



DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT



**THE IMPACT
OF THE 2014
ISAF FORCES'
WITHDRAWAL
FROM AFGHANISTAN
ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN
REGION**

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2014





DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION

DIRECTORATE B

POLICY DEPARTMENT

STUDY

**THE IMPACT OF THE 2014 ISAF FORCES' WITHDRAWAL
FROM AFGHANISTAN
ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION**

Abstract

As the 2014 NATO drawdown from Afghanistan approaches, the international community increasingly looks towards the impact that a stable or unstable Afghanistan might have on the broader region, including Central Asia. Emphasis is often placed on the threat of radical Islamism and Afghan extremists that could destabilise Central Asia. More realistically though, the risk of spillover stems from a potential collapse of the Afghan security forces, refugee flows or instability in Tajikistan. However, the principal security threats to the Central Asian region stand largely separate from Afghanistan's future. The main security challenges for the region lie in authoritarian governance, deeply-embedded state corruption, often connected to drug trade, and tensions over water and energy resources. This poses challenges to the European Union's (EU) policies towards Central Asia. Increased attention and possibly a revision of EU policy to Central Asia are needed, in particular in the fields of the broader security dialogue; practical Security Sector Reform (SSR), including border control programmes; increased national-oriented attention to water-energy-related matters; support for democracy and human rights; and EU development aid.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the 2014 NATO/ISAF drawdown from Afghanistan approaches, the international community increasingly looks towards the link between Afghanistan and Central Asia, and most importantly, the impact that a stable or unstable Afghanistan might have on the broader region and *vice versa*. The challenges for the region itself and for external actors are manifold and can be assessed at three different levels.

I. Security and stability in Central Asia

The main security threats to Central Asia are neither externally driven through Afghanistan, nor do they consist of potential inter-state military conflicts. Threats to the region's stability lie foremost in deeply-embedded state corruption and links to drug-trafficking, which affects the region's governance. Central Asian countries' national security agencies also play a negative role in the region's security, mainly due to their corrupt and rent-seeking nature and their fixation on regime security instead of on state and community security. At the same time, these agencies and the 'power ministries' remain unprepared for any potential (political) crisis or (natural) disaster. Regimes' insecurity and their obsession with remaining in power, combined with a lack of democratic development or respect for human rights, also constitute a direct stability threat. In addition, regimes' oppressive tactics, under the banner of the fight against terrorism and radical Islamism, risk aggravating these threats. Islamism in general seems to be on the rise, but so far the vast majority of the population has adhered to moderate forms of Islam; continued repression of this trend could foment the appearance of more radical groups.

Although all five Central Asian states are non-democratic, as well as susceptible to fragility and instability, they present distinct characteristics and stand at different levels of development. Kazakhstan is the most stable, and has assumed a regional leadership role due to its impressive economic growth and international position. Kyrgyzstan, which experienced ethnic violence in 2010 and subsequent regime change, is the most open and presents the biggest chances of democratic procedures taking root over the coming decade. Nonetheless, its future remains extremely fragile, not least due to the country's limited economic resources. Almost all of the region's security challenges seem to converge in Tajikistan, which is poor and under-developed, shares a long border with Afghanistan, serves as a key drug transit route, and is ill-run by an elite that mismanages the very few assets it possesses. Turkmenistan remains largely isolated internationally and from the rest of the region, presenting a mix of autocratic rule and one-sided infrastructural development centred on the country's enormous gas reserves. Uzbekistan is the region's linchpin, having a substantially larger population compared to its neighbours, while remaining adverse to democratic development, human rights and most international cooperation initiatives.

II. The relationship between Central Asia and Afghanistan and the risk of spillover

Central Asian regimes put emphasis, above all, on the threat of radical Islamism and extremists coming from Afghanistan that could destabilise the region. This narrative contributes greatly to diverting attention from their own security problems and is used to justify harsh authoritarian secular rule. Regimes also seek support from the West beyond 2014, as they fear that US and European attention might fade away after the NATO/ISAF withdrawal. There are, however, some real potential spillovers. These include foremost the potential negative impact of a possible collapse of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) or substantial flows of refugees from Afghanistan to its northern neighbours, in addition to the risk of increasing destabilisation in Tajikistan resulting from intra-Tajik interaction on both sides of the border.

The borders between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and especially Tajikistan will remain a source of concern for Central Asia and the international community. The drug flow from Afghanistan through Central Asia *en route* to Russia and Europe is likely to remain a serious problem. Donor support in this area remains problematic, as the focus continues to be placed on borders only, without addressing the broader problems that begin at production and end at consumption. The Central Asian elites, whilst continuously stressing the ties between radical Islamist groups and the drug trade, are actually the largest stakeholders in the drug business. On the other hand, Afghanistan could present a new opportunity for its Central Asian neighbours, if its economy is integrated into the broader region, in particular in terms of energy delivery to the country.

III. The broader regional environment and tensions over water resources

The water-energy nexus is probably the most tenacious issue in Central Asia today. A profitable trade-off between gas and oil-rich Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on the one hand, and water-rich Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on the other hand, has never developed. The most acute matter is Tajikistan's plan to build the Rogun dam, which would be the highest in the world and would give the impoverished state increased control over water resources and allow it to generate electricity. The plan is fiercely opposed by Uzbekistan that fears dependence on water flows, which it desperately needs for cotton cultivation. While Afghanistan has not been part of the Central Asian water debacle, it is enmeshed in the region's water distribution. A more economically-developed Afghanistan would thus also have its bearing on the already-tense water-energy nexus in Central Asia. Support for regional water management initiatives is important, but come often too early in a region adverse to cooperation. Right now, what is most needed are national-oriented approaches that can deal with water management, obsolete infrastructure, education and corruption. Here lies the real challenge, not necessarily in a shortage of water resources as such.

Several actors play an important role in the broader region, most notably China, Russia, Pakistan and Iran. China is the main economic driver in the broader region; Russia, remains a *primus inter pares* external actor in Central Asia; Pakistan is the most important actor concerning Afghanistan's future; meanwhile, Iran's bearing on Afghanistan is likely to rise, but not so much on Central Asia. Other regional actors, such as Turkey and India that play rather smaller roles in the broader region's politics, economics and culture are slightly less essential for the future of Afghanistan or Central Asia.

This regional environment poses political, economic, security and development questions for any external actor that seeks to engage with Central Asia and Afghanistan, including the European Union (EU). The 2007 EU Strategy for Central Asia was largely built on security, energy and development interests. Over the past six years, the EU, as a newcomer to the region, has sought to build political ties and establish cooperation mechanisms, both bilaterally and regionally. So far, however, results have been limited due to Europe's narrow interests in Central Asia and the few political and financial resources it is willing to invest, as well as the difficulties in working with authoritarian regimes that often prefer direct benefits to long-term cooperation.

The EU Strategy for Central Asia and the EU's policy towards Afghanistan have been developed separately and so far have been implemented without much coordination or integration. The 2012 review of the EU's approach to Central Asia considered increasingly connecting both policy strands, although almost no concrete options were put forward. It will be difficult for the EU to establish positive links between its approach to Central Asia and that to Afghanistan, largely due to two main factors. First, because Central Asian governments have shown no real inclination towards working with Europe on concrete joint projects that include Afghanistan. Second, because the EU's leverage and own interests

in the region are curtailed. Nonetheless, the EU should consider six issues in particular (most, but not all, relating to Afghanistan) when improving its Central Asia strategy over the short and medium terms:

- do not follow the spillover narrative when urging high-level engagement on Central Asia's security challenges;
- do not give up on democratisation and respect for human rights standards when coordinating rule of law support;
- re-think development aid and make hard choices on which areas to seek impact;
- revise border support programmes and address the broader security sector;
- focus increasingly at a bilateral level on the water-energy nexus in Central Asia while keeping regional fora open;
- initiate an early review of the EU Strategy for Central Asia in 2015.

Unlike external actors like Russia and China, but also the United States, which have geopolitical interests in the region, Europe seeks, in the first place, to improve the well-being of Central Asian societies and build long-term partnerships. Therefore, Europe must adapt its strategy to acknowledge that Central Asia's greatest challenges are governance-related. Linking Afghanistan and Central Asia in European policies and activities will be difficult, as long as there is no political will to build integrated cooperation mechanisms and local actors prefer to remain on the margins. It is in the EU's interest realistically to assess the post-2014 challenges and look for ways to promote constructive relations between the Central Asian countries and Afghanistan, while at the same time providing targeted development assistance.

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This paper was commissioned by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, together with its Delegations for Relations with Afghanistan and with Central Asia. The paper was presented at the high-level conference 'Afghanistan and Central Asia: Prospects and Challenges after Withdrawal of NATO/ISAF Forces', held on 18 December 2013 at the European Parliament in Brussels.

This report looks at the potential impact of the 2014 NATO/ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan on Central Asia. It assesses three levels of regional security and relationships: security and stability in Central Asia as a region; the relationship between Central Asia and Afghanistan, including possible spillovers; and the broader regional environment, including tensions over water and energy resources, as well as the policies followed by influential actors, foremost China, Russia, Pakistan and Iran. Lastly, the report offers specific recommendations for the European Union on how to strengthen its Central Asia strategy, as well as on what can be done to forge positive links between Afghanistan and Central Asia in a post-2014 environment.

This report is the result of a team effort by three researchers who are closely involved in FRIDE's EU-Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM) programme. Through EUCAM, as well as other initiatives such as the Central Asia Programme (CAP) of the George Washington University, the authors have travelled regularly to Central Asia and have carried out in-depth research and analyses on Central Asian political, economic and societal developments and international policies towards the region, in particular those of the EU and its member states. In this sense, this report builds on the knowledge acquired through interviews, meetings and conferences over the last five years in Central Asia, Brussels and Washington, as well as on information gathered through extensive desk research.

2. ASSESSING SECURITY AND STABILITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

2.1 Categories of instability

Conventional security is not a key factor of instability in Central Asia, despite the region being located in a sensitive geopolitical environment. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan share borders with Afghanistan and could be affected by spillovers, in particular in the face of the uncertain post-2014 scenario. For its part, Turkmenistan also shares a border with Iran, with whom it maintains cordial relations despite fears of retaliation in case of a US and/or Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear sites. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan border the Chinese province of Xinjiang, and host a Uyghur diaspora of around 300 000 people, some of whom are likely to support violent actions in Xinjiang in a bid to gain autonomy or independence from China. Even if Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian country that borders Russia directly, Moscow enjoys significant influence over the entire region, in particular at a military level. Despite becoming independent after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian republics are still dependent on the Kremlin's security analyses and foreign policy towards the region (¹).

Despite this fragile environment, there are no direct conventional threats: Russia, Iran, and Afghanistan have not challenged the old Soviet borders and China has signed territorial demarcation treaties with its three Central Asian neighbours. Central Asia's internal borders are more sensitive: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have failed to agree on a division of their contested territories and border incidents are commonplace. This could result in increased tensions and violence, both between citizens of different countries and between citizens and border guards. At the same time, Uzbek President Islam Karimov has threatened on several occasions to send troops in the event of a perceived threat to his country's water security in light of Tajikistan's hydropower projects, but so far, it has not gone past rhetoric.

Of greater concern are the non-conventional insecurity factors, which are more numerous and urgent. These can be divided into four major categories:

2.1.1 Drug-trafficking

Drug-trafficking, emanating mainly from the export of opiate products from Afghanistan to Russia, Europe, and China, constitutes one of the main threats to long-term stability in Central Asia. In addition to a significant increase in drug consumption among the Central Asian population, with its associated problems of HIV/Aids and other issues, drug-trafficking has also been the main driver of state corruption. It has led to a massive criminalisation of security organs (police, border-guards, customs officers, and intelligence agencies).

The official narrative of the Central Asian governments, often echoed by international donors involved in the fight against drugs, is that terrorism and narcotics are intrinsically linked. This assumption has been legitimised by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan's (IMU) well-documented involvement in drug-trafficking during its incursions into Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the summers of 1999 and 2000 (²).

In several cases, especially in Afghanistan, drug-trafficking has become more an *official* activity than– an *insurgent* one. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in 2009 Afghan traffickers – often linked to state structures – made an estimated USD 2.2 billion in profits, while

¹ A. Cooley and M. Laruelle, 'The Changing Logic of Russian Strategy in Central Asia: from privileged sphere to divide and rule?', *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* 261, Washington, D.C.: Ponars, July 2013.

² S. E. Cornell, 'Narcotics, Radicalism and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17/4 (2005): 577–97.

insurgent groups made USD 155 million ⁽³⁾. A similar profit-sharing proportion exists in Central Asia, where drug trade can be divided into three different types, represented by the colours green, black, and red.

- i. 'Green' refers to trafficking by clandestine Islamist movements to self-finance their operations. Their share of total drug profits is relatively low.
- ii. 'Black' is the trafficking of small quantities by small criminal groups or individuals at high personal risk in order to supply local markets.
- iii. 'Red' refers to the largest share of the drug trade, organised by larger criminal structures with the support of senior officials.

Sometimes the distinction between the black and red types of drug-trafficking is ambiguous. While they might seem to involve similar corrupt methods by law enforcement agencies, border guards in particular, two clear differences can be observed. First, black trafficking involves far more limited quantities than the red one. Second, black trafficking presupposes corruption at the lower echelons of the administrative chain and depends on the clandestine transportation of drugs. Red trafficking, on the other hand, is based on a well-structured pyramidal hierarchy that guarantees not only transportation but also distribution ⁽⁴⁾.

Central Asian national drug-enforcement agencies, which tend to act only when confronted with international pressure, target only black and green trafficking, leaving the red type rather untouched. On the rare occasions that red trafficking is targeted, it is typically attributed to a settling of scores among elites to get rid of political or commercial rivals.

By accepting the terrorism-drug-trafficking narrative of Central Asian governments, external actors indirectly contribute to legitimising rent-seeking strategies and repressive domestic policies, in particular against Islamist movements.

