

Identifying Instability Pockets

A Monograph

by

CPT Iskander Karim
Armed Forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan



School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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Name of Candidate: CPT Iskander Karim

Monograph Title: Identifying Instability Pockets

Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
Daniel G. Cox, PhD

_____, Seminar Leader
James W. MacGregor, COL

_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
Henry A. Arnold III, COL

Accepted this 4th day of December 2014 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, PhD

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Abstract

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After the collapse of the Soviet Union, new independent states have emerged in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Central Asia has been a strategically important region during the Great Game and is becoming more important as each of the great powers finds interests in the region. The precarious stability in Central Asia is at stake and it is vital to understand how it is undermined, as instability will cause problems for the international community. This monograph examines the causes of instability in Central Asia, in particular, ethnic strife, border issues, resource scarcity, radicalism, and drug trafficking and examines how to identify pockets of instability in the region in order to create longer-term stability in Central Asia.

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Acronyms

| | |
|------|--|
| CAPS | Central Asian Power System |
| CIS | Commonwealth of Independent States |
| CSTO | Collective Security Treaty Organization |
| EBRD | European Bank for Reconstruction and Development |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GWOT | Global War on Terrorism |
| IMU | Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NDN | Northern Distribution Network |
| SCO | Shanghai Cooperation Organization |
| WMD | Weapons of Mass Destruction |

Identifying Instability Pockets

Introduction

Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island.

Who rules the World-Island commands the World.

– Sir Halford John Mackinder, *The Geographic Pivot of History*

Central Asia, which comprises the territories of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, though only home to sixty million people, has played a large role in the political, military, and economic development of Eastern Europe, the Middle East, South and East Asia.¹ Central Asia was an important crossroads for international trade along the Silk Road that connected East Asia with the Middle East and Europe, was home to one of the greatest empires established – the Mongolian Empire, and is a meeting point for three major world religions and civilizations – Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity². Recognizing its importance, in the nineteenth century, Britain and Russia were in a competition called the “Great Game” to control the area of the Eurasia. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 signified a new phase in the history of the republics and because of their strategic location, hydrocarbons, and other valuable resources, a fresh chapter in international relations began in the region.

To understand this importance, one must examine the rivalry among major world powers such as the United States, Russia, and the People’s Republic of China. Worldwide, there is an

¹ Rafis Abazov, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), vii.

² *Ibid.*, Map 1.

ever-changing pattern of relationships amongst states.³ In Central Asia, the same is seen as the five former Soviet republics continue to shape the international debate. The strategic importance of Central Asia for Washington, Moscow, and Beijing varies with each nation's perception of its interests in the region.⁴ There is a range of interests, amongst them political, economic, and social. For instance, Washington's major concern with Central Asia is focused on the fight against terrorism.⁵ Additionally, Washington values Central Asia as a theater for setting up a counterbalance against Russia and China. Beijing on the other hand views Central Asia as a place for defending critical domestic interests, especially from the west. Russia looks at Central Asia as its sphere of influence. This is a paradigm of the asymmetry of interests that is a major factor adding to the strategic value of Central Asia.

The interactions and policies of the world powers determined the scope and scale of security issues in Central Asia. The Cold War, just as all major events in world history, left conflicting impacts on the future of these nations. Given this, there has been continued interest from the major powers in order to maintain their influence and presence in Central Asia. It is arguable that the nineteenth century belonged to European expansion and imperialism. Given the turn of events over the past century, and if the first few years of the new century are indicative of the future, Central Asia is surely destined to be a focus of the world attention.

³ Richard Boyd and Tak Wing Ngo, *Asian States: Beyond the Developmental Perspective* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 47.

⁴ Stephen Blank, "The Strategic Importance of Asia: An American View," *National Security Studies* 1 (2008): 73-88.

⁵ Eugene B. Rumer, Dmitri Trenin, and Huansheng Zhao, *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2007), 38.

Central Asia, the land Sir Halford Mackinder, called the Heartland in 1904 in his “Geographical Pivot of History,” is an important geostrategic region in Eurasia. Similar to any other part of the world, Central Asia has its issues that it has to resolve to remain in a stable environment. There is no benefit for Russia, China, and the United States if the region becomes unstable. The purpose of this paper is to understand what precipitates instability in Central Asia.

The methodology is a case study comparison of five states that comprise Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The variables chosen for this study are ethnic distribution, border issues, resource scarcity, radicalism, and drug trafficking.⁶

Literature Review

Central Asia has continued to struggle with different kinds of instability, which threaten its immediate, as well as long-term security. Though the nations became independent in 1991, they have not yet adjusted fully to the new sovereign states status.⁷ In the course of the political transition, the countries experienced major turmoil. Central Asia’s instability has many adverse consequences that could spill over to the neighboring countries.⁸ In the following discussion, there is an analysis of the instability situation in Central Asia as explained in different literatures.

⁶ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, *Greed and Violence in Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 563-595.

⁷ Jeffrey Mankoff, "The United States and Central Asia after 2014," report of the CIC Russia and Eurasia Program (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2013): 1-44.

⁸ Daniel Kimmage, "Security Challenges in Central Asia: Implications for the European Union's Engagement Strategy," *CEPS Policy Brief* 139, University of Pittsburgh (2007): 1-6.

Causes of the Instability

Instability in the entire Central Asian region is attributable to a myriad of factors, including the widening standard-of-living and income gap between wealthy persons and poor persons, combined with the perceptions of deprivation. Moreover, the rising macroeconomic disturbances like high inflation, labor strife, and wage arrears have worsened the instability.⁹ Furthermore, demographic downtrends like high death rates, drug abuse, and low birth rates have also increased the instability on a broader scale.

However, the genesis of the instability in Central Asian nations is traceable to issues like conflicts that have occurred over resources, drug related corruption, radicalization, underdevelopment, and poverty.¹⁰ Additionally, most current and emerging conflicts find their roots in the Soviet era. Unfortunately, when the Soviet system ended in 1991, the Central Asian nations were not prepared to control these emerging threats.¹¹ Undoubtedly, in a country where there are regular conflicts and wars, economic development and other developments may not be forthcoming, and the cycle of instability continues.

⁹ Olga Oliker and Thomas Szayna, "Sources of Conflict and Paths to U.S. Involvement," *Chapter Nine 1* (2010): 307-359.

¹⁰ Niklas Swanstrom, Svante Cornell, and Anara Tabyshalieva, "A Strategic Conflict Analysis of Central Asia with a Focus on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *Central Asia—Caucasus Institute* (2005): 1-45.

¹¹ Mustafa Aydin, "New Geopolitics of Central Asia and the Caucasus; Causes of Instability and Predicament," *New Geopolitics 1* (2003): 1-8.

Looking at a conflict like the one engineered by the water scarcity experienced in many of the Central Asian nations, there have been many secondary issues symptomatic of the fight over water.¹² Research indicates that water is a major cause or catalyst of regional conflicts and instability witnessed in most of the Central Asian nations. Competition for scarce water resources among the five nations dates back to the 19th century when Central Asian farmers and nomads fought over water.¹³ Soviet mismanagement exacerbated this conflict. Most studies overlook resource sustainability and cooperation, with many scholars paying attention to the specific roles of the United States, China, and Russia, and the mushrooming Islamist movements as the main causes of the instability. Central Asian nations cannot ignore the issue of water disputes that have historically dominated in the region.¹⁴

In addition to these externally focused concerns, there are many internal challenges that have caused instability in the region. Such challenges include the dysfunctional social and political environments in Central Asia. Across Central Asia, there are repressive governments, which fuel discontent normally tinged with rebellious radicalization.¹⁵ In addition, outside Kazakhstan, the booming populations, as well as corruption, have served to magnify discontent,

¹² William Hartman, "Central Asia's Raging Waters: The Prospects of Water Conflict in Central Asia," *National Security Affairs* 1 (2007): 1-77.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁴ Beatrice Mosello, "Water in Central Asia: A Prospect of Conflict or Cooperation?," *Institute of International and Development Studies* 4 (2008): 151-176.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

while at the same time sapping the governments' capability of responding to all underlying economic and social problems and hence the regional instability.

Corruption flourishes because the Central Asian nations have served as major routes for drug trafficking to Europe and Russia.¹⁶ State capacities, especially in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, are compromised by drug-related corruption. In fact, Turkmenistan declared drug addiction a major national catastrophe. Difficult kinds of socioeconomic conditions in Central Asia have further exacerbated many of the challenges that have caused instability, particularly the drug trade.

Moreover, even though the region has remained relatively immune from Islamist violence, its proximity to Pakistan and Afghanistan, coupled with religious dissent and opposition to governments has triggered radicalization and increased insecurity and instability.¹⁷ Accordingly, power transitions have caused instability especially in Kyrgyzstan, where ethnic tensions have roiled the southern portions of the country. The United States has recently been in the forefront in helping Central Asia to solve some of its challenges including the pervasive insecurity.

¹⁶ United Nations, "Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia," *The Paris Pact Initiative 1* (2008): 1-57.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Under-development in Central Asia

Central Asia has remained underdeveloped for quite some time now. Research indicates that underdevelopment relates to many factors including insecurity and environmental issues, which threaten any effective human development. Specifically, such environmental issues include the rising demand for resources like water as well as other issues like air pollution, extensive water pollution, and soil erosion or degradation.¹⁸ Most of the highlighted issues exist in varying degrees from one nation to the other across the region. Unfortunately, the effects of aspects like water pollution on human development, as well as trans-boundary security, remain underestimated.

Poverty has been pervasive in most of Central Asia, with about half of the residents living in some poverty stricken conditions. Such people lack sufficient natural resources to sustain their daily livelihoods. Today, the World Bank has set the poverty line in Central Asia at \$2.15 daily. Many persons, especially in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan live below this threshold.¹⁹ There is, therefore, a need to breach the gap between the wealthy and the poor in order to foster human development. Research indicates that despite the attempts for human development, Central Asia's landlocked countries have progressively faced major structural challenges in accessing the world markets. Consequently, this makes it lag behind the neighboring nations in

¹⁸ Alexander Carius, Moira Fell, and Dennis Tanzler, "Addressing Environmental Risks in Central Asia," *Environmental Governance Series 1*, (2003): 1-42.

¹⁹ Marc Suhrcke, Lorenzo Rocco, and Martin McKee, "Health: A Vital Investment for Economic Development in Eastern Europe and Central Asia," *European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies 1*, (2007): 1-280.

external trade and overall development.²⁰ The poor performance has been attributable to overdependence on the transit systems of neighbors.

To make the matters worse, the Great Recession in 2007-2011 affected the attainment of Millennium Development Goals set by Central Asia. In fact, lower incomes and high unemployment have compelled households to start economizing on necessities as they did previously on luxuries.²¹ This has mainly affected the poor who have experienced high unemployment levels, income losses, and decreased accessibility to health services.

Most of the development issues started after 1991 when the Soviet Union ended. Specifically, the Soviet collapse subjected Central Asia to various external shocks, including an aid shock, a trade shock, and macroeconomic mismanagement. As an example, the aid shock experienced was equal to 30-35% of Central Asia's Gross National Product.²² Accordingly, Central Asia was deprived of significant international assistance and engagement.

Cultural Differences as a Cause of Violence

Notably, the violence that has caused instability in the Central Asian nations has had an association with cultural divides among the people in the region. Historically, Central Asia has

²⁰ Michael Faye et al., "The Challenges Facing Landlocked Developing Countries," *Journal of Human Development* 5, no. 1 (2004): 31-69).

²¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, "The Unece Report on Achieving the Millenium Development Goals in Europe and Central Asia, 2012," *UNECE Report* 1, (2012).

²² Dari Khongorzul, "Mongolia and Central Asia in Transition," *Ritsemeikan Asia Pacific* 3, (2007): 117-149.

had two major cultural divides related to lifestyle divergence (nomadic vs. sedentary groups) and to linguistic differentiation (Persian vs. Turkic language groups). The two divides have always represented a stereotypical continuum that also includes the bilingual kinds of speakers of Turkic and Persian languages and the semi-nomadic agriculturalists.²³

For a long time, disputes have erupted from along these divides. As an exemplar, the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz of Ferghana Valley represent two opposing groups on the sedentary-nomadic divide. Consequently, even though Kyrgyz and Uzbeks frequently intermarry, sustain social interactions, and form friendships, they have maintained various stereotypes between themselves, which lead to distrust between their populations.²⁴ This stereotyping has more often than not triggered conflicts and violence across the divides, especially when it comes to land ownership.

From another perspective, the governments in the region have not been steadfast in conflict resolution and curbing violence. The region has sustained repressive governments in which religious and media freedoms various draconian restrictions. The governments, such as the Turkmenistan government, have progressively utilized imprisonment as a tool for political retaliation.²⁵ Consequently, various groups have felt discriminated against, and this has led to uprisings and the radicalization-of segments of the population.

²³ Sean Roberts, "What Ethnicity Got to Do with It? Healing the Wounds of Uzbek-Kyrgyz Violence in the Ferghana Valley," *Ponars Policy Memo* 106, (2010): 1-6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch, *World Report* (2013).

