of Action for the implementation of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia in November 2011, while countering terrorism and extremism has been one of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) of the Istanbul Process.

Yet, the entry of Daesh in the region has given rise to a paradox. On the one hand, the non-state entity is painted in official discourses as a common enemy which needs to see regional countries cooperate more closely. On the other hand, however, official discourses on countering violent extremism and terrorism in the region is heavily based on the tradition of blaming other states of using non-state entities as proxies for their national interests. This paradox is created primarily because Daesh is seen as a political entity, in the midst of a state-based system, instead of being seen for what it also is a social movement that starts with radicalization.

The phenomenon of Daesh, far from having created impetus for cooperation, has reinforced divisions: In Syria, Daesh has become a point of contention between the US and its allies on the one hand, and a Russia/Iran alliance on the other. Reactions to Daesh have also raised the specter of mistrust between states, with accusations of double standards between Russia and the United States and the renewal of Sunni/Shia strife. The danger of the non-state actor has therefore not opened the path for new security architecture in the region: The status quo, where states compete conventionally and blame the use of non-state actors by their rivals, reigns.

While it is obvious that regional cooperation is necessary to defeat insurgents, it is also true that the first order of cooperation should be political commitment and mutual trust. Technical measures and capacity, such as intelligence share, data gathering, proper analysis, border control, harmonized extradition laws etc., are all naturally important tools but they should come at the heel of political commitment in the first place. Yet, mutual trust, the quintessential

ingredient for cooperation on countering radicalism, terrorism and violent extremism, is low in a region where states have hitherto used non-state actors to further their national interests: India and Pakistan accuse of each other of using militant groups to target the interests of each other on Afghan soil, while Iran and Saudi Arabia do so in the Middle East, etc.

## Daesh as an External Enemy

While Daesh presence in Afghanistan and Daesh recruitment from Central Asia, Pakistan and China has created considerable anxiety for regional countries, the discourse among politicians, official media and state-backed think tanks of the region relies mostly on a wrong focus of an 'external phenomenon', tied to sectarian and great power polities in the Middle East, hence far from the reality of the region. Speculations run as to whether the interest of Daesh in the region is economic (tied to the control of the drug trade, energy routes etc.), geopolitical (to weaken and threaten Russia, Iran and China), ideological (to establish in Salafi inspired modern caliphate), or sectarian (to create a rift between the Sunnis and Shias of the region).

In Iran, where radicalization is not seen or recognized as an immediate domestic concern, most queries rest on finding out who is responsible for the creation of Daesh in the first place. Much of the blame is put on the US for the invasion of Iraq which destabilized the region and created ethnic and sectarian conflicts, or Saudi Arabia which allegedly funds the Sunni fundamentalists who are propagating an extreme version of the Kingdom's Salafi ideology. The discourse among Central Asian security circles is about monetary incentives behind the recruitment of migrant workers in Russia, while very little attention is paid to potential ideological sympathies. Central Asian governments, echoing Russia's position, are concerned with the sources of funding that sustain Daesh, including, in addition to oil sales and extortion, the allegedly \$1 billion made annually on Afghan heroin trafficked through Daesh-controlled territory.<sup>1</sup> The Pakistani government, which may have in the past mentored or used terrorist groups against the interests of other states (Lashkar Taiba against India, Mujaheddin against the Soviet Union, Taliban against the Russian and Iranian backed Mujaheddin etc), is also now finding it more opportune to paint its own enemies as foreign. Islamabad for example claimed that the January 20<sup>th</sup> 2016 attack Bacha Khan University in Khyber Pakhtunkwa was orchestrated by militants in Afghanistan and supported by Indian and Afghan intelligence, a claim rejected by the latter.

<sup>1</sup> FSKN head Viktor Ivanov quoted in a report of the Russian Television, "High finance: ISIS generates up to \$1bn annually from trafficking Afghan heroin », 6 March 2015. <https://www.rt.com/news/238369-isis-drug-money-trafficking/>

The discourse of Daesh as a foreign phenomenon was reiterated forcefully in mid-January 2016 by President Ghani at the World Economic Forum in Davos and during his subsequent interview on BBC on January 25<sup>th</sup> when he claimed that Daesh was not an Afghan phenomenon and that the Afghan people, with their high degree of resilience and alienated by the atrocities committed by Daesh, would ‘bury them’. By posing the threat as external, the Afghan government tries to kill a number of birds with one stone: First, it appeals to the US for continued support, financial and military, for its struggle against a sworn enemy of the West. Second, the discourse puts a wedge between the Taliban, a local movement with whom the Afghan government could potentially find common language and eventually share power, and foreign enemies they would fight together. Third, the insistence on the foreign adjective hints at the continued meddling of neighbors in Afghan affairs and the use of Afghan soil for launching of proxy wars (between India and Pakistan for example, or even Iran and Saudi Arabia).

It would be a mistake to blame the existence of radical groups such as Daesh solely on foreign ideology like salafism or on foreign funding. To classify the Daesh phenomenon as a purely external factor will be counter-productive for a number of reasons. For one, it is extremely difficult to pinpoint exactly the provenance and delimitation of the different groups that are known under the loose name of Daesh today. Motivations are also at flux, with groups merging and separating strategically according to local interests that keep changing. Furthermore, to identify countries behind Daesh not only leads queries to conspiracy theories, but is also an impossible task: A number of countries have directly or indirectly been involved in the creation of Daesh and its funding. Many other ones, including those of the region, are directly or indirectly benefiting from its presence. Most importantly, seeing Daesh as purely an external phenomenon is denial and missing the point that the movement represents a symbol for the attraction of radicalization, and that this phenomenon exists in most countries and societies. Even if, politically, Afghanistan is being used by other states as a terrain for their proxy wars, Afghans themselves are allowing conditions for others to use them.

### **The Neglected Domestic Element: A Name that Hides a Trend**

To have a lasting defeat of radicalized movements and long term stability, the discourse which blames other states for the external phenomenon of Daesh as a terrorist organization needs to be changed. A more productive security discourse would be to recognize Daesh not just as an external political entity but as a social phenomenon that has domestic root causes. As such, it

should not be Daesh as a terrorist organization but Daesh as the symbol of radicalization as a process that should be of a common concern to all the countries of the region. By reshaping this discourse, regional countries could forge a more cooperative demarche while at the same time recognizing and preventing the spread and danger of radicalization at home.

While tribal conflicts and political interests may explain the *raison d'être* of Daesh as a new avenue for insurgency in Afghanistan, these factors do not fully explain why the ranks of this group are becoming swelled with new recruits. Disillusionment with the Taliban partly explains the success of recruitment. Other factors however exist which explain the attraction of radicalization: Economic incentives, but also lack of employment, lack of education, ideological leanings, peer pressure etc. If political interests explain the ambitions of leaders, it is around social, psychological, and economic factors that explanations for the motivations of the rank and file should be sought. Exploring social and economic factors such as poverty, psychological trauma, sense of belonging, deference to views of elders and other such more personalized factors are as important for understanding radicalization as are the intricacies of political demands of insurgency groups and sources of funding from outside.

While charismatic leaders, ideological leanings, Wahhabi propaganda, monetary incentives, and ideologies such as nationalism all play into the equation of recruitment and radicalization, one condition that unites all the countries of the region and puts them at risks is the question of unbalanced development and horizontal inequalities. All the countries surrounding Afghanistan are undergoing a process of development that is creating discomfort between modernizers who strive to take society forward by means of technology, education and modern values, and traditionalists who resist change. At the same time, rapid urbanization and opportunities in cities have widened the urban/rural gap, leaving pockets of deeply poor, isolated, underdeveloped populations in the countryside. These populations, relegated, underdeveloped, socially marginalized and poor, can become highly vulnerable to recruitment by radical groups.

The solution to responding to the phenomenon of Daesh should rest as much on prevention strategies as those of combating terrorism. Over-focus on insurgency as a political and geopolitical tool dislocates it from the social phenomenon of radicalization. Shifting the focus to radicalization requires making a distinction between the leaders (who are willing to make political compromises) and those who fight for a variety of psychological and socio-economic reasons.

## Propositions for Cooperation in View of Prevention

In general, approaches to the question of radicalization can be divided into two categories: Responding to its consequences as a phenomenon or preventing it. In other words, the policy response can either rest on the supply side or the demand side. A supply-driven approach concentrates on what to do with individuals and groups prone to violent extremism and terrorism, how to curb the financing that sustains their efforts, how to identify extremists and prevent their travel across borders, etc. Traditional responses that have relied on the overuse of force through restrictive law and order for primarily a security response have proven ineffective. If combatting radicalization is done through force, it can lead to other cycles of the problem. Countries of the region have ample evidence of increased radicalization as a result of drone attacks in the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Responses to radicalization in the region often take this type of restrictive approach. Central Asian countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan for example focus on government-established limitations on Islamic education (e.g. control of Madrasa curriculum, Friday sermons by official state-sponsored religious leaders, financing of mosques and clergy, and government publications on 'proper' religious values). China has also been cracking down on illegal madrassas as part of its assault on illegal publicity materials, illegal religious activities and illegal religious teachings. In the case of Central Asian republics, focus has been largely on police presence in areas where domestic terrorist groups operate and on tight restriction on access to Internet website and information sharing.

While these measures seek to control the potentially radical and incorrect messaging that Muslims receive, they could potentially encourage resistance if they are too restrictive or impose too drastic limitations on freedom of religion and expression. A more effective way would be to prevent radicalization in the first place. As the UN Secretary General noted in his remarks to the Security Council High Level Summit on Foreign Terrorist Fighters on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014, "Over the longer-term, the biggest threat to terrorists is not the power of missiles – it is the politics of inclusion. It's peaceful societies and respect for human rights. It's education, jobs and real opportunity. It's leaders who listen to their people and uphold the rule of law. Missiles may kill terrorists. But good governance kills terrorism. »<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Secretary-General's remarks to Security Council High-Level Summit on Foreign Terrorist Fighters, New York, 24 September 2014. <http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=8040>

It is important to first of all understand the motivations that drive people and groups to radicalization. This would require examining jointly the sources and drivers of radicalization in the region and thinking jointly on what can be done to combat it. It would also mean exchanges of best practices in terms of preventing and dealing with radicalization at the national level that can be adopted by others with similar challenges and capabilities.

Although the manifestation of the problem may be common, the causes would depend on the specifics of the setting. Radicalization stemming from government grievances would for example require good governance (anti-corruption, equality, employment, and social security). If the motivation for radicalization is ideological, then programs to counter it should be about oversight of the curriculum in education systems, standardization and regulations, and dialogue. If motivations are purely economic, then employment opportunities targeting the youth in particular need to be accelerated. Overall, opportunities need to be provided for participation in the economic, social and political life as the best guarantee to shield populations against potential radicalization.

Radicalization, being an assault on thoughts, also requires a response in terms of thoughts. In this regard, one of the most important strategies for the prevention of further radicalization is dialogue. For the countries surrounding Afghanistan, more open dialogue and exchanges are necessary in order to expose the viewpoints of different branches of Islam (Hannafi, Wahabi, Salafi, Deobandi, Shia, Sufi, etc.) on matters such as peace, economy, human rights, governance, and violence. A healthy debate about the role of religion in societies is necessary, be they secular ones like Central Asian republics and China or Islamic Republics such as Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Exchanges need to be organized between Sunni clergy to come up with joint plans on preventing and combating radicalization through the development of counter narratives. They could also exchange curriculum for (Sunni) religious madrasahs, and share knowledge about what can be taught in these religious schools. Specialized trainings could be organized for different population groups who may be exposed to the problem and could play a role in prevention. They include training for journalists, Imams and religious leaders, community leaders, prison guards and law enforcement authorities.

# **Threats of international terrorism to the Caspian Sea region and the measures to be taken in its defeating**

**Huseyn HUSEYNOV  
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- The increasingly persisting threat of terrorism seriously damages the international peace and security and undermines the enjoyment of human rights, fundamental freedoms, political independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and the social and economic development of States.
- The international community has been evidencing the changing nature and character of the global threat of terrorism. In many instances, it is inseparably linked to aggressive separatism, extremism and organized crime.
- The proximity of the Caspian Sea region to volatile region of the Greater Middle East makes the threats of international terrorism, religious extremism and radicalism even more imminent for the countries of the region.
- Nowadays the Caspian Sea region is a region of considerable prominence in global affairs. Located at the crossroads between Europe and Asia and possessing vast natural resources it attracts widespread international interest. The security of the Caspian region is challenged by a wide variety of political, socio-economic and military threats, which include *inter alia* armed conflicts, inter-ethnic and confessional tensions, militant separatism, international terrorism, and illegal trade in arms and drugs. The security of the region is also affected by the intensifying strategic competition among major outside powers over establishing their political and economic influence in regional affairs.
- The threat of international terrorism and religious extremism in the regions of Caucasus and Central Asia is exacerbated due to the support the radical Islamic movements

receive from the local population, especially among the young people, who are being "brainwashed" through the massive extremist propaganda.

- The terrorist organisations like Al-Qaeda, ISIL, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Jund al-Khilafah, Hizbut-Tahrir, Ansar al-Din, Tablighi Jamaat, Turkistan Islamic Party and Jamaat Ansarullah, which poses direct threat to the security of the regional countries, have extensive and enhanced tools of propaganda and recruitment policy. These groups ruthlessly hijack religion to control territory and vital economic resources. But in fact, they are the enemies of faith. Groups like ISIL have nothing to do with Islam. Nevertheless, these groups have become attractive for foreign terrorist fighters who constitute up to 40% of their forces.
- According to the UN Monitoring Team estimation more than 13,000 foreign terrorist fighters from over 80 UN Member States have joined ISIL. Among them thousands citizens, including women and children, are from the Central Asia and Caucasus. In this regard, the outlook for the future is rather grim since the worst consequence of this situation for the countries of the Caspian region is that sooner or later militants will return to their home countries, and the chances are high that having gained experience in war, they would engage in terrorist activities at home.
- At this conjuncture a comprehensive political strategy to stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters is crucial. Immediate security issues must be addressed. Terrorists must be defeated but it must be done in a way that avoids the deliberate acts of provocation that they set – victimization and further radicalization. Eliminating terrorism requires international solidarity and a multifaceted approach. The underlying conditions that provide violent extremist groups the opportunity to take root must be decidedly extirpated.
- Over the longer-term, the biggest threat to terrorists is not the power of missiles – it is the politics of inclusion. It is peaceful societies and respect for human rights. It is education, jobs, rule of law and real opportunity. Free, independent and propitious societies – free from suffering, oppression and occupation – this is what will kill terrorism. At the same time, the war on terror cannot and must not be used to target any religion or culture. It should be ensured that all counter-terrorism actions and policies are consistent with international human rights and humanitarian laws.

- An integrated long-term strategy is an effective way to combat geographically dispersed and decentralized international terrorism. This comprehensive strategy has two parts: integration across *actors* and integration across *policies*. A comprehensive strategy that enables integration across actors and policies might be the way to reduce the growing advancements of the terrorist groups.
- In the light of the aforementioned the following measures can be taken to defeat and eliminate the impacts of terrorism in the Caspian region:
  - The states of the region as well as the regional organisations should mobilise and arrange all resources and efforts to prevent and eradicate the potential ethno-political and confessional conflicts and crisis that can pave the way for instability and radicalism in the region;
  - Close collaboration and coordination all counter-terrorism activities among the relevant agencies of the regional countries and international organizations as well as foster research and policy-making initiatives with regard to combating extremism and terrorism is quite significant. Common and comprehensive counter-terrorism strategies either should be formulated from the scratch or current strategies of the regional states and international organizations should be harmonized to enable them to speak with one voice and act through the same networks, channels or platforms;
  - Measures vis-à-vis border control and management through technical assistance as well as the exchange of information and best practices need to be enhanced to facilitate transit and trade flows among regional countries as well as to curb illegal arms, drug and human trafficking within and among regional countries;
  - The special attention should be given to tackling the underlying socio-economic drivers of violent extremism. In this regard the holistic and comprehensive approach needs to be applied to eradicate the socio-economic factors that are conducive to emergence and spread of terrorism and extremism in the region;

## Threats of international terrorism to the Caspian Sea region and the measures to be taken in its defeating

- Technical and administrative assistance among the related agencies of the regional countries and international organizations is needed to ensure cyber security and prevent the use of internet resources by extremist groups to recruit people as well as disseminate detrimental information;
- Ignorance, lack of access to decent education as well as pernicious narrative in educational programs is feeding grounds for extremism and radicalism in the region. Therefore, new educational programs and relevant projects that are tailored to promote ethno-political and religious tolerance, true Islamic values, rule of law, mutual respect as well as fundamental human rights should be implemented in the countries of the region.

It can be summarized that the military actions and airstrikes are not sufficient to defeat the terrorist groups. Missiles may kill terrorists. But proper targeted measures and good governance kill terrorism. The countries of the Caspian region are needed to ensure the success of regional counter-terrorism efforts. The policy can be built upon the key actions: to prevent, to protect, to prosecute and to respond. Therefore, the unity, coherence and solidarity among the states of the region are vital for effective implementation of this policy.

## **Thesis (speech at the UNRCCA seminar)**

**Vyacheslav MUSIKHIN  
Adviser  
Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Secretariat**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me thank the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (hereinafter the Center) and its head, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Central Asia Mr. Draganov for the invitation to take part in the seminar and its splendidly organized work. I would like to express special gratitude to the hospitable Kyrgyz hosts of this event.

I am glad to see once again my colleagues and friends whom I had met earlier at various international venues. Thank you for this opportunity.

I represent the Secretariat of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Established in 2003 and currently comprising six member states (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan), the CSTO is a multi-functional organization for security in Eurasia, designed to counter traditional external military threats, on the one hand, and new challenges and threats, on the other hand.

The first seminar held under the Center's aegis in Almaty a year ago also focused on regional security issues. The high level of discussions at the seminar, the recognition of its undoubtedly usefulness and the need to keep the format of this event predetermined the expediency of today's meeting. Moreover, as the organizers of the seminar were summing up its results, they spoke about the probability of holding the second such event in 2016. However, as we can see, the negative developments in Eurasia have prompted us to convene a meeting of experts under the UNRCCA aegis earlier.

Let me recall that the experts who spoke at the Almay seminar were divided in their assessments of the regional security situation, which was natural, considering their large number and diverse representation. Moreover, the careful and diplomatic evaluations made by some of those experts indicated criticism of what they believed to be the alarmist forecasts on the prospects of further developments made, among others, by your faithful colleague.

I would be happy if our forecast turned out to be wrong and the regional security improved over the year. Unfortunately, the situation has worsened dramatically. Eurasia is dominated with extremely negative trends fraught with overt confrontation between global strongholds of power due to the rapid unbalancing of the existing security mechanisms and the widespread breach of international law.

A number of unfavorable political, military and economic factors were directly impacting the situation in the zone of CSTO responsibility and in adjacent areas.

We consider the basic hotbeds of tension to be:

## 1. Afghanistan

The CSTO has been aware for several years now of a serious and immediate threat stemming from the territory of Afghanistan primarily for the Central Asian region in the form of terrorism, religious extremism and drug trafficking. Moreover, we believe that additional security complications of "Afghan origin" will emerge in the near future.

These developments will depend on the following factors:

- the weakness of the Afghan central government at the regional and local levels and the yet incomplete process of formation of the Cabinet of Ministers and government structures (even the defense minister has assumed the post in an acting capacity);
- the strengthening of the positions of the Taliban in some Afghan provinces;
- Taliban infighting such as the recent killing of A. Mansour;
- the expanding penetration of Islamic State militants into the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IRA), which may intensify with the retreat of IS gunmen from Syria, including their escape into Afghanistan; the readiness of breakaway fighters from the

Taliban, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and other terrorist groups to support the Islamic State;

- confrontation, including armed standoff between Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) and the Islamic State;
- the menacing situation involving the production and delivery of drugs from Afghanistan where the areas of opium poppy cultivation grow by an average of 15–20 percent annually;
- the low standard of living and literacy rate of the overwhelming majority of the population.

I have a concise four-page analysis of the Afghan situation close at hand. If you are interested and have the time, I am ready to get you acquainted with it outside the limits of my speech. Let me just brief you on it.

In recent years, the CSTO has been closely monitoring the situation in the Islamic State of Afghanistan and taking measures dictated by the ongoing developments, including the efforts to provide assistance to the Republic of Tajikistan in strengthening border security.

***The Working Group on Afghanistan (WGA) under the CSTO Council of Foreign Ministers*** continues its active work. It holds regular meetings with the participation of national coordinators on Afghanistan to analyze the military and political situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. On August 3 this year, the WGA visited the units of Russia's 201<sup>st</sup> military base and the 7<sup>th</sup> air assault brigade of the mobile forces of Tajikistan's Army, which make part of the CSTO Central Asia Regional Collective Rapid Deployment Force (CAR CRDF) and the CSTO Collective Rapid Response Forces (CRRF).

A surprise combat readiness check of military contingents of the Collective Rapid Response Forces (CRRF) was held for the first time on May 12–21 this year.

**For reference:** the check was conducted at national military contingents assigned to the CRRF.

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*The check involved over 2,500 servicemen, more than 200 pieces of military hardware and 20 aircraft of various purposes.*

*A CRRF group was deployed on the territory of the Republic of Tajikistan consisting of the Command, operational groups of the CSTO member states' defense ministries and contingents of their armed forces.*

*Simultaneously, units of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Tajikistan and the 201<sup>st</sup> Russian military base held joint demonstrative exercises near the Afghan border.*

*On the whole, the goals set by the surprise combat readiness check have been achieved and the actions of the ministries and agencies participating in the inspection, as well as the operations of the CSTO CRRF personnel and the attached air task force were assessed positively.*

## **2. Middle East**

The Middle East restructuring imposed from the outside has exploded the region and increased the threats for the entire world. The world seemed to have forgotten the consequences of the Arab Spring: over one million people died in Iraq and the population in Libya shrunk from 6 million to 3.5 million and in Syria it decreased from 21 million (according to the 2011 data) to some 8–9 million (with 12 million resettled persons).

Characteristically, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair admitted in late October this year that the invasion of the US forces and its allies in Iraq in 2003 had been a major cause for the emergence of the Islamic State. The ISIS is committing violence and terror in the territory of many countries and its victims run into thousands.

Unfortunately, our alarmist forecasts proved to be true in this respect as well. Over the past year, the ISIS had expanded the territory under its control in Syria and Iraq by almost a third. The ISIS continued executions, the plunder of artifacts, the illegal trade in oil and the genocide of Christians, in particular, Armenians, Alawites, Kurds and others. Before Russia's Aerospace Force launched its combat operation in Syria, the ISIS planned to seize Damascus and Baghdad and get a bridgehead for global expansion (note: it should be mentioned that in his speech in Almaty last year a CSTO representative paid special attention to the issue that was new at the time, i.e. the Islamic State's illegal trade in oil and its consumers actually financing international terrorism).

The CSTO has numerously pointed to the terrorist threat emanating from the Islamic State, first of all, due to the danger of return of ISIS fighters from among CIS citizens (there are

about 3,000 of them) to their countries where they would be ready to take part in the jihad against the "infidels." Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev said in a recent interview in Borovoye that "those guys who are fighting on the side of the ISIS today are being tested in combat in Syria and they will be subsequently sent to build the Khorasan Caliphate in Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan." Russian President Vladimir Putin said on many occasions that Russia is participating in combat operations in Syria for the sake of protecting its own citizens from terrorism (hereinafter, brief comments are made in response to the US White House's accusations of "preserving Assad's regime").

At the same time, the United States started supplying anti-tank systems to the Syrian opposition in October this year. As weapons in Syria were seized or landed in the hands of the ISIS on many occasions, it is to be hoped that man-portable air defense systems will not be handed over to the opposition forces since those arms may eventually be used not only against the sole legitimate power in Syria and its army but also against the US Air Force and the Russian Aerospace Forces.

Some experts do not trust the reports that the US has managed to train allegedly only 5,000 Syrian opposition fighters, despite spending \$500 million on the effort, after which the Pentagon curtailed this program. The expert community believes that in reality Americans "produced" far more heavily armed militants who finally replenished the ranks of al-Nusra and other similar groups.

These factors have significantly complicated the process of settlement of the situation in Syria, Libya, Yemen and Iraq and in the region as a whole.

The situation was also seriously aggravated by the horrible terrorist acts aboard the Russian airliner and in Paris, and also by the incident with the Russian Su-24 bomber shot down by a Turkish fighter jet in the Syrian air space. I will avoid the stakeholder assessments and will only recall the statement made on this score by Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev who considered it a fact that the Su-24 bomber did not demonstrate its intention to attack Turkey.

The United States made a decision in early December this year to deploy elite special units  
48 (200 troops) in the Middle East to carry out raids against terrorists in Iraq and Syria. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi stated in this regard that he welcomed foreign assistance but any deployment of new forces in the country should proceed with the approval of the Iraqi

government. Shi'ite armed groups earlier pledged to resist any deployment of US forces in the region. "Any such American force will become a target," a spokesman for one of the Shi'ite armed groups, Kata'ib Hezbollah, said.

Today the United States, Russia, France and Great Britain are dealing air strikes against terrorists. Early last week, the Bundestag supported the government's proposal on Germany's participation in the fight against the Islamic State on the territory of Syria. The sky over Iraq and Syria is becoming too small and the risk of incidents similar to the incident with the Su-24 bomber is increasing manifold. The consequences may be unpredictable.

Immediately after the incident with the Russian Su-24 bomber on November 24, Turkey received a notice from Damascus that any instance of Turkish combat aircraft straying into the Syrian territory would be qualified as intrusion into Syria's air space. After that, Turkey hasn't dealt a single strike against Daesh militants, which is positive restraint.

On the other hand, on January 4 Baghdad referred to Ankara's dispatch of a military contingent to the Iraqi city of Mosul as military invasion and demanded its withdrawal.