2.1.2 Inefficient security services

The inefficiency of Central Asia's security services and law enforcement agencies is another non-conventional threat, at three levels:

First, endemic corruption, scarce human resources, low-level technological capabilities, and badly-coordinated decision-making chains have made the security services largely inefficient. The police is the most flagrant example: instead of ensuring citizen security, it often extorts and threatens the population ⁽⁵⁾. Central Asian armies are also in need of in-depth reforms. Possibly with the exception of Kazakhstan's and Uzbekistan's, Central Asian armed forces are weak and mostly made up of Soviet-era officers and ill-trained and impoverished conscripts ⁽⁶⁾. The same applies to border guards and emergency services personnel, including fire brigades. The intelligence and security services, which are the backbone of the regimes, are better trained and have more means, although they remain relatively weak and are largely unprepared.

³ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, Vienna: UNODC, 2011, p. 83.

⁴ More in S. Peyrouse, 'The Fight against Drug Trafficking: mechanisms of regional cooperation and their Limits', in A. Snetkov and S. Aris (eds.), *The Regional Dimensions to Security: other sides of Afghanistan*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

⁵ E. Marat, 'Kyrgyzstan's Fragmented Police and Armed Forces', *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* 11 (2011).

⁶ S. Peyrouse, 'The Central Asian Armies Facing the Challenge of Formation', *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* 11 (2010): 2-16.

Central Asian authorities' interest in internationally-supported Security Sector Reform (SSR) is solely aimed at modernising their technical capabilities, not at improving their human capital or their decision-making chains (⁷). The notion of SSR, which implies that security is indivisible, is problematic insofar as it raises issues that run contrary to the authorities' political agendas, as civil society involvement, democratic oversight, and transparency are seen as a direct threat to the regimes' survival and grip on power. Kazakhstan, however, has shown some willingness to reform the army and, to a certain extent, other security organs, as the Kazakh authorities are more sensitive to the idea of improving the legitimacy of state organs and their functionality. However, Astana has been less receptive towards improving transparency or accountable civilian oversight. As for Kyrgyzstan, and to a much lesser degree Tajikistan, some police reform has been implemented, but under pressure from the international community, not on the regimes' initiative; they reflect neither political will nor societal awareness. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are fully adverse to any outside involvement and support for their security sectors beyond the acquisition of military equipment and some training.

Second, some sectors of Central Asia's security services constitute a direct threat to the population. All bodies in charge of regime security – the national guard, the presidential guard, interior ministry troops, and high-level intelligence agencies – have received privileged attention from the authorities and protect the presidential families, their cronies, and their assets. The Andijan tragedy in Uzbekistan in 2005, the ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010, the violent suppression of riots in western Kazakhstan in December 2011, and the armed showdown in southeast Tajikistan in 2012 were all characterised by aggressive responses from the authorities, resulting in many deaths and wounded civilians. Those responsible have not been prosecuted, and law enforcement agencies remain in place to protect Central Asian leaderships from protests or divergent views.

Third, despite the existence of ministries of emergency situations, Central Asian authorities work in a fundamentally reactive and ill-prepared manner in relation to disaster preparedness (⁸). All Central Asian countries are prone, to various degrees, to natural catastrophes, mainly earthquakes, landslides and floods, and suffer from high pollution due to an obsolete Soviet industrial legacy. Situated on the south-north and east-west passageways, the region is also susceptible to the outbreak of food and disease pandemics from other parts of Asia, and flows of political and environmental refugees from Afghanistan, Iran, and China. With the exception of Kazakhstan, which has committed to major long-term efforts in its '2030 Strategic plan for the environment and natural resources', the other Central Asian states broadly rely on international cooperation to improve their disaster response and prevention capabilities, in terms of both the human and technical capital required.

2.1.3 The nature of the political regimes

All Central Asian regimes can be defined as 'façade democracies'. They all hold elections, have several political parties, sitting parliaments, etc. But they all fall short of democratic practices. All are considered as authoritarian by international and human rights organisations; Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have even been included by Freedom House amongst the nine 'worst of the worst' countries in the world (⁹). Considered as 'partly free', Kyrgyzstan stands out; but although it guarantees more public freedoms, ideological diversity, freedom of the press and of association, it still ranks poorly when it comes to the

⁷ J. Boonstra, E. Marat and V. Axyonova, 'Security Sector Reform in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. What role for Europe?', *EUCAM Working Paper 14*, Madrid and Brussels: FRIDE-EUCAM, May 2013, p.19, available at: http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx_icticontent/EUCAM-WP14-SSR-EN.pdf

⁸ J. Linn, *Managing Compound Risks in Central Asia: a regional overview*, Washington, D.C.: Emerging Markets Forum and The Brookings Institution, June 2011.

⁹ Freedom House, 'Worst of the Worst 2012: the world's most repressive societies', Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2012, available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/special-reports/worst-worst-2012-worlds-most-repressive-societies>

justice system, state violence, corruption, inefficient public services, and so on ⁽¹⁰⁾. The Kazakh and Uzbek presidents – who are by now well in their seventies – have been in power for two decades and refuse to nominate successors, whereas in Tajikistan the president seems to be aiming either at establishing a presidency for life or some sort of ‘republican dynasty’ (as in Azerbaijan) that would enable him to hand power to his son.

Central Asian presidents hold political (head of the executive and of the armies), symbolic (personality cult of the ‘father of the nation’), and economic functions (control of all profitable sectors). Family members hold key political (government, security councils, army and intelligence), economic (state-run and private consortiums and main firms), and administrative (Customs Committee, tax agency, nomination of cadres) positions. The entire administrative apparatus functions through co-optation, position selling/buying and clientelism based on family or regional bonds, personal allegiance, or financial support ⁽¹¹⁾.

A democratisation process, possibly supported by external donors – the EU, US, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) etc. – will be extremely difficult to bring about. First, democracy is seen by Central Asian leaders as a direct threat to their existence. Second, democracy has a bad reputation in Central Asia, often being associated with the post-Soviet chaos of the early 1990s (when democracy was often put in the same basket as ‘robber capitalism’). Third, the regimes have so far managed to get away with ‘façade’ or ‘potemkin’ democracies without any repercussions from international organisations such as the OSCE, for example. Lastly, Central Asian leaderships have become more assertive in arguing that ‘democracy promoters’ use ‘double standards’, pushing for regime change but leaving democracy aside where profits can be made or where security interests override democratic principles ⁽¹²⁾.

Human rights are largely flouted: political opponents are harassed, imprisoned, tortured and sometimes even killed; religious freedom is not respected (in particular for Muslims deemed too radical and proselyte Christian movements); and social rights, such as the right to strike or the existence of free unions, are extremely limited. Human rights advocacy groups often lack popular support: they are seen by the population as ‘foreign agents’ working for personal gain or external interests. However, the new generations – who have a more positive perception of market economy principles and are tired of the post-Soviet ideological consensus incarnated by the ruling presidents and their cronies – might constitute an engine of forthcoming change. Whereas low civic engagement was the accepted norm during the first two decades of independence, institutionalised collective actions – trade unions, chambers of commerce, and farmers associations, among others – are beginning to emerge.

Meanwhile, the Central Asian regimes remain weak and could become prey to intra-elite revolts, or Arab-style popular revolutions ⁽¹³⁾. Regime security, instead of state security and institution-building, has driven public policies for the past two decades, endangering the security of the population and the future development of the Central Asian countries.

¹⁰ More on Freedom House, *Nations in Transit*, ‘Kyrgyzstan’, Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2013, available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2013/kyrgyzstan>

¹¹ M. Laruelle, ‘Discussing Neopatrimonialism and Patronal Presidentialism in the Central Asian Context’, *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 20/4 (2012): 301–24.

¹² J. Boonstra, ‘Democracy in Central Asia: sowing in unfertile fields?’, *EUCAM Policy Brief 23*, Madrid and Brussels: FRIDE-EUCAM, May 2012, p. 3, available at: http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx_icticontent/PB-EUCAM-23.pdf

¹³ B. De Cordier, ‘Can an Arab Uprising Scenario also Happen in Southern Eurasia? A cross-cutting look at Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan’, *Central Asia Research Papers 2*, Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, Elliott School of International Affairs, Central Asia Programme, September 2012.

2.1.4 Islamist insurgencies

The re-Islamisation of Central Asian societies has two main aspects: an apolitical re-traditionalisation, marked above all by more conservative customs and gender segregation; and respect for Islamic rites demanded by the youth from the middle class and some elites as a new cultural fashion. Other rather minor phenomena are also visible. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and to a lesser extent in Tajikistan, some of the younger generations are calling for a kind of 'Islamist-nationalist' regime; globalised networks of believers interact with foreign proselyte groups such as the Tablighi Jama'at from the Indian sub-continent. Moreover, clandestine structures offering community help such as the Hizb ut Tahrir have forged relatively powerful underground networks. Part of the population supports the Islamist narrative on the need for more social justice, and demands more respect of the right to practice Islam freely⁽¹⁴⁾.

Islamist groups advocating the seizure of power through violence or insurgency have been so far rare in Central Asia. They could potentially emerge as cross-border spillovers from Afghanistan, but also from Russia, especially through the North Caucasus. But the risk of Islamist insurgency is mainly home-grown, with some small groups inspired by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and its offshoots, or by jihadist narratives, being active in southern Kyrgyzstan, in the Uzbek part of the Fergana Valley, in the Rasht Valley, in Tajikistan in areas near the Afghan border, and in northern and western Kazakhstan⁽¹⁵⁾. For the time being, however, the national territories remain under the firm grip of the central state, with minor periodic exceptions – the Rasht Valley and the Pamir region in Tajikistan during the summer months.

Re-Islamisation seems to be unavoidable in Central Asia, where Islamic community-based organisations and groupings take over some social functions that the state is either incapable or unwilling to provide. In this sense, the regimes' harsh attitudes towards Islam risk increasing radicalisation in otherwise moderate, non-political Islamist groups.

2.2 National situations and challenges

2.2.1 Tajikistan

Tajikistan is probably the most fragile country in Central Asia. It faces a broad range of security threats, several of which are linked to under-development and poverty. The lack of educational and employment opportunities for the youth could in the future lead to further instability, whether secular or religious in nature. This risk is exacerbated by an authoritarian leadership, with a weak governance capacity and marred by corruption⁽¹⁶⁾. Potential threats from Afghanistan and the drug trade further complicate the situation. Meanwhile, relations with Uzbekistan have deteriorated due to Tajik plans to build the Rogun dam. To some extent, inflows of assistance are largely used to 'muddle through' while waiting for better times after Rogun is built, ensuring cheap electricity and boosting exports⁽¹⁷⁾. Internationally, the country also remains very dependent geopolitically on Russia, while cultural and linguistic ties with Iran provide little leeway.

¹⁴ C. Poujol, 'Islam in post-Soviet Central Asia: democracy versus justice', in I. Morozova (ed.), *Towards Social Stability and Democratic Governance in Central Eurasia*, Amsterdam: IOS Press, NATO Sciences Series, 2005, pp. 50-66.

¹⁵ T.M. Sanderson, D. Kimmage, and D.A. Gordon, 'From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan. The evolving threat of Central Asian jihadists', *CSIS Transnational Threats Project*, Washington, D.C.: CSIS, March 2010.

¹⁶ J. Boonstra and N. Shapovalova, 'Thinking security, doing development? The security-development nexus in European policies towards Tajikistan', *EUCAM Working Paper 12*, Madrid and Brussels: FRIDE-EUCAM, February 2012, p. 5, available at: http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx_ictcontent/EUCAM-WP12-Tajikistan-EN.pdf

Tajikistan's economic prospects are very limited: its agriculture is failing due to both geographical (two-thirds of the country is mountainous) and structural (powerful lobbies control cotton production) reasons. Its energy-guzzling mono-industry of aluminium does not contribute to the state's coffers, as revenues are sent offshore by the elites in office⁽¹⁸⁾. A severe energy shortage affects not only households but also the development of small businesses and the provision of basic services.

Unlike in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan has no active civil society, and there is practically no public space for diversity of opinion. The regime is not as closed as in Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan, but is heading in the same direction: persecution of opponents, media control, prohibition of topics linked with the presidential family, political system patronage, and growing repression of religious expression in the name of the fight against radical Islam. The regime is authoritarian, deeply-corrupt at all levels, and extremely nepotistic. In this context, the sole opposition party, the Islamic Rebirth Party of Tajikistan, itself a legacy of the 1997 peace agreements that followed the end of the civil war, can no longer play a constructive role and is increasingly contested by radical salafist movements⁽¹⁹⁾. Contrary to Uzbekistan, in Tajikistan the decision-making chain is inefficient and decisions are almost never implemented. Local elites and former warlords have retained their regional fiefdoms and their stranglehold over the country's shadow economy, with regular but localised violent clashes with the central authorities⁽²⁰⁾.

The situation is even worse on the social level. Around 70 % of the population is under 30 years of age (35 % are between 14 and 30 years old)⁽²¹⁾. However, there are no strategies in place to turn the country's youth into an asset⁽²²⁾. The educational system is collapsing, with an increasing illiteracy rate and endemic corruption from elementary school all the way to university; the healthcare system is unable to guarantee basic services (vaccination, follow-up care for pregnant women and small children, control of epidemics); and there are no employment prospects. Labour migration has become the main safety valve for society (around 1 million Tajiks work abroad – foremost in Russia – out of a population of 6 million), and remittances account for households' economy, totalling approximately half of the country's GDP – the highest remittances/GDP ratio in the world⁽²³⁾.

Tajikistan's stability is therefore threatened at several levels: centre-regions relations, intra-elite contestation against President Rakhmon's family and his Dangara clan, the direct involvement of elites and the security agencies in the narco-business, and potential popular protests based on social issues, with or without an Islamic colour.

¹⁷ M. Brill Olcott, *Tajikistan's Difficult Development Path*, Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012, p. 7.

¹⁸ J. Heathershaw, 'Tajikistan amidst globalization: state failure or state transformation', *Central Asian Survey* 30/1 (2011): 147–68.

¹⁹ See M. Kabiri, Chairman of the Islamic Rebirth Party of Tajikistan, 'Transcript of Mr. Kabiri's speech and discussion at the Central Asia Programme, George Washington University, 16 October 2012', *Voices from Central Asia* 8, Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, Elliott School of International Affairs, Central Asia Programme, November 2012.