In particular, the West links radicalization with Islam, because some of its members rely on violence and terrorism to seek redress.²⁶ However, despite efforts by the United States and other countries to help Central Asia combat different forms of violence, there have still been many rebellions. Even the formation of civil society to aid in improving democratization has not borne many fruits because of the major cultural differences among the citizens of each nation.²⁷ Perhaps, for democratization to succeed, the five nations have to address the main political issues such as nationalism and Islam and the main political actors engaged.

Today, radicalization has, thus far, emerged as a culture that advocates violence and rebellions. Radicalization has involved three major groupings even though there are many others that may arguably be equally influential. The main groupings are the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islami, and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.²⁸ Despite efforts by the governments of the region to fight radicalization, the militants have threatened to return to the region when North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) withdraws completely from Afghanistan.²⁹

²⁶ Jacob Zenn, "Terrorism and Islamic Radicalization in Central Asia," *A Compendium of Recent Jamestown Analysis* 1, (2013): 1-86.

²⁷ Oliver Roy, "The Predicament of 'Civil Society' in Central Asia and the 'Greater Middle East'," *International Affairs* 81, no. 5 (2005).

²⁸ Vitaly Naumkin, "Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies* 1, (2003): 1-71.

²⁹ Zenn.

Indeed, the United States' complete or partial withdrawal from the Afghanistan would severely destabilize Central Asia, especially in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, which face major unpredictable transitions, including leadership transitions after long-serving political leaders leave office.³⁰ Perhaps, it will also be imperative to find some equilibrium between the interests of clans in Central Asia and the authorities, especially in decision-making. This is because the lack of equilibrium between the two parties has also exacerbated some of the conflicts witnessed in the area and hence contributes to national instability.³¹

Importance of Comprehending Instability in Central Asia

It is imperative for Central Asia and its neighboring countries to understand instability in the region, to include delving into its root causes. In this way, it will be possible to derive solutions and reduce the risk to the region and parts of the world with which it interacts.³² Indeed, violent extremism, smuggling of illegal narcotics and cultural conflicts may progressively curtail Central Asia's development if not addressed. Therefore, if economic or political development is to occur in the Central Asian nations, those promoting such development must understand the etiology of instability.

³⁰ Ariel Cohen, "The Threat of Islamism in Central Asia and the North Caucasus," *The Heritage Foundation* 1, (2013): 1-9.

³¹ Vadim Volovoj, "Problems and Fundamentals of Stability in Central Asia," *Institute of International Relations* 3, (2009): 99-130.

³² Kimmage, 2.

However, it is important not to forget that the problems of terrorism, endemic corruption, decreased social services, weak security forces, and widespread criminalization of the political establishment have to be solved continuously and simultaneously.³³ Undoubtedly, if the problems are ignored, Central Asia, and the world in general, will continue suffering. Indeed, problems such as corruption and drug trafficking need to be addressed collaboratively at a global scale.

Instability in Summary

To summarize, it is clear that Central Asia still wrestles with instability and that this condition is the main hindrance to successful development of the region.³⁴ Despite the region having valuable resources, like oil, it has been unable to capitalize on these resources to stimulate economic development. This is an indication of an existing problem in the manner in which the countries of the region manage their resources and implement policies.

It appears the only way in which stability is to be restored is through collaborative efforts in which the United State, Russia, China and other powerful nations will join hands in helping Central Asia. Central Asia may not be able to solve all its problems alone, especially the terrorism threats, radicalization, corruption, poor governance and drug trafficking, all of which have been linked with instability. Indeed, the region and the world in general stand to benefit if the region becomes stable and enhances its trading capacities with the entire international community.

³³ International Crisis Group, "China's Central Asia Problem," *Asian Report*, (2013).

³⁴ Volovoj, 99-130.

Analysis

This section examines the countries in Central Asia by looking at their history, how each gained its independence, their major allies, major challenges that face that country, its economic development to have a better understanding of what each country represents. The variables – ethnic strife, border issues, resource scarcity, radicalism, and drug trafficking – show what causes instability in Central Asia.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan became a Russian protectorate in the 1730s. The Russians delimited Central Asia according to ethnicity, trade and economic subsystems, and geostrategic significance, resulting in republics where the titular populations resided.³⁵ Between 1905 and 1920, an affluent group of urban-based professionals created the Alash movement an Orenburg-based government known as Alash Orda; later the Bolsheviks overthrew this government.³⁶ By 1917, Orenburg had already surpassed Tashkent as a center of Muslim politics and printed works, such as the Qazak journal. Collectivization and artificially induced famine during the 1920s led to death and displacement of many Kazakhs.³⁷

³⁵ N. J. Melvin, “Patterns of centre-regional relations in Central Asia: the cases of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan,” *Regional & Federal Studies* 11, no. 3 (2011): 166.

³⁶ A. Sarsembayev, “Imagined communities: Kazakh nationalism and Kazakification in the 1990s,” *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 3 (1999): 326.

³⁷ B. Hierman, and N. Nekbakhtshoev, “Whose land is it? Land reform, minorities, and the titular "nation" in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan,” *The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 42, no. 2 (2014): 338.

Though the Russians brought many challenges, they also introduced printing technology, which enabled books, encyclopedias, newspapers, and journals to be printed in Kazakh language. It also enabled the assimilation of Russian words into Kazakh and thereby modernized Kazakh and promoted command of Russian by the Kazakh. Moreover, Kazakhs used Arabic script until 1929 and Latin script until 1940 when the Russians introduces Cyrillic. Such alterations made it difficult for Kazakh children to trace their rich cultural heritage. In 1924, though the Kazakhstani Constitution recognized both Russian and Kazakh as national languages, Russian was increasingly taking over as the official language. The result was a Kazakh population with poor command of their mother tongue and good command of Russian.

The Russification and Sovietization of Kazakh society, the latter lasting 70 years, largely redefined social, cultural, and political aspects of Kazakh's identity, leading to the virtual eradication of the Islamic identity and nomadic lifestyle. Furthermore, the occupation of Kazakh territories from 1953 to 1965 led to the displacement of the Kazakhs and their livestock from pastureland, disrupting their nomadic way of life.³⁸ In fact, the Kazakh population decreased by at least half by the end of the Soviet rule. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 revived Kazakh ethnic identity.³⁹

³⁸ H. E. Hale, "Cause without a rebel: Kazakhstan's unionist nationalism in the USSR and CIS," *The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 37, no. 1 (2009): 4

³⁹ Sarsembayev, 324.

How Kazakhstan Gained its Independence

At first, Kazakhstan was apprehensive about becoming independent since the country lacked the experience of nationhood and was largely dependent on Russia's economic planning. In fact, the majority of Kazakhstanis did not support the decision to 'opt out' of the USSR in the referendum of 1991. However, the inevitability of change became evident in 1990 when the Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus unanimously agreed to pull out of the Union. Kazakhstan became independent when it submitted its own version of the New Union Treaty in 1991.⁴⁰ Kazakhstan declared sovereignty over its own territory through the "declaration of sovereignties," drafted and approved by the Supreme Soviet in 1990.

Major Allies

In 1991, when Kazakhstan gained independence, the U.S was the first country to recognize it as a sovereign state.⁴¹ Since then, the bilateral relationship between the two has continued to intensify, almost in all areas, and has led to the establishment of a high-level strategic partnership. One of the main ingredients of this friendship is political dialogue, which at its highest level creates the conditions necessary to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries. Presently, there is a constructive, cordial relationship between the two countries' leaders. During the meetings of the countries' leaders, issues such as a strategic

⁴⁰ Hale, 13.

⁴¹ Claude Salhani, *Islam Without a Veil: Kazakhstan's Path of Moderation* (Bulles, VA: Potomac Books), 56.

partnership and the position of Kazakhstan in Central Asia dominate the agenda. At the same time, the U.S has continually noted the successes of Kazakhstan's diplomacy.⁴² Kazakhstan, therefore, has a growing role in regional advances that benefit Central Asia and the United States. This helps the two countries to cooperate on various interests such as security, economy, and politics.

Kazakhstan is perhaps the most important country in Central Asia.⁴³ It is landlocked, sharing land boundaries with the rest of the Central Asian countries as Russia and China. The country's geostrategic position makes it important for nuclear powers in Asia, especially China and Russia. Both nations have policies towards Kazakhstan, which are evident as they struggle to secure their interests in the region. Russia, whose endeavor is to regain its superpower status is widely observed, uses Kazakhstan. On the other hand, China is motivated by two factors. First, China's booming economy means that it must have a steady supply of energy to sustain it, and Kazakhstan is located nearby, can meet some of this requirement. Second, China has for long stretched a hand of friendship to its Asian neighbors as it seeks its place in the world as a major economic superpower.

Accordingly, over the past few years, some observers believe Kazakhstan has drifted towards China amid tension with Russia.⁴⁴ The relationship with China began in the post-Soviet era amid Nazarbayev's adherence to Eurasianism and its unique civilization. A member of the

⁴² Tigran Martirosyan and Silvia Maretti, *Scholar's Guide to Washington, DC for Central Asian and Caucus Studies: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan* (Washington, DC: M. E Sharpe, 2012), 67.

⁴³ Melvin, 142.

⁴⁴ Stephen Blanks and Kevin Rosner, *Russo-Chinese Energy Relations: Politics in Command* (London: GMB Publishing, 2006), 43.

Russian-sponsored Customs Union, Kazakhstan intends to join the Eurasian Union, despite the fact that its foreign policy indicated Russia as one of its several partners. The transportation of oil and gas is one of the central issues between Kazakhstan, China, and Russia. In this light, China has emerged as a viable partner and ally. It has provided Kazakhstan with alternative transportation routes such as railways and made considerable investments, both in cash and manpower. Kazakhstan is most likely not to sway to the West and the United States or to the East, represented by Russia.

Currently, the relationship between Kazakhstan and Russia is purely economic.⁴⁵ The two countries compete for the global market for their oil, gas, and metal products. Further, Kazakhstan formed economic partnerships with the former Soviet republics, especially Russia.⁴⁶ The trilateral agreement between Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan is a strategy to countervail Uzbekistan's bilateral partnership with the United States as well and enhances their bilateral relations with both Russia and the United States.⁴⁷ Kazakhstan also engages with global partners, such as the United States and NATO, to improve its border security, especially to contain WMD proliferation after 9/11.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ A. Bohr, "Regionalism in Central Asia: new geopolitics, old regional order," *International Affairs* 80, no. 3 (2004): 485.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 485.

⁴⁸ S. W. Garnett, n.d., "The strategic challenge of Kazakhstan and Inner Asia," in *Thinking Strategically* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 225.

Economic Development

Kazakhstan, in addition to possessing an educated workforce, is endowed with large reserves of natural resources, including oil, minerals, and gas. The economy also benefits from grain exports.⁴⁹ The fact that many Kazakhs enjoy high standards of living is a result of these facts. Kazakhstan can also easily adapt to maintaining intercultural links with Russia and the western countries.⁵⁰

The potential for Kazakhstan to become a liberal market economy is huge given the higher living standards and an educated workforce.⁵¹ As such, Kazakhstan rapidly introduces reforms initially. Despite this, Kazakhstan recorded an annual inflation rate of 50 percent in 1996, with sluggish macroeconomic stability. In response to this crisis, Kazakhstan adopted neo-liberal marketization policy rapidly.

Ethnic Strife

Despite being located amidst an ethnicity stricken region, Kazakhstan is one of the most peaceful countries in Asia. However, there are instances of ethnic strife from time to time. The

⁴⁹ R. Pomfret and K. Anderson, "Economic development strategies in Central Asia since 1991," *Asian Studies Review* 25, no. 2 (2001): 187.

⁵⁰ S. V. Golunov and R. N. McDermott, "Border security in Kazakhstan: threats, policies and future challenges," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 18, no. 1 (2005): 32.

⁵¹ M. Kim and S. W. Sokhey, "Liberalizing to be free: trade dependence on Russia and post-communist trade liberalization" (research paper, University of Colorado at Boulder, 2013), 6.

country is a multi-cultural state. The population of Kazakhstan experienced major changes over the years. First, there has been a substantial population of Russians in Kazakhstan; a situation that has fueled major conflict between Kazakhs and the incoming Russians.⁵²

The high population of Russian, Uzbek, and Ukrainian based workers in Western and Central Kazakhstan has greatly contributed to ethnic tension in the region.⁵³ Local Kazakhs complain about foreigners earning much higher salaries. A study carried out on 2300 Kazakhs in the two regions shows that over 40 percent Kazakhs believe that Kazakhstan ought to be a state of ethnic Kazakhs only and they should have the right to determine the present and the future of the country.⁵⁴

Over the last two decades, a few cases of ethnic conflict have occurred. For instance, in 2006, a quarrel between young Kazakh and Uighur men erupted into an ethnic conflict. The young men formed groups and arranged fights between each other. A group of Kazakh youths demolished three cafes in Shelek village and beat people causing major injuries. In March 2007, another large-scale fight occurred in Kazatkom village. A day after two young men of Chechen and Kazakh origin had a disagreement in a neighboring village, a large crowd gathered and

⁵² Jeff Chinn and Robert John Kaiser, *Russians As The New Minority* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

⁵³ Paol Kolsto and Andrei Edemsky, *Russians In The Former Soviet Republics* (London: Hurst and Co., 1995).