In this context, the need to establish an anti-terrorist coalition with the participation of a US-led international force, and also Russia, Iran and other stakeholders increases manifold. Relevant proposals were made by Russia but they did not receive support from the West. At least interaction is needed similar to what has been achieved by the Russian and French presidents during Francois Hollande's visit to Moscow. It is important that the understanding between Moscow and Washington on the prevention of air incidents should be fulfilled strictly and in a regime of confidentiality. At the same time, in connection with the incident with the Su-24 bomber, the Russian president expressed his bitter regret that Russia's air task force has been notifying the United States of its bomber flights but the matter ended in a situation of "us being shot in the back."

There is no other way but honest and effective cooperation in the struggle against terrorism. In this regard, it would be totally improper to divide terrorists into "good" and "bad" ones, "us" (meaning their use to achieve one's ends, for example, fighting against the Assad regime) and "them." However, a coalition of any sort would be completely out of the question if we fail for a start to compare and reach agreement on the list of those organizations that should be qualified as terrorist groups.

I would like to pin certain hopes on the Vienna process. After Austria, the talks have been scheduled for mid-December in New York. However, they were under the threat of disruption until the very last moment due to existing disagreements (editor's note: the disagreements between Russia and Iran, on the one hand, and the Arab monarchies and Turkey, on the other hand).

Oil. Russian aircraft bombed caravans of fuel tanker trucks stretching towards Turkey. British and French combat planes delivered air strikes with guided bombs to hit oil wells. All these efforts were made to deprive terrorists of their oil sale proceeds. This was the proper thing to do and all this was done on the territory of Syria.

But aren't terrorists producing oil on their controlled territories in Iraq and selling it illegally? Have oil fields ever been bombed before, for example, during the US invasion in Iraq? Anything was bombed, except for oil storage facilities, which were "sacred." Or is there too much oil on world markets now?

Has there always been an understanding that war would end eventually and it would be necessary to live and give food to people? The international community shows interest in what will happen to Iraq after the war and the oil storage facilities controlled by the ISIS on the Iraqi territory are not bombed but why should a final blow be dealt on the literally half-ruined Syria, especially now that Assad seems to be "staying on" there?

### **3. Eastern Europe and the Baltic States**

The territory of the Baltic States and Eastern Europe has become a scene of NATO's feverish activity in the past 18 months. It is the area where constant military drills and exercises are held, radar control posts are established and NATO aircraft barrage over the Baltic Sea while efforts are ongoing to accommodate the Alliance's new military infrastructure facilities planned for amassing considerable arsenals of armaments and military hardware.

This activity cannot but cause concern: the Alliance is also pulling such military hardware to the region that can carry nuclear weapons on its board. An illusion is created in some circles in the West that one party in a global conflict can achieve real victory without irreversible and inadmissible consequences for the victor even in the event of use of nuclear weapons.

The first tests of the US missile shield in Europe with the use of its sea-based component were conducted in mid-October in close proximity to the border critically important for Russia as a CSTO member state in terms of nuclear deterrence and maintaining strategic stability as a whole. This can be viewed as an attempt by NATO to start destroying the strategic balance and decisively changing the alignment of forces in its favor. The missile shield deployment in Europe is expected to be completed in 2018.

In any case, the CSTO and, above all, its Russian-Belarusian group of forces (troops) for the East European region, should make necessary conclusions from the developments in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states.

#### **4. Ukraine**

The developments in south-east Ukraine that have claimed the lives of many civilians and destroyed important life support facilities cause serious concern. The process of implementing the Minsk agreements reached with the participation and mediation of CSTO member states on the ceasefire and political settlement in south-east Ukraine is presently underway. While there is still a threat of disruption of the efforts aimed at peaceful settlement of the conflict, we only need to hope that the agreements will be implemented in full.

For a time being Ukraine has receded to the back burner. It is obvious that the Middle East is a more qualitatively important task for the United States. However, for Kiev this loss of attention from the West, which is its sponsor, is hardly acceptable. Experts believe that to receive new assistance, loans and armaments Kiev will need a fresh aggravation of the situation in Donbass, and a new armed standoff is the sole possibility for that.

#### **5. Nagorno-Karabakh Problem**

A sharp escalation of the conflict has been periodically observed on the border between Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan over the past few months. Azerbaijan continues grossly violating the ceasefire regime on the border with Armenia and the contact line with Artsakh. Artillery fire was opened from multiple launch rocket systems, 122 mm howitzers and mortars against Armenian positions for the first time since the truce was signed in 1994.

The CSTO supports solely a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and an earliest completion of the work on the Basic Principles of the Nagorno-Karabakh Settlement with the mediation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

## 6. Migration Problems

The migration problems, which over many years have largely been boiling down to illegal migration aspects for such a multifunctional organization as the CSTO, have become global in 2015 as a result of the Arab Spring stimulated and mainly organized from outside, overthrows, internal upheavals, foreign interference, bloody armed conflicts, the expansion of the area of activity of international terrorism, etc. A multi-thousand influx of refugees from the Greater Middle East has swept Europe, threatening the security and stability of the countries adjacent to the CSTO area of responsibility. It has so far reached our countries in small quantities (refugees from Syria in Russia and Armenia). However, a danger exists that this influx may be subsequently redirected at least partially towards CSTO member states. There have already been media reports on the proposals to send part of those refugees to Kyrgyzstan. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan has already started accepting refugees on an individual basis. But it should be borne in mind that the internal borders of the CSTO member states are open.

*Reference information: 1. The situation around Armenians in Syria: they were the second largest ethnic minority in Syria before the war (2–3% of the population) after the Kurds (9%); the massacre of Armenians committed by the ISIS; the remaining 15,000 Armenians mainly in the area of Aleppo; their struggle against the ISIS in armed formations of the coalition of ethnic minorities along with Yezidis, Christians and others; Armenian refugees from Syria – by the number of refugees who **have been received (16,000 people)**, only Turkey, Germany and Sweden are ahead of **Armenia** by this indicator. Jordan has received another 2,000 refugees while all the other countries have accepted 8,000 people.*

*2. Russia has received more than 1.2 million refugees from Ukraine since the spring of 2014.*

Brief additional information on the activity of the CSTO.

- The drills "**Indestructible Brotherhood-2015**" held at the Bagramyan training range in the Republic of Armenia on September 30 – October 4 this year contributed to raising the efficiency of the CSTO peacekeeping potential.

The exercises "**Interaction-2015**" became a major CSTO operation.

- For the purpose of ensuring prompt delivery of manpower and military hardware of the collective security system to the designated areas, the CSTO

Collective Security Council made a decision at its session in 2014 to create the **CSTO Collective Aviation Forces** and a Protocol on their structure and bases was approved in 2015.

- Some specific measures were taken **to strengthen the CSTO capacity for prompt response to emerging and potentially dangerous crisis situations**. Work has been launched to provide organizational, technical and legal support for the functioning of the Organization's Crisis Response Center.
- The Collective Security Council session discussed the issue of the CSTO Secretary-General. The CSTO heads of state gave instructions to work out a document stipulating the appointment of the CSTO Secretary-General on a rotating basis. A relevant decision will be passed at a session of the CSTO Council of the Heads of State in late December 2015.

In conclusion, it is necessary to stress the importance of cooperation among regional organizations in ensuring security (in particular, NATO-CSTO: a representative of the NATO Information Center said at last year's seminar that cooperation had been curtailed over the situation in Ukraine.

The CSTO cooperates actively with the UN, the OSCE, the CIS and the SCO.

## **The events in Ukraine and their influence on the Central Asian region**

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The conflict in Ukraine has altered the geopolitical configuration in Eurasia. The very beginning of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine's internal affairs became the starting point of major geopolitical shifts in the region and in the world. Ukraine and later Syria became "points of no return" – of Russia's policy course transformation into a policy of essentially different quality, possibly with regard to the Central Asian region, too. The conflict began to de-escalate only about six months ago; however, the consequences of the Ukraine conflict still continue to unfold in time and space. Those consequences have affected all the Central Asian countries, but, especially, Kazakhstan, Russia's geographical neighbor, with a strong division of public opinion, which was fraught with numerous dangers.

The Maidan revolution of 2014 had been ripening and was systemically predictable, especially since all the generations of Ukrainian leaders have shown a cautious, but steady pro-Europe orientation since Ukraine's independence.

Remember that a number of Russian politicians have been saying it is preferable to convert Ukraine into a federation or a confederation and, as the most wanted objective, "to have Ukraine and Russia re-unite". Another scenario has been discussed and elaborated: to gain an onshore line of contact from Kharkov via Lugansk and Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev, Odessa and the Crimea to Transnistria, as tying up the eastern border of Ukraine all the way to the River Dniester, with a transfer of control over Ukraine's maritime centers to pro-Russia interest groups. The problem with such scenarios was that their advocates were strongly convinced that Ukraine was a "sub-state" or a "failed state".

There was a strategy of entry into the Ukraine conflict, but no clear exit strategy. So from the very outset, there was an element of a no-strategy and situation-driven policy, except with regard to the Crimea.

Earlier, the Abkhazia and South Ossetia scenarios showed that, with consistent and measured extra-systemic influence on developments, secession could be used as a tool for setting up new unrecognized states, but the Crimea events showed that the bottom of such projects was yet to be reached.

**Central Asian States' Response to the Crisis in Ukraine.** At the very start of the conflict, in March 2014, Astana, Bishkek, and Tashkent made official statements on the events in Ukraine, in support of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Later, however, the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan officially reacted "with understanding to Russia's actions in Ukraine".

But as for the legitimacy and legality of the Yanukovich government, Bishkek never agreed with Moscow. The Foreign Ministry of Kyrgyzstan made a statement, underscoring that a president who had lost the people's support and fled the country could not be recognized as a legitimate leader.

Other countries in the regions – Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan – adopted a wait-and-see strategy with regard to the outcome of the events in Ukraine. The Foreign Ministry of Uzbekistan issued a meaningful statement, with calls for avoiding the use of force and respecting the principle of territorial integrity. As time has shown, concern over the economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States proved far from unjustified. Kazakhstan, a founding member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), along with Belarus and Russia, has strong links with the Russian economy, and so do other Central-Asian economies. So the economic isolation of Russia reduced incomes of migrants from Central Asia and money remittances from Russia to Central Asia.

The region's governments are also concerned over plans to continue simplifying Russian citizenship procedures for persons born in the Soviet Union or descendants of Russian-speaking Soviet citizens. The existence of such population groups, many analysts believe potentially could be used as justification of military intervention by Russia.

*The principal consequences of the Ukraine conflict for Central Asia and Kazakhstan can be classified and described as follows:*

## Information and Ideological Consequences

1. A strategy of both “hybrid” and information wars successfully applied.
2. The information component of the Ukraine crisis has exposed the low effectiveness, vulnerability, and weakness of Central Asian countries’ information strategies and the low level of information security. In fact, the region’s countries have no authentic information area: the leading players in that field are foreign media, primarily, Russian ones. This is especially applies to Kazakhstan.
3. The region’s perception of geopolitical processes is heavily influenced by external information factors, often shaped by foreign-policy preferences of leading extra-regional actors.
4. Over the past more than 20 years, Central Asia has not developed a Central-Asian identity. Bilateral relations are largely situation-driven and rely on post-Soviet heritages. The Ukraine case only serves to highlight the problem: what can the Central Asian region provide as a full-status geopolitical player? Is the region as a whole a full-status player in its own right at all?
5. The events in eastern Ukraine have demonstrated the importance of having systemic policies of government control of inter-ethnic accord and inter-confessional stability and of language policies in Central Asian states, which have significant ethnic Russian communities (especially Kazakhstan).
6. The post-Crimea period and the escalation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine also exposed another problem – the growth of militaristic sentiments in certain population groups, fed by the information background in the media. The separatists in eastern Ukraine included Kazakhstan citizens hired for the war. One of them was convicted on his return to Kazakhstan, and he is now in jail.
7. Risks of induced separatism and secessionism have heightened. Courts in Kazakhstan have tried several criminal cases<sup>1</sup> involving calls for separatism<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The sentence rendered on Shevtsova-Valova has become effective (<http://rus.azattyq.org/content/news/27022579.html>)

<sup>2</sup> Five years in jail for a publication. So much for warnings? (<http://rus.azattyq.org/content/bloger-igor-sychev-ridder-kazakhstan/27375080.html>).

and instigation of inter-ethnic discord.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that such calls intensified during the Ukraine conflict.

8. The geopolitical unpredictability of the “Russian World” concept and the thesis about “protection of fellow-countrymen” for Central Asia, transformation thereof from “soft power” to “hard power”, and the perception of the “Russian World” as an aggressive concept aimed at destabilization.
9. The politicization of ethnicity and language matters, which generates risks for state sovereignty and territorial inviolability.
10. The Ukraine conflict exposed the risks and threats of coexistence of multiple identities in the ideological field of a single state (one state – two identities). This primarily refers to systemic failures of the previous governments of Ukraine in shaping a systemic domestic policy in building a single-nation and single-state ideology.
11. The events in the Crimea and then in the Donetsk Region have shown the effectiveness of Russia’s strategy of artificial symmetric joining of a “divided people.” This means that we will see more attempts by Russia to activate initiatives to set up new or encourage transformation of existing ethno-confessional public movements and organizations in Central Asia.
12. It can be assumed that intervention or attempted military intervention by any extra-regional actor in Central Asia will enhance regional identity and, most importantly, Islamic solidarity-based identity in all the five states of the region, especially, as encouraged by Sunnism of Mazhab Hanafi, which heavily prevails in the region. The issue of the Crimean Tatars in the Crimea is also tangential to the matters of Turkic solidarity of Central Asian states.
13. A military intervention would automatically move into the field of inter-religious confrontation – a liberation Islamic jihad. The role and popularity of extremist organization would increase, and a combination of a matrix involving the construction of an Islamic state (as illustrated by the temporary success of the forbidden ISIS-Daesh terrorist organization, and anti-“infidel” liberation rhetoric would produce a complicated mix that would be difficult to counter.

<sup>3</sup> The proceedings in the Taychibekov case has reached the pleadings stage. (<http://rus.azattyq.org/content/news/27407057.html>)

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14. An important role in the Ukraine conflict has been played by the domestic regional-confessional context. That context indirectly correlated with the position of the Cossacks and Cossack organizations in the post-USSR area. The stand-off on the Maidan, which started in the autumn of 2013, clearly defined the geopolitical reference points of religious organizations – Orthodox Christian, Greek Catholic, and Roman Catholic ones.
15. Russia's media scene is showing an increased activity of forces calling for legitimization of territorial claims against Kazakhstan and a number of other territories in Central Asia. Their supporters in some countries of the region have been identified.
16. Personalization of foreign and domestic policies in Central Asia has been getting more topical. Many problems in the region stem from the factor of insufficient mutual trust in developing a joint agenda.
17. During and following the Ukraine events Russia regularized and systemized management of labor migrants from Central Asia and interaction with their most influential leaders. A bill has been submitted to Russia's Federal Duma to expand the powers of ethnic and cultural autonomous communities in migrant adaptation through conversion of such organizations into not-for-profit entities. The bill's key innovation is a provision to permit ethnic and cultural autonomous communities to be funded not only by domestic sources, but also by external sources.
18. Russia's image gains and losses in the region. The first changes have to do with perception of Russia as a strong neighbor and the principal foreign-policy partner, as well as a partner in many regional and international organizations – CSTO, SCO, EAEU, CICA, OSCE, and other organizations, which comprise a majority of the post-Soviet states. In the post-Crimea period, there emerged concerns that the "new" Russia may be a threat to its partners in Central Asia. As Russian analysts point out, "it is still an open question how strong the relationships built on such shaky foundation will prove to be... It is important to recognize that the key events in the international scene and Russia's role in them are viewed in Central Asia primarily through the lens of perception thereof as a threat to national stability, territorial integrity, and state sovereignty. A feeling of greater vulnerability inevitably affects the level of trust between Central-Asian countries and Moscow, as well as among vested interests and elites within the region's states."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Болгова И. Последствия украинского кризиса для Центральной Азии: шок и трепет ( I. Bolgova. The Consequences of the Ukraine Crisis for Central Asia: Shock and Awe). [http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/?id\\_4=5531#top-content](http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/?id_4=5531#top-content)

19. Changes in the image and perception of revolutions (two revolutions in Kyrgyzstan, two in Ukraine, and one in Georgia) as tools for changing the present and designing the future. A “revolution of dignity” was meant to ensure that lessons of interventionism should be learned and the events of 2005 should never recur. It was expected to generate new personalities, new ideas, and new concepts of state- and nation-building, and new ideas in Ukraine’s ideological field.
20. The influence of the image of “new Ukraine” as a transforming European country on Central Asian states. That image is still taking shape, so it is too early to discuss results, but it may produce a positive influence on the image of reform advocates in Central Asia if the success of its reforms does not rely on existing or new loans borrowed, because Western loans are an auxiliary tool of reform, but not the main one. Regrettably, during the year of reform Ukraine failed to produce any personalities similar in the level of competence and in views to Kakha Bendukidze, who advocated reforms reasonably straightforward and vital, deep-going and easy to understand. Successful reforms in Ukraine’s regions are largely attributed to the experience of expats, such as the successful reformer Mikhail Saakashvili, the former president of Georgia.
21. The more successful reforms in Georgia were more attractive as a model in a number of areas, including the police reform, the anti-corruption reform, the tourism management reform, the customs and border management reform and so on. All those successes could influence and are influencing the situation in a number of Central Asian countries.
22. No values-promoting party has emerged in Ukraine. No party to offer some new social political discourses in society and in the FSU region. No party to serve as a model for party development to Central Asia. Pro-Europe and pro-West orientation – those concepts have become stale by now.

## Military and Political Consequences

1. Russia's new, post-Crimea foreign policy concept does not exclude military intervention into Central Asia's affairs.<sup>5</sup>
2. Following from the above are risks of territorial conflicts and alteration of state borders by force. The fragmentation of Ukraine (the separation of the Crimea) shows that FSU borders can be changed. The changing of Russia's borders, through addition of the Crimea, further enhanced Central Asian countries' perception of the strength of their own borders against potential military actions by a third party, especially considering the existing enclaves, the diverse ethnic environment, and the dormant mutual territorial claims.
3. European security institutions and treaties to which Russia is a party are being eroded. The crisis has exposed the illusory nature of the agreements contained in the Budapest Memorandum of December 1994 among the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia. Securing the performance of the Budapest Memorandum agreements is an issue confronting Kazakhstan, too, as a state that has voluntarily relinquished its nuclear weapons.
4. The events in Ukraine have brought the future of nuclear security and the nuclear non-proliferation system to the international agenda. The matter is topical for Central Asia, because the region is surrounded by nuclear or threshold nuclear states.
5. The region has become more militarized. Along with the de-facto militarization of the Caspian following the launching by Russia of 26 ballistic missiles against the ISIS in Syria, that complicates the military-political configuration in the region.
6. From that moment on, Central Asian countries' multi-format cooperation with NATO has been an irritating factor to Moscow.
7. Double standards in interpretation and application of international law by extra-regional powers and priority of military pressure. The old-time policy of force is back in the Eurasian continent.

<sup>5</sup> 60 I. Timofeyev: "Russia is becoming a more active military and political player outside its own territory. But that activity will be pinpoint in nature, due to limited resources. Apart from Syria, Russia may intervene to perform its ally obligations in Central Asia to counter terrorist threats from militants based in Afghanistan. Such intervention will involve high-mobility units with active participation of aerospace forces." // Новая предсказуемость России (Russia's New Predictability). [http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/?id\\_4=6754#top-content](http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/?id_4=6754#top-content).

8. Central Asia should develop a political and economic agenda of its own, rather than follow the agenda of extra-regional powers. That is a realistic path for Central Asia's political and economic integration.
9. Russia has been accelerating expansion of its military presence in Central Asia, which conceptually is fully consistent with its policy course. Russia has signed agreements with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan on extending the presence of its military bases in those countries until 2042 and 2032, respectively; Russia's military contingent in Tajikistan will be increased from 5,900 to 9,000 personnel by the year 2020. This will make Russia's base in Tajikistan its largest base outside Russia. By 2016, Russia will upgrade its aircraft at its base in Kant, Kyrgyzstan, replacing its older aircraft with more than ten upgraded SU-25 aircraft.
10. The Ukraine crisis created an extremely negative precedent of politicizing by Moscow of Central Asian countries' multi-vector strategies as unwelcome.
11. The conflict in Ukraine created multiple traps for the multi-vector foreign-policy strategy that has been successfully implemented by Kazakhstan during the period of its independence. The conflict in Ukraine was not the first such conflict<sup>6</sup> (earlier Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy model had been put to the test during the Georgia-Russia conflict), but it was a major challenge to its multi-vector foreign policy. Efforts made by the United States and the European Union to hold Russia responsible for its actions in Ukraine put Kazakhstan in an awkward position between the two sides, further aggravated by a long diplomatic confrontation. In addition, Kazakhstan managed to keep close and productive working relations with Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> Russia's intervention in Ukraine was a good lesson for Astana, showing what might happen in the event of a major discord in a country with a significant portion of ethnic Russians.
12. Russia's "accomplished fact" policy in the Crimea, with unilateral sanctions imposed during the post-Crimea period and later – following its involvement in the Syria conflict, – did little to boost mutual trust between Russia and its strategic allies in Central Asia, from the standpoint of the region's pragmatic goals and objectives.

<sup>6</sup> On 26 August 2008, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed a Decree recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which had seceded from Georgia following the Georgia-Russia conflict. The sovereignty of those states has not been recognized by Kazakhstan.

<sup>7</sup> On 9 October 2015, Ukrainian President Pyotr Poroshenko paid a first official visit to Kazakhstan.

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13. The conflict showed the limits of what might happen when a dysfunctional enclave is created in a region of an independent country, provoking and accompanied by “archaic” forms of internal violence.
14. The strengthening of existing political regimes in Central Asian countries to guarantee protection of broadly interpreted national security.
15. In order to prevent potential replication of “color revolutions” in the region, which in Ukraine have led not only to a change of the political regime, but also to a civil war, Central Asian government authorities have been enhancing supervision of the tertiary sector – NGOs, Internet media, social networks, and foreign grant programs.
16. Recognition by Central Asian countries’ elites of their vulnerability and their varying, but generally high level of political loyalty to Moscow have been clearly expressed in those countries’ official positions with regard to the events in the Crimea.
17. The events in Ukraine exposed the concept of “post-Soviet area” as utterly inadequate and makeshift, in terms of its political, economic and military-strategy role. For the first time, a part of one “post-Soviet state” was de-jure transferred to another “post-Soviet state”. (Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia are more like examples of ethnic separatism).
18. The United States is getting less active in Central Asia, which supports the thesis that its policy in the region is auxiliary to the coalition’s operation in Afghanistan. The United States’ activity is moving to the Middle East and the South China Sea. This probably will not change even after the Presidential election, because the United States is busy with other international conflicts and challenges. In terms of security and economic interests, providing aid to Central Asia is not a major obligation for the United States. Its framework policy is likely to view Central Asia as a more diversified region.
19. The cooling of relations between Russia and the West promotes a strengthening of Central Asia’s strategic partnership with China. The gas contract and the earlier oil delivery contracts make Russia the principal supplier of energy to China. Recent agreements will encourage an increase of China’s exports to Russia and cooperation in areas important to China (for example, local currency payments and aviation). Closer links with Russia may also help to counterbalance the influence of the United States in Central Asia. The EU is

strengthening its positions in energy cooperation with Russia and watching (for now) the development of China's new security initiatives.

20. China, apparently, is prepared, at least in the mid-term, to yield political domination in Central Asia to Russia, in exchange for respect for its geo-economic interests in the region. In terms of political dominance, the Asia-Pacific region is a higher priority for China now. Accomplishing that task will occupy a lot of China's resources, considering the involvement of the United States and Japan in the geopolitical tug-of-war in Asia-Pacific.
21. At the same time, China has been building up its economic presence in Afghanistan – a part of what has been called "Greater Central Asia"; it actually plays a leading role in Afghanistan's economy. In expanding its influence in Afghanistan, China will probably use Pakistan's support. It should be noted that western Afghanistan heavily depends on energy imports from Turkmenistan. So Ashgabat and Beijing may have a common interest in building a gas and oil pipeline from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan to Pakistan, potentially also to handle oil and gas resources of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. With China importing oil and gas from Central Asia, it may control the geo-economic situation in the entire region.
22. Severance of cooperation in defense industry will cause negative consequences for Ukraine and Russia, as well as for Central Asian countries.

## **Social and Economic Consequences**

1. The Ukraine conflict highlighted the need for the region's countries to resolve territorial issues in the region, without any intermediaries involved, as early as possible, to complete delimitation of borders in a conflict-free manner, and to move on to a new level of decisions on a system of integrated use of transboundary water resources.
2. The crisis has brought out the significant economic interdependence between Russia and the rest of the world. Therefore the reciprocal measures taken by the West and Russia to reduce mutual trade in the principal commodities – oil, gas, and other commodities – have had long-reaching effects for the world economy and for the region. The most affected economy in the region has been Kazakhstan.