²⁰ J. Heathershaw and S. Roche, 'Islam and Political Violence in Tajikistan. An ethnographic perspective on the causes and consequences of the 2010 armed conflict in the Kamarob Gorge', *Ethnopolitics Papers* 8 (2011).

²¹ National Programme on Social Development of Youth in the Republic of Tajikistan for the period of 2013–15.

²² S. Jaborov, 'Radicalization of Youth in Tajikistan: causes, consequences, and addressing the challenges', *Voices from Central Asia*, Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, Elliott School of International Affairs, Central Asia Programme, forthcoming.

²³ The World Bank, *Migration and Development Brief 20*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank, Migration and Remittances Unit, Development Prospects Group, 19 April 2013, available at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1110315015165/MigrationandDevelopmentBrief20.pdf>

2.2.2 Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan closely follows Tajikistan on the fragility scale, albeit with some hopes in terms of political development. Although Kyrgyzstan is not the 'democratic island' it was in the 1990s, the country does allow an unprecedented level of ideological freedom, which has been strengthened since 2010. The new constitution of 2010 transformed the presidential regime into a parliamentary system, and then-interim President Roza Otunbayeva handed power at the end of 2011 to a new democratically-elected president, Almazbek Atambayev. Political parties have emerged with better-structured ideological fundamentals and more stable electoral bases ⁽²⁴⁾.

However, the shadow economy undermines state structures along the entire decision-making pyramid, and drug barons have connections with high-level politicians and the security services. Economic prospects are also limited. Agriculture is in a dire situation; the mono-industry of gold extraction has so far contributed little to the state's budget; and energy shortages penalise companies and households. However, relations with neighbouring China and Kyrgyz membership of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) since 1998 have provided the country with new sources of revenue. China not only offers opportunities for developing the country's small private textile industry; Kyrgyzstan has also become a platform for the re-export of Chinese products to the whole of Central Asia ⁽²⁵⁾. This unique commercial niche (at the end of 2000, customs revenues exceeded those of gold extraction) has nevertheless been severely affected by the Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan Customs Union and a hardening of bilateral Kazak-Kyrgyz relations.

But it is at the socio-economic level where the biggest challenges lie. Examples are the ethnic violence that erupted between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 ⁽²⁶⁾ and the rise of Kyrgyz ethnic nationalism, demanding that specific rights be given to the majority and that minorities be officially marginalised ⁽²⁷⁾. Massive labour migration (between 500 000 and 800 000 people) is also deeply altering the social fabric, just as is the rural exodus to the country's two largest towns, Bishkek and Osh. In the new suburbs, social tensions have also arisen.

Despite some good will on behalf of Kyrgyz authorities, reform of the administration and public services has so far produced limited results, and international aid is often badly-distributed. The overlap between senior officials and the shadow economy will continue to hamper state efficiency, while society remains riddled with varying social tensions.

2.2.3 Uzbekistan

Historically, Uzbekistan has been Central Asia's demographic and strategic powerhouse. It maintained this role throughout the Soviet period until the 2000s, when it lost its status as a regional bastion to Kazakhstan and the Almaty-Astana axis. But Uzbekistan still broadly decides the entire region's development patterns: any instability in Uzbekistan will have repercussions throughout Central Asia, and the Uzbek armed forces and security services are still the strongest in the region, with the potential to project the country outside national borders. Tashkent's isolationist economic policy and its refusal to

²⁴ E. Marat, 'Kyrgyzstan: a parliamentary system based on inter-elite consensus', *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 20/4 (2012): 325–44.

²⁵ G. Raballand and B. Kaminski, 'Entrepôt for Chinese Consumer Goods in Central Asia: the puzzle of re-exports through Kyrgyz bazaars', *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 50/5 (2009): 581–90.

²⁶ N. Melvin, 'Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: overcoming the causes and legacies of violence', *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series 3*, New York: Open Society Foundations, March 2011, available at: <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/OPS-No-3-20110305.pdf>

²⁷ M. Laruelle, 'The Paradigm of Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan. Evolving narrative, the sovereignty issue, and political agenda', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45/1–2 (2012): 39–49.

foster regional cooperation have harmed all of its neighbours⁽²⁸⁾. Uzbekistan's economy is based on agriculture, which employs half of the population, some transformation industries leftover from the Soviet regime, and some state production, mainly cotton, but also gold and uranium. The country avoided the great socio-economic shocks of the early 1990s, but was unable to implement the necessary economic, financial (non-convertibility of the national currency, for example), and political reforms, resulting in a scarcely-attractive investment climate⁽²⁹⁾.

Uzbekistan's social situation has been in constant deterioration. Inflation and price increases for basic food products have reduced the population's living standards; the rural exodus has accentuated, as an attempt to flee poverty; and labour migration continues to weaken the country's social fabric.

The Uzbek political regime under President Islam Karimov is based on a security narrative that presents secular authoritarianism as the only solution to avoid either Kyrgyz-style 'democratic chaos' or Islamic radicalism. This threat perception is largely shared by the population, enabling the regime to maintain a certain degree of social consensus, even if this consensus has dropped significantly in recent years. Criticism of the presidential family's nepotism and the practices of the elites and the security services have grown, despite the absence of a recognised political opposition and a ferocious rooting out of all dissidence. The justice system is corrupt and unjust, clamping down on any opposition under the banner of the fight against radical Islam.

With an ever younger population, social malaise is likely to increase and pose a serious challenge to the country's stability in the years to come, in the form of street protests or localised riots, for instance in the overpopulated Ferghana Valley, or groups calling for an Islamic state.

2.2.4 Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is Central Asia's economic engine, accounting for two-thirds of the region's GDP. The Kazakh economy is based mainly on the oil industry, but also on revenues from other minerals extraction and an unprecedented boom in the services and banking industries⁽³⁰⁾. The increasingly authoritarian political regime still benefits from broad popular support. President Nazarbayev is considered a wise politician, who managed to avoid the eruption of inter-ethnic conflicts in the early 1990s, or being caught between Russian and Chinese interests. Nazarbayev has promoted his country as a rising power internationally and has successfully attracted foreign investors. Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian country to have implemented a nation-branding strategy abroad, gaining chairmanships of regional organisations and promoting international initiatives related to de-nuclearisation and the 'dialogue of religion'⁽³¹⁾. Its hesitation between the Russian-led Eurasian integration and proper Central Asian integration has so far been eschewed towards the former, but this is increasingly contested⁽³²⁾. Economic pressure, the opportunities coming from China and the fact that Kazakh exports largely go

²⁸ F. Tolipov, 'The Foreign Policy Orientations of Central Asian States: positive and negative diversification', in I. Akihiro (ed.), *Eager Eyes Fixed on Eurasia*, Sapporo: 21st Century COE Programme Slavic Eurasian Studies, 2007, pp. 23-40.

²⁹ R. Pomfret, *The Central Asian Economies since Independence*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

³⁰ More in M. Laruelle and S. Peyrouse, *Globalizing Central Asia. Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2013, pp. 285-305.

³¹ E. Marat, 'Nation Branding in Central Asia: a new campaign to present ideas about the state and the nation', *Europe-Asia Studies* 61/7 (2009): 1123-36.

³² N. Kassenova, 'Kazakhstan and Eurasian Economic Integration: quick start, mixed results and uncertain future', *Russie. NEI. Vision*, 14 November 2012.

towards the EU, the latter also being the main investor in Kazakhstan, contribute to Kazakh scepticism towards fully joining the Eurasian Union ⁽³³⁾.

Despite successfully dealing with post-independence problems, new challenges have piled up due to the slow pace of reform and questionable socio-economic orientations. Presidential succession, a taboo for a long time, is today a topic of general concern, as it could create intra-elite tensions if the redistribution of wealth and the clientelist logic were challenged. While the country has managed to implement administrative reforms to facilitate international investments, the existing patronal mechanisms prevent any effective fight against endemic corruption, which paralyses or distorts the decision-making chain ⁽³⁴⁾.

At the social level, improvements in living standards during the 2000s have led to the emergence of a middle class that has supported the regime in exchange for the fulfilment of presidential promises to attain the living standards of Central European countries. Any economic collapse would have immediate political repercussions, as consensus between the elites and society is based on material well-being. Moreover, improvements in living standards have been very unequal across different social classes and regions, creating a feeling of social injustice. The rural milieus are the most neglected, with harsh living conditions and limited access to public services (health, education, transportation, and energy). Some sparsely populated regions are also marginalised, such as the Mangystau Peninsula. Meanwhile, flagrant economic disparities between the elites who benefit from the oil industry and the average labourers are aggravating social tensions, as evidenced in the violent riots of Zhanaozen in December 2011 ⁽³⁵⁾.

2.2.5 Turkmenistan

Since its independence, Turkmenistan has detached itself from its neighbours. It is barely part of the Central Asian and post-Soviet regional framework, it enjoys a status of 'permanent neutrality' recognised by the United Nations, and only cooperates with a few countries (Iran and Turkey in the 1990s, China and the United Arab Emirates today). Turkmenistan relies on its colossal gas reserves, which place it, depending on estimates, between second and fifth in the world ⁽³⁶⁾. However, Turkmenistan remains one of the most isolated countries worldwide, thus making it difficult to provide an assessment of the country's real domestic situation. GDP figures are artificially-inflated by sale prices for gas and cotton, the real economy operates as a black market, and the standard of living is far lower than what is reflected in the official statistics or those produced by international financial organisations. Turkmenistan's second president, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, in office since the end of 2006, has re-opened his country to the outside world in a very measured way, merely abolishing the most excessive aspects of the preceding regime.

Alike the other Central Asian countries, there is a huge gap between rural and urban populations. Rural life is largely shaped by agriculture, decreasing access to public services, deteriorating environmental conditions, and lack of financial capabilities. Urban dwellers are somewhat better off, with greater access to public services, a small service economy, and more protected cash revenues. For all, the major

³³ T. Tsertsvadze and V. Axyonova, 'Trading values with Kazakhstan?', *EUCAM Policy Brief* 32, Madrid and Brussels: FRIDE-EUCAM, September 2013, available at: http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx_icticontent/EUCAM-PB-32-Trading-values-KZ-EN.pdf

³⁴ S. Peyrouse, 'The Kazakh Neopatrimonial Regime: balancing uncertainties among the "family", oligarchs and technocrats', *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 20/4 (2012): 345–70.

³⁵ A. Kourmanova, 'Lessons from Zhanaozen. Bringing Business, Government and Society Together', *Voices from Central Asia* 6, Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, Elliott School of International Affairs, Central Asia Programme, September 2012.

³⁶ S. Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan. Strategies of Power, Dilemmas of Development*, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2011.

problems remain decreasing healthcare services; a poor and corrupt education system⁽³⁷⁾, which was largely destroyed by the previous president (to enter the most prestigious universities, students sometimes have to pay bribes of as much as USD 40 000); and everyday problems such as access to transport, energy, drinkable water, and so on. Due to the total absence of political autonomy (there is almost no access to the internet, no free or foreign media, no ideological freedom, and omnipresent security services), a large part of society lives in fear and is not interested in engaging in the public space. Islamist groups are becoming more active in the rural areas, as well as in some of the underprivileged suburbs of the capital, Ashgabat.

Due to the strict control of the authorities over citizens and the small number of elites, until now the regime has been able to maintain a sufficient level of intra-elite consensus and society inertia so as to appear stable. Regardless of future political developments, the regime does have two concomitant challenges to address: first, its inability to invest gas revenues to develop a service economy, since this would presuppose a certain degree of society liberalisation; and second, a human and brain drain, which began under former President Saparmurat Niazov.

3. CENTRAL ASIA AND AFGHANISTAN

3.1 Assessing the risk of spillover from Afghanistan

Central Asian governments, especially in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, often refer to the risk of instability stemming from post-2014 Afghanistan. This, however, is not based on an objective reality, but rather on perceptions, and should thus be analysed as such⁽³⁸⁾. Central Asian regimes' policies toward Afghanistan often say more about their own domestic anxieties than about the Afghan neighbourhood *per se*. They also show regimes' fear that US and European attention, and thus funds, might wane after the NATO/ISAF withdrawal.

The Central Asian regimes have based a large part of their political legitimacy on their fundamentally-secular nature, their Soviet heritage, and fears of a creeping Islamism. Secular authoritarianism, they argue, is the only way to prevent the risk of a 'green wave' of Islamism. They tend systematically to associate all political dissidence with Islamism and, in turn, Islamism with spillovers from Afghanistan or al-Qaeda-style international jihadism⁽³⁹⁾. But Central Asians regard the Afghan Taliban with disdain. Images of protracted violence in Afghanistan followed by public executions, prohibitions on music and alcohol, and stoning for adultery helps to weaken sympathies for Islamists in Central Asia, buttress the legitimacy of secular authoritarian regimes, and convince ordinary people to accept the devil they know. Central Asians interested in Islamic ideas tend to admire the Turkish or Malaysian models, and are influenced by Islamic debates emanating from Russia, not from Afghanistan.

There are other potential Afghan-related spillovers that may quite rightly raise international concern: a possible collapse of the Afghan armed forces and the spread of arms and private militias; the risk of uncontrolled waves of migration, especially refugees; and for Tajikistan, the risk of becoming a base of operations for Tajik-Afghan warlords.

³⁷ S. Horak, 'Educational Reforms in Turkmenistan: good framework, bad content?', *Central Asia Policy Brief* 11, Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, Elliott School of International Affairs, Central Asia Programme, September 2013, available at: <http://centralasiaprogram.org/central-asia-policy-brief-no-11-september-2013/>

³⁸ S. Radnitz and M. Laruelle, 'Will Afghanistan Take Central Asia Down with It?', *The National Interest* 1 August 2013.

³⁹ S. Peyrouse, 'Islam in Central Asia: national specificities and post-Soviet globalization', *Religion, State and Society* 35/3 (2007): 245–60.