⁵⁴ Christine Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation In Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2009).

carried out major attacks resulting in the three deaths. In October 2007, Kazakhs in Mayatas village burned houses of Kurds following the rape of a four-year-old Kazakh child.⁵⁵

One major challenge to Kazakh nationalism is the reconciliation of the urban Russian-speaking Kazakhs with the predominately Kazakh-speaking population, which is rural-based. The Russophones are already beginning to feel discriminated against by the Kazafication process. Such inherent ideological clashes between the two groups could significantly enflame nationalism.⁵⁶ One consequence of Kazafication is the emigration of Russophones and Russians from Kazakhstan to northern Russia; trend has become increasingly common since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This group is highly skilled and constitutes the largest chunk of the country's workforce. This is likely to hurt badly the country's economy in the long-term.⁵⁷

If the government does not take major action, the ethnical tension may erupt into a major conflict, causing significant loss of life and the eviction of numerous foreigners from the country.

Border Issues

Kazakhstan faces an almost insurmountable challenge of border insecurity. The structures of political power and settlement schemes inherited from the Russian-dominated USSR have

⁵⁵ Hooman Peimani, *Conflict And Security In Central Asia And The Caucasus* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009).

⁵⁶ Sarsembayev, 328.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 336.

sowed seeds of regional and interethnic tensions.⁵⁸ The country's borders remain porous, despite government intervention, enabling narco-trafficking, arms trafficking, and movement of WMD.⁵⁹ This is not surprising given the backdrop of border disputes with the surrounding states and unmanned territories. This has also been a recipe for ethnic and interstate clashes.

Kazakhstan and China settled their border disputes in 1998 after numerous territorial concessions. However, trafficking especially by the drug trade from Afghanistan is constantly undermining Kazakhstan's border security. Some border guards and customs officials are corrupt even as they fight with law enforcement agencies for a share of illegal activities profits. In addition, events in Uzbekistan caused cross-border shootings between Kazakhstan.

Resource Scarcity

As is the case with other downstream states in central Asia, Kazakhstan is rich in hydrocarbons. It is the eighth largest coal producer of coal in the world and possesses substantial oil reserves and several modernized Soviet-era refineries.⁶⁰ A significant part of this production is exported to other countries, particularly Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, both of whom rely heavily on these exports during winter months. Naturally, with most of its water supply coming from rivers that flow from the two countries, Kazakhstan exchanges its coal for water with the two upstream neighbors.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Melvin, 174.

⁵⁹ Golunov and McDermott, 31.

⁶⁰ Steven Solomon, *Water: the Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power, and Civilization* (New York: Harper, 2010).

⁶¹ Dinara Kemelova and Gennady Zhalkubaev, "Water, Conflict, And Regional Security In Central Asia Revisited," *NYU Env'tl LJ* 11 (2002): 479.

The Syr Darya River that flows from Kyrgyzstan is a major source of water for Kazakhstan. The Kyrgyz rely on the water of the Naryn River a major tributary of the Syr Darya to produce hydroelectricity. During the summer when the runoff is high, they accumulate water in the reservoir to help with electricity production during winter. This is in direct conflict with Kazakhstan's needs for water during the summer for irrigation. In a bid to solve the ensuing crisis, Kazakhstan entered into a trilateral arrangement with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan under which Kazakhstan would buy electricity from Kyrgyzstan in exchange for concessions in water volumes. However, Uzbekistan failed to live up to its end of the bargain to allow passage of extra water to Kazakhstan.⁶² The countries have yet to agree on how to share the water intake. Although Kazakhstan's relationship with its two neighbors remains rather good, it is unclear what impact the increasing water scarcity will have in the future.⁶³

Central Asian countries share a common Soviet heritage. The Soviets developed the electricity and water systems as part of the Soviet system with different areas trading water for electricity and fuel. The result was a self-sufficient model where the surplus in one state covered the deficit in another under the Central Asian Power System (CAPS).⁶⁴ Under this system, upstream states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan collected water in large reservoirs during autumn

⁶² Solomon.

⁶³ John Heathershaw, "Conflict transformation in Central Asia: irrigation disputes in the Ferghana Valley," *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 1 (2010): 133-135.

⁶⁴ Frederick D. Gordon, *Freshwater Resources and Interstate Cooperation* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008).

and winter and released it during the summer to Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Since the Soviets did not design a system for sovereign states, it is now ineffective. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have already withdrawn from the bilateral and multilateral agreements that held the system together. A give and take relationship that ensured mutual benefit for all parties has broken down and today, each country pursues its own interest at the expense of the others. This precipitates harmful political contention that could explode if left unchecked.⁶⁵

Replacing regional cooperation with economic nationalism could be a catalyst to social instability and future wars in the region. With downstream countries choosing to sell their fossil fuels to the world market where prices are higher, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, unable to pay the high prices, have been left with little alternative energy source for winter.⁶⁶ In a bid to bridge the shortfall in electricity production, the two countries have proposed to build two large reservoirs on the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers, plans that would deprive the thirstier downstream states of adequate water supply. Punitive measures from these states involve further cutbacks in fuel and electricity exports. The water rich, but poorer countries (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) continually use the headwaters of essential rivers as political advantage over downstream, wealthier neighbors; this is expected to continue in the future. The push and pull competition for

⁶⁵ Saskia Castelein and Otte, *Conflict And Cooperation Related To International Water Resources* (Paris: UNESCO, 2002).

⁶⁶ Solomon.

resources to sustain each country's livelihood has led to a situation where each country faces conflict on multiple fronts.

The result is a simmering political situation that is capable of erupting into full-blown war destabilizing the whole region. The competitive rather than cooperative exploitation of resources further hinders the possibility of the countries working together to save diminishing resources. Though the Aral Sea is disappearing, Uzbekistan still draws water from the rivers at the same destructive rates.⁶⁷ Further water scarcity in the future is likely to heighten political tensions in the region. Each country continues to lose farmland due to salination and leaching resulting from irrigation. Pastureland has also been disappearing fast in the last two decades.⁶⁸ As border delimitation and demarcation is high on the agenda, the clamor for more farming and grazing land in the future is likely to put the five countries in a collision course.⁶⁹

Radicalism

Kazakhstan experienced political stability in the past decade. However, there were some security alerts, especially between 2000 and 2011. Observers argue that the long period of political stability in the country is because Kazakhstan has been enjoying higher incomes after the

⁶⁷ Fred Pearce, *When the Rivers Run Dry: Water, the Defining Crisis of the Twenty-first Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

⁶⁸ Elena Lioubimtseva and Geoffrey M Henebry, "Climate and Environmental Change In Arid Central Asia: Impacts, Vulnerability, And Adaptations," *Journal of Arid Environments* 73, no. 11 (2009): 963-977.

⁶⁹ Pearce.

collapse of the Soviet Union that its neighbors. As a result, the country has a stable political system and economic welfare that has enabled the public to enjoy economic welfare rights and political freedoms.

However, 2011 sparked a wave of social conflict in which Kazakh society surrendered its political freedoms and rights of economic welfare. In May 2011, a suicide bomber blew himself in Aktobe, marking the beginning of attacks in response to poor local governance. Other armed attacks occurred in the subsequent months, prompting the Kazakhstani Government to respond to the wave of attacks through the enactment of the ‘anti-radicalization’ bill.⁷⁰

The militants countered this bill with additional attacks. One of them, Jund-al-Khalifa, an Islamist group, gained popularity owing to the media coverage. Thereafter, sporadic fighting occurred in the capital Astana and Aktobe, though fighting subsided in December 2011.⁷¹ This was followed by a violent labor dispute in western Kazakhstan that lasted for six months. It was during the standoff period that an Islamist insurgency emerged leading to the deterioration of security in the country.

A series of protests and attacks by Islamic militants seem to have created unrest; however, Islamic insurgency does not seem to be a significant threat to Kazakhstan because it

⁷⁰ Susan Corke, “Kazakhstan: As Stable as Its Government Claims?,” *Freedom House* (2012): 5.

⁷¹ Anvar Rahmetov, “Cracks in Social Contract: Instability in Kazakhstan, Its Sources and Alternative Risks,” 2, accessed July 1, 2014, [http://www.academia.edu/1861953/Cracks in Social Contract Instability in Kazakhstan Its Sources and Alternative Risks](http://www.academia.edu/1861953/Cracks_in_Social_Contract_Instability_in_Kazakhstan_Its_Sources_and_Alternative_Risks).

does not border Afghanistan or any other country that supports terrorists, as is the case for Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. In addition, the presence of NATO troops in northern Afghanistan cuts off the Taliban-connected insurgency from spilling over into Kazakhstan.⁷²

However, it is worth noting that western Kazakhstan has been experiencing radicalization from Islamist militants and religious extremists. This aspect raises security concerns regarding the country's stability, should radicalization become widespread in the country. From a critical perspective, radicalism may increase significantly in the next few years owing to the activities of the Salafiya organization that has been recruiting new members across Kazakhstan. This group has been associated with extremism and terrorism that are significant causes of instability. In addition, a section of the public is expressing discontent with the government's role in addressing social problems such as unemployment. Social problems have been some of the principal causes of radicalization in which the public divides into radical groups to fight problems including social injustices and economic crises, as well.

Drug Trafficking

Drug trafficking is the other issue that is feared for causing the greatest instability in Kazakhstan. Over the years, Kazakhstan, like the other states in Central Asia, has been associated with drug trafficking. It is believed that the country serves as a transit for narcotics into the Russian Federation. Krambs reports, "Kazakhstan remains a transit country for drugs bound for

⁷² Ibid., 4.

Europe, but is unfortunately becoming a consumer of Afghan opiates, as well as harvesting and marketing marijuana (cannabis), ephedrine, and opium poppies”⁷³ Evidence shows that drug trafficking occurs through the Russia-Kazakhstan border in which narcotics are supplied to the Russian consumer markets, one of the world’s largest consumers of narcotics.⁷⁴ It is estimated that narcotics are transported through the Russia-Kazakhstan Border, yearly. For instance, records indicate that 100-150 tons of narcotics transited through Kazakhstan in 2002 and 2003. Surprisingly, narcotics are hardly seized at the border territory with only 168 kg of heroin being seized in 2002.

A combination of factors such as landscape, border regime, communications, and the local population involved determine the amount of narcotics transported across the Russia-Kazakhstan Border.⁷⁵ These conditions enable drug traffickers to carry out their underground activities without the interference from security officials, especially the customs officials and border guards who use insufficient equipment to track narcotics. Golunov who reports, “Drug smugglers do not believe that border and customs’ checkpoints are insurmountable; they employ

⁷³ Timothy Krambs, *Drug Control in Central Asia An Assessment of Compliance with International Law* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office), 16.

⁷⁴ Sergey Golunov, “Drug Trafficking Through the Russia-Kazakhstan Border: Challenge and Responses, 331, accessed June 22, 2014, https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no14_ses/13_golunov.pdf.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 334.

modern technologies, in order to conceal drugs, and take advantage of high intensity of traffic”, reaffirms this aspect.⁷⁶

Therefore, drug trafficking in Kazakhstan may promote the establishment of terrorism and extremist organizations that place the country in an immense threat of instability. However, the country has been working of appropriate policy measures on drug trafficking since 2010. These measures are meant, “To combat the illicit drug industry, including reform of its infrastructure, disruption of supply, and strengthening of its borders, and supported demand reduction with drug treatment programs.”⁷⁷ These approaches are expected to reduce the threat of instability caused by the increase of drug trafficking, as well as, terrorism and extremism organizations.

Kyrgyzstan

The Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic was formed in the 1936 through the aggregation of single administrative units that shared the same ethnic characteristics, although differed in socio-economic and cultural traditions.⁷⁸ Bishkek became its capital. Given its agricultural productivity and population growth, the south, which is predominately Kyrgyz, remained important.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ibid., 335.

⁷⁷ Krambs, 16.

⁷⁸ A. B. Wachtel, “Kyrgyzstan between democratization and ethnic intolerance,” *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 6 (2013): 972.

⁷⁹ R. R. Hanks, “Crisis in Kyrgyzstan: conundrums of ethnic conflict, national identity and state cohesion,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 13, no. 2 (2011): 177.

Different ethnic groups lived in the southern city of Osh during the early decades of the twentieth century. When Russians delimited the Kyrgyz territory, Osh became connected culturally, geographically, and historically to other centers such as Transoxiana and Ferghana Valley.⁸⁰

The axis of power tilted more toward the south with the culmination of the Soviet rule. The southern Uzbeks, who were the minority, were highly represented in the Communist Party. The Soviet opened the boundary to the Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek republics to facilitate the Uzbek diaspora in Kyrgyzstan to maintain close contact with their homeland. Kyrgyzstan had significantly higher birth rates than the Uzbeks did during the 1970s. This was a recipe for tension between the two groups because the increasing population of the Kyrgyz placed additional strain on the crucial resources, including land and water.⁸¹

As the perestroika period began, the southern elites were increasingly being supplanted with pro-north elites such as President Askar Akaev and this widened the rift between north, south, and the different ethnicities in the south. As calls for nationalism increased among the Kyrgyz and Uzbek factions, tension increased between the two predominant groups in the south. This tension increased with the declarations of sovereignty by Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The Uzbek diaspora felt intimidated by the Kyrgyz increase in representation and, as a result, the two

⁸⁰ Melvin, "Patterns of centre-regional relations in Central Asia," 179.