3. Due to the long recession and the sanctions imposed, Russia's economy has been losing its modernization attractiveness for countries of the region. Even with good political relations, the condition of the Russian economy increasingly becomes a brake on the development of economic cooperation.
4. Russian factories' demand for raw materials from the region has been declining, since for production, those factories heavily depend on cooperation with industrial companies of Ukraine.
5. Trade between Ukraine and Kazakhstan has shrunk by more than 40 per cent during the post-Crimea period. The reasons are a decline of Ukraine's economy, the lack of revenue flows from its eastern regions, and problems affecting transit deliveries via Russian territory.
6. Ukraine's services market is currently depressed, so doing business in Kazakhstan opens ample opportunities for Ukrainian business people. In the small and medium-sized business sector in Kazakhstan's large cities, Ukrainian business people have been quite aggressive in entering the sales and services segments (sometimes using price dumping methods). HR agencies offer lots of low-priced skilled specialists from Ukraine. The problem has two conflicting consequences: on the one hand, paying earnings to non-residents of Kazakhstan means that cash flows out of the country; on the other hand, local specialists have a chance to learn from their skilled Ukrainian colleagues, and this is good for competition in the long term.
7. The Ukraine case actually originated from the selection of a political and economic development path between EAEU and the pro-Europe choice. Therefore during the post-Crimea period, the period of open political confrontation between the West and Russia, Moscow has been stepping up the integration processes. One interesting opinion is that "to a certain extent, that is a replay of the geopolitical maneuver that was successfully performed by the Russian Empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century to restore its foreign policy positions lost following the defeat in the Crimean War."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Дятленко П. Последствия украинского кризиса для Центральной Азии (P. Dyatlenko. The Consequences of the Ukraine Crisis for Central Asia). <http://polit-asia.kz/sports/222-последствия-украинского-кризиса-для-центральной-азии>

8. Partnership with Russia based on Eurasian integration is not the single option, especially since it involves risks of eroding national sovereignty. Alternative economic options should not be viewed as political subversion. Both elites and analysts in Central Asian countries have been looking at economic system options. When Central Asian countries began to feel direct and indirect consequences of the sanctions imposed by the West and Russia against each other, their doubts began to strengthen. One high-potential alternative project is the Silk Road Economic Belt, intended to promote development of infrastructure.
9. Russia's actions in Ukraine have led Beijing to intensify its efforts to implement its ambitious plans in both Central Asia and in Asia-Pacific. The strengthening of China's positions in the region, which remains the only political entity neutral in the conflict, and China being the only strong global economic partner, has intensified implementation of China's international economic projects in Central Asia, first of all, the Silk Road Economic Belt project and coordination thereof with the Eurasian integration processes. Although the two countries' interest do not always match (for example, in Central Asia), and China does not necessarily embrace some of Russia's actions (including the accession of the Crimea), yet it is cooperation that meets China's current interest in counterbalancing the influence of the United States. The withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan has diminished the role of the West as a player in Central Asia. China is the principal economic partner for Central Asia and the largest importer of energy from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and is becoming an increasingly important investor and lender for the region's countries. Beijing is seeking to expand roads and railway lines to export Chinese goods not only to Central Asia, but also to Europe. At the same time, China is becoming increasingly important as a political ally within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which also comprises Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
10. Migration flows from/into the region have become more complicated. The Russian ruble's devaluation, the stagnation of the Russian economy, and the decline of world market prices of hydrocarbons have affected the flows of labor migration and caused some labor migrants to go to other countries, including Central Asian countries.
11. The Ukrainian government still owns a significant portion of the country's economy as it undergoes reform, although in fact it is in a state of war and much of the budget is taken up by military spending. In 2014, the government-owned enterprises accounted for 53 percent of Ukraine's GDP. In late 2015, the figure was 51–52 percent. So reforms have not

reduced the government's involvement in the economy. This is a sure path to economic disaster, to confirm the thesis that revolutions do not lead to successful economic reforms. For Central Asia, this means that so far we have not received any new innovative information for successful economic reforms, including those that require more radical economic actions.

12. The Ukraine crisis is a huge risk for both European and Central Asian companies, first of all companies of Kazakhstan, considering developing business in that market. They should plan to participate in future modernization projects in Ukraine (including, for instance, infrastructure projects).
13. Russia's sanctions on imports from the EU, the United States, and their partners soured relations within the Customs Union, because the decision was not supported by Kazakhstan or Belarus.
14. Russia is a "seaway" to take European goods and services to Central Asian markets. The Ukraine conflict has complicated their logistics and narrowed the variety of goods and services, making trade dependent on the current geopolitical situation. The events in Ukraine have become a serious threat to business people in Kazakhstan and to small and medium-sized businesses in other Central Asian countries that trade with Ukraine, as well as for the European trade and investment.
15. Water and energy problems. During his visit, US Secretary of State John Kerry proposed a new-format Smart Waters Program, to include transfer of expertise and training and retaining of water management and coordination specialists for the region. It is not clear how the program will be implemented in practice, since Central Asian countries differ in their visions of regional water security issues. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, located in the lower reaches of the region's major rivers, have their own understanding of the problem, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, located in the estuaries of the principal sources of water resources, see it differently.
16. If Moscow perceives that Central Asia is not loyal enough, it may use "soft autonomization" strategies followed by unbalanced take-over strategies, with organizational and ideological characteristics of the united nation being exactly the same as those of the "integrating nation". So the nation being integrated would have to relinquish its political and economic and, in part, socio-cultural characteristics.

In summing up, the consequences of the events in Ukraine are still unfolding and have not reached the bottom yet. Bilateral and multilateral relations among the region's countries are largely sporadic. It is obvious, however, that Central Asian communities do have a social demand for and an interest in real mutual economic integration. Other promoting factors include the following:

- Central Asia is a land-locked region. Therefore building a single transportation and logistics link between Eastern Asia and Europe is a goal of strategic importance.
- The focus should be made on a bottom-up integration: public opinion in Central Asian countries does not have a systemically articulated mutual intolerance and is willing to recognize the need to develop cordial fraternal relations based on ethnic-cultural, language, and confessional closeness. Stability and the evolving regional identity should be driven by shared ideological reference points that are forward-looking and capable of countering external negative influences.

A longer-term issue consists in how well the Western political establishment will be able to shape a long-term strategy of relations with Moscow in the "post-Crimea" context; that will influence the general psychological climate in the region's foreign policy scene.

Another important change caused by the events in Ukraine is that Moscow's politics in the region develop along the lines of unpredictability, which Russian political scientists prefer to call a policy of "new predictability,"<sup>9</sup> even as a former rhetoric and previously established partnership institutions are preserved.

The region should not permit any extra-regional player to be stronger. The objective of Central Asia's existing elites and their successors is to ensure that no country pursues politics that would lead to a clash of the interests of any external player in the region.

Previously, it was the absence of external threats that impeded regional integration. However, in view of the complexity of the foreign-policy environment and the differences of domestic-policy contexts, regional integration should be developed stage by stage, but within the limited time framework. Integration of the region's countries is consistent with the interests of all the countries and can help counter old and new challenges and risks. In the medium term, the relatively weak political positions of Central Asia should be offset by a weighty economic role of the region's countries.

<sup>9</sup> Тимофеев И. Новая предсказуемость России (I. Timofeyev. Russia's New Predictability). [http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/?id\\_4=6754#top-content](http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/?id_4=6754#top-content)

## THE EVENTS IN UKRAINE AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

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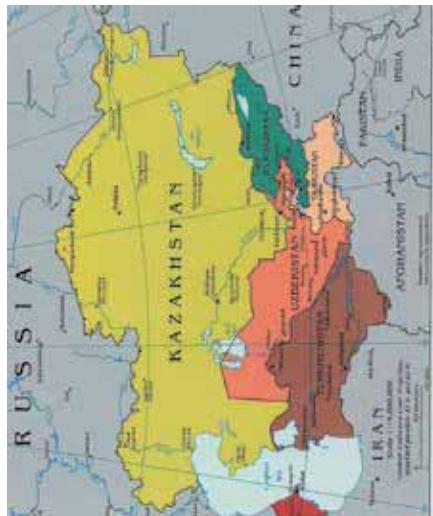
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*Unofficial translation*





## THE EVENTS IN UKRAINE AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

### *Information and Ideological Consequences:*

- ❖ Successfully applied strategy of maintaining of "hybrid" and information wars.
- ❖ The information component of the Ukraine crisis has exposed the low effectiveness, vulnerability, and weakness of Central Asian countries' information strategies and the low level of information security. In fact, the region's countries have no authentic information area: the leading players in that field are foreign mass media, primarily, Russian ones. This is especially applies to Kazakhstan.
- ❖ Information factor is shaped by foreign-policy preferences of leading extra-regional actors.
- ❖ Over the past more than 20 years, Central Asia has not developed a Central-Asian identity. Bilateral relations are largely situation-driven. Is the region as a whole a full-status player in its own right at all?
- ❖ The events in eastern Ukraine have demonstrated the importance of having systemic policies of government control of inter-ethnic accord and inter-confessional stability and of language policies in Central Asian states.



## THE EVENTS IN UKRAINE AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

### *Information and Ideological Consequences:*



- ❖ Growth of militaristic sentiments in certain population groups, fed by the information background in the mass media. The separatists in eastern Ukraine included Kazakhstan citizens hired for the war. One of them was convicted on his return to Kazakhstan, and imprisoned to jail.
- ❖ Risks of induced separatism and secessionism.
- ❖ The geopolitical unpredictability of the "Russian World" concept and the thesis about "protection of fellow-countrymen" for Central Asia, transformation thereof from "soft power" to "hard power", and the perception of the "Russian World" as an aggressive concept aimed at destabilization.
- ❖ The politicization of ethnicity and language as a threat for the state sovereignty and territorial inviolability.
- ❖ Ukraine is "one state- two identities". Systemic failures of the previous governments of Ukraine in shaping a systemic domestic policy in building a single-nation and single-state ideology.
- ❖ Precedent of the effective realization of the strategy of artificial symmetric joining of a "divided people."
- ❖ Intervention or attempted military intervention by any extra-regional systemic actor in Central Asia will enhance the Islamic solidarity-based identity in Central Asian states based on Sunnism of Mazhab Hanafi principles.
- ❖ The issue of the Crimean Tatars in the Crimea is also tangential to the matters of Turkic solidarity of Central Asian states.



## THE EVENTS IN UKRAINE AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

### *Military and Political Consequences:*

- ❖ Russia's new, post-Crimea foreign policy concept does not exclude military intervention into Central Asia's affairs.
- ❖ Risks of territorial conflicts and alteration of state borders by force. The fragmentation of Ukrainian government is a challenge for the Central Asian countries with the existing enclaves, the diverse ethnic environment, and the dormant mutual territorial claims.
- ❖ Illusory nature of the agreements contained in the Budapest Memorandum of December 1994.
- ❖ The future of nuclear security and the nuclear non-proliferation system. The Central Asian region is surrounded by nuclear or threshold nuclear states.
- ❖ Enhanced militarization of the region and militarization of the Caspian complicates the military-political configuration in the region.
- ❖ Central Asian countries' multi-format cooperation with NATO and CSTO in new realities.
- ❖ Double standards in interpretation and application of international law and priority of military pressure.
- ❖ Central Asia should develop a political and economic agenda of its own, rather than follow the agenda of extra-regional powers. That is a realistic path for Central Asia's political and economic integration.

## THE EVENTS IN UKRAINE AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

### *Military and Political Consequences:*



- ❖ Expansion of Russia's military presence in Central Asia.
- ❖ Precedent of politicizing by Moscow of Central Asian countries' multi-vector strategies as unwelcome.
- ❖ Conflict in Ukraine- multiple traps for the multi-vector foreign-policy strategy.
- ❖ Russia's "accomplished fact" policy in the Crimea, and later in the Syrian conflict - did little to boost mutual trust between Russia and its strategic allies in Central Asia.
- ❖ Attempts of creation of a dysfunctional country, accompanied by "anarchic" forms of internal violence.
- ❖ The strengthening of existing political regimes in Central Asian countries as a guarantee of protection of broadly interpreted national security.
- ❖ Central Asian government authorities have been enhancing supervision of the tertiary sector – NGOs, Internet media, social networks, and foreign grant programs.
- ❖ High level of political loyalty to the events in the Crimea by the Central Asian states.
- ❖ Concept of "post-Soviet area" - political, economic and military-strategic inadequacy and makeshift. For the first time, a part of one "post-Soviet state" was de-jure transferred to another "post-Soviet state".

## THE EVENTS IN UKRAINE AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

### *Military and Political Consequences:*



- ❖ USA's activity decay in the CA region, instrumental type of politics, auxiliary to the coalition's operation in Afghanistan.
- ❖ The cooling of relations between Russia and the West promotes a strengthening of Central Asia's strategic partnership with China.
- ❖ China has been building up its economic presence in Afghanistan – a part of what has been called "Greater Central Asia", Beijing multi-dimensionally influences the geo-economic situation in the entire region.
- ❖ Severance of cooperation in defense industry will cause negative consequences for Ukraine and Russia, as well as for Central Asian countries.

## THE EVENTS IN UKRAINE AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

### *Social and Economic Consequences:*



- ❖ Need to complete delimitation of borders in a conflict-free manner, and to move on to a new level of decisions on a system of integrated use of transboundary water resources in the region.
- ❖ The reciprocal measures taken by the West and Russia to reduce mutual trade in the principal commodities – oil, gas, and other commodities – have had long-reaching effects for the world economy and for the CA region. The most affected economy in the region has been Kazakhstan.
- ❖ Due to the long recession and the sanctions imposed, Russia's economy has been losing its modernization attractiveness for countries of the region. Even with good political relations, the condition of the Russian economy increasingly becomes a brake on the development of economic cooperation.
- ❖ Russian factories' demand for raw materials from the region has been declining, since for production, those factories heavily depend on cooperation with industrial companies of Ukraine.
- ❖ Trade between Ukraine and Kazakhstan has shrunk by more than 40 per cent during the post-Crimea period. The reasons are a decline of Ukraine's economy, the lack of revenue flows from its eastern regions, and problems affecting transit deliveries via Russian territory.



## THE EVENTS IN UKRAINE AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

### *Social and Economic Consequences:*

- ❖ The influx of Ukrainian small and medium-sized business in Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian Region, labor migration of skilled labor from Ukraine.
- ❖ The dynamics of the integration process is accelerating. Healthy criticism in the evaluation of the economic policy and the steps of each country in the Eurasian integration is growing.
- ❖ Partnership with Russia based on Eurasian integration is not the single option. Alternative economic projects should not be viewed as political subversion with Russia. The Silk Road Economic Belt project's coordination with the Eurasian integration processes.
- ❖ Migration flows from/into the region have become more complicated. The Russian ruble's devaluation, the stagnation of the Russian economy, and the decline of world market prices of hydrocarbons have affected the flows of labor migration and caused some labor migrants to go to other countries, including Central Asian countries.
- ❖ The Ukraine crisis is a huge risk for both European and Central Asian companies, first of all companies of Kazakhstan, considering of developing business in that market. They should, however, plan to participate in future Ukrainian modernization projects (including, for instance, infrastructure projects).
- ❖ Russia's sanctions on imports from the EU, the United States, and their partners soured relations within the Customs Union, because the decision was not supported by Kazakhstan or Belarus.



## THE EVENTS IN UKRAINE AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

### *Social and Economic Consequences:*



- ❖ Russia is seen as a "seaway" to take European goods and services to Central Asian markets. The Ukraine conflict has complicated their logistics and narrowed the variety of goods and services, making trade dependent on the current geopolitical situation. The events in Ukraine have become a serious threat to business people in Kazakhstan and to small and medium-sized businesses in other Central Asian countries that trade with Ukraine, as well as for the European trade and investment.
- ❖ Water and energy problems. US Project- Smart Waters for CA region.
- ❖ Use of the "soft autonomization" strategies and immediate separatism by external players in CA region.

# THE EVENTS IN UKRAINE AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

## CONCLUSIONS:



➤ Bilateral and multilateral relations among the region's countries are largely sporadic. It is obvious, however, that Central Asian communities have a social demand for and an interest in real mutual economic integration.

Other promoting factors include the following:

- Central Asia is a land-locked region. Therefore building a single transportation and logistics link between Eastern Asia and Europe is a goal of strategic importance.
- The focus should be made on a bottom-up integration: public opinion in Central Asian countries does not have a systematically articulated mutual intolerance and is willing to recognize the need to develop cordial fraternal relations based on ethnic-cultural, language, and confessional closeness. Stability and the evolving regional identity should be driven by shared ideological reference points that are forward-looking and capable of countering external negative influences.
- A longer-term issue consists in how well the Western political establishment will be able to shape a long-term strategy of relations with Moscow in the "post-Crimea" context; that will influence the general psychological climate in the region's foreign policy scene.

## THE EVENTS IN UKRAINE AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

### CONCLUSIONS:



- Another important change caused by the events in Ukraine is that Moscow's politics in the region develop along the lines of unpredictability, which Russian political scientists prefer to call a policy of "new predictability," even as a former rhetoric and previously established partnership institutions are preserved.
- The region should not permit any external player to be stronger. The objective of Central Asia's existing elites and their successors is to ensure that no country pursues politics that would lead to a clash of the interests of any external player in the region.
- Previously, it was the absence of external threats that impeded regional integration. However, in view of the complexity of the foreign-policy environment and the differences of domestic-policy contexts, regional integration should be developed stage by stage, but within the limited time framework. Integration of the region's countries is consistent with the interests of all the countries and can help counter old and new challenges and risks.
- In the medium term, the relatively weak political positions of Central Asia should be offset by a weighty economic role of the region's countries.

# Central Asia in 2030: Demographic Challenges and Strategies of Partner States

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Despite the serious development challenges in the post-Soviet period: economic crisis, ethnic tensions, mass emigration and political instability with civil war as a worst case scenario – the Central Asian states turned out to be quite resilient. All of them managed to maintain their territorial integrity, integrate into the world economy, fight poverty, unemployment and deal with other challenges. However, currently these countries are facing a tangle of serious social and economic challenges, which in some publications is called “Big transformation.” One of the key elements thereof is the demographic changes that impact the social, economic and political landscape of the Central Asia.

The following outcomes of the demographic development of Central Asia in the post-Soviet period deserve special mention. Firstly, the region has been experiencing a population growth. Within 25 years that elapsed since the collapse of the Soviet Union the region’s population increased by nearly 40 percent, from 48.6 million in 1989 to 67.8 million in 2014 with Tajikistan being at the top of the list (65% increase) and Kazakhstan at the bottom (only 5%).

Secondly, the population of Central Asia has been fleeing the region. This process started in mid-1970’s and in the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s collapse it turned into an avalanche. Up until early 2000’s ethnic minorities accounted for a “lion’s share” of the emigrants. So-called “Europeans” (Slavs, Germans and Jews) were the first to leave. As a result whole cities and regions were de-Europeanized. Over the past 15 years the indigenous population has been gradually going up in the emigration statistics.

Thirdly, the ethnic balance in the region has changed. All Central Asian states reported a drastic reduction of the ethnic minorities' share in the overall population of the region (40% in 1989 vs 20% in 2014).

Fourthly, the population growth in Central Asia is extremely uneven geographically. The following three types of regions have been growing rapidly:

- Capital and large cities (for instance, the Astana's population has trebled over 25 years);
- Traditional agricultural areas in the river valleys and fertile oases;
- New industrial centers affiliated with the sectors that have been rapidly evolving over the past 25 years, for instance, Mangystau and Atyrau Regions, which are Kazakhstan's oil industry champions.

The population of the old industrial cities and agricultural regions, where most of the residents are "European," has been dwindling.

Fifthly, the level of urbanization continues to increase in Central Asia. Despite the mass exodus of the urban dwellers in the 1990's, the percentage of the urban population has increased from 44 percent to 48 percent during 1989–2014. The number of people living in urban areas has increased by almost 50 percent.

Sixthly, Central Asia has to deal with a gap between the economic development level and population growth rate. Over 60 percent of the population is concentrated in southern and southeastern regions, while over two thirds of the region's GDP is generated in the northern and northwestern regions that boast major oil and gas fields, ferrous and non-ferrous metal deposits, as well as the main industrial facilities manufacturing goods for export.

Finally, the population of Central Asia is very young. According to UN statistics, in 2010 the average median age ranged from 21.2 years in Tajikistan to 28.9 years in Kazakhstan.

The demographic changes in Central Asia have triggered a whole chain of social and political problems.

80 1. Uneven socioeconomic development leads to unemployment. As demand for the key exported goods of the region (raw materials and labor force) is declining the unemployment problem will become even more pressing;

2. In the absence of industrial growth mass-scale migration creates the problem of “false urbanization,” which in turn hampers the formation of sustainable urban communities and affects the urban development;
3. The emigration of active and qualified specialists reduces the quality of human capital, thus further complicating modernization of the Central Asian states;
4. The high share of the young population creates identity problems (ideology, religious and national identity, historical memory, etc.).

The following processes are likely to unfold during the period until 2030:

- The population growth will slow down due to urbanization, exodus of young people and a change in the reproduction attitudes;
- Over two thirds of the population of the Central Asian states will consist of people born after the collapse of the Soviet Union;
- In a situation of continuing socioeconomic deterioration emigration is likely to increase leading to practically total “de-Europeanization” of the biggest part of the region;
- The problem of ethnic minorities will become more pressing. As the socioeconomic situation deteriorates the pressure on the minorities will be mounting;
- International and internal migration rates will remain high;
- Urbanization will continue largely at the expense of big cities. According to forecasts, there will be seven million-plus cities in Central Asia by 2025;
- The international migration priorities will change from the former Soviet Union to Europe, Turkey and countries of the Persian Gulf.

The partner countries should take into consideration the demographic changes in Central Asia which impact the social, economic and political landscape of the region. Ignoring these processes would significantly reduce the efficiency of political and economic strategies.

*Unofficial translation*

# Central Asia in 2030: demographic challenges and strategies of partner-states

Artem Georgiyevich Dankov  
PhD in History

Artyom DANKOV

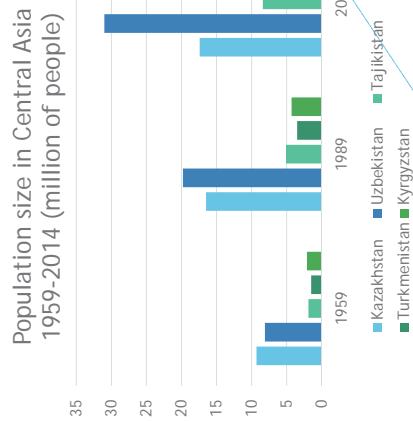
## Introduction

- ▶ Despite of the serious development challenges during the post-soviet period, such as economic crisis, complicated interethnic tensions, mass emigration, political instability and even civil war, the Central Asian states turned out to be fully resilient. All of them managed to maintain their territorial integrity and deal with poverty, unemployment and other challenges.
- ▶ Currently all countries of the region face a difficult period of social and economic challenges – “Big Transformation”.
- ▶ One of the key elements of the “Big Transformation” is demographic changes, that impact the socio-cultural, economic and political landscape of the Central Asian region.

## I. Results of the demographic development in Central Asia (1989-2014)

### 1) Population growth.

- Within 25 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union the region's population increased by nearly 40 percent, from 48.6 million in 1989 to 67.8 million in 2014.
- The largest increase was demonstrated by Tajikistan (almost 65%).
- The smallest increase was observed in Kazakhstan (only 5%).



## I. Results of the demographic development in Central Asia (1989-2014)

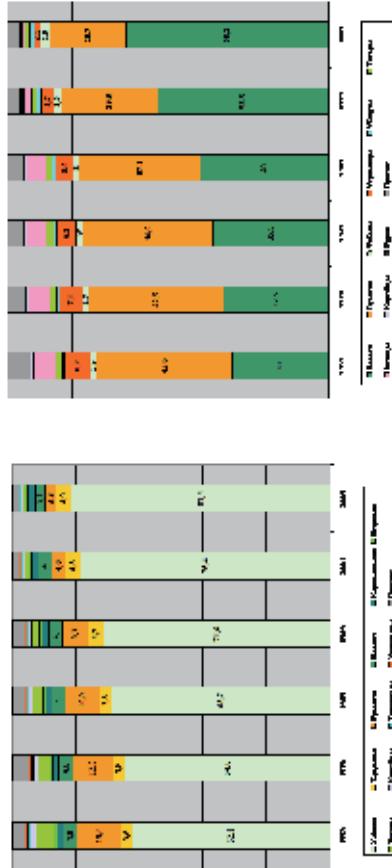
2) Emigration. A population outflow began in Central Asia since mid 70s of the XX century.

- ▲ Up until early 2000's a vast majority of the emigrants was represented by ethnic minorities. In general, so-called "Europeans" (the Slavs, Germans and Jews) emigrated, which led to the "de-Europeanization" of the entire cities and the regions.
- ▲ Over the past 15 years the indigenous population has been gradually going up in the emigration statistics.

## I. Results of the demographic development in Central Asia (1989-2014)

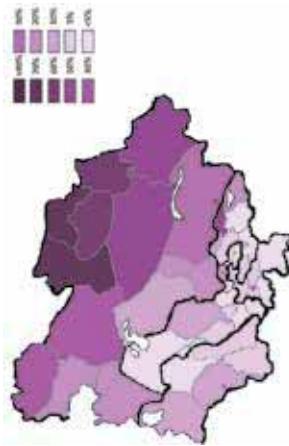
3) Change of ethnic balance. Reduction of minority share.

*Ethnic composition of Kazakhstan's population during 1959-2009*

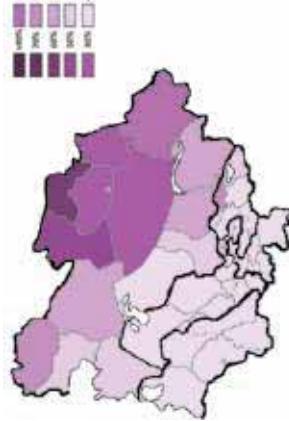


## I. Results of the demographic development in Central Asia (1989-2014)

Distribution of «Europeans» region-wise in Central Asia in 1989.



Distribution of «Europeans» region-wise in Central Asia in 2014.



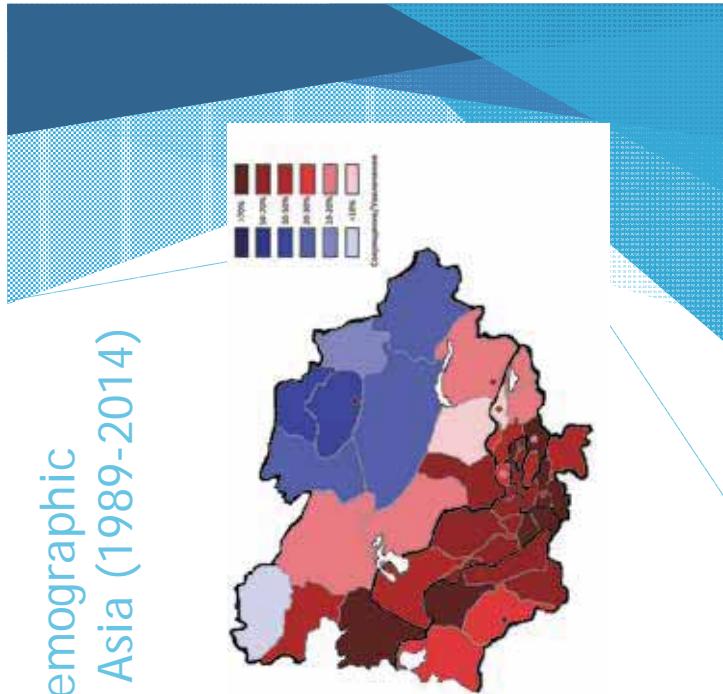
## I. Results of the demographic development in Central Asia (1989-2014)

4) Population growth is uneven geographically.