3.1.1 Spillover 1: Collapse of the ANSF

A full or partial collapse of the Afghan central government and the consequent demise of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) could have a negative bearing on Central Asia. Even with the presence of a relatively stable government in Kabul, the ANSF cannot survive without adequate external funding for the foreseeable future, as well as effectively combating corruption, operating under judicial control, and breaking the links to local power brokers⁽⁴⁰⁾. At present, ISAF and the Afghan government are working to build a force of 352 000 troops, while indicating at the same time that this number should be reduced to 228 000 by 2017. This raises concerns about the future of the 124 000 men who will be asked to leave ANSF ranks and will have to return to a labour market that is already in shambles. With no employment opportunities, some of these soldiers and police officers, with military training and probably in possession of their service weapons, will have to search for new sources of income, such as in private militias, or sell their weapons on the black market. Afghanistan's neighbours, in particular from Central Asia, have always expressed their concerns over the creation of an Afghan army that is powerful, disproportionate in size to its neighbours, and too expensive to be sustainable.

3.1.2 Spillover 2: New waves of refugees

The second risk concerns potential uncontrolled waves of refugees from Afghanistan. Historically, Afghans have migrated to Pakistan and Iran; the borders of the Soviet Union were tighter, and cultural, familial, and linguistic links were more developed with these two neighbours. Hazaras and Tajiks sought refuge in Iran, while Pashtuns went to Pakistan, especially since the Durand Line is an open border. During the civil war of the 1990s, Central Asia received only around 10 000 Afghan refugees, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)⁽⁴¹⁾. However, this low figure is due primarily to the fact that Tajikistan was also in the throes of a civil war during this time (1992–97) and the entire region suffered economic chaos following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

UNHCR already classifies more than 4.5 million persons as Afghan refugees⁽⁴²⁾. Among these, 2.6 million are living in Iran and Pakistan. Tehran and Islamabad have reduced the rights of refugees and hope to take advantage of the NATO/ISAF withdrawal to deport them back to Afghanistan, arguing that the country is no longer at war or occupied. More than 1 million refugees have already returned to Afghanistan and are now considered internally displaced persons (IDPs). They live in harsh conditions and will quickly attempt to leave again as soon as international aid is stopped or slowed. UNHCR expects the refugee figure to reach 5 million by the end of 2013 and to increase further in 2014⁽⁴³⁾. Afghan asylum seekers, whose numbers in Europe have risen exponentially in recent years, are only the tip of the iceberg, with growing numbers from the Afghan middle class finding other ways to exit the country (such as through work visas, dual citizenship, study abroad, and the purchase of real estate properties in the Gulf, in particular in Dubai).

Unlike the 1990s, this time Central Asia is likely to attract more refugees. The region's economies have grown and living conditions are more stable. If the security situation deteriorates in northern Afghanistan, some populations might try to cross the border. Tajiks living in northern Afghanistan regard Tajikistan now as a developed country that could offer better opportunities, especially after

⁴⁰ A. H. Cordesman, 'The Uncertain Role of the ANSF in Transition: establishing real world criteria and metrics', Testimony to the House Armed Service Committee, Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 27 February 2013, available at:

http://csis.org/files/publication/130226_Afghan_Uncertain_Role_ANSF_Transition_AHC.pdf

⁴¹ UNHCR, *UNHCR Global Report 2000*, 'Central Asia', Geneva: UNHCR, 2000, available at:

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=3e23eb617&query=afghans>

⁴² UNHCR, '2013 UNHCR country operations profile – Afghanistan', Geneva: UNHCR, 2013, available at:

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/page?page=49e486eb6>

⁴³ Ibid.

international aid to Afghanistan slows down. It is less likely that large numbers of Afghan Uzbeks and Turkmen will flee to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Many Afghans also consider Kazakhstan as a country with a nearly European standard of living. In addition, the Customs Union with Russia and Belarus means that the border with 'Europe' is almost largely open. Once in possession of a Kazakh passport, which is reasonably easily purchased with bribes, refugees could reach Russia or Ukraine and Belarus and from there transit to the EU. People-to-people relations between the Central Asian states and Afghanistan developed in the 2000s. Embassies and chambers of commerce, and the movement facilitated by small and medium-sized businesses, could also be used by potential Afghan refugees.

Waves of refugees are not a security risk in and of itself, but may weaken the Central Asian states in several ways. First, the lack of preparation of state agencies could lead to serious humanitarian crises. Second, local reactions to refugee flows are likely to be largely negative. Ethnic Kazakh repatriates from Mongolia (Oralmans) have been unpopular in Kazakh society, as well as the 1 000 Afghan students who have benefited from a training programme launched by the Kazakh government in 2010⁽⁴⁴⁾. New waves of refugees would not be welcome by neither the Central Asian regimes nor their populations, and their presence could give way to local tensions. Finally, a large number of refugees in a country like Tajikistan could destabilise both the regime and the social fabric. Refugees, who would likely be Tajik-speaking, could find themselves enmeshed in the conflict between the regions and their elites and the central authorities in Dushanbe.

3.1.3 Spillover 3: Intra-Tajik interactions on both sides of the border

The third potential spillover concerns the risk of growing intra-Tajik interaction on both sides of the border. Tajik insurgents fighting against Dushanbe's stranglehold could seek refuge in Afghanistan, as evidenced during the Khorog events in July 2012⁽⁴⁵⁾. And in case of open or low intensity conflict with the Taliban, northern warlords may need to use Tajikistan – or at least the border regions – as a zone of retreat for military operations. It is also possible that lawless areas controlled by criminal groups with an Islamist tint may develop astride the borders. The risk, often mentioned by the Tajik authorities, of a Taliban/Pashtun surge in Tajikistan is improbable: any instability will be largely intra-Tajik.

On the Afghan side, northern Afghan powerbrokers like General Dostum (Uzbek), Ahmad Zia Massoud and the former long-serving governor of Balkh, Atta Mohammed Noor (both Tajiks), may find themselves in a difficult situation in the years to come⁽⁴⁶⁾. Along with the Hazaras, they are likely to lose most from the departure of Western troops and the inevitable rebalancing of central power in favour of the Pashtuns. They would probably agree to a shared allocation of decision-making positions in Kabul while maintaining their autonomy in the north. But if they feel that their status is directly threatened, they might instead chose to engage in open or low intensity conflict with the Pashtuns. These warlords must also manage the rise of Taliban-style groups in their own northern regions, especially in Kunduz province, and among their co-ethnics, a phenomenon that did not exist in the 1990s.

Tajik and Uzbek authorities no longer control the Afghan warlords as they did in the 1990s. They have become more autonomous, with their own political and economic objectives and often the means to pursue them. The balance of power has changed fundamentally in favour of Afghan powerbrokers. The intrinsic weakness of Tajikistan's central authorities in controlling their own territory might come into

⁴⁴ Interviews in Astana and Almaty, May 2012.

⁴⁵ J. Kucera, 'The Tajiks Who Fight Their Own Government', *The Atlantic*, 18 June 2013, available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/the-tajiks-who-fight-their-own-government/277336/>

⁴⁶ A. Giustozzi, 'The Resilient Oligopoly: a political-economy of northern Afghanistan 2001 and onwards', Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, December 2012.

play, and restive regional elites in the Rasht Valley and the Pamirs could ally themselves with Afghan warlords against Dushanbe to defend their own interests.

3.2 The fight against cross-border crime

The fight against drug-trafficking from Afghanistan is a key objective of international donor involvement in the region. It is also a major area of cooperation among key actors. UNODC wants to strengthen its role in Central Asia; the EU will continue to finance the Border Management in Central Asia (BOMCA) programme; the US has launched a Central Asia Counter-narcotics Initiative (CACI); and Russia wants to take the lead in a new international anti-drugs campaign, if possible in cooperation with NATO.

This increased attention to drug-trafficking throughout Central Asia, however, is far from groundbreaking. Calls for an in-depth rethinking of regional security tools and innovative mechanisms are essentially rhetorical. Thus far, the strategy adopted by international actors is largely the same as the approach that failed in the 2000s. To take but one example, heroin seizures in Tajikistan amounted to 4 794 kilograms in 2004 but only 1 132 kilograms in 2009, despite rising production in Afghanistan and increased transit along the 'northern route' through Central Asia ⁽⁴⁷⁾.

3.2.1 Linking EU assistance to Central Asia to that to Afghanistan

The EU-funded BOMCA programme aims to introduce Integrated Border Management (IBM) methods and improve regional cooperation by providing infrastructure, equipment and training to national border agencies, as well as organising joint events. The EU also supports the related Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP). This focuses on drug-addiction prevention and treatment, and provides Central Asia with European expertise through trainings, seminars and study tours for Central Asian institutions on issues surrounding drug policies. The OSCE, which is 70 % funded by EU member states, has established a Border Management Staff College in Tajikistan ⁽⁴⁸⁾. Finally, several European states fund the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC), which was created to coordinate joint actions for combating illicit drug-trafficking. European countries also participate in the Central Asia Border Security Initiative (CABSI), a platform organised by Austria for dialogue and exchange between local actors and international donors.

All these programmes and initiatives are in some way associated with the 'Afghan factor'. But Kabul is almost never a stakeholder in them. The OSCE has led some attempts to organise joint Tajik-Afghan and Turkmen-Afghan trainings for border guards, but with very limited results. The most recent CABSI conference, in April 2012, also included Afghan representatives ⁽⁴⁹⁾. But there is no common programmatic approach linking Central Asia and Afghanistan. CARICC, for instance, brings together the five Central Asian states, Russia and Azerbaijan, but excludes Afghanistan. BOMCA stands practically separate from analogous EU initiatives in Afghanistan – the completed BOMBAF (Border Management in Badakhshan province) and its on-going successor, BOMNAF (Border Management Northern Afghanistan) – even though all of them are implemented by UNDP. The 2012 EU strategy review acknowledged the need to develop 'synergies between assistance programmes for Central Asia with those for Afghanistan and ensure improved coordination of EU programmes working on both sides of

⁴⁷ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, New York: UNODC, 2011, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Security and peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, border security and crisis management are usually among the key areas for joint PfP actions.

⁴⁹ Ministerial Conference of the Central Asia Border Security Initiative (CABSI), 'Ministerial Declaration', 16-17 April 2012, Vienna, Austria, available at: http://www.bomca.eu/images/stories/cabsi_Declaration%20en_2012.pdf

Central Asian and Afghan borders (BOMCA and BOMNAF)' (⁵⁰). However, it remains to be seen how this can be achieved in practice.

3.2.2 *The border security illusion*

Defining drug-trafficking as a spillover effect from Afghanistan leads to a poor assessment of the mechanisms that are needed to counter it. International institutions are focused on improving border security, principally its material aspects (infrastructure and equipment), again in accordance with the needs expressed by local authorities. A recent report published by the Open Society Foundations showed how the focus on personnel training came much later, notably within the BOMCA framework (⁵¹). It is, of course, true that Central Asian states need better border security. Their border guards require better equipment and training in new technologies and best practices. And as new states, they require foreign assistance to reach international standards.

However, it is naïve to assume that the fight against drug-trafficking can be waged successfully with such measures only. To secure a border with checkpoints, barbed wire, and watchtowers is not enough to make the frontier impermeable, as the recurrent US failure to 'close' its southern border with Mexico has shown. In Central Asia, all border points, even those that the international community has best equipped, are open borders, as corruption has rendered them permeable. Every entry into Central Asian territory can be negotiated (by buying a false passport, bribing a border guard to forego a document check, and so on). The smaller-scale 'black' and 'green' drug-traffickers are the only ones that try to get across borders by avoiding checkpoints, through mountain passes or across rivers. The more substantial 'red' traffic uses the main roads and official checkpoints, recently upgraded with international assistance (⁵²).

Central Asian borders with Afghanistan cannot be secured by physical means alone. There needs to be strong political will to fight corruption, and for the long-term. To be effective, efforts to combat drug-trafficking in Central Asia must be first political in nature. This does not only imply the principled consent of Central Asian governments. It also requires establishing measures similar to those implemented in Colombia several years ago or those Mexico is trying to put in place today: forcibly separating criminal networks from their pawns in the state apparatus and fighting real wars, likely with casualties, against drug cartels.

Securing borders is as much about soft infrastructure (such as trainings) as hard infrastructure. The involvement of local communities on both sides of the border is also a pre-condition for success, since the cartels enjoy a 'Robin Hood status', appearing as protectors of the local populations from the central authorities. But switching from a hard- to a soft-infrastructure strategy is unlikely to obtain the support of Central Asian ruling elites today, and the international community cannot force it upon them. Border security will thus remain the lowest common denominator for international cooperation, requiring important financial commitments but bearing little results.

⁵⁰ EEAS and European Commission Services, 'Progress Report on the Implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia: implementation review and outline for future orientations', Brussels: EEAS and European Commission, 28 June 2012, p.17, available at: http://www.eeas.europa.eu/central_asia/docs/20120628_progress_report_en.pdf

⁵¹ G. Gavrilis, 'Central Asia's Border Woes and the Impact of International Assistance', *Central Eurasian Project's Occasional Paper Series* 6, New York: Open Society Foundations, May 2012, available at: <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/OPS-No-6-20120601.pdf>

⁵² S. Peyrouse, 'Drug-trafficking in Central Asia: a poorly considered fight?', *PONARS Policy Memo* 218, Washington, D.C.: Ponars, September 2012.

3.2.3 From supply to demand

International efforts to combat drug-trafficking from Afghanistan are more focused on production and manufacture rather than on demand reduction, treatment, and prevention campaigns. Prevention and treatment are considered national issues, while the fight against drug-trafficking falls under the remit of international and regional actors. For example, the UNODC budget for Central Asia allocates only 11 % of its funds to prevention, while 88 % is assigned directly to the fight against drugs, organised crime, corruption, and terrorism⁽⁵³⁾.