⁸¹ Ibid.

groups rioted against each other in Osh and Novyi Uzgen in 1990. The southern Uzbeks wanted full control of the territories in the south and the elevation of Uzbek as a regional language.⁸²

Major Allies

The state of Kyrgyzstan has strategic importance as a member of the Central Asian countries. The issues that shape its position and presence in the region range from security, economy, and political issues. On the security front, Kyrgyzstan has become a strategic ally of Russia. A recent move by Russia to boost security ties with Kyrgyzstan is seen as a guarantee of loyalty.⁸³ This is a prerequisite for Kyrgyzstan to be considered one of Moscow's most trusted allies in the strategically important region. In this engagement, Moscow said that the anti-terrorism exercise in Kyrgyzstan were designed to practice interaction between the two countries; increased activity against radical Islamic groups, which have become notorious in Central Asia.

Economically, Kyrgyzstan is a poor Central Asian country.⁸⁴ Given the country's situation, the United States has extended assistance to help the country rise to its feet. This is so in order to enhance Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, prevent the proliferation of weapons, and combat transnational terrorism. This makes the United States an important ally of

⁸² Melvin, "Patterns of centre-regional relations in Central Asia," 180.

⁸³ Sergei Blagov, "Moscow Beefs up Security Ties with Kyrgyzstan," *Jamestown Foundation* (13 October 2006), accessed June 20, 2014, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=32131&no_cache=1#.VAxLRKjogrZ.

⁸⁴ Shalini Singh, *Domestic Tourism in Asia: A Diversity and Divergence* (London: Earthscan), 183.

the country. Additionally, there has been bolstering of civil societies and democratization that, despite the challenges, has been received well. It can be concluded that after the 2001 terror attacks on the U.S soil, the relationship with Kyrgyzstan increased.⁸⁵ The Central Asian nation hosted American troops at Manas International Airport. This further strengthened the relationships with the United States, hence helping it to safeguard its position in Central Asia.

China is among the major allies of Kyrgyz Republic. China adopts an open-door policy toward the Central Asian states, and its role has increased with the fall of the USSR. China forms an important trade partner given its sheer size and rising power.⁸⁶

Economic Development

During the 1990s, the Kyrgyz Republic appeared to be one of the most radical reformers of all the transition economies. It is a small wonder that the Breton-Woods institutions have been supportive of the former Soviet republic and, as such, its engagement with the WTO has been profound. Of all the former Soviet republics, Kyrgyzstan most successfully managed to control hyperinflation, which has dropped from an all-time high of 50 percent in 1995. Furthermore, Kyrgyz succeeded in creating a well-functioning market economy through structural adjustment, but this conjecture is highly debatable. Ironically, its national labor market, local capital, and

⁸⁵ Zhiqun Zhu, *China's New Diplomacy: Rationale, Strategies and Significance, Rethinking Asia and International Relations* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 111.

⁸⁶ Y. Melet, "China's political and economic relations with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 17, no. 2 (1998): 230.

foreign exchange mirror a poorly functioning economy. Increased emigration of the skilled labor force from the country reflected a moribund economy.⁸⁷

Major Challenges

One major challenge has been the increasing support for nationalism at the grassroots level, where the missionaries of nationalism often exploit the displeasure of the rural population to rally them against the regime.⁸⁸ This has also sparked ethnic tensions because rural Kyrgyz have sought to reclaim non-titular land. The regime is used as a countermeasure to rally their supporters in the wake of competitive elections, lack of optional resources, and tenuous enforcement of property rights.⁸⁹ The ‘Tulip Revolution’ of 2005 threatened the country’s sovereignty.⁹⁰ It is apparent that Kyrgyz Republic’s sovereignty is slowly slipping away because of the irredentist nature of the Uzbek minorities who live across the country’s border.⁹¹ The Kyrgyz is as vulnerable as ever because of it is a weak state. At least half of the border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan has not been delimited.⁹²

⁸⁷ Pomfret and Anderson, “Economic development strategies in Central Asia since 1991,” 185.

⁸⁸ Wachtel, 971.

⁸⁹ Hierman, and Nekbaktshoev, “Whose land is it? Land reform, minorities, and the titular "nation" in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan,” 349.

⁹⁰ The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan overthrew President Askar Akayev after the parliamentary elections in February 2005.

⁹¹ A. R. Bond and N. R. Koch, “Interethnic tensions in Kyrgyzstan: a political geographic perspective,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 51, no. 4 (2010): 535.

⁹² M. Laruelle, “The paradigm of nationalism in Kyrgyzstan. Evolving narrative, the sovereignty issue, and political agenda,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45 (2012): 44.

Ethnic Strife

In addition to border, ethnic, and social issues with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan faces major ethnic conflicts due to great power rivalries. Several political leaders in Kyrgyzstan have created a sense of superiority among Kyrgyz. This situation has led to numerous Kyrgyz discriminating against the minority Uzbeks and Tajiks. The Osh killings that occurred in 2010 and left scores dead, with the majority being Uzbeks, were termed as organized and perpetrated by political leaders. Numerous watchers were persuaded that the Osh massacre was provoked and organized by a clan of Bakiyev, the former Kyrgyz president. Investigations found out that the clan hired a number of Tajiks to open fire on Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. Situations such as these have seen the rise of political instability within Central Asia due to lack of trust and integrity amongst political dignitaries.

Resource Scarcity

Agricultural products such as wheat, sugar, cotton, fruits and vegetables, and wool, many of which depend on irrigation, constitute a major proportion of the country's growing economy. Kyrgyzstan has rich mineral resources that include gold, coal, and uranium. Alongside Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan has the greatest per capita water reserves in Central Asia, so water is hardly a matter of scarcity. However, unlike its neighbors it is not rich with gas and oil reserves. Just like its upstream neighbor Tajikistan, perennial electricity shortages during the winter plague the country

and it heavily relies on natural gas from Uzbekistan.⁹³ In 2010, ethnic clashes killed more than 400 people and the struggle for scarce resources has been implicated as a major factor behind the bloodshed.⁹⁴ Uzbekistan heavily influenced the clashes that were between native Kyrgyz and Ethnic Uzbeks living in the Kyrgyz town of Osh.⁹⁵ Uzbeks were perceived to hold a disproportionately high amount of land, wealth, and influence in the preceding ouster of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Such clashes have risen intermittently over the past two decades and could worsen in the future as the relationship between the two countries worsens.

In 2013, Kyrgyzstan was involved in cross border conflicts with both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In the Kyrgyz-Tajik border region of Batken, clashes over irrigation are frequent with villagers from both sides accusing each other of stealing water. At the Kyrgyz-Uzbek front, at least one border guard was reported to have lost their life. These conflicts involved both security personnel and civilians and stemmed from tension that had developed over the years due to disagreements over water. In July of the same year, residents of Kyrgyzstan's Kara-Bouourin province blocked the Bystrotok canal that provides water to thousands of farmers in Kazakhstan. The cause of disagreement was a piece of grazing land that Kyrgyz farmers claimed had been

⁹³ Philip Micklin, "Water in the Aral Sea Basin of Central Asia: Cause of Conflict or Cooperation?" *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 43, no. 7 (2002): 505-528.

⁹⁴ Michael Schwartz, "Ethnic Rioting Ravages Kyrgyzstan", *The New York Times*, June 13, 2010, accessed June 20, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/14/world/asia/14kyrgyz.html?_r=0

⁹⁵ Peter H. Gleick, *The World's Water* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2012).

annexed by Kazakhstan. This canal is used to irrigate 4000 hectares of land in Kazakhstan's Zhambyl Province.⁹⁶

Radicalism

Apart from ethnic violence, there are other possible causes of instability in Kyrgyzstan such as religious extremism and drug trafficking. It is worth noting that, Kyrgyzstan, like the other states in Central Asia, experiences threats of instability owing to the impact of Islamic revival in the region.

In Kyrgyzstan, Islamic organizations have been opposing secular rule; thus, creating conflict between the religious extremists and the country's political system. Khamisov states, "One can see almost the whole spectrum of radical Islamist organizations in the Ferghana Valley of Central Asia in southern Kyrgyzstan."⁹⁷ In recent years, the influence of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) has been characterized with radicalization within the Muslim community that accounts for 80 percent of Kyrgyzstan's Republic. It is believed that IMU has been carrying out military operations in Central Asia, especially in Southern Kyrgyzstan, which lies in the Ferghana valley. In addition, this radical Islamist group has been involved in terrorism.

⁹⁶ Joana Lillis, "Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan: Water Dispute Highlights Potential For Conflict," *Eurasinet* (2014), accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67267>.

⁹⁷ Vyacheslav Khamisov, "Problems Associated with Radicalism of Islamic Organizations in Kyrgyzstan," *The Quarterly Journal* 5, no. 1 (2003): 30.

Therefore, radicalism in Kyrgyzstan is believed to have been one of the principal causes of long-term instability.

Drug Trafficking

On the other hand, drug trafficking also seems to exert considerable impact on Kyrgyzstan's instability. Drug trafficking is believed to have corrupted Kyrgyzstan's political system, leading to its weaknesses.⁹⁸ As claimed by Madi, "Kyrgyzstan, by its geographic location, mountainous territory, the weakness of its state structures, and widespread corruption and economic poverty, has become a major route for the drug trade from Afghanistan to Russia and Europe."⁹⁹ However, it is worth noting that, Kyrgyzstan is not known to be producing opiates; instead, it is acting as a transit country for narcotics from Afghanistan. Evidence shows that drug smugglers access Kyrgyzstan through its border with Tajikistan, identified as the main drug hub in Central Asia.¹⁰⁰ Tajikistan is believed to be providing an alternative drug route for Afghan opiates. The second factor that has made the phenomenon of drug trafficking widespread in Kyrgyzstan is its strategic location. The country is positioned between Russia, the largest consumer market, and Afghanistan, the biggest producer of opiates.

⁹⁸ Erica Marat, "Impact of Drug Trade and Organized Crime on State Functioning in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (2006): 103.

⁹⁹ Maral Madi, "Drug trade in Kyrgyzstan: structure, implications and countermeasures," *Central Asian Survey* 23, no. 3-4 (2004): 250.

¹⁰⁰ Nate Schenkan, "Kyrgyzstan, Vexed by Drug-Trafficking Allegations, Bans Casinos," accessed March 5, 2014, <http://222.eurasianet.org/node/64239>.

Currently, there are about six primary drug routes in Kyrgyzstan that comprises the so-called the ‘northern route’ that traverses the country through Batken, Osh and Khorogh cities.¹⁰¹ The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, through which arms and drugs were smuggled across borders within Central Asia, established the Batken route. This aspect provides evidence for the interconnection between Islamic radicalization and drug trafficking. Therefore, drug trafficking is believed to have been playing a significant role in creating instability in Kyrgyzstan.

Tajikistan

The ‘Soviet Nationalities Policy’ of 1924 under Stalin’s stewardship led to recognition of Tajikistan as one of the Soviet republics. National territorial delimitation (NTD) ensured the division of regions into five disparate states according to ethnic, dialectical, or linguistic distribution advanced Stalin’s divide-and-rule strategy and vision of coherent nationalism.¹⁰² This strategy was a check on the rise of Islam and pan-Turkic nationalism. Prior to its separation from Uzbekistan in 1929, Tajikistan was an autonomous part of Uzbekistan. The spinoff was the creation of power brokers who served their states to gain power and privilege for themselves. The result was the separation of Uzbeks from Tajiks through the division of the Ferghana Valley where they had previously coexisted. The government deliberately gave Bukhara and Samarkand, which were the major cultural and historical centers of the Tajik, to the Uzbeks. This angered the

¹⁰¹ Jacob Townsend, “The Logistics of Opiate Trafficking in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (2006): 72.

¹⁰² J. Heathershaw and E. Herzig, “Introduction: the sources of statehood in Tajikistan,” *Central Asian Survey*, 30, no. 1 (2011): 6.

Tajik and caused lasting tension between the two groups.¹⁰³ In fact, the interethnic conflict of 1991 and 1992 went beyond the worst fears. There was an also inter-elite clash in the areas where nationalism and territorial independence were part of the national agenda. This was coupled with the so-called Islamic renaissance and the present economic woes in Tajikistan.¹⁰⁴

The northern region of Khujand, where Uzbeks are the majority, there are irredentist and separatist tendencies, which threaten to split Tajikistan. By 1881, the Russians had annexed northern Tajikistan. By 1921, they had annexed Dushanbe, which was part of Bukhara. As such, they Russianized and modernized the north, leaving the south underdeveloped under the Bukhara khanate. Khujand was a center of the country's politics. All First Secretaries of the Tajik Communist Party came from here. These leaders developed the north and ignored the south.¹⁰⁵

How Tajikistan Gained Independence

The rise of nationalism and territorial autonomy during the early Soviet period laid a solid groundwork for national politics as well as declaration of sovereignty. There were already efforts to restore Muslim identity in 1943 when Sredne-Aziatskoye Dukhovnoye Upravleniye Musulmanov (SADUM) was formed. Subsequently, national Qaziyats were introduced to restore Islam's official identity in the republic. These efforts sought to reconcile Muslim identity with communism. Evidence indicates that informal Islam or corresponding religious lifestyle often

¹⁰³ A. H. Shirazi, "Political forces and their structures in Tajikistan," *Central Asian Survey* 16, no. 4 (1997): 612.