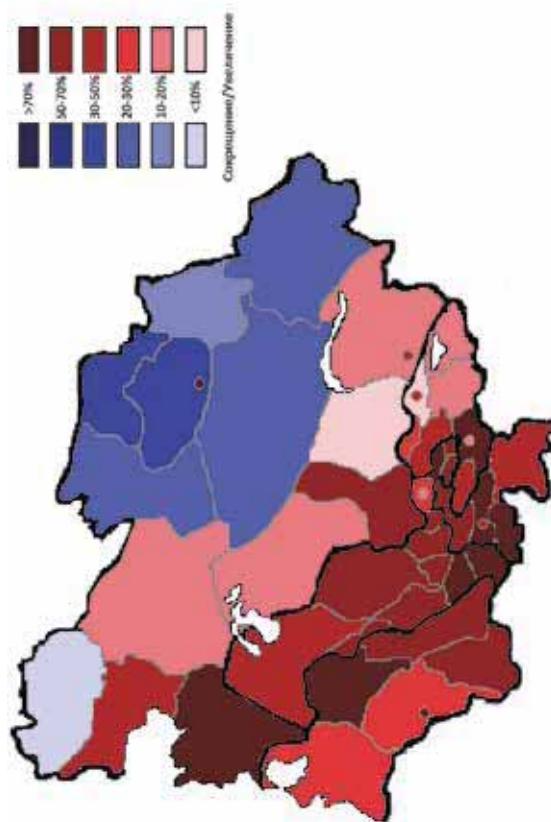
▲ Three types of the regions had been growing rapidly:

- Large cities (population of Astana has trebled over 25 years);
- Traditional agricultural areas in the river valleys and fertile oases;
- New industrial centers (Mangystau Region).

▲ The population of the old industrial cities and agricultural regions with mainly "European" residents has been dwindling.



I. Change in the population size of Central Asia  
during 1989-2014

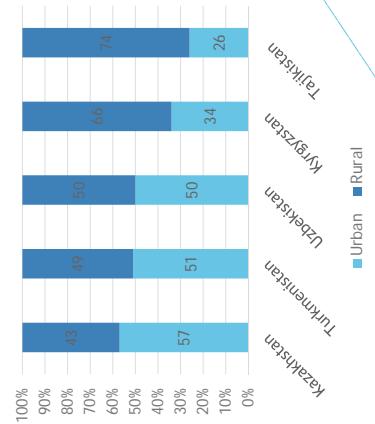


## 1. Results of the demographic development in Central Asia (1989-2014)

### 5) Urbanization

► A share of urban population has increased from 44% to 48% during 1989-2014 .

Urban and rural share of population of Central Asian states (2015)

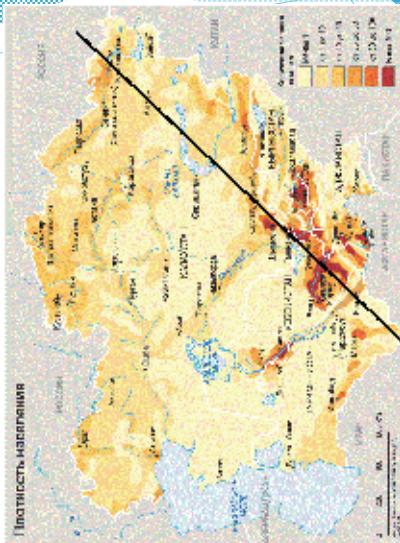


► A size of the urban population has increased almost by 50% in 25 years. Population of the large cities has grown by 1,5 - 2 times.

## 1. Results of the demographic development in Central Asia (1989-2014)

6) Inconsistency between the economic development level and population growth rate.

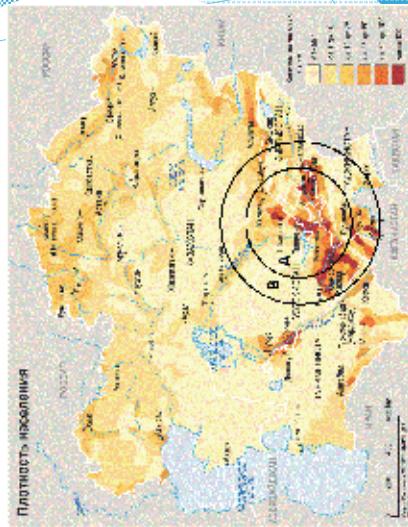
- ▲ «Inequality line»;
- ▲ Over 60% of the region's GDP is concentrated in the North-West;
- ▲ Over 60% of population – to the South - East.



## 1. Results of the demographic development in Central Asia (1989-2014)

### 7) Population location.

- ▲ 80% of the population dwell in the river valleys and fertile oases.
- ▲ Nearly half of Central Asian population resides within a radius of 300 km from Tashkent city (see circle A).
- ▲ 2/3 of the region's population reside within the radius of 500 km from Tashkent city (see circle B).

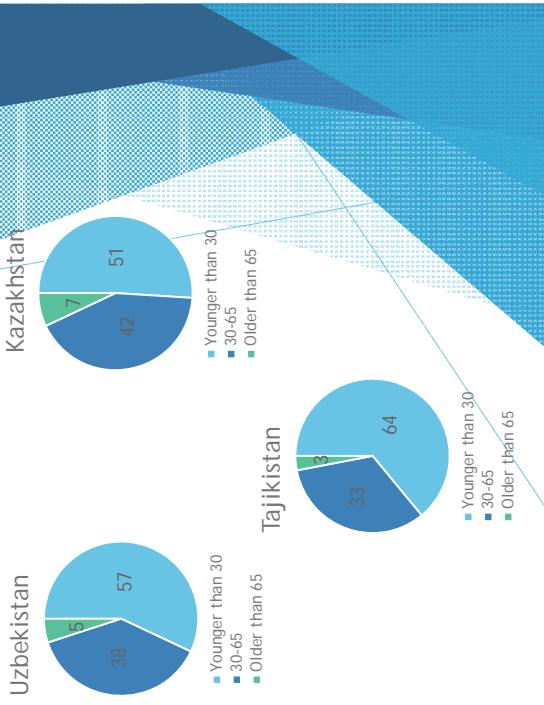


## 1. Results of the demographic development in Central Asia (1989-2014)

### 8) Young population structure of Central Asia.

The average median age of the population (years old):

- ▲ Kazakhstan - 28,9
- ▲ Kyrgyzstan - 23,8
- ▲ Uzbekistan - 24,1
- ▲ Turkmenistan - 24,5
- ▲ Tajikistan - 21,2



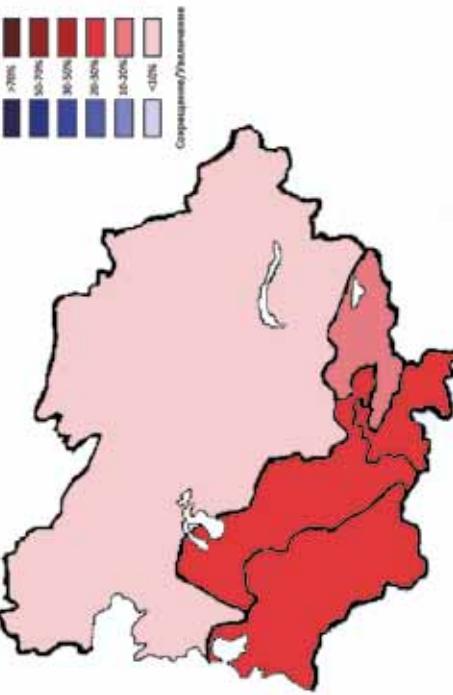
Source: UN data, 2010.

## II. Development Challenges of Central Asia, related to demographic changes

- ▲ Unequal socio-economic development leads to unemployment;
- ▲ In the absence of industrial growth mass-scale migration creates the problem of "false urbanization";
- ▲ The emigration of active and qualified specialists reduces the quality of human capital;
- ▲ The high share of the young population creates identity problems (ideology, religious and national identity, historical memory, etc.).

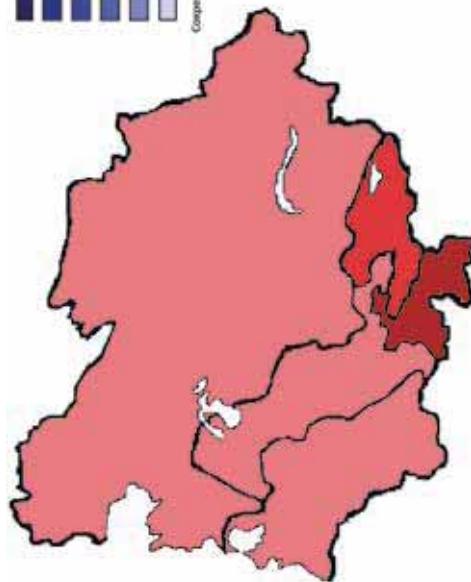
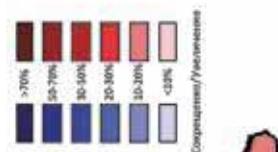
### III. Demographic forecast until 2030

Forecast by the Berlin Institute of population and development  
(2011)

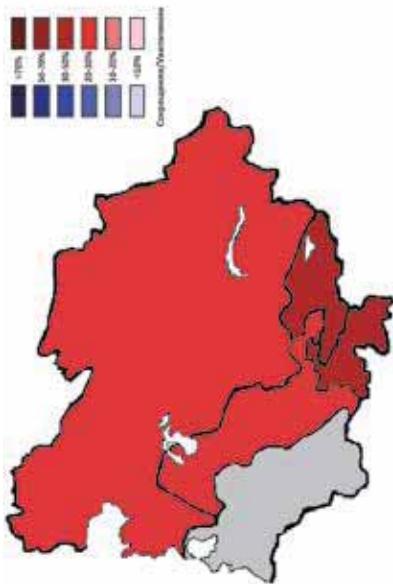


### III. Demographic forecast until 2030

Forecast by the United Nations (2015)



### III. Demographic forecast until 2030



## IV. Demographic trends in Central Asia until 2030

- ▲ Slowdown of the population growth rate;
- ▲ Over the 2/3 of the region's population will be comprised of people born after the dissolution of the Soviet Union;
- ▲ Emigration will continue and "de-Europeanization" of the biggest part of the region will be completed;
- ▲ The problem of ethnic minorities will become more pressing. As the socioeconomic situation deteriorates the pressure on the minorities will be mounting;
- ▲ International and internal migration rates will remain high;
- ▲ Urbanization. In general, due to the growth of the large cities. By 2025 - 7 cities - millionaires;
- ▲ The international migration priorities will change from the former Soviet Union to Europe, Turkey and the Gulf States.



## V. Challenges to be faced in 10 years

- ▲ Social intensity (favelas);
- ▲ Human resources problem at the stage of "generational change" in the economic and political life of the Central Asian states;
- ▲ Problem of introducing the new ideological approaches.

## **China Plays an Important Stabilizing Role in Central Asia**

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**China Institute of International Studies**

Dear conference participants!

It should be noted that the security situation in the Central Asian region has been stable since 2013. The number of terrorist acts in the region has decreased noticeably. For example, no dreadful terrorist attacks were observed in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in recent years as the governments of the Central Asian countries have intensified their struggle against terrorism and taken terrorism-preventing measures. In particular, the governments of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have adopted new anti-terrorism legislation and disseminated positive religious materials in their countries. The anti-terror work carried out by Kazakhstan can be used as an example. In 2012, Kazakhstan launched a website on anti-terrorism providing characteristics and explaining the danger of religious extremism. As a result, no terror attack was registered in the republic from 2012 to 2014 while 33 possible terrorist acts were prevented. Also, no mass disorders similar to the Zhanaozen riots have been registered in the Central Asian region since 2013. The scope and number of rallies have also decreased considerably. In Kyrgyzstan, 782 rallies were held in 2013 while their number in 2014 has halved.

However, a number of challenges continue to exist for the region's security.

The first challenge relates to the transfer of power. It is very important to ensure the process of normal transfer of power to a successor to keep stability in the countries of the region. The system of power transfer has yet to be developed in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Whenever the process of power transfer doesn't proceed smoothly, it is difficult to predict its harmful effect.

The second challenge, the “three evils” continue to be the largest non-traditional threats to security in the region. While the force of the three evils has been relatively calm in recent years, the efforts to spread the ideology of extremism and terrorism and recruit young people for their involvement in extremist and terrorist activity are continuing. The Islamic State is also spreading its influence in Central Asia today by disseminating propaganda materials and recruiting mujahids in the region. The number of people from Central Asian countries who have become Islamic State members or fighters in Syria has already reached 1,500 now. The armed attacks staged by the former deputy defense minister of Tajikistan in Dushanbe and the city of Vahdat on September 4, 2015, which killed from 17 to 33 servicemen of Tajikistan’s Interior and Defense Ministries, showed the increasing threat from radical Islamists.

The third challenge relates to disputes over shared water resources. Water disputes were even seen to impede the development of Central Asian countries. In recent years, conflicts have occurred between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan over water use.

The fourth challenge, the Afghan problem, still remains a major external threat to security in the Central Asian region. In particular, this threat is posed by the spread of the ideology of extremism and intensive terrorist activity near the borders of the Central Asian region and drug trafficking. Taliban militants in Afghanistan have carried out a series of attacks on checkpoints at the Afghan-Turkmen border since the summer of 2014. In addition, Afghanistan is turning into a major world producer of narcotic drugs. About 80 percent of drugs produced in Afghanistan are delivered to external markets through Tajikistan.

The fifth challenge is the struggle between the great powers. The United States and Russia are pursuing their own interests in Central Asia, acting more like rivals than partners. As Russia is leading the efforts to further promote regional integration, the micro-balance between Washington and Moscow in the region may be disrupted.

As is known, Central Asia covers the territories adjacent to the western part of China. Political stability in the Central Asian region creates a favorable political situation for the development of western China. Both China and Central Asian countries are confronted with the common threats posed by the “three evils.” Therefore, China is strengthening security interaction with the countries of the region both as part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and bilateral relations.

In 2007, the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization signed a Treaty on Long-Term Good-neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation, which laid the legal basis for long-term stability in the Central Asian region and provided clear political prerequisites for more active and broader security cooperation. Within the SCO framework, China contributes to strengthening multilateral cooperation in the struggle against terrorism. In 2009, the SCO member states signed a Counter-Terrorism Convention of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization at their summit in Yekaterinburg. In 2015, an Agreement on Cooperation on Border Issues was signed at the SCO summit in Ufa. These documents create possibilities for closer security cooperation in the region. Also, China has been cooperating ever more actively with the Central Asian countries in recent years within the framework of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). The number of measures carried out jointly with China has increased significantly. The SCO also regularly holds joint anti-terror military drills called the "Peace Mission," which strongly intimidates terrorists in the region.

As part of bilateral relations, the leaders of China and Central Asian countries have signed bilateral agreements on fighting the "three evil" forces. Law-enforcement agencies are strengthening bilateral practical cooperation in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking. China and Kyrgyzstan have also created a mechanism of joint border cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Moreover, China constantly renders military assistance to Central Asian countries. In particular, China delivers tents, motor vehicles, computers, office equipment and military supplies to Central Asian states. China also implements many programs of training officers from Central Asian countries.

It seems expedient for China to focus on building mechanisms of multidimensional and mutually advantageous economic cooperation with Central Asian countries, specifically, in the sphere of energy, infrastructure and minerals production, to ensure long-term stability in the region.

In view of the current challenges stemming from the Islamic State and other extremist organizations, China and Central Asian countries should undoubtedly further intensify their security interaction.

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First of all, they should develop mutual political understanding of security cooperation.

Secondly, it is necessary to expand practical interaction in the exchange of information on anti-terror issues. The creation of the RATS SCO single anti-terror database will further develop bilateral cooperation of law-enforcement agencies and improve the early warning system.

Thirdly, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation in the struggle against drugs. China can provide technological equipment and train personnel in this area. At the same time, China and Central Asian countries should support the anti-drug efforts of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure and platforms which are being gradually developed for the exchange of information on anti-drugs.

Fourthly, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation in network security. Bilateral efforts should focus on the exchange of information in the sphere of legislation, monitoring technologies and the prevention of cyber-attacks.

# EastWest Institute's Afghanistan Reconnected: Thoughts on Afghanistan's Regional Economic Potential

**James L. CREIGHTON**  
**Distinguished Fellow**  
**EastWest Institute, United States of America**

In 2015, the Taliban made gains in Afghanistan. Though this was not an entirely unforeseeable chain of events, the gains made by the Islamic State in the country were largely surprising and unexpected. In addition, the economic consequences of coalition forces' 2014 withdrawal began to manifest. In the face of these obstacles, however, there remains an astounding optimism within the Afghan leadership. Is this optimism justified?

News from Afghanistan remains pessimistic. The myriad challenges facing the country have mounted as the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) endured a tough fighting season. Despite these daunting challenges, President Ashraf Ghani maintains a positive vision of Afghanistan in the future. This might seem counterintuitive on the surface, but sizable opportunities for Afghanistan to engage regionally could facilitate favorable economic development. Regional engagement would allow it to capitalize on the progress made in the last 13 years and take advantage of both the infrastructural resources left behind by the coalition expansion and the natural resources that are readily available in the near-term. Focusing on what can be done while working toward more aggressive objectives may be a way to keep Afghanistan on a slow but positive path.

The common refrain of the international community is that Afghans have learned to provide for their own security. The truth is that the withdrawal of coalition forces left ANSF with fewer of the critical combat systems they had come to rely on, such as close air support, medical support and coalition intelligence systems. Army performance on the defense has been spotty at best. However, as the loss and subsequent retaking of Kunduz demonstrates, the Army has been much more successful when it turns to the offense. The police force has been severely tested in Kabul and more recently in Kandahar. While the ability of the Taliban to attack in large cities has created a bunker-type mentality wherein leaders and foreign representatives stay largely

behind "Texas Wall" compounds, the Afghan National Police have been able to respond in good order to restore the peace.

The ANSF has a long way to go in order to be a completely effective fighting force; however, they have been good enough to keep the Taliban and the emergent *Daesh* (Islamic State) threat at bay in the major cities and in much of the rural areas.

Interestingly, the attacks from the Taliban have not been as successful as they could have been. This might be due partially to the announcement of the death of their long-time leader, Mullah Omar, which has caused in-fighting and jockeying for leadership within the organization. However, the attacks that have occurred – or more specifically the political signal launched by these attacks – were strong enough to have given rise to an increase in capital flight and brain drain. Obviously, the diminishing of these vital ingredients of growth is detrimental to economic recovery.

Unchecked expansion of the drug trade continues to fund Taliban activity, destroying local communities and hindering trust-building efforts with neighboring countries. The long-term impacts of poppy cultivation on national health, education and social fabric stand in the way of long-term legitimate economic growth.

Afghanistan's allies and neighbors have committed to a strong Afghanistan in words, but these commitments were often not followed by actions. Pakistan showed positive inclinations toward full support in April 2015, but by September 2015, the fledgling cooperation had turned cold due to continued mistrust and accusations of support to insurgents on both sides. While Pakistan fights a fierce war against its "own" Taliban, it still falls short of adopting a more decisive stance against the Afghan Taliban who find shelter on Pakistani soil. Also, Iran is determined to have a stable Afghanistan as a neighbor but is accused of hedging its strategy by supporting both the Ghani government and Taliban leaders in the north and west of the country. Central Asian countries desire a peaceful southern neighbor but have not committed the resources for investing in Afghanistan and, worse, refuse to recognize that countering Islamic extremism requires cross-border cooperation. Conflicting signals come from China; although a "long-term partnership" was declared during Ghani's foreign visit to Beijing in November 2014, the latest version of President Xi Jinping's new silk road vision ("One Belt, One Road" or "OBOR") bypasses Afghanistan in the North (and uses Pakistan mainly as corridor to the sea).

The United States and its allies committed to extend their military support but only after long negotiations. The fits and starts of limited U.S. and NATO commitment undermines President Ghani's ability to project near-term confidence and long-term vision. A region not fully committed to Afghan prosperity combined with unreliable outside support is unlikely to become a catalyst for rapid development.

The same holds true for the slow domestic process and the lack of good governance. The cabinet ministers have taken over a year to be confirmed, while the parliamentary elections have faced numerous delays. The inability to establish confirmed government leaders quickly has prevented progressive policies from being created and implemented. The immediate challenge was to create a political and tribal balance through coordination between the President and the Chief Executive Officer, Abdullah Abdullah, in order to strengthen the unity government while addressing corruption head-on at all levels. The government is now moving more rapidly to congeal and has appointed some new, young, educated and energetic professionals to begin the process of improving the efficiencies in many of the most important ministries.

As a result, the Afghan government has to fight near-term internal conflicts along with external fights with the Taliban and *Daesh*. It must simultaneously struggle to sustain support from its neighbors and allies. Yet, even with a multitude of daunting challenges, President Ghani keeps his eyes on a positive long-term future for Afghanistan. He asserts that a regional economic growth strategy is vital to long-term prosperity. The president emphasizes the need to capitalize on what exists in terms of infrastructure, resources and a more educated youth capacity.

The Afghan government is seeking inventive ways to raise capital in order to fund critical projects already planned and accepted, including reforming land ownership laws and policies required to secure collateral for loans, improving banking laws and confidence in the banking system and increasing savings and loan potential. Currently, renegotiating existing contracts to ensure that they are compatible with local market standards has freed up capital for other projects and enabled more efficient project completion. The government is also working to slow capital flight by improving the investment climate, and there is an effort to explore public-private partnerships to help companies realize a profit for major infrastructure requirements.

<sup>106</sup> These actions all represent a recognition that capital is needed to realize project completion. The coalition's draw-down and diminishing foreign investment support has amplified this effort.

Afghanistan recognizes that it does not have the capacity to grow by itself. Regional cooperation and allied support is vital to its long term success. The government has adapted a policy of taking advantage of opportunities that can be quickly realized while continuing to work on building trust and overcoming historical obstacles. Capitalizing on the recent regular government outreach to Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, there has been progress made on implementing both the TAPI pipeline and CASA-1000 from their northern points of origin while continuing to work on overcoming implementation obstacles with Pakistan. To account for continuing challenges with improving trade and transit through Pakistan to Karachi, Afghanistan has dramatically increased the flow of goods through Iran and Turkmenistan. Membership in the World Trade Organization and other regional and global organizations will help improve confidence in Afghanistan's ability to become a viable economic partner.

Recognition of existing infrastructure, resources and capacity will help to create near term opportunities for growth. The thousands of miles of roads built over the last 13 years, while not perfect, provide the basic network needed to utilize the thousands of trucks left idle by the coalition departure. Likewise, the airfields, construction capacity, cement plants, and other hard infrastructure left behind offer opportunity for entrepreneurs. Combined with vast oil, gas and mineral reserves, Afghanistan is primed for near term successes if security concerns can be reduced and the government can create a more efficient business environment.

The art of leadership is built on the ability to resolve near-term challenges while remaining focused on long-term goals and objectives. President Ghani clearly articulated a strategy to achieving long term growth while addressing the many near-term obstacles in his path. The vision of a better solution with an effective government that capitalizes on economic opportunities while earning the trust of the population establishes a reasonable goal. The actions related to improving governance, education, regional cooperation and trust, and taking advantage of those readily available resources define the ways in which this vision can be achieved in the medium- and long- terms. The means associated with residual coalition capacity, natural and human resources and a dedicated search for capital are understood, if not readily available.

It remains to be seen if President Ghani can solidify this strategy and galvanize his people and the regional and international communities behind it. Does he have the power to communicate his vision and strategy internally to the many tribal, religious and political constituencies as well as the international community? He has taken much of the burden on himself, and it

unclear whether his government has the capacity or will to effectively take this burden from him and move forward toward his vision. The regional animosities remain a stumbling block that hinders both the bilateral and multi-lateral cooperation needed to achieve Afghanistan's goals. Afghanistan's ultimate prosperity will be tied to President Ghani's strategy; the question is whether or not he can build the momentum necessary to implement his vision, and also whether the international community will uphold its support at this crucial juncture.

## **Turkic council as a positive organization at the heart of Eurasia**

**Ali Resul USUL  
Director  
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey**

I am going to talk on the role of Turkic Council as a new type of international organization in Eurasia affecting Central Asia in a positive way. First, I will briefly talk on the nature of Turkic Council as a new actor playing active role in Eurasia and, then I will proceed to discuss the positive role and agenda of the Council as a security and stability provider organization in the region and international environment where the political tension is high and growing. The political crisis in the Middle East and Ukraine and Crimea and the emergence of ISIS as new form of international violent actor have led to more complicated geopolitical future of Eurasia. I personally believe the geopolitical future of Eurasia will depend on five basic variables: America re-evaluation of Eurasia within the general global politics, the Chinese next step in the region, Sino-Russian relations in the region, the future of political tension between NATO and Russia after the Ukraine crisis and last one is the capability and capacity of Eurasian nations to boost multilateral cooperation and collaboration. The Turkic Council could play a positive role to enhance mutual trust at both elite and popular levels as soothing mechanism in this rapidly deteriorating political environment.

The Council of Turkic speaking states, which is called now as Turkic Council, *Türk Keneși* in its original form is new international umbrella organization where Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey are official members. Turkmenistan has declared its neutrality in international politics and therefore does not join any international body. But, the president of Turkmenistan has participated several times as a special guest of the Council. Of course, the Council will not be complete without Uzbekistan's participation. We are looking forward to 109 Uzbekistan's participation again in the Council in near future.