International actors' counter-narcotics strategies are not free of contradictions. Russia, for example, wants NATO directly to combat production by destroying poppy fields and laboratories. In this context, the Russian government has put forward the 'Rainbow-2' plan, a large-scale poppy eradication programme, and has lobbied in the UN Security Council to have Afghan production declared a threat to global peace and security. Such a decision would enable sanctions to be imposed on Afghan landowners who authorise the cultivation of opium, as well as legitimise the destruction of poppy fields. However, NATO has refused to accede to Russian demands, on the pretext that it would be necessary to provide Afghan farmers with alternative sources of revenue or risk worsening the image of the organisation among the Afghan population. Instead, NATO wants to focus its eradication efforts on drug storage sites, so that the losses inflicted are targeted at criminal settings⁽⁵⁴⁾.

When it comes to treatment, the Soviet past⁽⁵⁵⁾, which places the medical and psychiatric domains under law enforcement agencies, still carries great influence. The tendency to criminalise drug addicts complicates the implementation of effective prevention strategies. Arguing that there is a synergy between insurgency, terrorism, and drugs does not allow for designing new approaches or creating more appropriate support structures for persons requiring care. Several Central Asian states, for instance, require treatment centres to pass the names of drug addicts to security organisations. Moreover, treatment centres are poorly-equipped and oriented around abstinence and zero tolerance. While Kyrgyzstan has accepted opiate substitution therapy, the latter remains quite controversial in most post-Soviet states. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan vehemently oppose it. In Uzbekistan, substitution therapy was termed 'inappropriate' by the Ministry of Health and banned in 2009, while in Kazakhstan a recent official evaluation group concluded that it is a 'security threat' to the nation. In Tajikistan, foremost in the region of Gorno Badakhshan bordering Afghanistan and prone to drug-trafficking, there is some non-governmental organisation (NGO) assistance for drug addicts, providing clean needles, for example, while the Tajik government is considering the provision of methadone in substitution therapy⁽⁵⁶⁾.

There is obviously no easy solution for drug-trafficking from Afghanistan, whether in terms of its impact on public health or the shadow economy it generates. Central Asian states, situated on the transit routes from Afghan production sites to Russian and European consumers, will not and cannot fight the problem alone; for the majority of Afghans, their economic future will remain linked to agriculture; and international assistance efforts have so far proved unsuccessful.

⁵³ A. Latypov, 'Understanding post 9/11 drug control policy and politics in Central Asia', *International Journal of Drug Policy* 20 (2009): 389.

⁵⁴ Despite these difficulties, Russian-American track II discussions around Afghanistan continue. See for instance E. Stepanova (ed.), 'Afghan Narcotrafficking: a joint threat assessment', New York: East-West Institute, 2013, available at: <http://www.ewi.info/afghanjta>

⁵⁵ A. Latypov, A. Bidordinova, and A. Khachatryan, 'Opioid Substitution Therapy in Eurasia: how to increase the access and improve the quality', *IDPC Briefing Series on Drug Dependence Treatment 1*, London: International Drug Policy Consortium, January 2012.

⁵⁶ Interview, Khorod, Tajikistan, 2 October 2012.

3.3 Post-2014 cross-border opportunities

Afghanistan is not only a potential source of spillovers; it also provides multiple economic opportunities that bordering Central Asian states hope to exploit and expand. Despite the different assessments of the potential prospects, Afghanistan's integration into a broader regional ensemble is desired by all neighbours. The international community has assessed this integration at two levels: a push for institutional integration through the signing of a plethora of treaties and agreements to oversee Afghanistan's growing trade; and an improvement of hard infrastructures connecting the country with its neighbours. In Central Asia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have most to gain from Afghanistan's economic integration.

3.3.1 Uzbekistan

Out of the Central Asian states, Uzbekistan is Afghanistan's most important trading partner. It benefits from an important Soviet legacy in terms of the existing infrastructure that connects it to its southern neighbour, despite the fact that the two countries share a short border of only 137 kilometres. As early as 2002, Tashkent reopened the Hairaton Bridge on the Uzbek-Afghan border – the former 'bridge of friendship' that served as a main transit site for Soviet troops during the invasion of Afghanistan – and in 2003 operations got underway at the Airtom Customs Complex in Termez, speeding up the process of registering and delivering freight to Afghanistan⁽⁵⁷⁾.

Uzbekistan's role in the Afghan economy and recovery is central in two sectors: electricity and transportation. In early 2002, Tashkent restored power supply to the Afghan border. Since 2007, Uzbekistan's electric state corporation UzbekEnergO has been delivering about 150 megawatts a year to Kabul, along a transmission line that stretches for more than 400 kilometres from Hairaton to Pul e-Khumri and then to Kabul, and which was built with funds from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank's CASAREM project⁽⁵⁸⁾. The Uzbek authorities claim that they provide an uninterrupted supply of 1.2 billion kilowatts of electricity a year to Afghanistan, with Kabul receiving electricity 24 hours a day, at an average rate of 6 cents per kilowatt hour (the price is different for industrial and residential consumers)⁽⁵⁹⁾. Tashkent hopes to retain this profitable and strategic market and to be able to deliver up to 300 megawatts per year. It does not hide its concern over increasing competition from Kyrgyz and Tajik sales of electricity to Afghanistan at far lower rates (3.5 cents). To be able to sell cheaper electricity, UzbekEnergO announced a plan to build a new power station in the Surkhandarya border region, and a new 270-kilometre-long transmission line connecting Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, and Afghanistan⁽⁶⁰⁾.

⁵⁷ V. Paramonov and A. Stokov, 'Constraints and Opportunities for Uzbek-Afghan Economic Relations', *Afghanistan Regional Forum 5*, Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, Elliott School of International Affairs, Central Asia Programme, February 2013.

⁵⁸ USAID, 'Import of Power from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan', Washington, D.C.: USAID, Afghanistan Infrastructure and Rehabilitation Programme, 2011, available at: <https://www.irp-af.com/?pname=open&id=291&type=html&c=5>

⁵⁹ 'Uzbekistan exports 1.2 billion kilowatt-hours electricity to Afghanistan a year', *Uzdaily*, 20 February 2012, available at: http://www.uzinfoinvest.uz/eng/news/uzbekistan_exports_12bn_kilowatt_hours_electricity_to_afghanistan_a_year.mgr

⁶⁰ M. Yeniseyev, 'New Uzbek power station will supply electricity to Uzbeks, Afghans First power station built from scratch in Uzbekistan', *CentralAsia Online*, 21 December 2011, available at: http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/main/2011/12/21/feature-01

In terms of transportation, Uzbek firms have contributed to restoring roads between Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul, and to reopening 11 bridges along this route ⁽⁶¹⁾. The Uzbek national railway company, Ozbekistan Temir Yollari, has also built a 75-kilometre-long railway between Hairaton and Mazar-i-Sharif, which has been in operation since the second half of 2011 and theoretically has a transit capacity of up to 30 000-40 000 tons per month ⁽⁶²⁾. Its subsidiary Sogdiana Trans runs the freight terminal at Mazar and assists Afghans in creating the necessary infrastructure to maintain and service the line. The short-term objective of the new railroad is to increase the role of Uzbekistan in the northern supply route for the international coalition ⁽⁶³⁾. Accordingly, the trains running on this line foremost transport foreign (non-lethal) materials, while Uzbek-Afghan trade remains minimal. Tashkent, however, plans to become a key actor in Afghan transport. Ozbekistan Temir Yollari hopes to win the tender bids for two potential sections: one linking Mazar-i-Sharif to Kabul, and then to Torkham to link up with the Pakistani railway network, and the other connecting Mazar-i-Sharif with Herat. However, it will encounter stiff competition from Chinese and Indian firms ⁽⁶⁴⁾.

3.3.2 Tajikistan

Tajikistan is the second-most important Central Asian trading partner for Afghanistan. Here again, electricity constitutes the core of the economic partnership. In 2008, an initial power purchase agreement was signed, and in 2012, exports attained 660 000 kilowatts through the only electricity line that links Geran in Tajikistan to Kunduz; initially built in the Soviet period, it has since been renovated ⁽⁶⁵⁾. Dushanbe hopes to take advantage of recent advances with the CASA-1000 project, funded by the ADB, to export 1 billion kilowatts in 2013 ⁽⁶⁶⁾. However, in June leaks from the ADB made it clear that the bank planned to withdraw its 40 % of shares due to a lack of commercial prospects and an absence of private investors ⁽⁶⁷⁾. In order not to lose face, Dushanbe continues to reiterate that the project will be developed with support from the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank. For the Tajik authorities, the stakes are considerable: CASA-1000 finances the connection of the Sangtuda power station to Kunduz and on to Baghlan and Pul i-Khumri, with the aim of linking up with the line to Kabul ⁽⁶⁸⁾. At present, it is this line that enables Dushanbe to compete with Tashkent as an electricity exporter during the summer months.

Beyond these electricity exports, trade exchanges are developing on a small scale. The border post of Nizhnii-Pianj, rebuilt with international aid in particular from the US, is supposed to handle the majority of the freight between the two countries. But traffic is limited to roughly 40-50 individuals and 10-20

⁶¹ J.C.K. Daly, 'Uzbek Afghanistan proposal relevant and timely', *UPI*, 5 November 2009, available at: http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Analysis/Outside-View/2009/11/05/Outside-View-Uzbek-Afghanistan-proposal-relevant-and-timely/UPI-71691257429600/

⁶² F. Mashrab, 'Afghan rail link marks a break-out moment', *Asia Times*, 11 January 2012, available at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/NA11Ag01.html

⁶³ J. Kucera, 'Pakistan's Gain in Afghan Transit Deal Central Asia's Loss?', *Eurasianet*, 17 May 2012, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65416>

⁶⁴ Tender bids have not yet been put out but it is likely that both Indian and Chinese construction companies will respond, likely with competitive prices and capabilities.

⁶⁵ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Energy Sector Status Report*, Kabul: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Economy Inter-Ministerial Commission for Energy (ICE) Secretariat, July – September 2010.

⁶⁶ 'Tajikistan to export one billion kilowatt hours of electricity to Afghanistan', *Afghan Business News Portal*, 31 January 2013, available at: <http://www.wadsam.com/tajikistan-to-export-one-billion-kilowatt-hours-of-electricity-to-afghanistan-897/>

⁶⁷ 'Central Asia: South Asia Energy Project a Pipe Dream?', *Eurasianet*, 20 June 2013, available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67151>

⁶⁸ The World Bank, 'Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA 1000)', Washington, D.C.: World Bank, available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P110729/central-asia-south-asia-electricity-transmission-trade-project-casa-1000?lang=en>

trucks each day; moreover, it is very isolated now that the security situation in Kunduz region has deteriorated⁽⁶⁹⁾. Further east, several smaller bridges, rebuilt or renovated by the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), enable border populations to set up small trade mechanisms to lift them out of poverty⁽⁷⁰⁾. Dushanbe has also created several cross-border economic zones, designed to attract foreign investors as well as Afghan entrepreneurs, in the Piandj region in the district of Kumsangir and at the Ishkashim border crossing in the autonomous region of Gorno-Badakhshan, but so far results have been minor.

3.3.3 Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan, which shares a 750-kilometre-long border with Afghanistan, is also an important partner for Kabul. Electricity exports again constitute the main driver of bilateral trade. In 2002, a bilateral agreement was signed, and to this end, the state-run electric corporation TurkmenEnergo renovated several power stations, and constructed electric lines in Balkh province, linking Zernow, Andkhoy, and Sherberghan, with two bifurcations running toward the south (Maimana and Sar-i-Pul)⁽⁷¹⁾. Ashgabat hopes to increase its electricity exports fivefold, by connecting the existing network with the ADB-funded Mazar-i-Sharif to Kabul line, which is located only 40 kilometres away⁽⁷²⁾. The Turkmen authorities also put back into service a 2-kilometre-long stretch of cross-border railway between Kushka and Turgundi (Towraghondi) in 2007⁽⁷³⁾; they have renovated their own roads from Mary to Serkhetabat (formerly Kushka, in Turkmen *Guşgy*) and from Turkmenabat, on the border with Uzbekistan, to Atymyrat and Kerikichi on the border with Afghanistan. Turkmenistan has also been the driving force behind the 400-kilometre-long Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway project, which began in June 2013⁽⁷⁴⁾. The 2015 proposed deadline seems overly ambitious given the many financial and technical uncertainties. Moreover, Turkmenistan provides the Turkmen minority in Afghanistan with financial and technical assistance in the form of medical aid and school supplies, allows them to cross the border to receive treatment in Turkmen hospitals, allocates various state-funded scholarships, and is also upgrading their irrigation infrastructure⁽⁷⁵⁾.

Gas export projects have been evoked since the mid-1990s, but have not yet come to fruition. The four countries involved in the TAPI project – Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India – have recently agreed to establish a joint consortium by the end of 2013. Meanwhile, Kabul and Ashgabat have signed a bilateral agreement according to which Afghanistan will purchase 500 million cubic meters of gas in the first 10 years, and 1 billion and 1.5 billion cubic meters of gas annually in the second and third 10-

⁶⁹ Fieldtrip to Nizhnyi-Pianj check-point in the framework of the OSCE Border Management School, 19 May 2012.

⁷⁰ S. Peyrouse, 'Economic Trends as an Identity Marker? The Pamiri trade niche with China and Afghanistan', *Problems of Post-Communism* 59/4 (2012): 3–14.

⁷¹ Asian Development Bank, 'Afghanistan and Turkmenistan: regional power interconnection project, Manila: ADB, available at: <http://www.adb.org/projects/44184-012/details>.

⁷² ISW, 'Turkmenistan and Afghanistan', Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, (undated), available at: <http://www.understandingwar.org/themenode/turkmenistan-and-afghanistan>

⁷³ See, for instance, the Turkmen information on the repairing of a 2-kilometre-long section of the railway crossing the territory of Afghanistan, 'A Gift from the Turkmen People to Afghan Brothers', *State News Agency of Turkmenistan*, 8 February 2008, available at: http://turkmenistan.gov.tm/eng/2008/02/08/a_gift_front_he_turkmen_people_to_afghan_brothers.html

⁷⁴ S. Medrea, 'Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan Railway Project Inaugurated', *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 12 June 2013, available at: <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/12760-turkmenistan-afghanistan-tajikistan-railway-project-inaugurated.html>

⁷⁵ F. Sabir, 'Turkmenistan i Afganistan: ot neitraliteta k sotrudnichestvu', *Afghanistan.ru*, 7 July 2012, available at: <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/23210.html>

year periods respectively ⁽⁷⁶⁾. Kabul should also receive about USD 500 million annually in transit fees. However, it is unclear whether this agreement is strictly wedded to the TAPI project, or if both countries envisage a specific and more limited gas trade that could develop even if the TAPI project fails.