¹⁰⁴ Heathershaw and Herzig, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Shirazi, 613.

accompany such official Islam. The civil war in the early 1990s may lead to the intricate connection military, economic, and political power.¹⁰⁶

Major Allies

Moscow has deep rooted relationships with almost all Central Asian countries, including Tajikistan. The relationship with Russia is a beneficial one for the county, as it depends on it for a number of reasons. First, there is a possibility of the collapse and instability of Afghanistan once all the U.S troops vacate.¹⁰⁷ This stability will most probably affect Tajikistan, and in order to keep the situation under control, the government has to rely on outside support. The Russians, who have a record for assisting Asian countries that face such troubles, can offer this support.¹⁰⁸ The relationship with the Russians is that of a dual nature, but there is reason to believe that Tajikistan is one of the main allies in Central Asia. On military terms, the country accommodates the 201st Russian Military base, which, according to a signed agreement, will remain stationed in Tajikistan until 2042.¹⁰⁹

The relationship between India and Tajikistan is worth the mention. Over time, the political relationship between the two has been close and cordial.¹¹⁰ There has been a frequent

¹⁰⁶ Heathershaw and Herzig, 14.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ria.ru, *Russian Army Base Deal with Tajikistan Key to Regional Security-Lawmaker*, (July 2013), accessed February 4, 2014, http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20131007/183983310/Russian-Army-Base-Deal-with-Tajikistan-Key-to-Regional-Security.

¹¹⁰ Sidda Goud and Manisha Mookherjee, *India and Iran in Contemporary Relation*, (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 2014), 90.

exchange of visits between the two that has served to cement the bilateral ties. The countries have since elevated the ties between them to a level of “strategic relationship.” This relationship encompasses cooperation in a wide spectrum of areas, among them health, education, and culture. India has extended financial assistance to Tajikistan in times of crisis. This makes India a very close ally of Tajikistan, a relationship that is projected to grow strong over the years.

With the United States, Tajikistan has also proven to be a significant country in Central Asia. This is because of its geographic location, which borders China and Afghanistan, and because it has plenty of water and other natural resources. Over the years, the U.S has been the country’s largest bilateral donor. The country also cooperated with the United States after the 2001 terror attacks. However, there was a hesitation to do so until Moscow gave the action approval. In the fight against terrorism, Tajikistan also proved its significance by supporting the Afghan Northern Alliance to combat the terrorists.¹¹¹ After further consideration of Moscow’s concern, Tajikistan also offered the use of its airspace to the United States troops. There since have been more agreements of cooperation with the West in combating terrorism and insecurity. However, analyzing past relationships, it can be concluded that Tajikistan’s strongest ally is Russia, who over time have been influential in their decision-making and foreign policy.

Iran is another major ally of Tajikistan because it shares a common cultural and ideological background. Tajikistan is the only Farsi-speaking Central Asian country and is

¹¹¹ Peimani, 163.

strongly linked to the Iranian culture.¹¹² Another major ally is Uzbekistan whose military policy was closely connected with President Karimov's concern over the democratic challenges of Islamic uprising he believed that subduing the uprising would bring about political stability.¹¹³

Economic Development

Tajikistan's internecine civil war during the first half of 1990s significantly hampered the country's efforts toward achieving a stable market-based economy. Oil and gas production are virtually absent, but the country is rich in metals, and its hydroelectric is probably one of the largest in the world.¹¹⁴ As such, the nation's GDP declined hugely during that era. Despite signing an armistice in 1997, economic growth remained intractable because of political instability.¹¹⁵ The north, particularly Khujand, was transformed from an agrarian economy to a mechanized and industrialized economy in 1940. This was where the highly skilled Russian population resided. The region maintained a strong connection to Moscow and Tashkent and constituted at least seventy percent of the republic's GDP. The south, particularly Gorno-

¹¹² M. Mesbahi, "Tajikistan, Iran, and the international politics of the 'Islamic factor'," *Central Asian Survey* 16, no. 2 (1997): 142.

¹¹³ A. Joharifard, *Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan Alliance: Assessing the Potential of a Persian-Speaking Association* (Simon Fraser University, 2008), 1.

¹¹⁴ Gleason, 79.

¹¹⁵ Pomfret and Anderson, 190.

Badakhshan, which is the homeland for the mountain Tajiks, was economically isolated from the north.¹¹⁶

Major Challenges

One major challenge is that Tajikistan is resource-poor. Rural areas have endured the most poverty and, as such, the practice of purchasing land titles by the rich and powerful is likely to increase hostility of the rural-based populations against land reforms. The opposition is likely to exploit such disaffection to rally the rural populations against the regime by broaching the disparity between rhetoric and reality. This rhetoric champions the rights and privileges of the Tajiks as unofficial practices strip them of their right to land.¹¹⁷ Another major challenge is the legacy of a dysfunctional agrarian system in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Furthermore, Tajikistan's institutions are weak because of many years of civil war, which saw the country's GDP drop from middle to low income.¹¹⁸

Ethnic Strife

Tajikistan is not new to conflict associated with ethnic tension. The ethnic conflict in Tajikistan that still runs in the memory of many is the 1992 civil war. The war began in May 1992 when ethnic groups from the Gorno-badakhshan and Garm regions rose up against President

¹¹⁶ Shirazi, 613.

¹¹⁷ Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev, 350.

¹¹⁸ Gleason, 77.

Rahmon Nabyev's national government.¹¹⁹ The ethnic communities from the two regions believed that they were underrepresented in Nabyev's rule. The rule was made up of people from the Kulyab and Leninabad regions. By June 1997, almost a hundred thousand people had lost their lives.¹²⁰ The tensions that would later turn into the civil war of Tajikistan, which commenced in the spring of 1992 when members of the opposition took to the streets of various towns in Tajikistan to protest against the outcome of the 1991 presidential elections. The opposition members consisted of people from the Gorno-Badakhstan and Garm areas.¹²¹

The ethnic tension in Tajikistan is characterized by discrimination against the minority ethnic groups, especially the ones based in the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous province. Relatively hardly any people know of the Tajikistan's Badakhshan region. This region is an isolated mountainous area located in the southeastern Tajikistan. The region is rich in minerals. About 250,000 people inhabit the region with most of them belonging to the Pamiri ethnic group who are Shi'ite Muslims.¹²² Being a Sunni-majority country, there is a major ethnic tension between the Sunni and the Pamiri. Since Badakhshan lies far away from Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, it seems isolated, and the Pamiri see themselves as outcast compared to the Sunni who

¹¹⁹ Lena Jonson, *Tajikistan In The New Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

¹²⁰ V. A. Kozlov and Elaine McClarnand MacKinnon, *Mass Uprisings In The USSR* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002).

¹²¹ Karl R. DeRouen and Uk Heo, *Civil Wars Of The World* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2007).

¹²² Frank Bliss, *Social and Economic Change In The Pamirs (Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan)* (London: Routledge, 2006).

seem to enjoy much of what the government has to offer. Tajikistan seems to be weak when it comes to vulnerability to ethnic conflicts since the Pamiri do not shy away from showing the rest of Tajikistan that they are unhappy with the situation they are in. Recently, in July 2012, government troops clashed with armed groups in Badakhshan.

Resource Scarcity

Perhaps the most biting resource shortage for this small country is that of electricity during the winter months. Ninety-eight percent of Tajikistan's electricity comes from hydropower generation.¹²³ This overreliance on seasonal hydropower creates fluctuations in electricity supply with severe shortages in winter alternating with surpluses in the summer. During the winter, high electricity demand for heating and low water flow mean that the country is unable to generate enough electricity to support its population. During winter, many of the country's households receive electricity in rations. Many receive just 8 to 12 hours of electricity daily and this gets much lower in rural areas.¹²⁴ Cotton products and aluminum exports, both of which are energy intensive activities, account for over 80 percent of export earnings, underlining the sensitivity of electricity to the country's economy. Following extensive power shortages in 2008 and 2009, Tajikistan reached an agreement with Turkmenistan to import 1.2 billion kWh of electricity

¹²³ Bo Libert, Erkin Orolbaev, and Yuri Steklov, "Water and Energy Crisis In Central Asia," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (2008): 9-20.

¹²⁴ Michel Cain, "Tajikistan's Energy Woes: Resource Barriers In Fragile States," *The Washington Review*, 2014, accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.thewashingtonreview.org/articles/tajikistans-energy-woes-resource-barriers-in-fragile-states.html>.

during winter from the latter using Uzbekistan's power grid. However, Uzbekistan continually interrupted power deliveries from Turkmenistan to Tajikistan due to what they termed technical problems in Karakul substation.¹²⁵ In a bid to increase power generation, Tajikistan has been planning to construct a second dam on the Vakhsh River. Once completed, the Rogun Dam, which is to be constructed upstream of the Nurek Dam, will be the tallest dam in the world at 335 meters.¹²⁶ Uzbekistan, however, is opposed to the idea as it claims that the dam will stop the flow of the Vakhsh, a crucial source of water for its cotton farms which contribute significantly to its economy. Another cause of disagreement is that the Rogun Dam is to be built in a seismically active region. This poses a risk to people downstream in Uzbekistan in case the dam fails due to earthquakes. If Tajikistan goes ahead with the construction, the already strenuous relationship between the two countries will only get worse. In 2013, Uzbekistan, the sole supplier of natural gas to Tajikistan cut off its gas supply to the impoverished country in order to sell its gas at higher prices to richer countries such as China. Against an annual demand of 1.2 billion square meters, Tajikistan only received 130 million cubic meters; as a result, the country was only able to use one power plant.¹²⁷ This further exposed Tajikistan to chronic power shortages and underlined the antagonistic and potentially explosive nature of the relationship between the two countries.

¹²⁵ Solomon.

¹²⁶ Globalpolicy.Org, "Water In Conflict," (2014), accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/the-dark-side-of-natural-resources-st/water-in-conflict.html>.

¹²⁷ Cain.

Radicalism

Tajikistan has always been portrayed as being at risk of collapse owing to security threats, especially after President Rahmon took power in 1992.¹²⁸ However, the political system has proved resilient, even during the recent violent conflict that created tension in the Rasht Valley. Much of the current security threats facing Tajikistan emanate from Afghanistan. This is the reason the Tajik government expresses its fear over the increase of instability after the removal of NATO from Afghanistan in 2014. In the past, IMU fighters have crossed the Tajikistan border with Afghanistan to carry out attacks, leading to a significant loss on the Tajik army.¹²⁹

The Tajik government has been securing IMU suspects through torture to reduce the level of radicalization in the region. Nevertheless, there are fears of future instability owing to a number of factors including external shocks, political upheavals, and mass mobilization. This aspect is reaffirmed by Bleuer reporting, “future instability that may occur as a result of elite-level political upheavals, external shocks or mass mobilization unconnected to Islamist militants could provide groups such as the IMU an opportunity to gain strength in Tajikistan.”¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Rashid Ahmed, *Tajikistan: The Next Jihadi Stronghold?*, accessed June 30, 2014 <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2010/nov/29/tajikistan-next-jihadi-stronghold/>.

¹²⁹ Vatii Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 231.

¹³⁰ Christian Bleuer, “Instability in Tajikistan? The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Afghanistan Factor,” *Central Asia Security Policy Brief* # 7 (2012), 10.

Drug Trafficking

Another factor that may cause instability in Tajikistan is the phenomenon of drug trafficking that fuels terrorism and religious extremism in the region.¹³¹ Drug trafficking forms part of the country's poor economy in which drug smugglers transit Afghan drugs into the Russian Federation. This situation can be attributed to the insecure Tajik-Afghan border, social conditions, and the country's geographical location in Central Asia.¹³² In recent years, armed drug smugglers have been causing attacks on border guards and government officials, and this serves as a significant security threat to Tajikistan. "Tajikistan is a very young nation, and its social fabric is so fragile that a threat posed by the nexus of terrorists and drug traffickers can jeopardize the process of nation building."¹³³

Turkmenistan

The delimitation of boundaries between 1924 and 1925 led to the incorporation of the republic into the Soviet Union. The territorial delimitation policy by the Russian government was based on ethnic and dialectical distribution of various groups. Not much is known about Turkmenistan because it is a closed system, but before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which signified the end of Cold War, Turkmenistan declared its sovereignty in 1990. Since then,

¹³¹ Johan Engvall, "The state under Siege: The drug trade and organized crime in Tajikistan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 6 (2006): 827.

¹³² Girja Mohanty, "Tajikistan: A Transit Hub of Drugs Smuggling," *Social Science Research Network* (17 January 2010): 1.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 3.

the country has undergone little reform toward democracy because the Parliament extended the president's term to life in 1999.