The Council is in fact an upgraded structure of the summits of the Turkic Speaking nations which realized the first summit in 1992 just after the end of the Soviet Union. There were 10 summits before the institutionalization of the summit processes. The cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States was officially created in 2009 with the Nakhichevan agreement in Azerbaijan. In addition to the Council, there are some affiliated organizations in close cooperation with the Turkic Council, like TURKPA, the parliamentary assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries, Turksoy, the International organization of the Turkic Culture, the Turkic Business Council, the International Turkic Academy and Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation.

The Turkic Council is a new type or generation of international organization that has a more economic and cultural appeal rather than high politics. In other words, common cultural heritage has been the basic force that brings these nations together. From this perspective, these new generations of regional or international organizations have differing nature than those political organizations during the Cold War. However, it does not mean that these new type organizations have not any political agenda. The point here is that the political concerns do not constitute the basic framework of the organization.

For example, the theme of the last summit of the Council, held in Astana on September 11, is the cooperation in the field of information. More cooperation in the field of mass media and the realization a joint International Turkic TV has come to fore.

When the states realize more cooperation at regional or international level, their policies can converge in time. For example, when we look at the voting patterns of the Council's members at the UN General Assembly, you would see that the voting patterns have been more converging than before.

The Council has convened five times so far, and the priority areas of the member nations have been the trade and economic relations between member states, increasing collaboration on education, culture and science, improving transportation and connectivity and tourism among member states.

Regarding the Council policies on the improvement of transportation and regional interconnectivity, the revitalization of the historical Silk Road has been one of the significant issues on the agenda. The council considers the Silk Road projects as the cement of the regional economic cooperation and integration. The Council plays important role in terms of more

cooperation in the energy supply. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and Baku-Tbilisi Erzurum gas pipelines projects were only realized by the members of the Council.

In a similar way, in addition to the meeting of the ministers of transportation of the member states, the relevant customs administrations meet regularly to ease the procedures of the national customs which is very important for smooth and healthy trade relations among member nations. The importance of ports is vital in this regard, and more cooperation among the ports in member states constitutes one of the corner stones in this regard. The sister-port relationship between Akhtar, Baku and Samsun can be given an example to this collaboration.

Tourism serves as a very important stimulating factor for both economic development and the transnational movements among member nations. Turkic Council initiates a modern Silk Road joint tour package project, and the Council work closely with the UN World Tourism organization for the revival of this road as an attractive tourism destination.

The shared, common culture, history and roots provide a solid foundation for cooperation in cultural affairs and events. For example, the first World nomad games were realized in Kyrgyzstan last year.

One of the very important facts for the Council is that the Council has not in competition with the other Eurasian integration projects. In other words, the Council does not see the other regional integration projects in Eurasia as rival projects or initiative. There can be more cooperation between different versions of the regional integration project in this region, instead of a fierce rivalry. The possible cooperation between the Turkic Council and other Eurasian regional organizations is quite possible and also pronounced by the leaders of the member states. For example, president of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev underlined last year the fact that there was no rivalry and contradiction between Turkic Council and other Eurasian regional organization, like the Eurasian Economic Union, Shanghai Cooperation organization or Collective Security Treaty organization.

What do all these mean within the current context of Eurasian and international politics? Turkic States account for a population of around 150 million and cover an arena of over 4.5 million square kilometers and have a total GDP exceeding 1.3 trillion dollars, as a whole, ranging 13th in the world. Turkic Council, which does not represent yet the whole Turkic world of course, has started to play important role at heart of Eurasia. This is particularly important when we take the recent increasing challenges in the whole Eurasia into account.

Thus, we see that Turkic Council has benign character. It has no grandiose plan or projects. All projects are rational, reasonable and able to contribute to economic political stability, cooperation and security in the region. The Council is a benign organization and is not established as a rival organization to any other initiatives. It would contribute positively to enhance political stability and regional security through more economic integration among their members and other states and organization in the region. You would see that the Council members are very ready to articulate the Council to the great Silk Road projects and other regional initiatives. Increasing transitional activities through tourism, education could lead to more trust and understanding among nations in the region.

The other issue relating to the Turkic Council is the fact that although Turkic Council depends on the common cultural and linguistic ties shared by the peoples in the region, the Council is not an ethnic club and has an inclusive character with universal appeal and against the rejectionist and parochial appeal.

## **PRESENTATION at the seminar "The impact of External Factors on Security and Development in Central Asia"**

**Askar YERKINOV  
Expert**

**Executive Committee of the Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure of the  
Shanghai Cooperation Organization (RCTS SCO)**

Dear seminar participants!

First of all, let me express gratitude on behalf of the leadership of the Executive Committee of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure to the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia for the invitation to take part in this event and note its high organizational level.

The analysis of international developments testifies to a considerable increase in threats from terrorist organizations to the security and development of the entire international community, including Central Asian countries. The transnational nature of terrorism is prompting the need to consolidate efforts in the struggle against terrorism and extremism both at the international and regional levels.

This is why, a principal goal for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is to maintain and strengthen peace, security and stability in the Central Asian region, first of all, by organizing joint counteraction to the forces of the three evils: terrorism, separatism and extremism.

To solve these tasks, the heads of member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization signed in June 2002 an Agreement on establishing the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure whose main objectives are to timely track the operational situation and assist coordination and interaction among the competent bodies of the SCO member states in the struggle against terrorism, separatism and extremism.

The measures presently being taken by the competent bodies of the SCO countries prove to be efficient in ensuring security of our countries and stability in the region. However, new challenges and threats are emerging for SCO countries amid the escalation of the international situation. These are:

**Firstly**, active use by the “three evil” forces of the Internet for the propaganda of their ideology, spread of the technology of violent and terrorist activity and recruitment of new members, which poses a serious threat to the security of our countries.

**Secondly**, the aggravation of the situation in the Middle East, South Asia and other regions is influencing security in the SCO countries. It is especially important to highlight the intentions of persons originating from our countries who are fighting abroad on the side of various international organizations to return to their countries and continue their terrorist and subversive activity.

**Thirdly**, the “three evil” forces are exploiting the existing problems in our countries’ social and economic development for spreading discontent and inciting ethnic strife seeking to replenish their ranks and undermine social stability in the region.

To counter these threats, the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) has intensified practical cooperation among the competent bodies of the Organization’s member countries and organized interaction with the relevant structures of SCO observer countries in the following areas:

**Active fight against the use of the Internet for terrorist, separatist and extremist ends.**

The working group of the Executive Committee of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure is monitoring the Internet jointly with the competent authorities of the Organization’s member countries to detect and block websites in these countries that spread the propaganda of terrorist ideas of terrorist and extremist organizations such as the Turkestan Islamic Movement, Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and the Islamic State.

<sup>114</sup> As of today, experts have detected 106 websites, more than 3,100 video materials, 320 audio records and 8,000 information articles on terrorism. A total of 160 Internet resources advocating terrorism and religious extremism have been restricted for access and banned

and corresponding measures have been taken against some persons in compliance with the legislation of the SCO countries.

For the purpose of exchanging experience and raising the level of practical cooperation in this area, the first joint staff exercise of the competent bodies of the SCO countries, Xiamen-2015, was held on the territory of the People's Republic of China in October to counter the use of the Internet for terrorist, separatist and extremist purposes.

**2. With regard to the involvement of citizens from SCO member states in combat activities in Syria, Iraq and other countries**, the Executive Committee of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure has formed a database of persons who have left the territory of SCO countries to fight on the side of terrorist organizations in armed conflicts, according to the information provided by the SCO competent bodies, and has established regular information exchange among law-enforcement agencies in this area.

Also, work is underway to keep a Single Register of Wanted Persons put on an international wanted list by SCO special services and law-enforcement agencies for the commission or suspected commission of crimes of terrorist, separatist and extremist nature.

The SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure regularly updates its database on international terrorist, separatist and extremist organizations, which currently contains records on 78 terrorist and extremist organizations.

**3. To ensure security on the borders** and counter the penetration of the supporters of the three evils into the territory of the SCO countries and the smuggling of weapons, ammunition, explosives and narcotic drugs, the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure has established a mechanism of border cooperation, which involves the holding of annual joint border operations and exercises.

**4. Active cooperation is being developed with SCO observer states and international organizations for ensuring security in the region.**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is unique in its composition and geopolitical potential, which considerably expands the geography and the range of measures for countering the challenges and threats posed by international terrorist organizations. Within our organization, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure has launched a mechanism of interaction with observers

and held three scientific and practical conferences on cooperation among the SCO member states and observer countries in fighting international terrorism and extremism.

Along with this, the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure is taking an active part in international anti-terrorism cooperation under the UN auspices. Among other things, it has established close interaction with the UN competent anti-terrorist structures and broad cooperation with other international and regional organizations for taking joint effort to maintain international security.

We can state today that interaction among the SCO competent bodies has helped both localize negative processes in Central Asia and place them under control. As a result, the situation in the territory of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is stable and predictable, which facilitates integration processes and helps expand social, economic and cultural cooperation, i.e. solve the tasks defined by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Charter.

In conclusion, I would like to note the broad representation of the seminar's participants and express the hope for fruitful cooperation in the struggle against new challenges. I am confident that the threats to peace and stability posed by international terrorist organizations can be neutralized by joint efforts of various institutions of the international community.

## **Reference information on the topic: "The Role of Regional Organizations in the Context of External Impacts on the Central Asian Region"**

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The tasks of ensuring regional security and stable development are presently among the key issues both for the Kyrgyz Republic and the countries of the region.

The nature of extremist threats is changing significantly today. Having consolidated forces on the basis of a single extremist ideology, extremist and terrorist organizations are currently becoming powerful criminal structures with a ramified network of their like-thinkers.

The present situation in the Middle East riven by protracted conflicts and inter-confessional clashes are a matter of special concern.

It is extremely worrisome to see the rapid spread of the ideology of radical groupings and the advance of their militants close to the borders of Central Asia, as well as the intensifying propaganda and recruitment of our citizens into the ranks of mercenary terrorists.

The problem originating far from the borders of the countries of the region may become our common problem.

The recent terrorist attacks in Paris and the terror act aboard the Russian airliner that have claimed the lives of many people are tragic evidence of this.

Meanwhile, the situation in Afghanistan remains the most acute problem in the Central Asian region, despite the continued destructive activity of extreme radical terrorist organizations in the Middle East.

Escalation of violence and the intensified activity of radical Islamic forces in Afghanistan pose a threat to the entire Central Asian region.

In this situation, close international interaction is the most important element and a decisive factor of effective anti-terrorist policy and cooperation.

Both international institutions, the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as regional organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) play an important role in ensuring peace and security in the region. The Kyrgyz Republic's cooperation within these organizations is a major element of its foreign policy. The participation of most countries of the region in these associations is an important factor of ensuring peace and security in Central Asia.

The CIS specialized structure, the Anti-Terrorism Center, has accumulated extensive experience of coordinating regional anti-terrorism cooperation, in particular in the organizational and legal spheres. The elaboration and implementation of CIS counter-terrorism programs, joint drills, command and staff exercises, intensive bilateral and multilateral contacts have already produced an operational matrix of interaction between CIS states, their special services and law-enforcement agencies in their efforts to fight terrorism.

A branch of the Anti-Terrorism Center for Central Asia operates in Bishkek as a standing regional division of the CIS Anti-Terrorism Center responsible for coordinating interaction between competent bodies of the CIS member-states (*the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan*) in the struggle against terrorism and other violent manifestations of extremism.

The Program of Cooperation between the CIS Member States in the fight against terrorism and other violent manifestations of extremism is the basic document defining the range of tasks of the CIS Anti-Terrorism Center.

Drawing a line, we can conclude that it is precisely regional organizations that are equipped with sufficient capabilities to transform framework and declarative formats of international efforts sealed in the corresponding resolutions and recommendations of such institutions as the UN and OSCE.

## The role of regional organizations in the context of external factors affecting Central Asia

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The OSCE throughout its 40 year history has undergone different historical phases marked with tension and detent, hostility and cooperation.

There was time when the security space was clearly divided into two with both parties exercising certain restraint not to shatter the balance and damage stability. Early 1990s brought diversity and watered down erstwhile seemingly indestructible order. In 1990s the shared values were often referred to as a pre-requisite for shared security. The security space in the Euro-Atlantic area suddenly became, or at least was for certain period of time perceived, as one and shared. Gone are those days and now the region, and the world alike, is facing quite fragmented security space with numerous risks, complicated politico-military landscape and multiple security, value and identity challenges. Escalations in various parts of the world as well as globally are quite high reminiscent of the worst days of the past bipolar stand-off. This is a great challenge for the nations including the countries of Central Asia and, at the same time, this situation offers opportunities to reanimate instruments successfully applied several decades ago. The very title of the process Helsinki+40 reminds us the variety of tools and arrangements adopted during that period that allowed at times to mitigate tension, bridge gaps and ensure stability in individual countries, regions and the entire OSCE area. And apparently many key countries appreciate the OSCE format as an appropriate platform for dialogue and action.

Some important external factors influencing the security situation in the Central Asian region:

1. *Radical religious ideology that challenges the very basics of the nations*
2. *Afghanistan*
3. *Widening division between the powers and fragmented regional security space / Risk of arms race and proliferation*

What the international organisations can do to help the regional countries address the challenges so that those efforts complement rather than oppose each other in the given vulnerable situation? Do they have a shared vision and strategy?

Extensive experience the OSCE has accumulated since 1970s as well as the capacity of the organization and the available mechanisms gives the organization certain optimism in this regard. However the experience and the tools would mean little if not supported by political will of the main stakeholders – the OSCE participating states, particularly those of Central Asia.

Along with this a better coordination and synergy between the key international organizations particularly the OSCE and UN would make their operations more efficient and streamlined allowing to spare precious resources. In fact the concept of comprehensive security is adopted by both organizations: the OSCE has three dimensions – a) politico-military, b) economic and ecological and 3) human whereas the UN has among its strategic directions 1) international peace and security, 2) economic and social development and 3) human rights.

*1. The protection and strengthening of the system of values also reflected in the international, including OSCE commitments the CA countries undertook should be regarded among the utmost priorities of the international actors amid the growing **influence of radical ideology**.*

There are a number of large scale international projects and concepts suggesting regional cooperation based on common interests. But are the current processes sufficiently powerful and do they provide attractive messaging able to consolidate and steer peoples? It seems many of them lack ideological core attuned to the expectations and traditions of the nations of the region. At the same time ideological projects, such as Islamic State often manage to win hearts and minds of people.

The Central Asian governments undertake series of measures to address the problem and international organizations stand by the authorities in this endeavor. The international organizations active in the area (UN, OSCE) should center their activities on the ground on the common values that unite various nations as well as different ethnic groups and political camps within countries against radical ideologies threatening those values.

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In this regard it is crucial to identify the root causes of the radicalization and cooperate with the respective governments to ensure that all stakeholders have common understanding of the problems and the ways to tackle them.

The Kyrgyz Government made clear on several occasions that it regards the possible return of its nationals fighting in the Middle East to Kyrgyzstan with malicious intentions among the main threats to the national security. The international organization together with the Government should try to answer the question “why some people are more prone to those ideas than others?” Why certain groups of the society are susceptible to them? One of the theories reads in this regard that religious extremism is an entirely foreign product imposed upon the local population. However, it seems that this concept does not address the complexity of the challenge.

## *2. Working together in Afghanistan*

The fragmentation of the security space has influenced the policies of the countries towards Afghanistan, particularly when it comes to joint efforts to curb the risks pertaining to extremism, drug trafficking etc. This however does not mean that differing interests cannot be accommodated. Furthermore cooperatively dealing with Afghanistan related challenges would provide a rare nowadays opportunity for elaborating coordination mechanisms that may enhance mutual understanding between the countries engaged in a broader context of international affairs. International organizations may play a more proactive role serving as an accepted format for consultations and coordinated actions.

OSCE to this end may develop more robust programmes with emphasis on arms control and CBMs (incl. military exchange / visits) in the regional framework that would engage the CA countries and, when feasible, Afghanistan.

Along with this the OSCE comprehensive approach to security and its experience could be useful in Afghanistan to tackle inter-community relations, economic security (income generation, water management, infrastructure projects, with focus on ethnically mixed areas), youth engagement, media development through providing expertise, training, and support for small and medium scale projects. Such expertise and assistance may be provided through the UN presence in Afghanistan (and elsewhere) where the OSCE has no field operation.

Additionally, appointing Afghanistan liaison officers to the OSCE field operations and UN field missions in CA could be considered for more coordinated cooperation.

Furthermore OSCE has already been engaged with Afghanistan related issues through its programmatic activities. Besides the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe that each

year enrolls dozens of Afghan students, the Centre in Bishkek conducted a number of projects that directly address Afghanistan, such as supporting Afghanistan's Customs Department, enhancing Afghan border management and police capacities through engaging Afghan participants in training and other relevant activities.

The OSCE Academy with its Afghanistan research capabilities and expanded partnership with think-tanks world-wide is another asset the OSCE may offer in this context.

The OSCE has further advantages for its engagement in Afghanistan: a) it maintains a rather impartial profile not directly associated with powers having vested interests whose image was affected through military presence and conflicts, b) more so - as an institution incorporating many countries it has a merit of balancing and managing diverse and sometimes conflicting interests of its participating states. c) no less important is that the OSCE partners with the CA Governments many of them sharing cultural and ethnic background with peoples in Afghanistan.

*3. International organizations can assume more responsibility for the peace and stability in CA amid **widening division between the global powers** serving as available multilateral platforms for consultation and coordination.*

The OSCE possesses a range of consultation mechanisms, particularly within the Vienna Document (VD) that could be rendered upon demand by the OSCE participating States. Though growing mistrust between some participating States further exacerbated along with the conflict in Ukraine risks to undermine the VD, nevertheless the instruments under the VD, such as confidence-building and security measures (CSBMs) should be fully used to address the growing antagonism.

An utmost importance should be given to strengthening stability in view of increasing geopolitical differences and widening division lines. International organizations should adapt to the new conditions and employ flexibility and a broader vision in choosing and applying policy instruments.

<sup>122</sup> Given the current situation, the OSCE should try to more vigorously put its principles into practice. In particular, the OSCE participating States may agree upon a code of conduct to be applied in the most problematic areas. Besides that a fresh impetus to the stagnated conventional arms control should be given along with effective efforts to modernize existing

CSBMs and enlarging their scope. In this regard short term measures that allow improving effectiveness of verification should be seen as priority.

Given the lack of trust between some regional countries, their unequal military capabilities and diverse geopolitical visions the VD may provide valuable tools to dispel the suspicion and wariness among CA countries all of which are parties to the Vienna Document.

In this respect the OSCE pre-1992 experience could be useful to address the new situation. We should not shy away from this reality and accept things as they stand. Comprehensive understanding of the security needs of the countries concerned viewed in a broader context may facilitate search for common ground, particularly when those countries are facing similar risks including religious extremism.

# Prospects for Cooperation Development between Central Asian Countries in the Context of Growing External Impacts

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Director

**Institute of the Eurasian Integration of the Republic of Kazakhstan**

As you know, in November last year Almaty hosted a seminar organized by the United Nations Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia featuring where experts discussed regional cooperation issues in detail.

The results of the seminar allow us to systematize the opinions of experts on the prospects of cooperation among Central Asian countries in the context of the growing external impacts.

At the same time, we are all aware that the search for solutions for eliminating internal obstacles is also an integral process.

## SLIDE 1

### ***Internal factors preventing constructive and systematic cooperation among Central Asian countries***

The key factors impeding the processes of cooperation among the countries of the region are the following:

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- the prevalence of narrow state interests in inter-state relations, different vision of integration goals and objectives among the leaders of Central Asian countries;
- jealous attitudes towards integration initiatives, undeclared rivalry among the countries over leadership in the region;
- different levels of development of economic relations and social and political institutions;

- differences in political and economic models and strategies;
- economic and technological weakness and an acute shortage of financial resources. Hence the different directions of geopolitical policies of the region's countries, preference for extra-regional formats of economic cooperation for all Central Asian countries without any exception.

## SLIDE 2

The permanent problems complicating the development of integration processes in Central Asia are well known:

- unsettled border issues, especially in the Fergana Valley, problems of the enclaves;
- persistent risks of the emergence and escalation of inter-ethnic conflicts;
- energy issues and different positions of the states on the use of cross-border river resources.

## SLIDE 3

### ***Impact of external factors***

Another important set of cause and effect relations impeding integration processes is connected with external influence on the region. The following factors can be mentioned:

- competition among integration projects (the EAEU, the Silk Road Economic Belt, the New Silk Road, the Islamic idea, pan-Turkism);
- disinterest of global players in the emergence of a potentially strong integration bloc in the region;
- a new phase of rivalry between China, Russia and the United States in the context of actual geopolitical confrontation;
- the problem of Afghan drug trafficking, which plays into the hands of organized crime and leads to its penetration into government structures;
- permanent tension on the borders between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan caused by the above-mentioned problem of drug trafficking, as well as by the intensified activity and the buildup of terrorist elements, first of all, the ISIL, Taliban and IMU.

The analysis of current integration processes in Central Asia shows the existence of a wide range of objective factors hampering the development of inter-state cooperation.

## SLIDE 4

### *Prospects of cooperation in the Central Asian region: experts on their countries' roles and policies*

Expert opinions on the roles and policies of their countries are important in analyzing further development of cooperation in Central Asia.

#### **Turkmenistan**

The position of Turkmenistan's experts is determined, first of all, by the country's geographical position and the policies of the country's leadership related to transport initiatives and the development of trade and economic cooperation on this basis. This can be seen in Turkmenistan's intention to play a key role in establishing the East–West and North–South transport corridors.

The main emphasis is made on large-scale projects (the gas pipelines along the Turkmenistan – Uzbekistan – Kazakhstan – China and the Turkmenistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan – India routes and the Kazakhstan – Turkmenistan – Iran and the Turkmenistan – Afghanistan – Tajikistan railway corridors).

Obviously, the desire to maintain balanced relations with key international organizations, geopolitical centers and countries in the region is based on the intentions to build up trade and economic cooperation and conduct an open door policy.

For instance, Turkmenistan's trade relations with Kazakhstan are expected to develop both through export-import operations and the expansion of transit cargo flows across Turkmenistan to adjacent countries after the construction of the North–South railway corridor is completed.

The creation of the Turkmenbashi–Farap and Ashgabat–Dashoguz multi-modal transport corridor with its further extension to Uzbekistan can play a positive role in increasing transport flows between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

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Experts expect trade cooperation between Turkmenistan and Tajikistan to expand as a result of the construction of the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Tajikistan railroad.

## **Uzbekistan**

According to Uzbekistan's experts, the country prioritizes mostly bilateral relations, which clearly pushes the development of multilateral cooperation to the back burner.

It is obvious that the country is preoccupied with the strengthening of its own security and is constantly balancing between external geopolitical centers, which make Uzbekistan uninterested in regional cooperation.

In Central Asia, Uzbekistan stakes on selective development of elements of bilateral interaction with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, while intensifying confrontation with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (the problem of water and energy).

All these factors suggest that cooperation with Central Asian countries is of minor importance for Uzbekistan and is viewed in the context of threats to national security, without considering the cooperation potential for Uzbekistan's own development.

## **Kyrgyzstan**

Experts in Kyrgyzstan believe that the reputation of their country, which is associated with internal political instability and a weak economy, as well as the rivalry between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan over the leading positions in Central Asia, complicate Kyrgyzstan's role in regional cooperation.

At the same time, Kyrgyzstan can contribute to developing the legal framework of cross-border cooperation, implementing international standards for border crossing and serve as a regional logistics operator. In the opinion of the expert, their country has the necessary conditions for this, including the lenient legislation and a lower price bracket as compared to the other Central Asian countries.

The experts note that the success of cooperation projects among Central Asian countries hinges on the development and implementation of pragmatic and specific projects, which can yield a multiplier effect already in 5–7 years' time and contribute to achieving mutual understanding on more complex areas of cooperation among the region's countries.

## SLIDE 5

### Tajikistan

Assessing the degree and the nature of Tajikistan's participation in the system of regional relations, experts conclude that cooperation and integration in Central Asia would be incomplete without Tajikistan.

The experts point to Tajikistan's hydropower, transport and transit potential that can be used in the interests of the region.

They recognize as especially important Tajikistan's contribution to maintaining regional security as the country has extensive borders with Afghanistan and acts as a Central Asian shield in the struggle against extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking and so forth.

### Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's experts express a commonly shared opinion that Kazakhstan is the nation that demonstrates its constant aspiration for closer relations among Central Asian countries and regional cooperation and acts as the main initiator of many integration ideas, which frequently remain unheard.

Kazakhstan promotes the ideology of dialogue and objective evaluation of possible ways of reaching compromise with account taken of all the stakeholders.

Kazakhstan can contribute to further development of cooperation in Central Asia through the search for new joint investment projects, mediation at talks between Central Asian countries on issues of disputed territories and the water problem, and through stepping up joint efforts in regional security matters.

It was President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan who introduced an issue of formulating the concept of a Single Central Asian approach based on objective mutual interests to the international agenda.

## SLIDE 6

### ***Pre-requisites for cooperation among Central Asian countries***

At the same time, the countries of the region have a whole number of potentially important pre-requisites for integration.

First, it is their economic inter-dependence expressed in the need to develop a common transport, logistics and energy infrastructure in the region.

Second, the need to build up mutual trade, diversify exports and imports for the benefit of neighboring partner states in Central Asia. These efforts will help avoid the existing imbalances in trade between Central Asian countries and their partner states outside the region, first of all, Russia and China, and thus strengthen the economic potential of Central Asia as a whole and each individual country.

Third, the common history and values, similar cultures, a large number of family and business ties among citizens of Central Asian countries and a huge potential for cultural and humanitarian cooperation.