3.3.4 Central Asia's dependency on Afghanistan's recovery

During the 12 years of the international community's military involvement in Afghanistan, massive investments have been made to foster new regional economic ties. New economic opportunities have reassured Afghanistan's neighbours of the need to have a centralised Afghan government, recognised by the entire international community, with which it is possible to sign treaties, agreements, and contracts.

Numerous infrastructure projects, mainly in energy and transport, have been undertaken with the aim of connecting Afghan regions – and thus improving the state's capacity to manage the country's entire territory – as well as Afghanistan and its neighbours. Some of these projects fall under the umbrella of the US-initiated 'new Silk Road' strategy, announced by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during her 2011 Mumbai speech ⁽⁷⁷⁾. But the new Silk Road is still mainly wishful thinking, as no specific budget has been allocated, neither have any commitments been made in terms of diplomatic personnel. Although all of the region's governments – with the exception of Russia and Iran, which view it as a rival geopolitical project – support the new Silk Road narrative, off-the-record few local voices actually believe in its merit, or at least not in the medium term as a viable project able to influence current decision-making processes in the region. The dominant logic is therefore as follows: if Afghanistan's economic integration is successful, it will prove a bonus to its neighbours; but if it fails, the countries of the region can extricate themselves without being too enmeshed with an unstable Afghanistan. Competition over trade and economic development is still largely geopolitical by nature, especially for the two main external actors, Pakistan and Iran. Among the regional neighbours, it seems, only China has the ability to contribute to a trade-based regional integration including Afghanistan, given its status as Central Asia's foremost economic partner and its alliance with Pakistan. In this sense, the EU is also marginal since it is well-established as an investor in and trade partner of Central Asia, in particular of Kazakhstan, but lacks the incentive, capacity or geographical continuity to link its economic influence in Central Asia to that of Afghanistan.

Tajikistan is the most dependent on Afghanistan's economic success. International investments in Tajikistan's hydroelectric sector only have meaning if electricity can be subsequently exported to Afghanistan and onward to South Asia. Not only is hydroelectricity the Tajik state's only prospect for increasing its revenues, but its geopolitical competition with Uzbekistan is also at stake. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan is probably the only country in Afghanistan's neighbourhood whose strategic foundations have been partly affected by the new economic realities. The importance that Tashkent today places on electricity exports to Afghanistan has had an impact on its stance in so far as, unofficially, the Uzbek government is preparing to recognise, if need be, the Taliban as a legitimate interlocutor in order to assure its electricity exports in the future. This change of position can also be explained by the competition with Tajikistan, not purely economic reasons, for, even if electricity exports to Kabul are profitable and important, the Uzbek economy is not dependent on these exports. Like Tashkent,

⁷⁶ 'Turkmen, Afghan governments sign gas deal', *UPI.news*, 10 July 2013, available at:

http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Energy-Resources/2013/07/10/Turkmen-Afghan-governments-sign-gas-deal/UPI-71251373459091/

⁷⁷ A. Kuchins, 'Laying the Groundwork for Afghanistan's New Silk Road: how Washington and Kabul can turn a vision into a plan', *Foreign Affairs*, 5 December 2011, available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/136714/andrew-c-kuchins/laying-the-groundwork-for-afghanistans-new-silk-road?page=show>; and J. Kucera, 'The New Silk Road?', *The Diplomat*, 11 November 2011, available at: <http://the-diplomat.com/2011/11/11/the-new-silk-road/>

electricity exports to Afghanistan are also of commercial interest for Turkmenistan, but they are not crucial to the national economy, which is based on gas exports. However, in contrast to the Uzbek authorities for whom recognition of the Taliban would amount to a strategic U-turn, Ashgabat has always enjoyed cordial relations with the Taliban and its current Afghanistan policy differs little from that of the 1990s.

4. THE BROADER REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT

4.1 The water-energy-security-development nexus

In the water-energy area, the lack of regional integration is detrimental to all states. This stands at the core of development hopes and strategies of both the Central Asian states and Afghanistan, and is also a driver of insecurity. The water-energy nexus is responsible for inter-state tensions that could potentially degenerate into serious conflicts, as well as for regular energy shortages that hamper economic development. This 'knot' of tensions is therefore bound to remain at the core of international concerns, including from Europe.

4.1.1 Integrating Afghanistan into an already tense water situation

A revival of the Afghan economy could create new regional tensions around water usage. Afghanistan is legally allowed to draw 9 million cubic meters per year from the Amu Dary/Pianj rivers, according to the 1964 agreement between the Soviet Union and Zahir Shah's Kingdom of Afghanistan. The country currently uses only about one-quarter of its quota; but its potential economic revival would require increased agricultural irrigation and the construction of hydropower projects downstream ⁽⁷⁸⁾. Afghanistan is not, however, a stakeholder in the distribution of Amu-Darya basin water, an issue which was negotiated at the beginning of the 1990s between post-Soviet countries without Kabul's participation. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan do not welcome a new actor in what are already heated debates, and have not invited Kabul to join the Amu Darya Basin Management Authority or the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea ⁽⁷⁹⁾. The situation could become problematic in years to come in the face of climate change, which could have a significant impact on water flows from glaciers in the Pamirs and Hindu Kush.

The water-energy nexus is the most conflicting factor in intra-Central Asian relations. In theory, however, the region should not be affected by energy or water shortages or a 'hydric stress'. Three states are rich in gas, oil, and coal, while the other two have significant hydroelectric potential; and the region is well irrigated by the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya rivers of the Aral basin, as well as by the Tarim basin for the eastern region of Kazakhstan.

Conflict over water and energy resources can be attributed, *inter alia*, to the Soviet legacy and a lack of regional cooperation. In the Soviet Union, Central Asia's economic priorities were centred on large energy-consuming industries, and thus collective mechanisms of water and electricity management were set up. After independence, Central Asians began to place high emphasis on their energy autonomy, while remaining dependent on regional structures. Also, ageing installations and obsolete distribution networks required costly investments that the newly-independent states could not finance

⁷⁸ UNEP, GRID Arendal and Zoi Environment Network, 'Environment and Security in the Amu Darya River Basin', Nairobi, Arendal and Geneva: UNEP, GRID Arendal and Zoi Environment Network, 2011, available at: <http://www.zoinet.org/web/sites/default/files/publications/AmuDarya-EN-Web.pdf>

without international aid. Today, the regimes pay little attention to long-term profits or sustainable development; the elites prefer quick revenues in foreign currencies. Therefore, centralised, large-scale projects – as in the Soviet Union – that are more likely to allow them to profit from bribes are prioritised, however unrealistic they might seem. Lastly, energy choices are highly politicised, without much connection to economic rationality.

The complexity and diversity of these problems, compounded by the deterioration of inter-state relations, as well as the increasing association of energy negotiations with state security in official discourse, hinders nuanced decisions. Negotiations over the exchange of water for oil and gas regularly break down, most often over contractual terms; Central Asian leaders, who represent young states, are also afraid of giving in too much in negotiations, and thus end up maintaining inflexible and non-practical positions. Beyond the economic stakes involved, there is also a geopolitical dimension. Water-rich Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan use water as a geopolitical weapon to strengthen their position *vis-à-vis* Uzbekistan, for instance. While Bishkek's decision to build two power stations at Kambarata angered the Uzbek authorities, it is the Tajik Rogun project that is most controversial⁽⁸⁰⁾.

4.1.2 The Rogun issue

The construction of the Rogun dam, about 110 kilometres from the Tajik capital Dushanbe, began in 1976, but was interrupted with the break-up of the Soviet Union and the ensuing civil war between 1992 and 1997. A major part of the construction – a 60-meter wall – was also destroyed during the great floods of 1993. Since the 2000s, the project has been back on the national agenda as the ultimate solution to Tajikistan's multiple energy shortages. After concluding that massive external investment was not forthcoming, in 2008 Tajik President Emomali Rahmon officially and unilaterally re-launched the project, claiming that the Tajik state and its people could finance it alone. The Rogun dam became President Rahmon's flagship project, despite numerous doubts regarding its viability. Tajikistan has set eyes not only on energy self-sufficiency, but also on the export of electricity to the 'Southern Corridor' countries (Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India). Uzbekistan fiercely opposes the project that would give Tajikistan increased control over water flows. Uzbek President Islam Karimov has cultivated such anti-Tajik sentiment that backsliding now from his position would be seen as a symbolic defeat⁽⁸¹⁾.

Although relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have been very tense since independence, Rogun has further deteriorated bilateral diplomacy in recent years. Tashkent has accused Dushanbe of trying to control the Vakhsh River, a major tributary of the Amu Darya, for primarily geopolitical purposes – to cut off water supplies from Uzbekistan that are necessary for cotton irrigation. According to Tashkent, the planned production of 13 billion kilowatts of electricity annually would not require a 335 metre-high dam; this is more of a geopolitical symbol than an energy strategy, says Uzbekistan. According to Tashkent, the time required to fill the reservoir (over 12 years) will limit the flow of the

⁷⁹ S. Horsman, 'Afghanistan and Transboundary Water Management on the Amu Darya: a political history', in M. M. Rahaman and O. Varis (eds), *Central Asian Waters: Social, economic, environmental and governance puzzle*, Helsinki: Helsinki University of Technology, 2008, pp. 63-74.

⁸⁰ Literature abounds on water and conflicts linked to hydraulic questions in Central Asia. Worth mentioning are: V.A. Dukhovnyi and J. De Schutter, *Water in Central Asia: Past, Present, Future*, Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2011; M. Spoor and A. Krutov, 'The "Power of Water" in a Divided Central Asia', *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 2/3-4 (2003): 593-614; and K. Wegerich, 'Water Resources in Central Asia: regional stability or patchy make-up?', *Central Asian Survey* 30/2 (2011): 275-290.

⁸¹ V. Jacoby, 'If Only It Was Only Water... The Strained Relationship between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan', *Central Asia Policy Brief* 9, Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, Elliott School of International Affairs, Central Asia Programme, May 2013, available at:

http://www.gdnet.org/~research_papers/If%20only%20it%20was%20only%20water...%20The%20strained%20relationship%20between%20Tajikistan%20and%20Uzbekistan

Amu Darya to the detriment of Uzbek cotton production for over a decade. Uzbekistan also points to the significant environmental risks of the project, particularly the high seismic risk and the fact that should it break, the dam could flood a large part of the fertile basin of both countries⁽⁸²⁾.

Despite not being completely unfounded, Tashkent's stance also reveals Uzbekistan's geopolitical and economic goals. Uzbekistan knows that Tajikistan's energy dependence guarantees Tashkent the status of 'an older brother'. In addition to verbally opposing the project, Uzbekistan also sometimes blocks trains on the border *en route* to Tajikistan, thus further isolating the mountainous country and exerting control over its economy.

4.1.3 Beyond Rogun

The international community has not fully endorsed the Rogun project, for many reasons. First, it is extremely expensive – at least 4 billion dollars according to some estimates – and will weigh extremely heavily on the Tajik state's small budget. Second, the credits offered by the major international organisations, mainly the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, are likely to prove problematic in a country that is so corrupt. The construction company in charge of the project, the Rogun Joint Stock Company, is controlled by the president's family, in particular his brother. His sons-in-law have also invested in cement companies. Third, construction costs are likely to increase, while the conditions for the future sale of electricity and its price remain unclear. Neither the Department of Energy nor the national power company Barki Tojik have provided hard data on the topic, even as Dushanbe continues to insist that electricity exports will boost the national budget⁽⁸³⁾.

International experts have put forward multiple alternative proposals: a not so-high dam; the construction of hydroelectric facilities on smaller rivers like the Zeravshan, Panj and Gunter; investment in solar panels; and programmes drastically to reduce electricity waste in industries and homes. All of these are less costly, would have a minor impact on the environment, decrease the risk of failure or accidents, and would probably face less opposition from Uzbekistan. So far, however, the international community has failed to convince Dushanbe. The World Bank has conducted two audits on the feasibility of the Rogun project. Preliminary abstracts were released in October 2013, while the main reports still await input from several stakeholders before they are made public. As expected, the abstracts are extremely carefully worded and can be read as a victory for either side; they do not advise Tajikistan to halt the project, while at the same time mentioning that the overall safety and quality of existing structures at the construction site should be substantially improved⁽⁸⁴⁾.

Clearly, there is a need for a paradigm shift in the way of thinking about water in Central Asia. The issue of water in Central Asia is discussed as if it were a scarce resource. But this is not the case. The question is not a lack of resources, but rather of poor management.

Turkmenistan is the largest consumer of water in the world, followed by Uzbekistan. Even the United States, known for its profligate use of water, ranks far below Central Asian averages, with the exception of Kazakhstan. At the other end of the spectrum, Israel, a much more arid region than Central Asia and where agriculture is highly developed, consumes about 5 % of the water consumed by Turkmenistan (281 m³ per capita versus 5 400).

⁸² See 'Rogun damage to Uzbekistan estimated at \$600 million – US experts', *Eurodialogue*, 5 October 2012, available at: <http://eurodialogue.org/Rogun-damage-to-Uzbekistan-estimated-at-600-million%E2%80%94US-experts>

⁸³ Anonymous interviews with Tajik experts, Dushanbe, May 2012.