Major Allies

In the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union, smaller regional states have been debating whether to join Russia in an economically integrated neo-empire. Turkmenistan's dictator, Saparmurat Niyazov, has been pursuing a Russia-resistant policy.¹³⁴ The country long been dependent on the Russian owned natural gas pipelines to export its vast natural gas resource and for some time, it has been looking for alternatives routes to the international market. This was the basis of the formation of the Turkmenistan-Chinese partnership. China agreed back in the year 2006 to help Turkmenistan build a pipeline, connecting the two countries. The relationship between these two new allies is, however, dependent on two factors. First, the dictator's ability to reign and secondly, the willingness of China to convert from coal burning to natural gas.¹³⁵ In case the pipeline deal becomes a reality, Russia will lose its monopoly over the cheap gas from Turkmenistan, which would affect its influence in the Central Asian region. On the other hand, if the deal fails, Turkmenistan will have no option but to continue relying on Russia and this time, they may be reduced to an almost modern colony.

Recently, there are foreign policies advanced by China towards Central Asia that suggest that China has an agenda to compete with Russian influence in the region. It has to be noted that China is already an established power in Central Asia region. Looking at the situation

¹³⁴ Kathleen J. Hancock, "Escaping Russia, Looking to China: Turkmenistan Pins Hopes on China's Thirst for Natural Gas," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (2006): 68.

¹³⁵ Peimani, 165.

analytically, China is in need of the support of Russia in its pursuit of a multi-polar world, an effort to counter unilateral American influence, which grew steadily after the cold war. On the other hand, Russia also needs China in order to realize a stable political and economic system in Central Asia. This zero-sums the Chinese and Russian interests in Turkmenistan and the wider Central Asian region.

Turkmenistan engages in multilateral trade through the Economic Cooperation Organization, which has added little value to the country's economy. However, its engagement in trilateral partnerships with Turkic-speaking countries such as Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan has been beneficial. However, Russia remains Turkmenistan's major trading partner, which the trilateral partnership seeks to offset. Turkmenistan is a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, yet its engagement with the World Trade Organizations and, to some extent, the United Nations, has been little.¹³⁶

Economic Development

Turkmenistan is increasingly benefiting from its large oil and gas reserves, which contribute significantly to the country's overall gross domestic product (GDP). Consequently, the economy is growing rapidly, posting impressive double-digit growth. Economic pundits have classified Turkmenistan as a lower middle-income nation thanks to the export of its oil and gas

¹³⁶ Pomfret and Anderson, 166.

produce at favorable market prices.¹³⁷ At independence, Turkmenistan's economy, which has been largely dependent on energy and cotton, was among the smallest.¹³⁸ In the second half of 1990s, Turkmenistan's gas production increased substantially and thus closed the income gap with their Kyrgyz and Tajik counterparts. The transition from central planning to price liberalization has resulted in substantial benefits for Turkmen republic because the Soviets bought them at substantially lower prices.¹³⁹

On the other hand, the country's adoption of price liberalization has been somewhat slow, partly because Saparmurat Niyazov offered a directive, which allowed all citizens to access public utilities free of charge. Such a populist move was unsustainable in the long-term because imbalance of payment problems caused severe shortages. The regime has also been profligate, spending taxpayer's money on economically unfeasible projects, such as a presidential palace. In 1999, Turkmenistan became increasingly isolated when the Parliament declared Niyazov president-for-life, which prompted the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to stop giving loans to the country.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Ibid., 136.

¹³⁸ Pomfret and Anderson, 165.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 187.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 190.

Major Challenges

Turkmenistan provides public utilities such as gas, water, salt, and electricity freely to its citizens following President Niyazov's directive in 1992. This placed an enormous strain on the country's infrastructure, resulting in frequent shortages for those commodities. Furthermore, the use of economic estimations of household consumption of these commodities has been a source of disappointment for the citizens. As such, supply is not always guaranteed, particularly in the rural areas.¹⁴¹ The pace of the country's political and economic reform is sluggish. Moreover, the country maintains the political structure of power politics it inherited from the Soviet Union and, as such, people's attitude toward this system has changed little since independence. Niyazov's one-man leadership excluded the public from participation in governance, resulting in widespread apathy toward politics among the people.¹⁴²

Ethnic Strife

Turkmenistan has been heavily criticized for having one of the poorest human rights records in the world.¹⁴³ One of the reasons why the country has been accused of such acts is because of discrimination against the ethnic group minorities. For instance in 2003, the Turkmen government's move to cancel the dual-citizenship deal with Russia led to thousands of Russians in Turkmenistan losing their property and leaving the country. The cancellation of the agreement

¹⁴¹ Dadabaev, 138.

¹⁴² Ibid., 148.

¹⁴³ James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, *Ethnicity And Territory In The Former Soviet Union* (London: F. Cass, 2002).

saw numerous Turkmen discriminate and mistreat Russians in the country. Many Russians fled Turkmenistan out of fear of being trapped in a country where human rights abuses were rampant.

The relations between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have not been perfect by far. The existence of the enormous number of minorities in the two countries has fueled ethnic problems and tension. The Turkmen minority in Uzbekistan and the Uzbek minority in Turkmenistan have experienced steady economic and social decline. These minorities have found themselves on the brink of exclusion from sources of employment. The situation has led to diplomatic issues between the governments of the two countries. Most importantly, the situation has fueled conflicts between Uzbek and Turkmen minorities in Uzbekistan as well as Turkmen and Uzbek minorities in Turkmenistan. The majority groups in both countries seem to be avenging the atrocities committed against them in the countries where they are a minority. As a result, the situation between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan has always been hostile.¹⁴⁴ However, in the last few years, governments from both countries have sought to end the hostility towards each other by holding peace meetings. Much still needs to be done if ethnic tension between Turkmen, minority Uzbeks, and Russians is to come to an end soon.

¹⁴⁴ Margaret Cormack, *Muslims and Others In Sacred Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Resource Scarcity

Turkmenistan is the ninth most resource-deprived country in the world. In cities such as Dashoguz, Turkmenabat, and Balkanabat, water is only available for three hours per day.¹⁴⁵ In rural areas, the situation is dire with residents having to draw water from polluted irrigation canals and open wells. With the Kara Kum desert covering more than 80 percent of its territory, irrigation is critical to attaining self-reliance when it comes to food.¹⁴⁶ Turkmenistan is a major producer of wheat, rice, vegetables, and cotton both for domestic use and export. As would be expected, production of these crops relies heavily on irrigation. Turkmenistan depends largely on the Amu Darya River for water. However, being located downstream, the Amu Darya water that reaches Turkmenistan is saline due to drainage discharge by upstream countries into the river system. Without radical action, many analysts believe that by 2020, Turkmenistan will be facing an acute water shortage.¹⁴⁷

Turkmenistan has large fossil fuel deposits though they are largely unexploited due to poor infrastructure and various political impediments. With Uzbekistan having officially ended its gas exports to Tajikistan in 2012, Turkmenistan was keen to capitalize on the newly available market. However, although Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan enjoy relatively good relations, the

¹⁴⁵ Universalnewswires.com, “Water Shortages Create Instability Risk in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan,” accessed June 30, 2014.

¹⁴⁶ Olen Paul Matthews, “Ground Water Rights, Spatial Variation, and Transboundary Conflicts,” *Ground Water* 43, no. 5 (2005): 691-699.

¹⁴⁷ Jacqueline Langwith, *Water* (Detroit, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2010).

latter was not keen on facilitating the deal that would have seen Turkmen gas transported to Tajikistan through its pipeline infrastructure.¹⁴⁸ Turkmenistan and Tajikistan have been referred to as Central Asia's "best friends" in some quarters due to the increased cooperation in economic and cultural aspects. If Uzbekistan continues to impede the intended gas exports, relations between the two countries could deteriorate over the coming years.

Turkmenistan has a good relationship with other central Asian countries. Being landlocked, it clamors to develop infrastructure that would enable it to export its fossil fuels to countries such as China and India, which means they must go through neighboring countries. A substantial part of this infrastructure such as rail and pipeline would need to cross other countries in the region. How these countries cooperate with Turkmenistan in its quest will largely determine the nature of future relations. Further, with its water shortage approaching crisis levels, the relationship with Tajikistan, which controls the headwaters of the Amu Darya River, could turn for the worse if Turkmenistan feels it is not getting a fair share of the water.

Radicalism

Turkmenistan has been experiencing a repressive political system in which dictatorship forms the culture of political leadership.¹⁴⁹ It is reported that there are no democratic institutions in the country and this indicates how social freedoms and civil rights are constrained.¹⁵⁰ In

¹⁴⁸ Reuters, "Tajikistan Seeks Turkmen Gas As Shortage Looms," accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/28/tajikistan-gas-idUSL6E8ES52E20120328>.

¹⁴⁹ Boris Rumer, *Central Asia at the End of the Transition* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), 344.

¹⁵⁰ *Turkmenistan Country Report* (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012), 8.

addition, independent political parties do not exist in the country; thus, the legislature and executive operate under the decree of the president. This indicates that political and social integration in Turkmenistan is entirely missing, and this creates an opportunity for the public to oppose the political system. As a result, Turkmenistan is prone to instability caused by extremist groups and Islamic militants.

From a critical perspective, Turkmenistan experiences increase in Islamic radicalism due to its authoritarianism. President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov is exercising immense authoritarianism in running the country's political affairs in which public participation does not occur. In addition, the president undermines democracy at all spheres of political leadership and social integration. This situation has led to the emergence of radical groups who use violence as the most appropriate way of responding to the country's repressive political system.

Drug Trafficking

Turkmenistan, like the other states in Central Asia, faces enormous challenges from drug trafficking. One of the main factors that contribute to an increase of drug trafficking in the country is that, it shares its border with Afghanistan through which narcotics are transited. However, it is worth noting that, Turkmenistan is not known as a producer of narcotics. This implies that, the phenomenon of drug trafficking in the country is attributable to its geographic location and social demographics.

Despite the existence of drug routes in Turkmenistan, it is surprising that the country does not have any reliable data on the amount of narcotics that are transshipped through its borders. In addition, there are no records of drug seizures, and this compromises the country's commitment in combating drug trafficking.

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan has had a tumultuous history, especially during the latter half of the 1980s. When Mikhail Gorbachev ascended to power in 1985, his purge of corrupt leaders mainly targeted the Uzbek's ruling elite. As a result, First Secretaries were sacked even at the slightest implication of corruption. However, Islam Karimov offered stable leadership to the Uzbek Republic in 1989. According to the 1989 Census, the Uzbek population was twenty million, which made it third among the most populous Soviet republics. Uzbekistan was a producer of raw materials, such as cotton, and minerals, such as gold and uranium, for the Soviet Union. The country has been politically conservative and has significantly hampered the adoption of reforms. It was one of the less heterogeneous republics with rich cultural and historical traditions. Despite the Uzbek diaspora clash with Kyrgyz majority in Kyrgyzstan in Osh in 1990 and 2005, Uzbeks who lived in the other boundaries did not become irredentists.¹⁵¹

Throughout 1991, Uzbekistan was somewhat reluctant to be self-dependent, despite the collapse of the USSR. In a referendum of March 1991, its citizens voted not to 'opt out' of the Union. Even after failed coup attempt in Russia, Uzbek leaders remained silent. In fact, President Karimov was indifferent to Union's dissolution toward the end of 1991. In 1992, Uzbekistan remained within the Russian ruble zone. With price liberalization, Uzbekistan maintained price controls on more commodities than Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

¹⁵¹ R. Pomfret, "The Uzbek model of economic development, 1991-99," *Economics of Transition* 8, no. 3 (2000): 735.

Major Allies

In Central Asia and Asia at large, Uzbekistan has proven to be an important strategic ally for the United States. It has been an important strategic ally of the West as it is a route that is used for the NATO forces-led missions in Afghanistan. However, there are cases of rampant abuse of human rights by the country's authorities, such as the May 2005 shooting of protesters.¹⁵² This puts the country on bad terms with the West, which is well known for its support of human rights and democracy. However, the country repaired the relationship with the West over the following years by forming an important link in the distribution of military supplies to Afghanistan. Additionally, the government has said that it faces threats from radical Islamist groups, which it accuses for a number of deadly attacks. An example is a terror attack that the country said was part of a plan to destabilize it. This makes the country to share common interests with the West, fighting terror. The country's natural resources have also helped to cement its position as a strategic partner and ally in the region. The country has gold, copper, uranium reserves, and oil, which have drawn interest from international businesses.