Fourth, the need to address common regional threats and challenges (security challenges, the struggle against terrorism and drug trafficking, environmental problems, etc.), which would yield the highest effect only through united and coordinated efforts of all the Central Asian countries.

Therefore, only close regional economic cooperation, cultural and humanitarian integration and intensification of multilateral and bilateral political contacts can boost the development of the entire region and ensure both national and regional interests in full.

### **Common View of Central Asian Experts on the Solution of Regional Problems and Cooperation Expansion**

It should be noted that Central Asian experts share their opinions on specific strategic issues and cooperation development factors in the region, as well as on the nature and directions of resolving the existing problems.

## SLIDE 7

- 1.** Experts have a predominant consolidated opinion on top priority for the Central Asian countries to resolve water, energy and territorial disputes.
- 2.** With regard to water and energy issues, the experts agree on the need to work out a comprehensive mechanism for discussing the problem under the UN aegis, establish the principles of international law, harmonize the water legislations, conduct independent international feasibility studies and environmental expert evaluations of all hydropower facilities on cross-border rivers already at the stages of their designing.

It is important to timely establish the fair nature of mutual relations regarding those issues in order to prevent regional military conflicts in the future.

## SLIDE 8

- 3.** As for territorial disputes and cross-border conflicts, the most potentially effective approach to settling those issues is to develop integration among Central Asian countries and establish a border regime similar to border control between the EU countries, make progress in border delimitation and demarcation, carry out thorough survey of opinions of the public and decision-makers on the relevant territories about alternative ways of addressing the issue of the enclaves in Central Asia.

The expert community clearly shares the opinion that the UNRCCA should expand its activities to prevent conflict situations and stabilize relations among Central Asian countries.

The settlement of internal contradictions in the region will help increase investment appeal of each Central Asian country, which is especially important amid faltering economic growth.

## SLIDE 9

- 4.** A radical resetting of relations between the region's key actors, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, is a major condition for developing regional cooperation, which can largely determine the specific nature and dynamics of processes in Central Asia.

The analysis of the positions of experts from Central Asian countries allows a conclusion that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan demonstrate greater readiness for regional integration.

Turkmenistan is more likely to continue the bilateral format strategy owing to its traditional neutrality while Uzbekistan will follow the tactics of self-isolation.

At the same time, Tajikistan's experts say that the position of Uzbekistan could undoubtedly exert decisive influence on regional integration, considering that the country is situated in the region's center, shares common borders with all Central Asian states, possesses a large economic and human potential and has special geopolitical significance for external players.

**5.** The political will of the leaders of Central Asian countries is a key factor on the way towards real cooperation because only decisive readiness and actions of all stakeholders will help resolve the intra-regional problems while making coordinated use of the potential of external players. This can be achieved through specific and consistent work of the governments of Central Asian countries toward this goal.

**6.** There is common understanding that trade and economic cooperation through the development of the transport and transit potential and the strengthening of security in the region, including in the form of participation of geopolitical centers and international organizations in these processes, are the key lines of cooperation among Central Asian countries.

These are the factors, on which real cooperation development can be based in the Central Asian region. The significance of these issues grows amid the changing nature of geopolitical processes and the intensifying activity of international terrorism, especially ISIS, and the turbulence of the global economy.

## SLIDE 10

**7.** Experts consider the struggle against terrorism and extremism to be important both at the global level under the UN auspices and regionally (CSTO, SCO).

**8.** As the Central Asian countries are not fully represented in regional organizations, there is an urgent need for the Central Asian countries to elaborate a common strategy at the highest level to prevent and counter religious extremism and terrorism.

**9.** It should be noted that all experts from the Central Asian countries welcome the idea about the need to formulate a common scientific research and analysis agenda for scientific and expert support of regional cooperation development issues and create a permanent single

institutional platform. E.g. experts from Uzbekistan suggest establishing a regional think-tank on cooperation in Central Asia.

## **Policies of External Players in Central Asia: the Current Status and Prospects for the Future**

The growing influence of external factors is becoming quite important amid the speedy and unpredictable changes on the international scene and the increasingly complicated global economic situation.

### **SLIDE 11**

#### **Russia**

Russia has traditionally been considering Central Asia as a sphere of its vital interests. However, as Russia is broadly involved in the Ukrainian and Syrian crises and its economy is experiencing a recession, a certain decrease in Russia's attention to the region and the levers of influence on processes in Central Asia has been observed.

At the same time, Russia is a major trade and economic partner for Central Asian countries and a key investor in the region and, therefore, will try to maintain and, as far as possible, build up its economic presence in the region through cooperation within the EAEU, the SCO, key bilateral agreements and the link between the Eurasian Economic Union with the Silk Road Economic Belt.

The military-political vector of the Russian policy in the region is connected with the presence of military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, strategic military and political cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan and Russia's working bilateral relations with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Moreover, Russia is obviously striving to raise the status and functionality of the CSTO.

#### **China**

Chinese policies in the region largely stem from the country's economic priorities. As most external sources of financing are shrinking, Chinese investments in the region steadily tend to grow and now account for the larger share in the region's economies. Also, China has initiated several important infrastructural projects in the region aimed at strengthening China's influence. First of all, this relates to China's initiative of the Silk Road Economic Belt.

China's general economic interests in Central Asia are based on its desire to ensure stable and smooth supplies of resources to its actively developing western and central provinces and create infrastructure for trade with Europe and the Middle East.

In the political sphere, China's interests are focused on strengthening the SCO military and political component and preventing the spread of terrorism, extremism and separatism to maintain the status quo in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

## SLIDE 12

### United States

The United States does not have evident economic interests in Central Asia. The US interest in the region involves primarily geopolitical considerations and is aimed at blocking the efforts of Russia and China to build up military, political and economic influence in Central Asia.

The current process of decrease in diplomatic contacts (despite the recent tour of the US Secretary of State) and financial flows, as well as the peripheral status of Central Asia in the priorities of the US Department of State, are related to the plans announced by the US administration to withdraw its military contingent from Afghanistan. The best proof of this trend is the US decision to close the transit center at Manas airport in Bishkek.

At the same time, considering the global nature of US foreign policy, possible actualization of the Afghan problem and geopolitical considerations, it can be said that the United States will keep its presence in the region and build it up, if necessary.

### European Union

The EU's interests in Central Asia are focused on three main areas: the need to diversify energy supplies, ensure stability of economic investments and the fight against drug trafficking and terrorism. The importance of these areas requires the EU's long-term presence in the region.

Meanwhile, internal contradictions in the EU, problems in the economy, the EU's policies influenced by the United States and the peripheral status of Central Asia in the EU's priorities do not suggest that the EU is intensifying its activity in the region or will considerably strengthen its positions in the future.

## SLIDE 13

### Iran

As the international community has lifted its sanctions off Iran, the country has intensified its foreign policy considerably. Central Asia is a region traditionally important for the Islamic Republic. Iran aspires for regional leadership in West Asia and active influence in the Middle East.

First of all, in the context of building up its own economic potential and political influence.

Secondly, from the viewpoint of traditional rivalry with the Sunni countries over leadership in the Islamic World. Also, Central Asia is a region of special interest in terms of establishing transport corridors with China and Russia and the sales markets for Iranian goods.

Today we can only speak about the general patterns of the Iranian policy in Central Asia. The instruments or the mechanisms for its implementation are not clear.

There are close contacts with Tajikistan, certain relations with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan in the Caspian format, as well as bilateral treaties regulating Iran's relations with each of the Central Asian republics.

Nevertheless, regarding the current situation, we can expect Iran to conduct a more focused and systematic policy in the region and its stronger influence in Central Asia.

### Japan

Japan's interests in Central Asia are especially focused on the supplies of rare earth metals and uranium for the strategic sectors of the Japanese economy and the protection of considerable investments in the region.

In addition, Japan's considerably active economic policy fits into the logic of tacit confrontation with China and strategic partnership with the United States.

134 In the near future, the Japanese presence in the region is unlikely to decrease and may even grow in case of a favorable regional situation and the strengthening of the Japanese economy. The recent visit by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the countries of the region enhances this tendency.

## SLIDE 14

### Turkey

Turkey's interests in the region focus on economic, cultural and humanitarian issues and also stem from its ambitions to consolidate Turkic-speaking countries under its aegis (Pan-Turkism) and be a leader in the Turkic and the wider Islamic World.

Turkey has friendly and productive relations with all the countries in the region. However, it maintains closer cooperation with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

The whole set of Turkey's interests in the region suggests that the country won't scale down its activities in Central Asia. Moreover, the dramatic deterioration in the Russian-Turkish relations will most likely further intensify Turkey's policy in Central Asia.

### Arab Monarchies

The interest of countries of the Arabian Peninsula in the region is primarily explained by their desire to promote Islamic traditions in the region's political and social life. Considerable investments in Central Asia, the growth of business activity, cultural and humanitarian contacts between the regions, and also the rising role of Islam in global politics are objectively drawing Central Asian countries into the orbit of the Arab Monarchies' interests. This is a steady trend that will persist in the long-term perspective.

### General Conclusions and Cooperation Prospects in the Context of Growing External Impacts

The following conclusions can be made to sum up the discussion on cooperation prospects in the context of external impacts:

**First**, the development of cooperation among Central Asian countries is highly dependent on external factors but this dependence is insufficient for the strengthening of regional integration. External investments are obviously very important for the countries of the region and without them their further economic development seems very problematic.

Also, the poor transport infrastructure and the vital need to expand the sales markets calls for both close interaction with external players and cooperation within the region.

However, the leading geopolitical centers are actively promoting their own projects for developing relations with Central Asia.

The Central Asian countries, in their turn, are forced to maneuver among these integration projects, giving preference to a particular vector and pursuing their own economic benefits and national interests.

Therefore, the activity of external actors in Central Asia is ambiguous. On the one hand, it stimulates certain economic development processes and, on the other hand, provokes regional disunity.

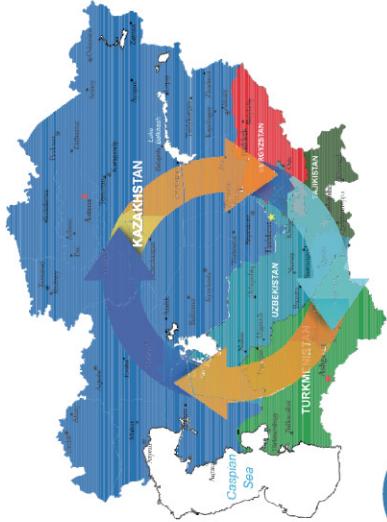
**Second**, despite the mediation of external forces, it is important for Central Asian countries to remain politically independent and try to formulate a common internal strategy based on mutual benefits and parity to eliminate problems and contradictions. Otherwise, the countries of the region run the risk of becoming the subjects of growing geopolitical confrontations in the long term.

Moreover, it is important to understand that external actors can be the moderators of problems only at a certain stage. Final decisions will depend only on the region's countries themselves.

**Third**, the analysis of the views of experts from Central Asia on the influence of external factors leads to the main conclusion: geopolitical centers are generally uninterested in united Central Asia.

*Therefore, it is obvious that Central Asian experts have the common understanding and the actually consolidated position on the prospects of cooperation development. However, further work on a common strategy of regional cooperation between Central Asian countries requires efforts from the expert community to thoroughly analyze the acute problems of development and define the contours of the future, including on the basis of changing external factors.*

## INTERNAL FACTORS PREVENTING CONSTRUCTIVE AND SYSTEMATIC COOPERATION AMONG CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES



the prevalence of narrow state interests in inter-state relations, different vision of integration goals and objectives among the leaders of Central Asian countries



economic and technological weakness and an acute shortage of financial resources.

different directions of geopolitical policies of the region's countries, preference for extra-regional formats of economic cooperation for all Central Asian countries without any exception

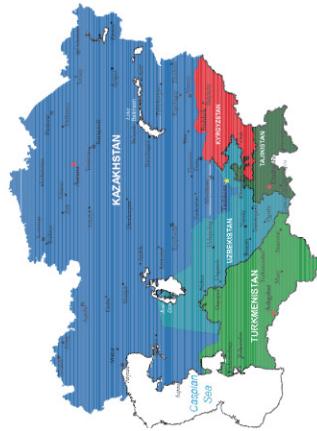


differences in political and economic models and strategies



different levels of development of economic relations and social and political institutions

## The permanent problems complicating the development of integration processes in Central Asia



unsettled border issues, especially in the Fergana Valley, problems of the enclaves



persistent risks of the emergence and escalation of inter-ethnic conflicts



energy issues and different positions of the states on the use of cross-border river resources



## The most influential external factors



### Russia:

Military-political influence (CSTO)



Economic integration (EEU)



Support of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in water and energy standoff



### China:

The politics of "multimillion investments"



Cooperation in the field of security (SCO)



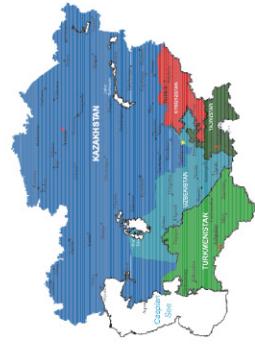
### USA:

Completing the "afghan problem" – reducing the economic cooperation

Realization of the "soft power doctrine"

The deepening of the military-strategic relations with Uzbekistan

## Prospects of cooperation in the Central Asian region: experts on their countries' roles and policies



### Turkmenistan

- Transport initiatives and the development of trade and economic cooperation on this basis
- Key role in establishing the "East-West" and "North-South" transport corridors : gas pipelines and railway corridors



### Uzbekistan

- Bilateral interaction with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and confrontation with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (water and energy problem)
- Strengthening of own security only
- Secondary format of cooperation development with Central Asian states

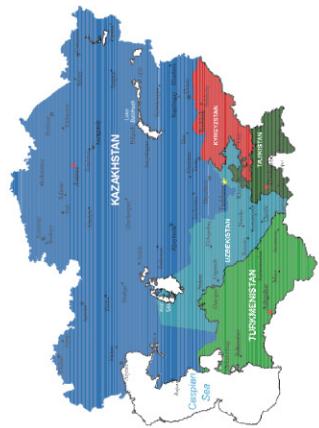


### Kyrgyzstan

- Reputation of Kyrgyzstan associated with internal political instability and a weak economy as a factor of complicating Kyrgyzstan's role in regional cooperation
- Fundamental role in developing the legal framework of cross-border cooperation, implementing international standards for border crossing and establishing a regional logistics operator



**Prospects of cooperation in the Central Asian region:**  
experts on their countries' roles and policies



**Tajikistan**

- Regional cooperation corresponds to the real national interests of Tajikistan
- Role in hydropower, transport and transit potential, and in its utilization in the interest of the region
- Maintaining regional security: Tajikistan as a shield of Central Asia on the Afghan border



**Kazakhstan**

- Main initiator of integration ideas
- Advocating for the dialogue and compromise with account taken of all the stakeholders
- Role in the search for the new joint investment projects, in the mediation at talks between Central Asian countries on the issues of disputed territories and the water problem, and through stepping up joint efforts in regional security matters



## Pre-requisites for cooperation among Central Asian countries

economic inter-dependence, development of a regional transport, logistics and energy infrastructure



need to build up mutual trade among Central Asian states



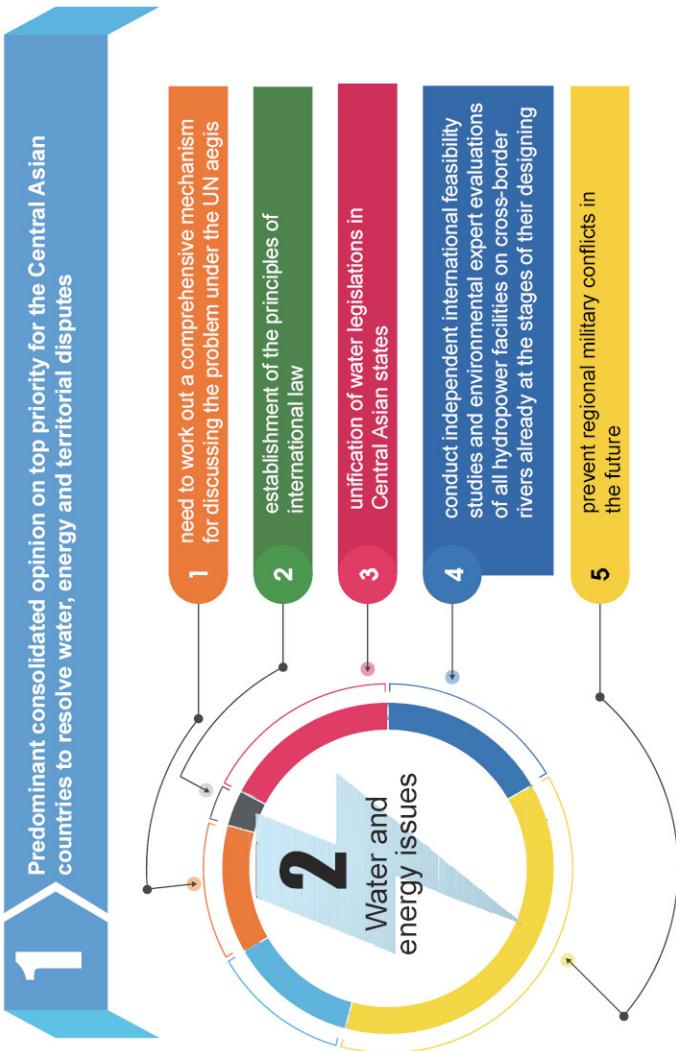
common history and values, similar cultures, a large number of family and business ties among citizens



need to prevent/address common regional threats /challenges

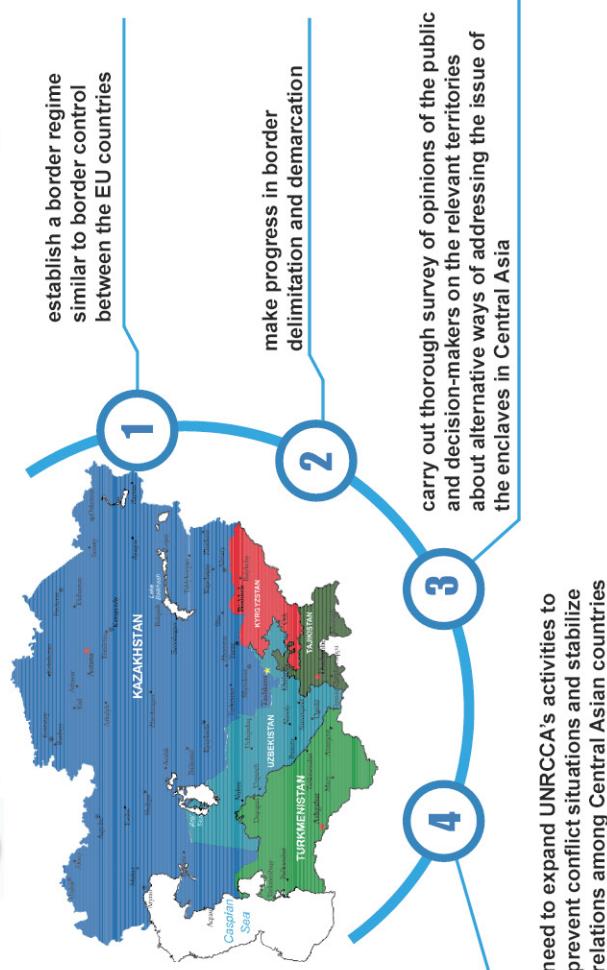


## COMMON VIEW OF CENTRAL ASIAN EXPERTS ON THE SOLUTION OF REGIONAL PROBLEMS AND COOPERATION EXPANSION



## COMMON VIEW OF CENTRAL ASIAN EXPERTS ON THE SOLUTION OF REGIONAL PROBLEMS AND COOPERATION EXPANSION

### 3 Territorial disputes and cross-border conflicts



COMMON VIEW OF CENTRAL ASIAN EXPERTS ON THE SOLUTION  
OF REGIONAL PROBLEMS AND COOPERATION EXPANSION

4



A radical resetting of relations between the region's key actors - Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

5

A key factor to the real cooperation is a political will of the leaders of Central Asian countries

6

Key lines of cooperation among Central Asian countries are trade and economic cooperation through the development of the transport and transit potential and the strengthening of security in the region

## COMMON VIEW OF CENTRAL ASIAN EXPERTS ON THE SOLUTION OF REGIONAL PROBLEMS AND COOPERATION EXPANSION

7. Fight against terrorism and extremism both on a global level under UN aegis and on the regional (CSTO, SCO).



8. Elaboration of a common strategy at the highest level to prevent and counter religious extremism and terrorism among Central Asian states



9. Formation of a common scientific research and analysis agenda for scientific and expert support of regional cooperation development issues, creation of a permanent single institutional platform



## Policies of External Players in Central Asia: the Current Status and Prospects for the Future

### Russia

#### Current situation

A certain decrease in Russia's attention to the region and the levers of influence on processes in Central Asia

#### Perspectives

Efforts will be directed towards maintenance and establishment of economic presence in the region through cooperation within the EAEU, the SCO, key bilateral agreements, and the link between the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt. In the military-political vector, Russia is obviously striving to raise the status and functionality of the CSTO.

### China

#### Current situation

Chinese investments in the region has a sustainable tendency to growth  
Several important infrastructural projects in the region were initiated  
(Silk Road Economic Belt)

#### Perspectives

Increase of Chinese investments in the region, strengthening positions in key infrastructure projects, intensification of the contacts related to terrorism and extremism issues

## Policies of External Players in Central Asia: the Current Status and Prospects for the Future



### Current situation

USA lost its interest to the region after its military contingent withdrew from Afghanistan

### Perspectives

Retaining its presence in the region at a current level and building it up upon necessity, with the consideration of the global nature of the US foreign policy

### EU



### Current situation

Significant investments in the region, interest and certain successes in the diversification of energy supplies and fight against drug trafficking and terrorism. A new strategy of EU's cooperation with the Central Asian countries was developed, and as of today, was signed only by Kazakhstan in June 2015.

### Perspectives

EU's complex problems do not contribute to the EU's activation in the region and considerable strengthening of its positions in the future.

## Policies of External Players in Central Asia: the Current Status and Prospects for the Future

### Current situation

Close contacts with Tajikistan, certain relations with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan within the Caspian format, as well as bilateral treaties regulating Iran's relations with each of the Central Asian republics.

Iran  
ایران

### Perspectives

Emergence of a more focused and systematic policy of Iran in the region and its stronger influence in Central Asia

Japan

### Current situation

Particular interest in the imports of the rare earth metals and uranium for the strategic sectors of the Japanese economy and considerable investments

### Perspectives

Japanese presence in the region is unlikely to decrease and may even grow in case of a favorable regional situation and the strengthening of the Japanese economy



## Policies of External Players in Central Asia: the Current Status and Prospects for the Future

### Current situation

Friendly and productive relations with all the countries in the region in economic, political, cultural and humanitarian spheres

### Perspectives

The whole set of Turkey's interests in the region suggests that the country won't scale down its activities in Central Asia



### Current situation

Considerable investments in Central Asia, the growth of business activity, cultural and humanitarian contacts between the regions

### Perspectives

Objective drawing of the Central Asian countries into the orbit of the Arab Monarchies' interests



## Arabian monarchies

# Cooperation Prospects between Central Asian States against the Backdrop of External Impacts

**Saifullo SAFAROV**

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**First Deputy Director**

**Centre of Strategic Research under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan**

After reviewing the highlights of our two-day discussion and comparing them with my notes from the discussions I had in Moscow, Tomsk, Dushanbe and Bishkek during the past three weeks, I have come to the conclusion that data collection and analysis alone would not help us accomplish our historical mission.

To prevent conflicts in Central Asian states and other similar countries going through a transformation period, we need to define our objectives.

First of all, we should properly identify the processes we are dealing with:

1. It would be absolutely pointless to wait for the United States or Russia to collapse. Both countries are quite capable of finding ways to strengthen their might and settle their differences via dialogue and cooperation. A unipolar world turns into a multipolar one rather than returning to its bipolar state. China and India strengthening their position in the world economy and Russia enhancing its standing in the international security system are by themselves factors that have a great influence on the modern international relations. We proceed from the fact we have been moving towards a multipolar world and therefore multi-vector policy would be the only option for the Central Asian states consistent with their national interests.

We can therefore conclude that the transformation of geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economical processes gave rise to some negative tendencies that may cause internal, 151 international and interstate conflicts.

These phenomena can be characterized as demoralization, deactivation and de-socialization.

These words reflect the processes underway in the context of destruction of traditional values and creation of new ones that are yet to be comprehended and absorbed by the citizens of our countries.

In such a complex sociopolitical, economic and geopolitical environment it is important to have strictly defined goals and clear plans of attaining them, in other words, a so-called “roadmap” for reaching these goals. These are the principles underlying the Concepts and National Development Strategies of Tajikistan for 2030 and 2050. The said documents provide rationale for the new strategic goals and outline the mechanisms for their achievement so the country could pass over to a qualitatively new stage in implementing the strategic objectives already set by the President and leader of the nation.

It should be noted that in achieving our strategic goals we have to face new serious challenges in the form of conflict-triggering factors. Such conflicts must be prevented. But the question is how to foresee and prevent them?

**First**, in order to be able to prevent or settle a conflict it has to be de-politicized. This process is pretty straightforward and requires no further clarification. For instance, politicization of Islam has been and will continue creating a lot of problems for all countries of the region aggravating the external impacts related to the geopolitics of Islam, especially those of the *Salafi* nature. In the same way water, border, ethnic, alphabetic and dozens of other problems may turn into a factor triggering new types of conflicts.

**Second**, we should not really talk so much about society becoming radicalized and thus give the radicals the publicity they crave, but focus all our efforts on de-radicalizing society, the state and people. Much discussion is underway presently about radicalization of society and religion. And instead of trying to keep it low-key everybody just continues stepping hard on the radicalism pedal. This strengthens the positions of radicalism as radicalism engenders other types of radicalism. If we fail to de-radicalize public consciousness it would be pointless to blame religion or the government.