⁸⁴ D. Trilling, 'Tajikistan: World Bank Begins Rogun Data Dump, Recommends Repairs', *Eurasianet*, 2 October 2013, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67575>

Annual per capita consumption of water in Central Asian countries as compared to the United States and Israel

| | Consumption of water in m ³ |
|----------------------|--|
| Turkmenistan | 5 415 |
| Uzbekistan | 2 358 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 2 015 |
| Tajikistan | 1 740 |
| United States | 1 550 |
| Kazakhstan | 1 304 |
| Israel | 281 |

Source: FAO, Aquastat, available at: <http://www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/main/index.stm>

The Central Asian countries combine two paradoxes: the Soviet legacy (water-intensive agriculture and chemical pollutants that deplete the soil) and the end of Soviet legacy (the deterioration of irrigation facilities due to the lack of investment by the independent states and permanent postponement of maintenance). As such, 30-50 % of the water flowing into poorly maintained irrigation channels will be lost to evaporation. Individual farmers tend clandestinely to divert water to irrigate portions of private land, while the numerous remaining collective farms illegally irrigate new plots that are often unreported to the authorities. Not only has water distribution become random in rural areas and sometimes in urban ones as well, but diversions also exacerbate soil pollution. An increasing amount of land is contaminated with salt. In addition, hundreds of stagnant pools of water, polluted groundwater or artificial lakes have appeared, decreasing crop quality⁽⁸⁵⁾.

The international community is partly to blame for this situation, because it agreed to discuss the issue of water under the terms established by the Central Asian regimes, often focussing on extremely large water management projects instead of sustainable development.

One way to ensure sustainable agriculture in Central Asia could lie in the drip irrigation system used in Israeli agriculture. But reforming the use of water in the region depends not only on technology transfer, but also on changing local socio-economic structures. With the exception of Kazakhstan, agriculture is the basis of the Central Asian social fabric and therefore of the political legitimacy of local, regional, and national elites. Reforming water use involves changing power relations and attitudes in rural areas, and potentially has implications that go well beyond sustainable development.

As long as the debate is carried out according to Central Asian rent-seeking regimes' interests, a lack of interest in sustainable agriculture that consumes water in a rational way will prevail and water will remain a major conflict issue, now symbolised mainly by the Rogun dam. The expected intra-regional cooperation in light of Afghanistan's economic revival and in preparation for the post-2014 context has not yet materialised – quite the contrary. The future integration of Afghanistan into the region's water structures will be challenging, especially as Kabul also needs to manage water-related tensions with its two main neighbours, Iran and Pakistan.

⁸⁵ Rahaman and Varis 2008, op. cit.; Amu Darya Basin Network publications, available at: <http://amudaryabasin.net/content/resources>; and Global Water Partnership IWRM Case Studies, available at: <http://www.gwp.org/en/gwp-in-action/Central-Asia-and-Caucasus/>

4.2 The roles of Pakistan, Iran, Russia and China

Afghanistan's future is often linked to the evolution of its 'neighbourhood'. In 2011, the Istanbul process, which includes all of Afghanistan's neighbours and the main international actors and donors, was established to bring all stakeholders and regional players together to decide on Afghanistan's future. However, little results have been produced so far. Most actors have divergent objectives, tools of influence, or leverage mechanisms.

4.2.1 Pakistan

Pakistan is Afghanistan's key neighbour; it is directly involved in the country's domestic politics, often spoiling intra-Afghan negotiations. Conversely, Pakistan has also been directly affected by the loss of control of Islamic radicals in Afghanistan, which are now targeting the Pakistani state⁽⁸⁶⁾.

Relations between Pakistan and the Central Asian republics are very imbalanced. Islamabad sees the post-Soviet states as potential allies, and naively dreamed of strategic and cultural unity with the new states in the name of Islam. But for Central Asian governments, Pakistan is understood as the archetypal example of radical Islam, political instability and economic failure. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan fear the growing influence of proselytising movements like Tablighi Jamaat. Pakistan has struggled to engage in Central Asia and is not very involved in many regional platforms with Central Asian leaders. Both India and Pakistan have only observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and the Pakistani position there is somewhat marginal. Islamabad has high hopes that China will push Central Asian states to increase cooperation, but Beijing remains cautious. In economic terms, Pakistan is also a secondary actor, and all major projects to construct transit links between the two regions – the Central-South Asia Transport and Trade Forum (CSATTF), the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline, and CASA-1000 (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan exporting electricity to Afghanistan and Pakistan) – are developing at a slow pace⁽⁸⁷⁾.

In recent years, relations between Islamabad and Moscow have intensified. First Dmitry Medvedev, and now Vladimir Putin, have ostensibly demonstrated their will to establish a constructive dialogue with Islamabad, despite decades of mistrust and prioritised relations with India. Moscow has initiated four-party talks with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan to discuss the region's future and the fight against drug-trafficking, and is looking to become involved in the TAPI and CASA-1000 projects. This strategy can be explained in terms of a reassessment of Central Asia as Russia's 'near abroad', ensuring that the Kremlin can keep an eye on major US-backed regional projects, and the rising role of Russia in South Asia, at least at the rhetorical level. As of now, Russian-Pakistani cooperation initiatives in sensitive areas such as military exercises and weapons sales have not yet materialised, but both India and China are keeping close watch⁽⁸⁸⁾.

The key policy issue in the Central Asia-Pakistan relationship remains post-2014 Afghanistan. The Central Asian states have sharply criticised Pakistan's support of the Taliban as central actors in political negotiations. Islamabad is seen as interfering in Afghanistan's internal balance to a much greater degree than the Central Asian republics, skewing the domestic stakes between Pashtuns and Tajiks in favour of the former.

⁸⁶ M. Waldman, 'The Sun in the Sky: the relationship between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan insurgents', *Crisis States Research Center Discussion Paper* 18, London: London School of Economics and Political Science, June 2010.

⁸⁷ More on Central Asia-Pakistan relations in Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, op. cit., pp. 102-3.

⁸⁸ S. Stokan, 'Pakistan and Russia move closer toward military cooperation', *Kommersant*, 10 October 2012, available at: http://rbth.ru/articles/2012/10/10/pakistan_and_russia_move_closer_toward_military_cooperation_18965.html

Beyond the Afghanistan issue, some relationships could be emerging around specific issues, possibly more positive between Pakistan and Turkmenistan (mostly on gas exports), but limited between with Tajikistan and/ or Kazakhstan. In all cases, the Central Asia-Pakistan relationship will also depend heavily on Pakistani domestic stability and its now fragile partnership with the United States, as a weak or internationally-troubled Pakistan would have little to offer to Central Asia besides suspicions about Islamic extremism and instability.

4.2.2 Iran

Iran is a key player for Afghanistan's future, following Pakistan. Domestic evolutions in Afghanistan have a direct bearing on Iran. For Tehran, an Afghanistan marked by an ethnic divide between Tajiks/Hazaras and Pashtuns is easier to deal with than one stamped by a religious divide between Sunni and Shiites. Afghanistan's ethnic diversity stretches far back and is not questioned by any actor (the Tajiks and Hazaras may be marginalised from central power in the post-2014 context, but they will retain their autonomy). On the contrary, the Sunni-Shiite divide in Afghanistan has direct domestic implications for Iran (the Baloch rebellion), alike international divides (tensions between Sunnis and Shiites in Pakistan, the Gulf countries, and now Syria).

Iran also sees in Afghanistan a tool for its relations with the US. Unlike Pakistan, Iran's interests in Afghanistan are similar to those of the international community: it will gain nothing by seeing a Taliban regime in power in Kabul. However, Iran has also sought to undermine the US strategy in the region⁽⁸⁹⁾. The possibility of a rapprochement between Washington and Tehran, visible since the arrival of Iranian President Hassan Rowhani, could thus impact Iranian configurations towards Afghanistan or Central Asia. Khomeinist ideology considers the US to be the embodiment of colonial domination over the Muslim world and denounces the support that Western powers have provided to repressive regimes in the developing world, including that of the Shah that was toppled in 1979. Superimposed on this ideological conflict are the tensions related to the Iranian nuclear programme⁽⁹⁰⁾.

In working with Tehran, the Central Asian states have sought to escape Russian influence, diversify economically, and gain access to open seas in the south. However, in the face of mounting pressure from Washington, they have also showed wariness in giving too much room for manoeuvre to an Islamic revolutionary regime. Territorial conflicts in the Caspian Sea have not been resolved, and projects to connect Central Asian road and railway networks to those of Iran have so far failed. Trade contributes to good relations between Iran and Turkmenistan and, to a lesser extent, with Kazakhstan, but political ties are tense with Uzbekistan. Tajikistan remains Iran's main gateway into the region. This is mainly due to ethnic and linguistic proximity, Iranian support for the Tajik Islamic Rebirth Party, and its generous investment policy. But the Iranian-Tajik partnership has not helped improve Tehran's position in the broader region.

All in all, despite not being as successful as initially hoped, Iran is appreciated by the majority of Central Asian governments as a pragmatic and reasonably stable actor, which is willing to put ideological differences aside to promote regional cooperation⁽⁹¹⁾.

⁸⁹ A.M. Haji-Yousefi, 'Iran's Foreign policy in Afghanistan: the current situation and future prospects', *South Asian Studies. A Research Journal of South Asian Studies* 27/1 (2012): 63-75.

⁹⁰ M. Hooman, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ: the paradox of modern Iran*, New York: Doubleday, 2008.

⁹¹ Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013, op. cit., pp. 80-5.

4.2.3 Russia

Historically, Moscow has disassociated Central Asia from Afghanistan. However, since the second half of the 2000s, with Putin's quest to reassert Russia's great power status and the revival of the Kremlin's interest in Afghanistan, Russia has reassessed the links between Central Asia and its southern neighbour, interpreting them mostly from a spillover point of view⁽⁹²⁾. Moscow views Central Asia through an essentially security-oriented prism. The fight against Islamic extremism and drug-trafficking passing through Central Asia from Afghanistan is one of Moscow's priorities. Another is the control of mass labour migration from Central Asia. Russia wants to be able to anticipate, or at least limit, regional instabilities that originate in Central Asia and are at risk of being projected onto Russian territory⁽⁹³⁾.

The military partnership with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan is the standard-bearer of Russian influence. Moscow's main tools in this sector include large-scale training of local military personnel, a joint doctrine and shared security space, arms sales, joint military exercises, the maintenance of the Ayni and Kant military bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and the multilateral structure of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)⁽⁹⁴⁾. In the economic domain, Russian influence in Central Asia is decreasing. It has lost its monopoly over local hydrocarbons, Kazakh uranium, and more generally over the region's commercial orientation. Indeed, China and the EU have overtaken Russia as Central Asia's main trading partners. Through the Eurasian Economic Community, the Customs Union, and potentially also the Eurasian Union that Vladimir Putin evoked in October 2011, Russia wishes to promote an integrated space – encompassing at least Kazakhstan, and possibly Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – so as to halt the growing geopolitical dissociation, driven by China, between Russia and Central Asia⁽⁹⁵⁾. Russian pressure on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to join the Eurasian Union is likely to grow over the coming years, as Moscow's integration ambitions do not engender substantial interest in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. Central Asia's small states can push the number of members up, although Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will be largely economically irrelevant to the Eurasian Union.

One of the weaknesses of the Russian position in Central Asia on the Afghan issue remains the Kremlin's difficulties to come up with unified strategies that integrate Central Asian development into the stabilisation of neighbouring Afghanistan. Indeed, it was not until 2010 that Moscow manifested its interest in the TAPI gas pipeline project and CASA-1000 electricity exports. There is therefore a large gap between Russia's power projection and its actual political will and capabilities on the ground. Its quest for great power status drives dual strategies. On the one hand, Russia sees the NATO/ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan as an opportunity to seize the moment to be recognised as the legitimate 'supervising' power in Central Asia. In this context, it does not want the US to negotiate with the local regimes without its consent, and has succeeded in forcing Bishkek to refuse the renewal of the US

⁹² More in M. Laruelle, S. Peyrouse and J. Boonstra, 'Security and development in Central Asia. The EU compared to China and Russia', *EUCAM Working Paper* 11, Madrid and Brussels: FRIDE-EUCAM, May 2012.

⁹³ A. Matveeva, 'Selective Engagement: Russia's future role in Central Asia', *Central Asia Policy Briefs* 3, Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, Elliott School of International Affairs, Central Asia Programme, July 2013.

⁹⁴ S. Peyrouse, 'Russia-Central Asia: advances and shortcomings of the military partnership', in S. Blank (ed.), *Central Asian Security Trends: views from Europe and Russia*, Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2011, pp. 1-34, available at: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=1063>

⁹⁵ S. Blank, 'Toward a New Chinese Order in Asia. Russia's Failure', *NBR Special Report* 26, Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, March 2011; I. Danchenko, E. Downs and F. Hill, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back? The realities of a rising China and implications for Russia's energy ambitions', *Brookings Policy Paper* 22, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, August 2010; M. A. Smith, *The Russo-Chinese Energy Relationship*, Shrivenham: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, October 2010.

Manas transit centre ⁽⁹⁶⁾. On the other hand, Russia worries about future instabilities in Central Asia that may be aggravated by the situation in Afghanistan, and does not want to shoulder this burden alone. In both cases, Afghanistan is only an appendage of Russia's strategic calculus toward Central Asia, and its relationship with China, India, and Pakistan.

4.2.4 China

China's stance on the post-2014 situation is confusing. Beijing keeps a low political profile on the Afghan domestic scene. Officially, it is not interested in anything other than state-to-state contacts with the Karzai government, and refuses to comment on the reconciliation process. But China's traditional diplomatic position of 'non-interference' is in reality tempered by a more transactional policy in Afghanistan: Beijing buys peace, at a high price, from local actors, and tries to strengthen its Pakistani ally ⁽⁹⁷⁾. However, the partnership with Pakistan is not an easy one. Since the resumption of Uyghur activism in Xinjiang province in 2008, the Chinese authorities have demanded that Islamabad clamp down on Uyghur insurgent groups and Uyghur students attending radical madrassas. Pakistan has complied with this demand, extraditing Uyghur activists and discouraging radical groups from targeting China's interests in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Chinese firms' assets in northern Afghanistan (Aynak and in Sar-i-Pul) also force the Chinese authorities to engage, reluctantly, in local politics. Moreover, they always have had indirect contact with some Taliban groups via their Pakistani allies in the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) ⁽⁹⁸⁾. Since 2011–12, China for the first time has publicly blamed the Pakistani ISI for supporting Islamic insurgents ⁽⁹⁹⁾ – without, however, questioning the privileged status of Pakistan as an ally. But having become unsure about the reliability of Pakistani intelligence, Beijing has raised the profile and information-gathering activities of its embassy in Kabul ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾. In the post-2014 context, China will probably try to involve a growing number of Afghan non-state actors and obtain assurances that they will not attack Chinese interests, while maintaining an official wait-and-see position.