With Russia, the relationship continues to sour. This is evident as the country withdrew from a Russian-led military alliance of former Soviet states, triggering a wave of speculation that they had finally decided to look to the West. Reports are that the United States has endeavored to

¹⁵² Neil Buckley, *Uzbekistan: An Important but Problematic Ally* (March 2013), accessed June 21, 2014, [http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/8b75819e-8723-11e2-bde6-00144feabdc0, Authorised=false.html?_i_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2Fs%2F0%2F8b75819e-8723-11e2-bde6-00144feabdc0.html%3Fsiteedition%3Dintl&siteedition=intl&_i_referer=#axzz3CXnjoJeF](http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/8b75819e-8723-11e2-bde6-00144feabdc0,Authorised=false.html?_i_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2Fs%2F0%2F8b75819e-8723-11e2-bde6-00144feabdc0.html%3Fsiteedition%3Dintl&siteedition=intl&_i_referer=#axzz3CXnjoJeF).

make Uzbekistan a strategic ally and would provide financial and military assistance.¹⁵³ It is anyone's guess that the United States will continue partnering with Uzbekistan and make it one of the strongest forces, if not the strongest, in Central Asia.

Economic Development

Uzbekistan's economy has been predominately cotton-driven. The economy's transition to a liberal market economy has been somewhat successful partly because it became increasingly less dependent on imported fuel and partly because global market prices for cotton were favorable during the early 1990s. The economy lags behind other transition economies in adopting market liberalization, according to Bretton-Woods institutions. Uzbekistan's economic performance remains a conundrum during the 1990s because, on one hand, it is sluggish former Soviet system and, on the other, a good performer.¹⁵⁴

Uzbekistan's attainment of macroeconomic stability has been much slower than in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz Republic. Inflation fell below 50 percent in 1997. Uzbekistan surpassed Kazakhstan according to the index of accumulative progress toward adopting neoliberal marketization by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development during the late 1990s. Nevertheless, the difference between the formal and informal exchange rates had been growing

¹⁵³ James Kilner, Uzbekistan Withdraws from Russia-led Military Alliance, *World News* (July 2012), accessed June 23, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/uzbekistan/9369392/Uzbekistan-withdraws-from-Russia-lead-military-alliance.html>.

¹⁵⁴ Pomfret, 733.

bigger and bigger because the government introduced austere measures in response to an imbalance of payments when cotton prices became unfavorable in 1996.¹⁵⁵

Ethnic Strife

Population pressures in Uzbekistan have exacerbated ethnic conflicts. Two ethnic schisms have played a major role in the ethnic nature of Uzbekistan. The first is the interaction of the Uzbek majority and the remaining Russian population in the country. Historically, the interaction between the two communities has been based on colonial dominance, fear and major differences in norms and values between the two communities. The differences have seen the rise of a major ethnic tension between Uzbeks and the Russians.

The second ethnic schism is amongst the Central Asians themselves. This has defined the nature of ethnic conflict in Uzbekistan over the past few years. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have had major border and ethnic issues over the last few decades. Uzbekistan has witnessed conflicts between the local Kyrgyz and Uzbek Communities, over twenty years after the 1990 inter-ethnic clashes in the country. In 2010, a fight between Uzbek and Kyrgyz youths at a nightclub in Osh led to a conflict between the two communities. The conflict involved use of firearms by young men who walked in Osh torching residences, cars, gas stations, restaurants, and stores. Following the conflict, over 900 people were hospitalized and over 470 people losing their lives. A high number of Uzbeks were forced to leave their places of residence. Over 100,000 Uzbeks had to flee back to Uzbekistan out of fear for their lives.

¹⁵⁵ Pomfret and Anderson, 189.

In the current decade, the ethnic and border issues between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have fueled ethnic conflicts even further. On January 2013, people from Hushar, a village in Uzbekistan, attacked a newly built watchtower on the Kyrgyzstan border and gained access to the Kyrgyzstan territory. Here, they captured and imprisoned 35 Kyrgyz residents in Sokh. A day later, negotiations between the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan resulted in the release of the Kyrgyz residents. Currently, ethnic and social tension between the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz are still present. Incidents that lead to clashes among different ethnic communities are a common occurrence. The ethnic conflict between the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz has been detrimental to any efforts of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Border Issues

The inheritance of the Soviet structure of political power and borders, independence calls, and the push for macro-economic policies may have caused the Ferghana Valley border dispute between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000.¹⁵⁶ The 870 km long border straddles large tracts of disputed land, which is evidenced by the erection of barbed wire fences, destruction of bridges, termination of interstate bus routes, enhancement of customs inspection, unmarked minefields, and denial of access by non-nationals.¹⁵⁷ During the 1990s, trans-boundary insecurity arose from multi-national Islamist groupings invading Uzbekistan territories. Secondly, the

¹⁵⁶ F. Tolipov, "Micro-geopolitics of Central Asia: A Uzbekistan perspective," *Strategic Analysis* 35, no. 4 (2011): 636.

¹⁵⁷ N. Megoran, "The critical geopolitics of the Uzbekistan–Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley boundary dispute, 1999–2000," *Political Geography*, 23 (2004): 732.

nation's border service has not been entirely reformed lacking strong leadership and massive corruption.

Resource Scarcity

Uzbekistan is the most water scarce country in the region, yet it is also the most populous country in the region (25 million and growing). Uzbekistan consumes 60 percent of the region's water. By 2015, it is expected that the population will have risen to around 35 million and water requirements will far exceed the supply. Uzbekistan is ranked fifth in the world among countries that face the greatest risk of water shortage. Ninety percent of Uzbekistan's water supply is used to irrigate its thirsty desert farms that support its economy significantly.¹⁵⁸ Rapid population growth, drought and the restriction of water flow by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have all put severe pressure on Uzbekistan's water resources. The Aral Sea, once a major source of water, is on the brink of disappearing due to overexploitation of its water. The seasonal resource advantage swing that plays out in the region places Uzbekistan in a tough spot during the summer. The two upstream neighbors Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan which control the flow of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers both plan to build dams to solve their perennial electricity shortages. These dams would further limit Uzbekistan's water supply and some Uzbek officials have been quoted these

¹⁵⁸ Adam Radin, *The Security Implications Of Water: Prospects For Instability Or Cooperation In South And Central Asia* (Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 2010).

dams might be the cause for war.¹⁵⁹ There is cause for concern when such utterances come from the country with the largest army in the region.¹⁶⁰

Other measures of persuasion seem to have failed among them Uzbekistan's refusal to export natural gas and coal to Tajikistan during the winter. There is a curious unwillingness by the Uzbek leadership to negotiate with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan over potential water for electricity and gas trade. In spite of its obvious advantages, Uzbekistan currently refuses to export fossil fuels especially natural gas to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan further straining the relationship with the two countries and complicating its own water situation.¹⁶¹ In the past, the country has even been accused of disrupting the electricity supply from Kazakhstan to Tajikistan that uses the Uzbek power grid.¹⁶²

Radicalism

Uzbekistan has emerged as the epicenter for instability in the Central Asian region. Despite the intervention of the United States in security operations within Central Asia after the September 11 terrorist attack, Uzbek-American relations and diplomacy seem to have

¹⁵⁹ Nick Megoran, "On researching Ethnic Conflict: epistemology, politics, and a Central Asian boundary dispute," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 2 (2007): 253-277.

¹⁶⁰ Shamil Midkhatovich Yenikeyeff, "Energy Interests of the Great Powers in Central Asia: Cooperation or Conflict?" *The International Spectator* 46, no. 3 (2011): 61-78.

¹⁶¹ Gleick.

¹⁶² Joseph Nevins, "Resource conflicts in a new world order," *Geopolitics* 9, no. 1 (2004): 255-263.

deteriorated owing to Uzbekistan's allegiance to Russia and China.¹⁶³ It is worth noting that, Uzbekistan had previously experienced stability despite security threats posed by radical Islamists groups. However, the country seems to have been awash in a wave of instability owing to increased radicalism and drug trafficking. This is why the country has become the focus of the international community.

One of the most significant causes of radicalism in Uzbekistan is repression by the political system. Zasada reports that "repression against the opposition (real and perceived) has radicalized large sections of the society. The suicide terror attacks in 2000, which happened for the first time in Uzbekistan's history and targeted the state security apparatus, were symptomatic of the direction of developments."¹⁶⁴ It is speculated that ideological differences between members of the political class in Uzbekistan are the principle factors that may cause political destabilization. For instance, there has been a rivalry within the security apparatus of Uzbekistan in which Zohirjon Almatov, the head of the Interior Ministry opposes the prospects of Rustam Inoyatov, the head of the National Security Service. These individuals come from different ethnic groups, the clan of Ismail Jurabekov and Timur Alimov, which have been struggling to gain political power in the country. Apart from the influence of these two men, there are other internal threats that seem to have been dormant, but are still potentially dangerous, including religious and

¹⁶³ Kathleen Collins, "Clans, Pacts, and Politics in Central Asia," *Journal of Democracy* 13 no. 3 (2002): 137.

¹⁶⁴ Grzegorz Zasada, "Uzbekistan: The major source of instability in Central Asia?" *OSW Studies* (15 October 2004): 69.

ethnic separatism. For instance, the Tajik separatism may gain substantial reinforcement owing to the increase of radicalization within Uzbekistan leading to instability.¹⁶⁵

Therefore, radicalism serves as one of the greatest potential causes of instability in Uzbekistan. Historically, Islamist radicals have always been associated with radicalism leading to occasions of terror attacks on the Uzbekistan authorities. Zasada reports, “since 1997, Islamic fundamentalism, extremism and terrorism have been regarded as the major enemies of Uzbek authorities, a perception that heightened in February 1999.”¹⁶⁶ It is argued that the repressive political system in Uzbekistan has led to the radicalization of the public.

From an analytical perspective, the manner in which the Uzbekistan approaches political opposition, fundamentalism, and religious extremism seems to enhance radicalization. This is so because the political system has remained repressive for decades, rather than adopting the most appropriate precepts of democracy, in order to reduce pressure from the public. In the recent years, immense criticism has been observed among the Uzbek populace in which the public expresses its displeasure with the political system. Some of the principal causes of criticism of the Uzbek authorities include the government’s power abuse, its failure in creating new jobs for the Uzbek society, and the adoption of inappropriate economic policies. These factors have led the country to slip into a social and economic crisis with poverty being a widespread phenomenon. Therefore, it is argued that the weakness of the secular opposition in Uzbekistan owing to the lack

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 74.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 75.

of public support will create an alternative political system. This system will most likely be based on Islamic fundamentalism. This is why Zasada observes, “opposition of the society is more likely to be channeled through religion. It is not the official Islam, or popular Islam, or even Sufi Islam that voice opposition sentiments, but rather the politically committed radical Islam.”¹⁶⁷

Moreover, it is argued that the government’s response to Islamic fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism cause devastating effects on people who are not involved in the phenomena. For instance, security investigators, especially on terrorism and radical groups, exercise brutality. Some people have reported having been forced to give false testimony. On the other hand, scores of people are said to have been wrongfully detained, and this has raised a storm of strife among those detained unlawfully, their acquaintances and families.¹⁶⁸ These attitudes are likely going to increase radicalism within the Uzbek society leading to instability.

The rise of radicalization within the Uzbek society can be evidenced by the emergence of the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami, which has become one of the most powerful Islamist group in Uzbekistan. This radical group became popular due to the government’s response to Islamic fundamentalists and supporters in Ferghana valley. Therefore, the government’s response to religious extremism does not address the problem of radicalism, but rather create the opportunity to the radical groups to advance their missions.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 78.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 76.

Drug Trafficking

On the other hand, Uzbekistan faces a threat of instability from drug trafficking. Historically, drug trafficking in the country has always been linked with radicalism and terrorism. Drug trafficking in Uzbekistan dates back to 1980s when criminal networks flourished owing to changes in circumstances and the ‘glasnost’ policies. After the reign of Mikhail Gorbachev, who had introduced the ‘glasnost’ and ‘perestroika’ policies, former officials of the Red Army in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan developed arms smuggling routes.¹⁶⁹ These officials were involved in selling the Red Army weapons to insurgents in Asia, especially to the Taliban in Afghanistan, as well as other parts of the world. As a result, arms smuggling triggered drug trafficking in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states bordering Afghanistan. Thereafter, in 1991 when Uzbekistan gained independence, drug trafficking networks continued to develop across the country; thus, prompting the government to respond to arms smuggling that was connected to drug trafficking.

Despite terrain that is favorable for the cultivation and production of narcotics, Uzbekistan is not known to be a producer of opiates. However, Uzbekistan is considered as a transit country of narcotics owing to its strategic location bordering Afghanistan and Tajikistan, the world’s leading producers of narcotics.

Currently, a number of drug trafficking routes have been identified in Uzbekistan. It is reported that Uzbekistan serves as one of the most significant routes for heroin entering Russia

¹⁶⁹ Mazhar Yasin, “Drug Trafficking in Uzbekistan,” 7

and Europe. This route exists between its borders with Afghanistan. As a result, Uzbekistan has become the main transit state for narcotics, especially opiates from Afghanistan. As Yasin points out, “there are some advantages to trafficking (drugs) through Uzbekistan, due to its relatively favorable infrastructure and geography, when compared with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.”¹⁷⁰ In addition, it is worth noting that Uzbekistan has well-established commercial links between Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation, as well as, Europe, and this facilitates the transit of illicit drugs through the country. Uzbekistan’s geography lends itself to movement of illicit material through its territory into Russia, Europe, and beyond. This shapes the relations with neighboring countries.