**Third**, with a view to mitigate the conflict-triggering factors in the near future as part of the 152 overall preventive strategy we need to demilitarize all international, interstate and internal political processes in the Central Asian region.

Use soft power or, under worst case scenarios, a combination of soft and hard power, take a smart power approach or, as philosophers say, rationalize the process, make it less emotional and move it from a conflict zone into a zone of dialogue, discussion and consideration.

Analyzing the various interstate conflicts and their dynamics you cannot but come to the conclusion that had it not been for people's mythologized conscience and attitudes toward each other the number of conflicts on the planet would have dwindled dramatically. Therefore, public consciousness should be de-mythologized as well.

Under the new circumstances, one of the most important characteristics of the Central Asian states, despite their weak and somewhat chaotic public administration system, is still their adherence to the principles of democracy, multi-partisanship, political pluralism and tolerance.

**Another characteristic** conducive to national cohesion, absence of conflicts and stability of those states is their secular nature, which effectively precludes rivalry between various religious factions.

The third characteristic of our states that has proven instrumental in prevention of various social conflicts is the social nature of the national states in Central Asia. The above mentioned characteristics of the states reduce the polarization of society and alleviate social conflictogenity.

What all the states of the region have in common is the development trends of their political system, supremacy of law, a secular, democratic and social nature of the state, which makes them predictable in accordance with international standards.

Therefore, if the Central Asian states manage to preserve these contemporary characteristics in the long term and overcome the destructive internal processes, as opposed to Libya, Egypt and Syria, they would guarantee security, stability and development. However, it should be noted that Afghanistan remains a major conflict-generating factor in the region that requires a lot of resources and attention. The states of the region still have to keep a close eye on their southern borders and therefore it is in their best interests to develop good-neighborly relations both among themselves and with the world superpowers.

It is notably the commitment of the Central Asian states to secular, democratic, social, multipolar principles that is key to their stability and development. These features of the national states in Central Asia warrant their sustainable development, ability to deal with today's challenges

and threats and mitigate external impacts on their security. What the states of the region have in common is the overall tendency of their political systems development based on supremacy of law, which makes them predictable from the point of view of international law. Therefore, if strategically the Central Asian states succeed in maintaining these characteristics they would be able to minimize the risk of the destructive internal tendencies such as the ones in Libya, Egypt and Syria.

Failure to uphold these principles leads to a slump in citizens' activity and social marginalization, which ultimately pushes them out of their traditional, sustainable way of existence and their entire intellectual potential starts working against them.

To be able to prevent conflicts in Central Asia it is necessary to have a ready action plan aimed at the raising of social awareness and increasing the involvement of civil society institutions.

To put such an action plan together it is important to identify the goals, which may help assure security, stability and development in the region.

Such universal goals, in our opinion, could be to make the overall societal development process steer clear of political, radical and ideological ways. These goals can be set for both Afghanistan and Syria. But the Central Asian states where the development pace has been more or less balanced, stable and dynamic might be used as a test ground.

Otherwise society could end up demoralized, destabilized, de-globalized and marginalized with social awareness severely diminished thus laying groundwork for such states leaving the zone of the traditional influence of positive external factors and opening the door for such negative factors as islamization and radicalization, which is unacceptable.

# U.S. Policy in Central Asia: An Overview

**Martha Brill OLCOTT**  
**Visiting Professor, Michigan State University**  
**Professor Emerita, Colgate University**

The U.S. government remains keenly interested in developments within the Central Asian region, because of the proximity of these countries to Afghanistan and also because of U.S. economic interests, especially in the energy sector. This notwithstanding, events in Central Asia rarely become a major preoccupation of the U.S. President, the Vice President or the Secretary of State.

One notable exception was the 5 country trip to Central Asia by Secretary of State John Kerry, from October 31, 2015 through-November 3, 2015, which included a 5+1 summit of Central Asian Foreign Ministers, held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. This was a follow-on to a gathering of these officials during the U.N. General Assembly meetings in September, and was designed to signal to the Central Asian leaders that their countries had not dropped off the map of U.S. concerns, despite Washington's preoccupation with Syria and the Middle East, and the negotiations over Iran's nuclear capabilities.

However, it is hard to see this effort, or U.S. policy in the region more generally, as any sort of effective balance to Chinese or Russian influence in the region. This is also true even when U.S. and European Union efforts are viewed in tandem; for while the policies of the U.S. and EU are distinct initiatives they generally are supportive of the same policy goals. However, despite the fact that the U.S. and EU footprints in the region are fainter than those of Russia or China, the leaders of all five Central Asian countries are eager for good relationships with their American and European counterparts precisely for the balance and potential leverage it provides with their more persistent and oftentimes omnipresent international partners.

Although they travel to the region with nothing like the frequency of their Chinese or Russian counterparts, European leaders are more frequent visitors to the countries of Central Asia than their U.S. colleagues, and more welcoming of visits by at least some of these leaders. For example, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev was received by Queen Elizabeth II during his

November 2015 trip to the U.K. and France, attesting to the importance that the U.K. places on its economic interests in Kazakhstan.

By contrast, Kerry's visit was the first U.S. Secretary of State to visit all five Central Asian countries during the same trip. Al Gore and Dick Cheney both travelled to Kazakhstan while U.S. Vice-President and a Gore trip included a stop in Kyrgyzstan. No U.S. President has travelled to any of the five countries, nor has any Central Asian leader been given a State Dinner in the White House. But those presidents who have travelled to the U.S. have generally had the opportunity to meet or greet the U.S. president either at the General Assembly or in other settings.

One of the main problems facing U.S. officials in trying to foster closer ties with the Central Asian states is the human rights record of these governments. All are regularly criticized for restrictions on religion, media, assembly, and the way their legislative and judicial institutions are elected and function by groups like Human Rights Watch, Freedom House and Amnesty International. All of these groups have considerable traction in the U.S. Congress, have close relations with the State Department (through the Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor) and through the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which serves to set limits on what the U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. AID, and the State Department are able to do in these countries (except where the President decides to issue Presidential waivers).

As if to demonstrate the nature of the challenge, Secretary Kerry, got criticized by the New York Times,<sup>1</sup> when he was careful to moderate his tone concerning human rights during public settings, speaking of "the human dimension" during his comment about the summit, when he said that:

We are going to talk about the economic growth and connectivity, the environment, the regional security and stability and the human dimension. In this particular moment of history, economic and security issues go hand in hand. They reinforce each other.<sup>2</sup>

The U.S. policy approach, with its attention to "the human dimension" is in sharp contrast to that of either Russia or China. In China's case, there is an explicit statement of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries in their "One Belt One Road" program which aims to

<sup>1</sup> 156 "John Kerry is Cautious on Human Rights During the Uzbek Visit" The New York Time, November 1, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/02/world/asia/john-kerry-is-cautious-on-human-rights-during-uzbekistan-visit.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/02/world/asia/john-kerry-is-cautious-on-human-rights-during-uzbekistan-visit.html?_r=0)

<sup>2</sup> As quoted by "Kerry Meets Uzbek President Central Asian Leaders, Voice of America, November 1, 2015 <http://www.voanews.com/content/kerry-tours-central-asia/3031714.html>

invest some US \$40 billion in infrastructure projects in the Central Asian region through its Silk Road Investment Fund.<sup>3</sup> If this project is fully funded it will dwarf both the scale of U.S. and EU assistance in the region, and the investments made by Russia as part of Eurasian Economic Community which Moscow sponsors, and which both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are a part of. While Russia is very critical of the U.S. “human dimension” approach, Moscow does use all of its available levers (including energy policy, Russian language media and the presence of a large labor migrant population from Central Asia) to try and influence the economic and security policies of the countries in the region.

Even with the various kinds of political pressures that U.S. policy-makers have sought to introduce, the Central Asian leaders remain eager for U.S. security assistance, and for technical assistance, economic and infrastructure investment by U.S. companies and by the international financial institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development which the U.S. and EU countries lead or dominate.

For this reason, the Foreign Ministers gathered in Samarkand were willing to sign a Joint Declaration of Partnership and Cooperation which included a commitment to:

Protect human rights, develop democratic institutions and practices, and strengthen civil society through respect for recognized norms and principles of international law, including the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Declaration on Principles of International Law, and the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe;<sup>4</sup>

The majority of the provisions in the document provide for cooperation in areas that the Central Asians are eager to work closely with the U.S., including cooperation in countering trans-boundary threats including, of which the most relevant for them is terrorism, as well as regional trade, transportation and communication, energy linkages and efforts to ameliorate the risks of climate change. And of course, the document included a reference to the need to insure and bolster the independence and security of Afghanistan.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Cheung and Alexious Lee, “A Brilliant Plan: One Belt, One Road,” CLSA, 2015. <https://www.clsainc.com/special/onebeltoneroad/>.

<sup>4</sup> Joint Declaration of Partnership and Cooperation by the Five Countries of Central Asia and the United States of America, Samarkand Uzbekistan, November 1, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/11/249050.htm> 1/1.

Concurrent with the summit meeting, the U.S. Department of State issued a new circular summarizing the goals and priorities of U.S. assistance to the Central Asian countries,<sup>5</sup> which outlined at length the projects (both through U.S. bilateral and U.S. donations in multi-lateral assistance) that were being developed to meet these goals.

All this said, the focus of U.S. bilateral assistance in the Central Asian region remains on military and security assistance, projects that are designed to bolster the capacity of the Central Asian states to protect themselves from potential incursions of terrorist (or other opposition) groups crossing into the region from Afghanistan. While exact estimates are difficult to obtain because of secrecy provisions relating to certain parts of the U.S. budget, this aid is estimated at approximately US \$250 million for fiscal year 2016.<sup>6</sup> Funding for fiscal year 2017 seems certain to also include funds for CVE (confronting violent extremism) projects related to preventing recruitment of Central Asian youth by the Islamic State, and countering any risks that this might create within these countries.

This notwithstanding, the renewed interest in Central Asia by the U.S. that John Kerry's visit to the region seemingly represents is certain to be tempered by the realities of the U.S. budgeting process in Washington. This is especially true in the current year, when a U.S. presidential election is being held, and this coincides with a U.S. congress in which fiscal conservatives are able to dominate the budgeting process. While all the outgoing Obama administration and all of the contenders to succeed him are certain to press for more and better protection of U.S. security interests against external threats, it is very unlikely that the security risks in the Central Asian states will come near the top of anyone's lists for major increases in program funding. Moreover, in the current difficult global financial climate, the Central Asians may find that the much larger promised purses of Russia and China are also more difficult to tap into than previously promised.

158 <sup>5</sup> New U.S. Assistance Programs in Central Asia: A Fact Sheet, November 1, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/11/249051.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> "U.S. Security Assistance to Central Asia," Security Assistance Organization, July 22, 2015, [http://securityassistance.org/fact\\_sheet/us-security-assistance-central-asia](http://securityassistance.org/fact_sheet/us-security-assistance-central-asia).

# Prospect of ISIS in Afghanistan and its implication on Central Asia

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## Overview

Despite being in the news for only a couple of years now, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has gained immense ground in Syria and Iraq and is now being considered as the world's most powerful terrorist organization. Since its establishment around three years ago, the organization has influenced a large number of Muslim diaspora across the world. Weak or nearly failed states, such as Afghanistan are considered more vulnerable to ISIS' expanding strategies. In early 2015, ISIS announced the establishment of its new regional sub-division in Afghanistan calling it their "Khorasan" base. Since ISIS announced its establishment in Afghanistan, a number of active terrorist groups affiliated them with ISIS and started their activities mostly in south and south-eastern provinces of Afghanistan. The groups quickly managed to attract followers from the local communities in some of the far-flung areas of the country. Launching a local radio station in Nangarhar province, kidnapping of the passengers from Kabul-Qandahar highway and the raising of ISIS flag by some of the students in street protests are clear indications of ISIS' emerging presence in Afghanistan. In their recent statements, ISIS affiliated groups in Afghanistan have made it clear that they independent groups and has no links with the existing terrorist organizations, such as Taliban or Haqqani network. In fact, a number of clashes between the newly established ISIS groups and the existing Taliban supporters were reported in the media which apparently show that the two groups differ and have no sympathies for each other.

However, both ISIS and the Taliban share fundamental ideological interpretation of religion as well as political goals and as such this conflicting relation do not seem very deep. If both sides come under political and military pressure, there is a chance of mutual collaboration to act as a

united organization. As a result, the growing influence of the active terrorist groups including ISIS and the Taliban is worrisome for both the Afghan government as well as the wider region. The recent decades' civil wars in Afghanistan have made the country very susceptible to the emergence of radical religious movements and groups. The emergence of Taliban in 1990's is a clear example of such susceptibility. If ISIS succeed to gain sufficient ground in Afghanistan, their aim to expand the Islamic State will get a huge boost. Afghanistan's central location will provide a solid base for ISIS to pose threats to both south and central Asian states. Therefore, if not dealt with effectively, the ISIS affiliated groups in Afghanistan have the ability to create some serious problems for both Afghanistan and the neighboring region. This threat could get more serious if various terrorist groups try to create a coalition with other active insurgent groups, such as Taliban and Hizb-e Islami Afghanistan. Considering the seriousness of the issue, there is a serious need for robust national and joint regional strategies to effectually deal with the threats posed by ISIS and other terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan and central Asia.

## **The link between ISIS affiliated groups in Afghanistan and ISIS in the Middle East**

Most of the AISS affiliated groups' in Afghanistan claim that they are operating under the command of their main branch in Syria and Iraq. However, the level of agreement on nature of their linkage is not very significant. One of the major views in Afghanistan is that the existing terrorist groups only changed their name, while in reality they are subdivisions of Taliban who disassociated themselves from the Taliban due to the Taliban's recent organizational crisis, particularly after the death of the Taliban Leader – Mullah Muhammad Omar was formally announced. These groups seized the opportunity to conduct their operations under a more popular name – ISIS. It has now become a common view in Afghanistan that some of the unsatisfied members of the Taliban and other active terrorist groups are joining ISIS in a bid to rise to popularity soon. For example, the kidnapping and killing of civilians belonging to ethnic Hazara community are believed to have been orchestrated by the dis-satisfied members of the Taliban who are now working for ISIS in Afghanistan.

However, with time this view is changing. It is worth sparing a thought that whether the 160 groups, fighting against the Afghan government under the name of ISIS in Afghanistan, have any links with the ISIS' main center in Iraq and Syria or not. Some of the supporters of this view have narrowed down such linkage to only ideological aspect with two main arguments:

1) Currently, ISIS does not have the ability to establish an organized chain of command for their affiliated groups across the world, including Afghanistan. 2) ISIS does not follow the same strategy as those of the conventional terrorist organizations, such as Al-Qaida – the main aim of which was to create a pyramid structure of power in different parts of the world. Instead, the ISIS is focusing on to disseminate their ideology across the world via modern communication tools, such as social media and discover the like-minded people or groups in different countries in the world. It is confirmed from the nature of activities carried out by the ISIS affiliated groups in Afghanistan that they following their role models in the Middle East.

### **ISIS power and influence in Afghanistan**

According to the latest reports by the Afghan and international security officials, ISIS has about 3000 members in Afghanistan. Until now, ISIS groups have not gained any eye-catching achievements like those of Taliban in Afghanistan. And it makes it difficult to gauge their level of influence. In addition to this, the ambiguous identical line between the ISIS affiliated groups in Afghanistan and the Taliban pose another challenge for a better assessment of their influence. In the beginning, the emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan was downplayed by a number of high officials in the Afghan government. However, with the increase of ISIS' activities in the recent months, some of the key officials of the Afghan government acknowledged the threats posed by the ISIS. However, the Afghan government is focusing on the groups' ideological linkage only and not the financial, technical or logistical linkage. It is noteworthy to mention that regardless of the nature of linkages, the ISIS affiliated groups in Afghanistan have managed well to maintain their bases in Zabul, Nangarhar and few other areas in south east of Afghanistan. There are also evidences that the foreign fighters, mainly from central Asian states are present in ISIS influenced provinces. Given the whole situation, it would be wise to take action against these groups before it is too late.

### **Facilitating factors enable ISIS expansion in Afghanistan and wider regions**

During the last decade, international community provided a golden opportunity for Afghanistan to tackle with several issues the country is confronted with. However, the current situation of Afghanistan indicates that most of the opportunities created by the international community were wasted. Insecurity, poverty, insurgency, emergence of radical ideologies and movements

and so on are some of the serious problems in Afghanistan. In addition to these problems, there are other destructive measures that pave the way for extremist and terrorist groups, including the newly established ISIS affiliated groups, to strengthen their bases in the country and later use those bases to fulfill their regional objectives. Emergence of radical ideologies among the Afghan people is one of the many manifestations of such factors. Issues like these provide a platform for ISIS in Afghanistan to strengthen their position in the country. In the last two years, Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) has conducted a series of research projects on the trends of radical religious ideology across various sectors in Afghanistan. These researches have shown that a relative level of radical and extremist ideology exists among the Afghan people.

These radicalized people make it easier for ISIS to recruit new local members and deepen their influence among the local communities in Afghanistan. Additionally, in the recent years, a number of religiously motivated radical organizations have been established and are found to spread radical ideologies among the youth in Afghanistan. Hezb-ut Tahrir and Jamiat-e Islah are the prime examples of such organizations and have thousands of followers in Afghanistan. Aside from the problem of radicalization, the tribal rivalries over political power in Afghanistan also make it easy for ISIS groups to strengthen their roots in the country.

Throughout the history of Afghanistan, tribal and ethnic identity has played a decisive factor in the country's politics and nature of conflicts in Afghanistan. A clear example of this is the manipulation of identity by the Taliban to gain power in 1990s in Afghanistan. The sense of tribal or ethnic rivalries do not limit itself to the major ethnic groups in Afghanistan, but can be found among the relatively smaller ethnic groups. In order to gain influence over other tribes, the tribal leaders do whatever they can in their capacity. The ones who fail in this competition are very likely to seek help or join hands with various illegitimate organizations including extremist groups. Gulbadeen Hekmatyar, the head of Hizb-e Islami Afghanistan – a militant Islamic organization in Afghanistan is a clear example of this. As the sensitivity to ethnic rivalry seems more robust in the southern parts of Afghanistan, the relative success of ISIS in southern parts of the country can be associated with this issue as well.

An economic incentive ISIS provides for its organizational operations, particularly for 162 recruitment of new members, seems to be the other element that helps ISIS in building its base in Afghanistan. Higher levels of poverty and unemployment are two very serious social challenges faced by the Afghan people, particularly youth. The recent reports indicate that the minimum monthly salary for the newly joined ISIS members is around US\$ 500, in comparison

to a large number of Afghan government employees who are paid roughly US\$ 200 per month. Since the number of unemployed youth is on rise in Afghanistan, ISIS could attract more young people to join their ranks by paying them almost double the money they would normally get at a junior position in the Afghan government. The other factor which contributes to the rise of ISIS in Afghanistan is the weak governmental institutions in Afghanistan.

Afghan government has time and again failed to secure its soil from the foreign as well as internal threats. According to the latest reports by Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), Afghan government controls almost 70% of Afghanistan and the remaining 30% is controlled by the Taliban and other insurgent groups, including ISIS. At the same time, the International Transparency Organization (ITO) in its latest global report on corruption listed Afghanistan among the top three most corrupted countries of the world. Moreover, political crisis during the last presidential elections and the following security related issues are all the clear manifestations, which prove that the governance structure is weak in Afghanistan. The groups like ISIS are well aware of such weaknesses in the government establishment and effectively take advantage of them for their own benefits. For instance, ISIS established its first local radio station, Radio Khelafat in the Achin District of Nangarhar. Though the radio station was recently destroyed by an American drone strike but it is a clear indication of ISIS strengthening their base on the Afghan soil and constitutes yet another failure of the current Afghan government. Another issue with the governance in Afghanistan is its failure to have total control over the religious institutions in the country. There are thousands of unregistered religious schools operating in Afghanistan with the potential for some of them to disseminate radical ideologies, but the government has no control over their programs, curricula and financial sources. This means that ISIS can use these religious institutions and for its political propaganda and recruiting new members. In mid-2015, hundreds of university student in Jalalabad University raised ISIS flag and raised slogans in favor of the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate. If ISIS can influence the university students, which are under the control of government, then it is a duck soup for them to misuse religious institutions over which the government has no control. Another concern for the Afghan government is related to the prisoners who flee from the prisons and other criminals. Hundreds of prisoners have managed to flee from the main prisons of Ghazni and Qandahar in Afghanistan in the last couple of years.

The ISIS' background in Iraq and Syria shows that they are very good at attracting the prisoners who had managed to flee the jails. Since, most of these prisoners were members of the Taliban

and hence majority of them are expected to have rejoined with the Taliban. But due to the recent disputes over the leadership issues in Taliban, some of the prisoners might have joined ISIS. Therefore, it is important for the Afghan government to tighten their grip over the prisons in the rest of the country or they might face the same fate in the near future. The other big concern within the Afghan government is the lack of technical and logistical support for ANSF operations which was provided earlier by NATO and ISAF in Afghanistan. The radical mindset of the ANSF also provides an opportunity for ISIS to infiltrate among the ranks of ANSF as has been done by the Taliban time and gain, e.g., carrying out the green-on-blue attacks where in an Afghan soldier attacks its foreign counterpart.

## **Allegations of national and regional support for ISIS in Afghanistan and its impact on regional countries**

There is an excessive agreement on a statement that the current extremist and terrorist organizations in Afghanistan are imported phenomena. And also there is little doubt that these groups do not plan to limit their activities merely inside the afghan border. Instead, they eagerly wait for a proper time to trespass the Afghan border and stretch their deeds wherever there is a market for. Historical background of extremist groups indicates that they are politically misused by different regional and international powers. As now a days, the situation between different regional and global political powers is fragile, the idea of taking advantage of these groups by the regional powers to downfall their rivalries give more sense than the past. With such circumstances, almost all of the neighboring countries of Afghanistan are vulnerable to the emerging movement of extremist and terrorist groups. In particular, the countries where religious radical ideologies are in state of flourishing seem more vulnerable to the threat. In this respect, some central Asian states who already suffer from the issue have to be worried more than others. According to the recent past news reports, numerous radicalized individuals from central Asian countries have joined ISIS affiliated groups, Taliban and Al-Qaida in Afghanistan.

The recent instance is these individuals involvement in kidnapping passengers in Zabul province of Afghanistan. The local officials as well as local community leaders in the area where kidnapping took place reported that some of the kidnapers, who are with ISIS, were the citizen of Uzbekistan. The reports also indicate that hundreds of youths from central Asia joined Taliban in northern Afghanistan. The joining of these central Asian youths to terrorist groups attest a number of issues which is not good news for both the countries, they come

from as well as the entire region. First of all, the trend verifies there are opportunities for these youths in their home countries to get radicalized first. In other words, there are institutions or factors that make these youth extremist in their home countries. Second drawback lies in their future plan. These groups who at the moment trespassed the countries border and joint their ideological brethren to fight for their radical beliefs in Afghanistan or somewhere else; however, their ultimate goal is not to be away of their countries forever. Instead, there is likely for them to have the idea in mind to return their countries once get an opportunity and fight for what they believe are true inside their own countries. One of their routine ways is to shift from the central and southern parts of Afghanistan towards the border areas of their countries. To pave the way of return, they need support of local communities in both side of Amoo and Panj River which separate Afghanistan from central Asia. Provision of economic inventive is a major way of convincing border communities. According to the SIPRI's 2015 research report on studying human security condition of border communities of Afghanistan and central Asian countries, the communities bitterly suffer from poor livelihood facilities, high unemployment and poverty. The study states that, if not dealt effectively, the challenges have the potential to greatly threaten the border areas.

Taking advantage of such chaotic situation in the border areas, organized criminal groups (e.g. Mafia groups), and extremist groups via providing economic and social incentives have the chance to make the border areas as safe haven for their ambitious strategies including expansion of their activities inside central Asia. Weak government systems in Afghanistan which lead the establishment of hundreds of unregistered religious institutions operate in the border areas worsen the scenario. The religious institutions with no control over their activities are easily used by ISIS and other extremist organizations. As a consequence, by gaining strong ground in the border areas along with getting foreign support, the groups can start thinking how to expand their influence inside central Asia. Even now days, some Afghan political analyst and government officials complain about large scale and systematic transfer of insurgent groups and logistic from southern Afghanistan to the northern provinces of the country. Though it is soon to confirm accuracy of such gossip, the recent gradual strengths of insurgent groups including Taliban in northern Afghanistan has increased the chance of the rumor to be true. In case such chatters is true, the central Asian states have to be very worried about and immediately think on preventative solutions before it gets too late.

## Concluding Remarks

The recent emergence of so called ISIS affiliated groups in Afghanistan has become a serious source of worrisome not only for Afghanistan but for the entire region. The ideological similarities between these groups and those of Taliban increase the chance extremist groups to be united and make a tougher coalition bond. Such united force has the potential to not only insecure Afghanistan but also it is neighboring countries. Though it is widely perceived that future of ISIS affiliated groups in Afghanistan depend to the fate of ISIS in the Middle East, only ideological dependency to ISIS make them relatively independent of ISIS global trend. In other words, the newly emerging groups under ISIS will not be heavily influenced by defeat of ISIS in the Middle East and are able to continue their activities independently. So in order to effectively struggle against the groups, there are needs for both national and regional robust strategies. At the national level mainly in the afghan side, there is a need for short as well as long term preventive strategy. As a short term solution, the government of Afghanistan should conduct a comprehensive security operation to halt the groups' expansion in different parts of the country. But for long term and stable straggle, it is very crucial for the afghan government to struggle against the social and economic patterns which help ISIS to deepen their roots among afghan community. To do so, it should think how to effectively control religious institutions particularly in the border areas. Second, the afghan government should find way to solve human security issues of the border communities so that secure the border areas from the harms of terrorist groups such as ISIS. As Afghan government is financially and technically weak to successfully put in practice these strategies, therefore, getting assistance from central Asian states are crucial for such success.