Seen from Central Asia, China's investments throughout the region and in the northern provinces of Afghanistan are appreciated, although they are also criticised for targeting only minerals and hydrocarbons. The growing Chinese presence is also the cause of identity anxieties, due to the long-term implications for Central Asian societies of the power differential, in particular demographic, with their neighbour ⁽¹⁰¹⁾.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation – of which Russia and most Central Asian states are members and where Beijing has taken the lead – has had little impact on the ground in Afghanistan. Both its Shanghai-based Secretariat and the Tashkent-based Regional Anti-Terrorist Centre (RATS) promote a threats-based narrative on the need for regional cooperation against instabilities coming from

⁹⁶ E. Marat, 'Kyrgyzstan's Decision To Renounce Manas Transit Center Favors Russia', *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 26 June 2013, available at: <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12764-kyrgyzstans-decision-to-renounce-manas-transit-center-favors-russia.html>

⁹⁷ E. Wishnick, 'There Goes the Neighborhood: Afghanistan's challenges to China's regional security goals', *Brown Journal of World Affairs* XIX/1 (2012): 83-100.

⁹⁸ A. Small, 'China's Afghan Moment', Washington, D.C.: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 4 October 2012, available at: <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/chinas-afghan-moment/>

⁹⁹ M. Wines, 'China Blames Foreign-Trained Separatists for Attacks in Xinjiang', *The New York Times*, 1 August 2011, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/02/world/asia/02china.html?_r=0Share_this_page; 'China urges Pakistan to expel Uighur Islamic militants', *BBC News*, 31 May 2012, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-18276864>

¹⁰⁰ BBC News, 31 May 2012, op. cit.

¹⁰¹ More in M. Laruelle, *The 'Chinese Question' in Central Asia. Domestic Order, Social Changes and the Chinese Factor*, London and New York: Hurst and Columbia University Press, 2012.

Afghanistan. However, the organisation has no coordinated structure among member states that is relevant to Afghanistan, not even on humanitarian aid or crisis preparedness or refugee flows, not to mention the unlikely prospect of shared border management. At the regional level, the SCO is only active in the fight against alleged Uyghur extremism and in monitoring persons suspected of terrorist activities ⁽¹⁰²⁾. Afghanistan's attribution of observer status in 2012 was, however, welcomed by all member states and the Afghan authorities as a far-reaching symbolic gesture, one that could potentially allow the organisation to gain regional influence in a post-2014 context.

Over the past decade, China has eclipsed Russia to become the leading trade partner for the Central Asia region (albeit in some years exceeded by the EU in some countries) ⁽¹⁰³⁾. This is the result of large investments in transport infrastructure, Turkmen gas, Kazakh oil and uranium, minerals extraction, and a generous loan system. But Beijing's overall posture is defensive, seeking to prevent Central Asia and Afghanistan from negatively impacting Xinjiang's development ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾. The capacity of China to innovate its post-2014 role in the region is limited. As seen from Beijing, Afghan and Central Asian issues are important but limited in their geographic relevance to the security of Xinjiang and the stability of Pakistan.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EU

The 2007 EU Strategy for Central Asia was created at a time when the EU was seeking to engage beyond its direct neighbourhood ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾. Opportunities for increased trade relations with Kazakhstan and the possibility of importing Turkmen gas through the envisaged Southern Corridor were among the key drivers in building ties with the Central Asian region. But already then, security and stability were the main underlying factors, forming the basis of the strategy's introduction as well as one of the seven priorities outlined. High-level conferences organised by the French (2008) and Swedish (2009) EU Council Presidencies also had a specific security focus. As a 'newcomer' to the region, the EU chose first to build political relations and establish mechanisms for delivering aid, while increasing its presence on the ground by establishing delegations in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and later Uzbekistan. Until 2012, EU Central Asia and Afghanistan policies were largely disconnected.

In the 2012 EU Council and Commission review of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, Afghanistan was highlighted several times, especially in the wake of the potential changes that are likely to emerge after 2014 ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾. It stressed the need better to articulate the relationship between Central Asia and Afghanistan in the years ahead, particularly with regard to security and development. Regular High-Level EU-Central Asia Security Dialogues were initiated and the EU plans to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation within the UN framework. Whereas several more fields are mentioned, from border control and fighting organised crime to migration issues and disaster prevention and reaction, concrete proposals remain largely absent.

¹⁰² A. Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: the new great power contest in Central Asia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

¹⁰³ More in Laruelle, Peyrouse and Boonstra 2012, op cit.

¹⁰⁴ Cooley 2012, op. cit.

¹⁰⁵ Council of the European Union, 'The European Union and Central Asia. Strategy for a New Partnership', Luxembourg: General Secretariat of the Council, June 2009, available at:

http://www.eeas.europa.eu/central_asia/docs/2010_strategy_eu_centralasia_en.pdf

¹⁰⁶ Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions on Central Asia', 3179th Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, Luxembourg: European Council, 25 June 2012, available at:

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/131149.pdf

In light of the NATO/ISAF troop drawdown and changes to the broader region, the EU should consider six issues in particular (most, but not all, relating to Afghanistan) when improving its Central Asia strategy over the short and medium terms:

Do not follow the 'spillover' narrative when urging high-level engagement on Central Asia's security challenges

The Central Asian narrative of spillovers from Afghanistan in the form of radicalisation and terrorism seeks to keep external actors – foremost the US and EU – engaged, while diverting attention from Central Asia's own security and instability threats. The EU should avoid linking Afghanistan to Central Asia's immediate stability. The internal Central Asian threat stemming from bad governance, poverty, declining social services and tensions over water resources seems more urgent than a terrorism narrative from Afghanistan. This is not to say that the EU should not be open to discussing potential spillover effects, but rather that these could better focus on the possibility of refugee flows or on helping development in border regions of Afghanistan and Central Asia. So far, debating genuine EU security concerns with Central Asia has been difficult. The first institutionalised High-Level Security Dialogue held in Brussels in June 2013 did not attract sufficient high-level interest from Central Asian states (some countries being represented at Ambassador level only). If this continues to be the case, the EU should nonetheless try to avoid talking mainly about Afghanistan just to please Central Asian leaders. A more direct approach by the EU in airing concern over Central Asia's instability due to bad governance could be stressed just as well.

Do not give up on democratisation and respect for human rights standards when coordinating rule of law support

In its Central Asia strategy, the EU set out to promote democracy, human rights, rule of law and good governance. Attention is devoted to human rights through the annual Human Rights Dialogues with Central Asian partners. The EU needs to ensure that the dialogues do not separate human rights from other fields such as security and energy. The June 2012 EU Strategic Framework for Human Rights and Democracy¹⁰⁷, which places values at the centre of the EU's relations with third countries, could be applied to the Central Asian context. While the EU is active on good governance through some projects, it largely abstains from democracy-oriented projects, mainly because Central Asian governments see democratisation as a threat to their existence. Europe should not shy away from bringing up democracy-related matters, also in light of the commitments that Central Asian states have willingly signed up to through their OSCE membership. The EU has prioritised the rule of law in Central Asia, and some aspects are acceptable to Central Asian leaders. But the EU needs to be careful so that rule of law is not the lowest common denominator on what can be done in terms of promoting values in Central Asia. Whereas all these matters do not link to Afghanistan directly, they are essential for the EU's posture in the region and should be at the forefront of engagement if Europe wants to stay true to its values and seek a stable and long-lasting partnership with the region.

Rethink development aid and make hard choices on which areas to seek impact

EU development aid to Central Asia is small compared to other regions and spread over a variety of priorities. Funding is divided regionally (excluding Afghanistan) and bilaterally with a focus on the poorest countries, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Regional funds go largely to three initiatives on water and

¹⁰⁷ Council of the European Union, 'EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan in Human Rights and Democracy', Luxembourg: European Council, 25 June 2012, available at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/131181.pdf

the environment, education, and the rule of law, as well as BOMCA and the anti-drug programme CADAP. Bilateral funds go to sectoral budget support in the case of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, plus a host of projects in which a large part of the funding is swallowed up by Western consultancy firms.

2014 will offer an opportunity to strengthen the EU's development approach to Central Asia, as the current seven-year cycle ends and a new cycle of the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) is being developed. In the case of Central Asia, funding levels will increase by around 25 % to EUR 1 billion for the period 2014–20, even though they will remain limited overall. To have a greater impact, the EU will need to choose carefully where to invest. EU aid would be most effective if devoted to supporting social-economic projects that prioritise civil society organisations and local institutions instead of national bureaucracies and corrupt governments. Three matters seem to stand out considering the EU's experience, added-value compared to other donors and the resources it can bring forward: educational projects and exchanges; fighting corruption and building the rule of law; and cooperation with and support to Central Asian (and Afghanistan's) civil societies. Most importantly, EU funding provided through DEVCO would need to be further tailored to the political strategy implemented by the European External Action Service (EEAS). On a sub-regional basis, Afghanistan (for instance together with Tajikistan) will hopefully be included in some activities, especially those that focus on local communities and civil society.

Revise border support programmes and address the broader security sector

European border support programmes should be further revised in accordance with the post-2014 context. First, taking into account that there are many border control programmes and projects by multiple donors in different countries, all with very limited impact, it would make sense to engage in an in-depth and independent assessment of these programmes. Second, European activities should focus mainly on soft infrastructure issues, especially the training of border guards and customs officers, and on more efficient procedures; while funds devoted to purely hard infrastructures should be further reduced. This is a process that has already been initiated by BOMCA and which should be expanded, also elsewhere. Third, activities and programmes should be increasingly coordinated with similar initiatives on the Afghan side, and contribute to overcoming the traditional mutual distrust of both sides of the border. This means that local communities on both sides need to be increasingly engaged and that border support programmes should increasingly involve local economic and trade aspects. Lastly, as far as the EU is concerned, border support programmes could be included into broader SSR-related activities, with a link to on-going efforts in police reform and rule of law development. However, in-depth and reform-driven SSR programmes are unlikely to be accepted by Central Asian governments, since they touch on the core of their existence. But for internal planning and coordination purposes and as an awareness raising process, SSR aspects should be taken up in a more holistic manner while also discussing these security matters at a high-level between the EU and Central Asia.

Focus increasingly at a bilateral level on the water-energy nexus in Central Asia while keeping regional fora open

The EU and its member states are already heavily involved in both formal and informal coordination mechanisms around the water-energy nexus, and work well with some of the major international organisations. However, a truly regional framework is not realistic under current political conditions: diffusing Uzbek-Tajik tensions will take years, and convincing Central Asian governments to recognise Afghanistan as an integral actor in the Amu Darya basin negotiations will be extremely difficult. In order to avoid a mismatch between intentions and realities on the ground, Europe should increasingly focus on national programmes for each state, while maintaining the regional fora as a means to broaden socialisation and lessen regional tensions.

The water-energy nexus is a governance issue rather than a resource-scarcity issue, which means that solutions must be first domestic and then regional. Numerous water-energy related tensions would disappear if more focus were placed on improving efficiency and effectiveness. Central Asian states do not need *more* water; they need to use the water they have *more efficiently*. Their energy situation could also largely improve if their efforts and those of European programmes focused more on renovating transmission and stock systems; avoiding large losses and energy theft; reforming the agencies in charge of energy and their political connections; improving distribution by prioritising energy-wise industries and households; and training new generations of engineers.

Initiate an early review of the EU Strategy for Central Asia in 2015

The 2012 review of the EU strategy emphasised the potential impact on Central Asia of the NATO/ISAF troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. Whereas the Council and Commission normally draft an annual report on the strategy and an in-depth review is carried out every five years, it would make sense to do a complete review in spring 2015, three years after the last one. There are two main reasons for bringing the review forward on the agenda. First, the process of assessing EU policy would take place after withdrawal (and Afghanistan's elections), but leaving enough time to engage all stakeholders. Second, it would be an opportunity to take into account the new DCI budget cycle, beginning in 2014, thus further streamlining EU development aid with broader policy objectives. This would also represent an opportunity to adapt the EU Strategy for Central Asia to new circumstances, taking into account lessons learnt over the past eight years.

6. CONCLUSION

Central Asia has been affected by grand narratives and geopolitical designs that have framed external engagement in the region, from the 'war on terror' to 'nation building' and 'new great game' ideas. Concepts such as these have been internalised by the local elites to their own advantage. Unlike external actors such as Russia and China, but also the United States, which have geopolitical interests in the region, Europe has declared its intention to improve the well-being of Central Asian societies and build long-term partnerships. Europe must therefore adapt its strategy to acknowledge that Central Asia's greatest challenges are governance related. The domestic framework is therefore more important than the regional one. Programmes that are realistic, more limited in scope, and focused on improving efficiency and implementation will have greater chances of success than strategies that are too broad and ambitious.

Linking Afghanistan and Central Asia in European policies and activities will be difficult and often not possible, productive or welcome. Still, there is some scope for the EU to streamline its Afghanistan and Central Asia policies, foremost in the development field, though linked to stability and security objectives. The EU must focus on areas in which the long-term involvement of local actors can be boosted, in particular that of local civilian stakeholders, who are the only vectors of long-term sustainable solutions. But it will be hard for Europe to set up official mechanisms of trilateral EU-Central Asia-Afghanistan cooperation. Probably the most realistic way in which the EU can help connect Afghanistan and Central Asia is by supporting locally-based initiatives, such as cross-border trade or community-based activities, and by trying to foster water negotiations and joint education programmes. But most calls for greater integration between Afghanistan and Central Asia will remain unanswered, as long as there is no political will to build integrated cooperation mechanisms and local actors prefer to remain on the margins.

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