Conclusion

Evaluating the situation in Central Asia, major allies, strategic relationship, and major challenges it can be concluded that the region is in a vital stage of its development. The countries comprising of the region gained their independence quite recently, after the break-up of the former Soviet Union. Most decisions were made from Moscow during the days of the Union, but after gaining independence, the individual countries began making their own decisions, policies, and foreign relations. Russia, therefore, remains an important ally in the region as it still helps with logistics, finances, and military aid. However, there have been issues with some countries in the region over the influence of Russia. In light of this, the region has looked out to forming relationships and strengthening ties with other world powers, especially China and the United States. The scope of relationship with these powers reaches matters of security, economy, politics, and investments. The countries of Central Asia have over time found themselves fighting

¹⁷⁰ Mazhar Yasin, “Drug Trafficking in Uzbekistan,” 8.

over a number of issues such as ethnic strife, border issues, resource scarcity, radicalism, and drug trafficking, especially water resources.

Ethnic Strife

The five states in Central Asia are ethnic creations that are named after the majority population in the country i.e. Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, Tajiks in Tajikistan, Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbeks in Uzbekistan and Turkmen in Turkmenistan. This trend has created a sense of superiority among the majority groups in each country. Hence, they feel that they are the ones that belong to the country and that the minority groups are inferior minorities.¹⁷¹ The majority groups have found it difficult to cope with the presence of a minority group in each country. The big problem is that these minority groups are mainly from the neighboring countries in the same region. Therefore, the hostility towards minority groups has posed a threat to both national and regional cohesion in Central Asia. Ethnic conflicts have been taking place at both the national level and regional level making it impossible to attain regional cooperation among the Central Asian states.

In Central Asia, ethnic conflict is characterized by a certain degree of social movements, organized political action, civil wars, separatist acts, and massive disturbances that occur along ethnic lines.¹⁷² In most Central Asian countries, there is a conflict between a dominating ethnic majority and the ethnic minority. The dominant ethnic majority controls the resources and power of the state. This circumstance is the underlying reason as to why minority ethnic groups begin

¹⁷¹ Anara Tabyshalieva, *The Challenge Of Regional Cooperation In Central Asia* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1999).

¹⁷² L. M. Drobizheva, *Ethnic Conflict In The Post-Soviet World* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998).

questioning the political structures and the existing power structure. Moreover, if the society does not have a mechanism that controls the relations between parties, there is a high possibility of conflict and violence of the highest degree. A good example is the 2010 Osh massacre that was instigated by failure of the political system in Kyrgyzstan.

The share of ethnic Ukrainians and Russians highly skilled engineering, industrial, education, technical and healthcare workers has been quite high compared to that of the native population in most of the Central Asian countries.¹⁷³ This has been a major cause of dissatisfaction among the native civilians. Compared to Turkmen, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz, Uzbeks have remained the most skillful traders in most parts of Central Asia. Most of the people in the region tend to view these traders as enemies and make attempts to stop their activities. After the Osh massacre, the Uzbek population based in Kyrgyzstan demanded an autonomous status from the state. According to them, the region they occupied was a part of Uzbekistan. This reveals the underlying border conflict that has greatly led to conflicts within the Central Asian region. In 1991 alone, over 35 ethnic clashes took place among different nationalities in Central Asia.¹⁷⁴ The threat of inter-ethnic tensions among Kazakhs and Russians as well as between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz has become a greatly discussed issue.

¹⁷³ P. Geetha Lakshmi, *Ethnic Conflict In Central Asia* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2003).

¹⁷⁴ M. Ruffin Holt and Daniel Clarke Waugh, *Civil Society In Central Asia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999).

The question of identity remains unanswered in most Central Asian states. As a concept, identity is abstract and vague. Like individuals, states ought to know who they are, their peculiarities, origins and how they differ and resemble other states and people near them. It is only when a country gains a sense of its geography, culture, and place in history that it can begin to have a sense of unity and belief.¹⁷⁵ Currently, the Central Asian states are still in search of their identities. The supposed nationalities are failing largely by implementing policies that seem to favor one group and diminish the other. Instead of identifying everyone in the state as part of the country's population regardless of ethnic backgrounds, various government policies have segregated the individuals into ethnic enclaves.¹⁷⁶ The dominant group has a sense of pride and belongingness while the minorities are seen as people who are not a part of a national identity. For instance, the move to ban dual-citizenship in 2003 by the Turkmenistan government was an abuse of human rights of the Russian population in the country. The ban incited the local Turkmen, who in turn started oppressing the Russians in the country. The governments can, therefore, be blamed largely as far as creation of social fragmentation in Central Asia is concerned. The ethnic strife in Central Asia has been the reason behind poor inter-state cooperation within the region. Thanks to ethnic conflicts, the Central Asia states do not see eye to eye. The creation of regional trading and other cooperative institutions and systems within the

¹⁷⁵ David D. Laitin, *Identity In Formation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

¹⁷⁶ Madeleine Reeves, Johan Rasanayagam, and Judith Beyer, *Ethnographies Of The State In Central Asia* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, n. d.)

region has been an impossible task due to the increased tension amongst various ethnic groups within the region.¹⁷⁷ For instance, there is eminent enmity between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan due to the border and ethnic problems fueled by youth groups from both Uzbek and Kyrgyz communities.

In the light of the highlighted ethnic issues faced by the Central Asia states, the strategy of civic nationalism is the most appropriate remedy for the situation. The civic nationalism approach assumes that the political sovereignty and collective identity of a society are based on its devotion to a universal set of political norms and values and on its common loyalty to a territory-defined republic.¹⁷⁸ Civic nationalism encompasses the entire population living in a country unlike ethnic nationalism that prioritizes a particular ethnic community within a society. The main cause of ethnic strife in Central Asia has been ethnic discrimination carried out on minority groups by the majority ones. Therefore, the states ought to build national unity by ensuring that there is equality among all the ethnic communities in the society. That way, incidences such as the Osh massacre and the Tajikistan civil war will be a thing of the past.

Border Issues

Following the breakup of former USSR, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan inherited border disputes with China, Afghanistan, and Russia. These nations gained attention due to their major strategic location and vast amounts of natural resources. Concurrently, the nations have become spheres of interests for external forces particularly Russia,

¹⁷⁷ Viktor Abramovich Dukhovnyi and Vadim Sokolov, *Lessons On Cooperation Building To Manage Water Conflicts In The Aral Sea Basin* (New York: UNESCO, 2003).

¹⁷⁸ Harold H. Saunders, *Sustained Dialogue In Conflicts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

EU, and China, with the nations like Iran, Turkey, and the United States increasing their involvement. Recently, China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan signed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization conference that eased tension and placed a burden on these countries to ensure not just border security but control of trade. However, these nations border guards and customs officials are often corrupt even as they constantly fight with law enforcement agencies for a share of illegal activities profits. This is made worse by poor training and low morale within the border service. Border security has become a major focus in combating terrorism, drug-trafficking as well as illegal migration especially after the ouster of Taliban in Afghanistan. Before the breakdown of the USSR, the five countries shared a common planning system and economic structure. However, with the fall of Soviet Union, each country has demonstrated different speeds of transition toward a more liberalized economy.

Resource Scarcity

Central Asian countries share a common Soviet heritage. The electricity and water systems were developed as part of the Soviet system with different areas trading water for electricity and fuel. The result was a self-sufficient model where the surplus in one state covered the deficit in another under the Central Asian Power System (CAPS).¹⁷⁹ Under this system, upstream states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan collected water in large reservoirs during autumn and winter and released it during the summer to Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

¹⁷⁹ Gordon.

Since this system was not designed to be run by sovereign states, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has deteriorated to the point of oblivion. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have already withdrawn from the bilateral and multilateral agreements that held the system together. A give and take relationship that ensured mutual benefit for all parties has broken down and today, each country pursues its own interest at the expense of the other countries' needs. This precipitates harmful political contention that could explode if left unchecked.¹⁸⁰ Replacing regional cooperation with economic nationalism as has happened since these countries split from the Soviet Union could be a catalyst to social instability and future wars in the region. With downstream countries choosing to sell their fossil fuels to the world market where prices are higher, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, unable to pay the high prices have been left with little alternative energy sources for winter.¹⁸¹ In a bid to bridge the shortfall in electricity production, the two countries have proposed to build two large reservoirs on the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers, plans that would deprive the thirstier downstream states of an adequate water supply. Punitive measures from these states involve further cutbacks in fuel and electricity exports. The water rich, but poorer countries (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) continually use the headwaters of essential rivers as political leverage over downstream wealthier neighbors and this is expected to continue in the future. The push and pull competition for resources to sustain each country's livelihood has led to a situation where each country faces conflict on multiple fronts. The result is

¹⁸⁰ Castelein and Otte.

¹⁸¹ Solomon.

a simmering political situation that is capable of erupting into full-blown war destabilizing the whole region. The competitive rather than cooperative exploitation of resources further excludes the beneficial possibility of the countries working together to save diminishing resources. With the Aral Sea disappearing, water is still being drawn from the rivers at the same destructive rates.¹⁸² Further water scarcity in the future is likely to heighten political tensions in the region. Each country continues to lose farmland due to salination and leaching resulting from irrigation. Pastureland has also been disappearing fast in the last two decades.¹⁸³ Livestock rearing is a major economic activity in the five central Asian countries. This has resulted in overgrazing and poor pasture management among other factors. With border delimitation and demarcation yet to be concluded satisfactorily, the clamor for more farming and grazing land in the future is likely to put the five countries on a collision course.¹⁸⁴

It is indisputable that the water is the most closely guarded resource in Central Asia; this is not surprising given that the region is predominantly desert. There is unease among downstream states over unfair control of water by upstream states, a situation that plays itself out in many other regions as well. However, the asymmetrical distribution of water and fossil fuel play out to an almost zero sum game, with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan control headwaters of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya Rivers while Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan control vast fossil fuel reserves. The seasonal swing in interdependence for such vital resources means that the tension between the five countries is inevitable. With climate change and mismanagement of

¹⁸² Pearce.

¹⁸³ Lioubimtseva and Henebry, 963-977.

¹⁸⁴ Pearce.

water in the region likely to further cut the available supply, it is highly likely that the existing tensions will escalate and potentially lead to war between two or more of these countries. Water scarcity is also tied to a decrease in farming and grazing land in the region. This is a potentially more volatile situation as it pits farmers and herders directly against each other.

Radicalism and Drug Trafficking

Interconnections of instability between states in Central Asia can be explained through their approaches to the situation in Afghanistan. It is believed that, the Taliban government had significant influences on the Central Asian states; thus, the toppling of the Taliban-led government has diverse impacts on respective states. This is so because radical Islamic groups within Central Asia have their roots in Afghanistan. Therefore, it is likely to cause instability in all the five states in Central Asia as the Islamic rule movement spreads.

On the other hand, instability may spillover from Afghanistan into the countries that share borders with it such as Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. For instance, instability in Tajikistan that shares a long border with Afghanistan seems to have spilled over to Kyrgyzstan. It is worth noting that Kyrgyzstan is not one of Afghanistan's neighbors, but there exists an intrinsic interconnection between the states. These interconnections are attributable to the existence of regional networks of Islamic insurgents and drug trafficking routes.

Another factor that links instability within the states is the existence of ethnic affinity. For instance, the Uzbeks are found in most of the Central Asian states, and some sections of the

community are linked to those in Afghanistan.¹⁸⁵ Kassenova observes, “Although ethnic affinity between Uzbeks in Uzbekistan and those in Afghanistan is low, there are well-established ties at the level of the elites.”¹⁸⁶ Therefore, there is an extensive interconnection of instability in Central Asia because all the states seem to experience from radicalism and drug trafficking equally.

In conclusion, radicalism and drug trafficking are some of the most significant causes of instability in Central Asia. Currently, the region faces immense threats of political instability owing to the impact of religious extremism and drug trafficking. Instability in Central Asia is believed to be linked to Soviet communist policies and secular political structures. This is why all the five countries in Central Asia have experienced resistance in streamlining secular political systems. Evidence indicates that secular structures do not guarantee Islamic supremacy, and yet these countries are comprised of Muslim majority. As a result, religious extremism by Islamic groups has taken the center stage in which Islamic revival after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 has led to the emergence of Islamic radicalism.¹⁸⁷

Drug trafficking in the region also seems to be exerting significant impacts on instability.¹⁸⁸ This is because the phenomenon of drug trafficking has compromised some political systems through corruption and other economic aspects.

¹⁸⁵ Hooman Peimani, *Failed Transition, Bleak Future?: War and Instability in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 10.

¹⁸⁶ Nargis Kassenova, *Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian States after 2014: Incentives, Constraints and Prospects* (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2014), 5.

¹⁸⁷ Kathleen Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories,” *World Politics* 56, no. 2 (2004): 224.

¹⁸⁸ David Lewis, “High Times on the Silk Road: The Central Asian Paradox,” *World Policy Journal* 27, no. 1 (2010): 39.

From a political lens, instability in Central Asia seems imminent owing to the interconnection of the countries. All the countries face threats from Islamic radical groups, especially the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan that has its presence in all the states. Therefore, radicalism and drug trafficking are significant causes of instability in Central Asia, although ethnic violence has always been the cause of ethnic clashes.

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