# Final Report

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The seminar "The Impact of External Factors on Security and Development in Central Asia" was organized in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, by the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA). The event brought together representatives of institutes of strategic studies, academia and government bodies from the five Central Asian countries, Azerbaijan, China, Iran, the Russian Federation and the United States, as well as international and regional organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO).

The focus of the seminar was on the latest global security developments and their implications for Central Asia and neighbouring countries. The seminar was divided into five sessions, the conclusions and recommendations of which are presented below on the basis of the reports of the sessions' respective rapporteurs: Ms. Bakhit Abdildina, Ms. Monika Kalandia and Mr. Nodir Khudayberganov.

## **Session 1: The rise of ISIL and other extremist groups as a threat to stability in Central Asia**

In the first session, participants discussed the links between security and geo-political developments in the Middle East and Central Asia. One of the key developments in this regard has been the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Participants noted that the rise of ISIL in mid-2014 came as a surprise to the international community. The group's early successes were facilitated by the involvement of highly motivated and even fanatical foreign fighters from Europe and Asia, in addition to a tactical alliance between Iraqi insurgents and former members of the Saddam Hussein regime. While

it is known that Central Asian citizens have been involved in the fighting in Syria and Iraq, estimates of the exact number vary widely, between a low of just 300 to a high of between 3,000 and 5,000 (including Russian citizens). Regardless of the exact number, these fighters are of particular concern given that they are experienced and well trained. Even in small numbers, they could become a destabilising factor in their countries of origin.

Increasingly, Central Asian Governments are voicing concerns about terrorist recruitment. Investigations and arrests in this connection, however, are frequently criticized by international observers who are concerned that such arrests may have less to do with terrorist recruitment and more to do with reining in political opponents.

Another situation of concern in Central Asia is the region's proximity to Afghanistan. Bordering Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, Afghanistan has endured violence for over three decades. Its future remains fragile. The Government's control over the country is not strong, the capabilities of the Afghan military and security forces are questionable and the Taliban have already managed to bring large parts of the country under their control. This uncertainty has provided an opening for ISIL, and indeed there have already been reports that ISIL sympathisers (including some former Taliban commanders) have begun to recruit actively in Afghanistan on behalf of the so-called 'Caliphate'.

A variety of other external factors affecting security in the region were also mentioned, including long-standing geopolitical interests in Central Asia among world powers. The worsening security situation in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of neighbouring China was also mentioned. In 2014, 37 civilians were killed in bloody terror attacks in Xinjiang. In addition, Afghan Taliban have fought to capture checkpoints and territory at the border with Turkmenistan and Tajikistan from Herat to Kandahar, which is the intended path of the TAPI gas pipeline through Afghanistan. ISIL has also increased its presence in the Afghanistan-Turkmenistan border regions.

Central Asian countries have been concerned since gaining their independence about Islamist militancy in general, and the rise of ISIL specifically is of paramount concern. Authorities have responded to this concern by taking increasingly harsher measures to stamp out militant Islam. However, these very measures risk triggering a backlash in the form of making militant Islam even more attractive to young Muslims as a vehicle for demonstrating opposition to the Government. Similarly, in countries with vast oil and/or gas reserves (such as Kazakhstan,

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), the fact that a large proportion of the population lives in poverty can lead to a sense of marginalization that can cause individuals to seek solace in religion and, in extreme cases, become radicalized.

As for the reasons Central Asian citizens join ISIL, researchers found that poverty was not the primary motivation and many if not most were not particularly knowledgeable about Islam. Social justice was a common thread – many sought to join ISIL to help their fellow Muslims, to fight an oppressive regime, to defend the weak. Others chose to join because of adventurism, romanticism, love (especially among women), a desire to become a hero, or because they believed the Caliphate offered a good Muslim life and they wanted to contribute to its development.

Although social media remains a pivotal instrument for ISIL recruitment, it is not considered the most important in Central Asia, simply because the number of people with access to the internet is quite low. More important is the role of local institutions such as mosques and places of religious learning. Influential religious leaders may assist in radicalising individuals either through their own teaching or by distributing the extremist teaching of others.

Another factor in the recruitment of Central Asian citizens is the large number who migrates to Russia in search of employment.

## Session 2: Impact of developments in Ukraine on Central Asia

During the second session, participants discussed the crisis in and around Ukraine and its impact on Central Asia.

The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the attempted secession of two eastern provinces of Ukraine became a challenge for the five Central Asian countries' foreign policy and highlighted these countries' simultaneous affinities for and wariness of Russia. The dilemma for the Central Asian countries concerned striking the right balance in their reactions to the developments while trying to maintain friendly relations with both Russia and Ukraine. The Central Asians' cautious approach was striking. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan expressed support for Ukraine's territorial integrity early on, with Astana and Bishkek later expressing "understanding" for Russian actions. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan called on all parties to refrain from the use of force.

This caution was clearly demonstrated in the context of the voting on General Assembly resolution 68/262 on the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan abstained, while Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan avoided the vote entirely by not even showing up.

While Central Asia was largely able to avoid impacts from previous East-West disputes in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and elsewhere, the most recent conflict in Ukraine has been felt acutely. The main difference between then and now has been the Western sanctions against Russia, combined with the low price of oil and the increasing levels of economic integration with Russia.

The impact of the dispute between Russia and the West has played out differently in each of the five countries, based on the respective country's relationship with Russia and the scale of the country's economic ties to Russia and Russia-led integrationist structures. The economies of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are closely aligned with that of Russia, thanks to their membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAU), and so they have felt the pinch of Western sanctions. Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and to some extent Uzbekistan are highly dependent on remittances from labour migrants, most of whom are working in Russia, and as the value of the rouble has dropped, the value of the remittances has fallen in tandem. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have continued to cooperate closely with Russia in the context of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and even Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which usually guard their sovereignty jealously, have reportedly sought out additional Russian assistance recently in various fields. At the same time, all five Central Asian countries continue to strive to maintain "multi-vector" foreign policies and are cultivating their engagements with the United States, the European Union, China and others so as not to become wholly dependent on Russia.

### **Session 3: Strategies of key partner-countries in Central Asia**

In the third session, presentations and discussions focused on the evolution of the role of key-partner countries – the United States, Russia, China and Turkey – in Central Asia and ways to transform those countries' interests into opportunities to enhance stability and economic development.

170 One of the major features of the political environment in Central Asia is the complex web of geopolitical, security, economic and other interests of outside powers, a situation that often harkens back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century "Great Game." These dynamics are complicated by the Central

Asian countries' own "multi-vector" foreign policies, which seek to maximize the benefits from outside powers while minimizing the risks.

The overriding interest of the **United States** in Central Asia relates to the so-called "War on Terror." The Central Asian countries are seen as key allies in this effort, particularly insofar as their geographical location has proven to be useful with regard to operations in Afghanistan. In addition, the US is concerned with safeguarding the independence of the five Central Asian countries, while also ensuring stability and preventing radicalization. The US also wishes to maintain access to the energy resources of the region. Finally, the US does support democratization in Central Asia.

The predominant interest of the **Russian Federation** in Central Asia is the maintenance of stability, including through the elimination of terrorism, particularly in view of its own proximity to the region and long border with Kazakhstan. In addition, Russia also places great importance on maintaining influence in the region, particularly with regard to the regional energy market.

While **China** also seeks to maintain regional security, its primary interest in the region is linked to its desire to preserve its own territorial integrity, as the Chinese government does not want crosspollination of influence between the Central Asian countries and its own Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. In addition, China seeks to increase its political and economic influence in the region, perhaps in an attempt to gradually replace the Russian Federation as the main commercial presence in Central Asia.

Finally, **Turkey** plays an unusually prominent role in Central Asia particularly thanks to its cultural and linguistic links with the region. Although its foreign policy towards Central Asia has not necessarily been consistent, it generally contains five main components: (i) developing cooperation in the fields of energy, economy, commerce, culture, society and politics; (ii) supporting local efforts to peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities; (iii) supporting local efforts in nation- and state-building; and (iv) promoting and fostering closer intra-regional cooperation.

Central Asian countries, thus, find themselves at the crossroad of major geopolitical players' interests. The challenge for the Central Asian countries is to converge the rivalries among those

big actors into opportunities for the development of the region as a whole, incentives for boosting economic development and trade, mechanisms to address security concerns.

## **Session 4: The role of regional organizations in the context of external factors affecting Central Asia**

During the fourth session, participants focused on the role of international regional organizations in Central Asia and the wider region. The focus was not only on those regional organizations that count one or more of the Central Asian countries as members, but also ones that do not.

Among the Central Asian states, Turkmenistan has since independence promoted the policy of neutrality, and has limited its participation in various multilateral interaction platforms. For its part, Uzbekistan has conducted more contrasting policies, endorsing regionalism when it thinks it is in a leadership position and unilateralism when it views its sovereign rights as not being respected. Tashkent has shown little interest for multilateralism, instead giving priority to pursuing bilateral relations. Kazakhstan has aimed at being a defender of regionalism above all, and of multilateralism to a lesser extent. Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, pursued the multilateralism very early on, as symbolised by its accession to membership of the World Trade Organisation in 1998. Tajikistan pursues and combines various strategies in accordance with the domain and the actors involved.

**The European Union (EU)** adopted the Strategy for Central Asia in 2007. The document was reviewed for the fourth time in 2015. The assessment concluded that the Strategy remains valid and that the European Union remains committed to its strategic objectives in Central Asia and as elaborated by the Central Asia strategy, with due regard to evolving conditions and building on the achievements of the last eight years. Since the adoption of the Strategy, the EU has successfully established several institutionalised mechanisms for strengthening relations and working with Central Asian governments, including an increased presence on the ground. Despite this, the EU's engagement in Central Asia is one of limited to no impact. The region has become more unstable; forecast gas deliveries from the region to Europe have so far not

<sup>172</sup> materialised; trade is minimal with the exception of EU-Kazakhstan links. While some global and regional actors have laid out a broad policy vision for Central Asia ('New Silk Road' by the United States (US), 'Silk Road Economic Belt' by China) – the EU focused on the strategy of 2007, which outlined priorities ranging from democracy promotion to education and from security

to energy and trade interests. The EU's Central Asia Strategy is more than a policy expression in which just a few objectives are outlined, but less than an extensive and detailed strategy that would ideally be accompanied by an action plan and measurable benchmarks. The EU, despite the Strategy and its pledge of over one billion euro to the region, finds itself in an often seemingly powerless position to influence events in the region. In this sense the priority for the EU could be to focus on a few areas where it could have a meaningful impact - bilateral partnerships and increased links with civil societies; strengthening the defence of human rights; modest security co-operation and conflict prevention projects; and a more simplified and effective development policy with a heavy emphasis on education.

**NATO** continues to deepen cooperation with its partner countries in Central Asia - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It is part of NATO's policy to reach out to strategically important regions whose security and stability are closely linked to wider Euro-Atlantic security. Each of the five countries has the potential to positively impact the future development of Afghanistan, where the Alliance remains deeply engaged. NATO's new Strategic Concept, adopted at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, states that the promotion of Euro-Atlantic security is best assured through a wide network of partner relationships with countries and organizations around the globe. NATO's partnership structures and co-operation programmes offer a multilateral framework for security dialogue and opportunities for practical bilateral cooperation in a wide range of areas with NATO member states and other partner countries. This promotes transparency, builds confidence and helps address shared security challenges. All five Central Asian countries were early participants in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. This body was later replaced by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997. Four out of the five countries quickly took advantage of the opportunities offered by the Partnership for Peace, joining this major programme of practical bilateral cooperation shortly after its launch in 1994 (Tajikistan joined later, in 2002). At the Istanbul Summit of 2004, Allied leaders decided to make partnership with Central Asia a priority for the Alliance. Each Central Asian country's relations with NATO have evolved differently, as individual partners are free to choose how and in which areas they wish to cooperate with NATO. Aside from cooperating with the Alliance, several of the Central Asian partners also participate in other regional security organizations. NATO sees no contradiction between their cooperation with the Alliance and their desire to build strong relations with other organizations.

The **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** is the only pan-European security organization that granted membership to the five newly independent states of Central Asia following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The OSCE has embraced a re-emerging geopolitical area constituting a bridge between Europe and the Far East, but also between the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. The admission of the countries of the region brought considerable new challenges that have posed challenges for OSCE. The five states are characterized by specific cultural and geographical features, which had been de-emphasised during the Russian empire and Soviet Union for more than a century and had faded from western awareness. Integration into the OSCE forced new consideration of the aims of a henceforth Eurasian as well as Euro-Atlantic organization towards political entities confronted with specific challenges. In addition, the OSCE immediately had to face the conflict in Tajikistan. Ethnic tensions, nationalism, absence of democratic experience, generalised corruption, and lack of civil society, economic collapse, growing social disparities, and growth of religious radicalism, development of organised crime, environmental catastrophes, and all these factors feed a genuine threat of worst-case scenarios in the region. Therefore, the role of the OSCE as a stabilising entity for countries experiencing nation- and state-building processes was of special importance in the area. Over the years, the OSCE has been equipped with five field presences in all five Central Asian states. It has also developed an individual approach to the activity of each of its missions on the ground. For many years, the OSCE has tried to embrace a regional perspective towards its role in Central Asia. To some extent, this has materialised in the establishment and functioning of two regional flagship projects – the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and the OSCE Border Staff College in Dushanbe. These two institutions have also become an efficient link between the Central Asian region and their partner states in Europe. However, the necessity to expand the OSCE role as a facilitator of regional co-operation in Central Asia has an undeveloped potential.

The **Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)** is a regional mutual defence alliance that consists of seven member states: Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Originally formed in 1992 under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Collective Security Treaty (CST), the purpose of the CSTO is to promote peace, strengthen international and regional security and stability, and ensure the collective defence of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the member states. Led by the Russian Federation, the CSTO has a Collective Security Council, a Council of Defence Ministers, a Council of Foreign Ministers, a Secretariat, and a small rapid deployment force consisting of

4,000 troops. Since its inception, alliance building within the CSTO has progressed at a glacial rate often running into road blocks as a result of diverging national interests among member states. While none of the Collective Security Treaty Organization's forces are permanently deployed, each member nation has designated specific units within their militaries to stand on call for deployments. CSTO forces are largely stationed in Central Asian bases but answerable to a Moscow-based command structure. There are two key combat forces organized by the CSTO: the Central Asian Regional Collective Rapid Deployment Force (KSBR- TSAR) and the Collective Fast Deployment Force (KSOR). Of the three Central Asian states that share borders with Afghanistan, only Tajikistan is a member of the CSTO. Uzbekistan withdrew from the group in 2012. Russia maintains three military installations in Tajikistan — near Kulob, Qurghonteppa and Dushanbe, all part of the 201st Motor Rifle Division.

The **Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO)** in the recent years focused on economic co-operation as a main goal. At the last Ufa summit in Russia, in July 2015, member states adopted the SCO Development Strategy, which included bolstering finance, investment, and trade cooperation as a priority over the next ten years. Beijing has pushed the organization to focus on economic cooperation with proposals like launching a development fund and a free-trade zone. In the past, many of these initiatives were met with scepticism. However, Central Asian member states, in need of infrastructure and energy investment, have been responsive to these overtures, despite Russian sensitivities to China's expanding influence in former Soviet satellites. Several SCO member states - notably Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan - possess some of the world's largest reserves of oil and natural gas, driving interest in expanded energy cooperation among members. China is looking to tap energy resources for its growing demand and while Kazakhstan and Russia are dominant energy exporters, Uzbekistan increasingly needs its energy resources for domestic development and consumption, and the economies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan remain weak. Members prefer to keep national control over their production, supply, and consumption mechanisms and agreements. Still, regional energy cooperation occurs outside of SCO auspices.

The **Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States** was established in 2009 as an international intergovernmental organization, with the overarching aim of promoting comprehensive cooperation among Turkic Speaking States. Its four founding member States are Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey. According to the two main Turkic Council documents, the Nakhcivan Agreement of 3 October 2009 and the Istanbul Declaration of 16

September 2010, member States of the Council embrace the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, along with other universally recognized principles of international law. Established norms related to the maintenance of peace, security and development of good-neighbourly relations lay the foundation for cooperation to be promoted. Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States is based on the particular solidarity stemming from the unity of common history, culture, identity and language of Turkic speaking peoples. The main objectives of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States is to promote and deepen comprehensive cooperation among Turkic Speaking States, to preserve historical ties of friendship and brotherhood among them, to protect cultural riches of Turkic speaking peoples and to bring them closer to each other, as well as to make joint contributions to peace and stability in Eurasia.

The **Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation, (CAREC) Program** is a partnership of 10 countries (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, People's Republic of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), supported by 6 multilateral institutions, working together to promote development through cooperation, leading to accelerated growth and poverty reduction. The Program's long-term vision is Good Neighbours, Good Partners, and Good Prospects. With the rapid economic expansion of the People's Republic of China and Japan to the east, the Russian Federation to the north, and India and Pakistan to the south, there is unprecedented opportunity for CAREC countries to emerge as a centre of trade and commerce, achieve higher levels of economic growth, and reduce poverty. CAREC helps Central Asia and its neighbours realize their significant potential by promoting regional cooperation in four priority areas: transport, trade facilitation, and energy and trade policy.

Central Asian countries as well as China, Iran, Pakistan, and the Caucasian republics - Georgia and Azerbaijan are involved in the process of organization and harmonization of the transport arteries and communications connecting Europe and Asia, the West and the East. Famous **Transport Corridor Europe–Caucasus–Asia** (TRACECA) has received serious support from the European Union in an effort to rebuilding sea, road and railway links. From the point of view of the regions of Europe, South Asia and North-East Asia, Central Asia is a crucial linkage area of inter-regional contact, which can either result in division and conflict, as in the Cold war and the hot conflict in Afghanistan, or in a new series of connections which allow more positive relationships.

## Session 5: Prospects for closer co-operation between Central Asian states in the light of growing external factor affecting the region

During the session, the participants explored the current stage of the inter-state relation in the Central Asian region and the avenues for bringing the existing co-operation potential into practical and mutually beneficial projects.

There was a general consensus that the countries of the Central Asian region need to co-operate to ensure their security, sustainable development and that broad economic gains would be won from increased trade and mutual investments. There was an understanding that the countries of the region should make further efforts to make the Central Asian market a cohesive and viable economic unit. Interest in diversifying the manufacturing industries and making a more attractive business and investment climate fosters a revival of interest in regional cooperation. It would be naïve to hope for a rapid improvement in the current state of affairs as it will take time for the countries to assess the costs and benefits of regional economic co-operation. However, the desire of a growing part of the population to take advantage of what they see as the benefits of developmental integration will be a key driver of regional integration: grassroots dynamics are already underway and will, eventually, impact the policy-making process. In this sense, regionalism in Central Asia is likely to be driven from the ground up rather than the other way round. Only private sector initiatives and the understanding of competitive factors or synergy of resources, technology, and factors of production may allow the region to achieve the desired level of modernization that the countries ultimately seek, and to fight poverty and other social issues like unemployment, outward migration, and potential radicalism.

It must be underlined that the formal instruments to enhance co-operation among the countries in the region have been generated since their independence. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have signed "Treaties of Eternal Friendship". However, taking the sometimes five very cumbersome relations between individual Central Asian countries into consideration, one wonders what the aim of such treaties should be. Besides, the Central Asian states interact in various regional mechanisms that have been established not only to formalise the need to co-operate but also to address specific regional problems. One could mention Conference on Interaction and Co-operation in Central Asia and Central Asian Co-operation Organization but with the remark that these mechanisms did not provide for genuine

interaction opportunities and remained in the area of formality and without real outcomes. The main thing clearly underlined was that it would be impossible for any country in the region to attain progress in building up an economy based on the principles of sustainable development and address security challenges without engaging in an efficient regional co-operation.

It was emphasised that it is obvious that more political will is needed to focus the co-operation efforts on solving the still existing ruptures in approaches to deal with problematic issues in such areas as border security, water and energy nexus, migration, trade. It is to be realised that security and economic development cannot be promoted at the expenses of neighbours. A special attention is to be paid to experiences in other geographical areas. For instance, the EU integrationist mechanism proved to be a sustainable one. Its experience could be replicated in at least some areas of co-operation among the states in the region. Elimination of trade barriers, simplification of border crossing procedures could bring significant benefits to the development in various areas in Central Asian countries.

The situation in Afghanistan, for instance, represents both a challenge and an opportunity to enhance co-operation of Central Asian states. Various initiatives in different areas offer ways to assist the neighbouring Afghanistan and expand intrastate co-operation of Central Asian region. The international actors invest a lot to connect Central Asia to Afghan initiatives. There is no alternative to co-operation in order to promote progress and development in the region. Central Asia is a distinct part of the world community and is a place where all global actors – bilateral and multilateral, could demonstrate the beneficial character of promoting regional co-operation for a sustainable development path for the countries of the region.

## Annex 1: Agenda of the Seminar

### Day 1

14.00 – 14.20 **Opening**

*Opening remarks by Mr. Alexander Avanessov, UN Resident Coordinator, Kyrgyzstan*

*Opening remarks by Ms. Mira Karybayeva, Head of Department of ethnic, religious policies and interaction with civil society, Presidential Administration of Kyrgyz Republic*

*Opening remarks by Ambassador Sergey Kapinos, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Centre in Bishkek*

*Opening remarks by Mr. Armands Pupols, Political Affairs Officer, UNRCCA*

14.20 – 16.00 **Session 1: The rise of the Islamic State (ISIL) and other extremist groups as a threat to stability in Central Asia**

*Moderator: Mr. Alexander Avanessov, UN Resident Coordinator, Kyrgyzstan*

*Keynote speakers: Mr. Nurlan Aitmurzayev, Rector, Diplomatic Academy of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kyrgyzstan*

*Mr. Kayhan Barzegar, Director, Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies in Tehran (IMESS), Iran*

*Mr. Farhad Mamedov, Director, Centre for Strategic Studies under the President of Azerbaijan*

*Rapporteurs: Ms. Monica Kalandia, Associate Political Affairs Officer, Department of Political Affairs, UN Secretariat*

16.00 – 16.20 **Coffee-break**

16.20 – 17.30 **Session 1: The rise of the Islamic State (ISIL) and other extremist groups as a threat to stability in Central Asia (continuation)**

*Moderator:* *Mr. Nurlan Aitmurzayev, Rector, Diplomatic Academy of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kyrgyzstan*

*Keynote speakers:* *Ms. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, Professor, Paris Institute of Political Studies, France*

*Mr. Huseyn Huseynov, Deputy Head, Department of Analysis and Strategic Studies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Azerbaijan*

*Mr. Vyacheslav Musikhin, Adviser, Secretariat of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*

*Rapporteurs:* *Mr. Nodir Khudayberganov, National Program Officer, UNRCCA, Uzbekistan*

## **Day 2**

09.00 – 10.30 **Session 2: Impact of the developments in Ukraine on the Central Asian region**

*Moderator:* *Ms. Zhanargul Kusmangalieva, Director, Institute of Eurasian integration, Kazakhstan*

*Keynote speakers:* *Mr. Mukhit-Ardager Sydyknazarov, Director, Institute of Modern Studies of Kazakhstan*

*Rapporteurs:* *Ms. Bakhit Abdildina, National Program Officer, UNRCCA, Kazakhstan*

10.30 – 10.50 Coffee-break

10.50 – 13.00 **Session 3: Strategies of key partner-states in Central Asia**

*Moderator:* *Mr. Saifullo Safarov, First Deputy Director, Centre for Strategic Research under the President of Tajikistan*

*Keynote speakers:* *Mr. Artyom Dankov, Associated Professor, Tomsk State University, Russia*

*Ms. Han Lu, Assistant Research Fellow, China Institute of International Studies*

*Mr. James Creighton, Distinguished Fellow, the East West Institute, USA*

*Rapporteurs:* *Mr. Nodir Khudayberganov, National Program Officer, UNRCCA, Uzbekistan*

13.00 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 15.30	<b>Session 4: The role of regional organizations in the context of external factors affecting Central Asia</b>
<i>Moderator:</i>	<i>Mr. Lilian Darii, Director General for Multilateral Co-operation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Moldova</i>
<i>Keynote speakers:</i>	<i>Mr. Ali Resul Usul, Chairman, Centre for Strategic Research, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey</i>
	<i>Mr. Askar Yerkinov, Expert, Executive Committee of Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</i>
	<i>Mr. Almaz Imangaziyev, Deputy Director, Department of Integration Union, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kyrgyzstan</i>
	<i>Mr. Artem Aznaurian, Political Officer, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Centre in Bishkek</i>
	<i>Mr. Vyacheslav Musikhin, Adviser, Secretariat of the Collective Security Treaty Organization</i>
<i>Rapporteurs:</i>	<i>Ms. Bakhit Abdildina, National Program Officer, UNRCCA, Kazakhstan</i>
15.30 – 15.50	Coffee-break
15.50 – 17.10	<b>Session 5: Prospects for closer cooperation between Central Asian states in the light of growing external factor affecting the region</b>
<i>Moderator:</i>	<i>Ms. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, Professor, Paris Institute of Political Studies, France</i>
<i>Keynote speakers:</i>	<i>Ms. Zhanargul Kusmangalieva, Director, Institute of Eurasian integration, Kazakhstan</i>
	<i>Mr. Saifullo Safarov, First Deputy Director, Centre for Strategic Research under the President of Tajikistan</i>
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17.10 – 17.30	<b>Concluding Remarks</b>

## Notes

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# About UNRCCA

The United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) is a special political mission of the United Nations Organization established in 2007 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, upon the initiative of the five Central Asian states. UNRCCA assists the government of the Central Asian countries to identify and address existing and potential threats to peace and security, including international terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking, organized crime and environmental degradation.

UNRCCA's mandate is specified in triennial Programmes of Action designed in consultations with the Governments of Central Asian states. The current Programme of Action for 2015-2017 focuses on four key priority areas, identified as:

- (1) transnational threats and challenges;
- (2) management of common natural resources;
- (3) domestic factors affecting regional stability;
- (4) building national/regional conflict prevention capacities.

The Centre plays a central role in preventive diplomacy efforts in Central Asia and in developing common initiatives to address regional challenges to peace and security.

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