CHAPTER-V

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The collapse of the former Soviet Union leading to the independence of five Central Asian Republics and their joining of Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991 are two important developments influencing the emerging political order in Central Asia. These events have given a new dimension to existing conflicts in Central Asia accentuating the need for their peaceful settlement by adopting confidence-building measures.

The post-Soviet Central Asia is, however, marked by a number of challenges arising from various primary problem areas. These problem areas can broadly be categorized into economic and non-economic categories. These Central Asian Republics are the titular nations which frequently represent the ethnic majority of their populace with the boundaries of the respective states also containing large minorities of other ethnic groups of this region, as well as sizeable Russian population. Thus the ethnic diversity, which created a conflict situation in Tajikistan also presents problems inside Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Second, the boundaries of the nation states that were created after the collapse of the USSR did not evolve from historical processes of ethnic settlement patterns, but were more or less established by the Soviets in 1920s. Third problem area is the current economic situation which, in all Central Asian states, with the exception of Uzbekistan is cause for great concern and has been showing few signs of stabilization. Fourth, after the independence of the Central Asian states, serious disputes have arisen over the usage of natural resources, especially, water. Whereas, some countries possess sufficient supplies of water while others particularly Uzbekistan, are dependent on water supplied by neighbouring states. Fifthly, the environmental degradation of several regions, particularly the area around the Aral sea, has taken on dramatic proportions resulting in the rapid deterioration of living conditions, including a noticeable reduction in life expectancy. These developments may also engender destabilising tendencies. Sixth, the relatively similar economic structure of the Central Asian Countries also presents certain disadvantages for regional cooperation. The

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experiences of the countries of other regions have shown that regional cooperation projects frequently fail because the economies of the countries involved are too similar and do not complement each other. Some authors believe that this problem exists in Central Asia and are, therefore, holding little hope for the success of regional cooperation in Central Asia.  

Finally, the Central Asian Regional Cooperation has suffered an account of the clash of leadership ambitions between the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov and President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. According to a news item published in the Kyrgyz press, president Karimov did not attend the Cholpan Ata Summit in July 1998 in Kyrgyzstan as he was not happy with the 'political wedding' of the children of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh Presidents.

Besides the above mentioned problems, the external factors are also posing some challenges in the way of regional cooperation in Central Asian countries. According to Professor Ahmad Hasan Dani, a Pakistani expert on Central Asian affairs the west has a vested interest in propagating regional conflict in Central Asia. According to him, the west perceives the rise of two giant republican states in Central Asia namely Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as threat to the New World Order.

The collapse of Soviet Union not only paved the way for the independence of Central Asian countries from the Russian tutelage but also exposed the vulnerability of these states to various unresolved conflicts. The re-emancipation of the Central Asian states is thus a crucial factor not only at the regional level, but also relevant to the global political order. Given numerous unresolved ethnic and territorial conflicts among the states, there is also a possibility of further fragmentation and emergence of new states in that region.

In some cases, ethnic, linguistic and territorial contradictions are so strong that the assertion of religious forces may be counter productive. In a situation when the Central Asian states are exposed to a conglomeration of problems and challenges, one viable option for stability and peace in that region is to seriously strive for confidence building measures in military and non-military areas. Such a process can be launched at bilateral and multilateral levels and would require the

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3 Devendra Kaushik, Regional Cooperation: The Central Asian Experience, Contemporary Central Asia, Vol. IV-No. 12, 2000 PP.37
4 Ahmad Hasan Dani, "West sowing seeds of conflict in Central Asia." The Muslim (Islamabad), April 12, 1993, PP.123-126.
adoption of concerted efforts and seeking of support on the part of the regimes in power, of other influential groups and external factors.5

5.1 Historical Moorings of Conflicts

Central Asia remained a turbulent and conflict prone region for much of its history. For centuries, Central Asia has been ruled either by foreign empires which incorporated the region into their territories as a single political unit by a few regional multi-ethnic states.6 Before the Soviet take over, Central Asia was a single geopolitical entity called “Turkistan”. There were three old empires within that entity, stretching from the Black Sea to the desert of Mongolia. The three Central Asian empires which existed before the Russian occupation were:

a. Kokand Khanate, which stretched over parts of what is now Southern Kazakhstan, Osh oblast in Kyrgyzstan and the Farghana valley in Uzbekistan.

b. Emirate of Bukhara which included Samarkand and all of what is now south eastern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

c. Khanate of Khiva, which stretched over the existing territories of western Uzbekistan and eastern Turkmenistan.

The breakdown of the Central Asian political order was mainly due to the result of imperial rivalry between the Russian and British empires in 19th century. Finally, both Britain and Russia decided to draw a line and demarcate their spheres of influence. After that Central Asian kingdoms became part of the Russian Tsars and territories which were south of the Durand line were accepted as part of the British Crown.7 The “great game” which Great Britain and Russia had played during 19th Century planted the seeds of existing conflicts in Central Asia.8

A brief glance at the history of Central Asia reveals that it has passed through a turbulent past. Isolation from the rest of the world, disunity, constant

5 Maqbool Ahmed Bhatti, "Impact of Central Asian changes in South and West Asia", Regional Studies, Vol. 2, spring 1992, P.18
warfare, despotism, and religious fanaticism turned the once prosperous lands into deserts, ruined the economy, impoverished and prevented the process of modernization.

5.2 Ethnic, Linguistic and Religious problems

The upsurge of ethnicity is a global phenomenon and its intensity is growing rapidly in the later part of the 20th century. If one observes the nature of conflicts in different parts of the world, one will find majority of these conflicts have ethnic or lingual basis.9 The former Soviet Central Asian republics are not an exception to the contemporary escalation of ethnic conflicts. After decades of Russian and the communist tutelage, the people of the five Central Asian states have got an opportunity to revitalize their lost position and achieve the sovereign status.10

As far as the ethnic conflicts in Central Asia are concerned, one can examine these conflicts in two different perspectives. First, the strong presence of the Russian minority in nearly all the Central Asian states, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Secondly, the ethnic tension prevailing between the Central Asian groups, conflicts between the Uzbek minority in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and the Tajik minority in Uzbekistan are quite noticeable.11 The indigenous people of Central Asia can be divided into sedentary and pastoralists. The pastoralists as well as the sedentarists are attached in different ways to their land. Therefore, the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen though nomadic Pastoralists, nonetheless had distinct territoriality. And in the same manner, inhabitants of the oasis towns and its surrounding villages lived on the land, and in more outlying areas hardly experienced political change when ruler changed from Iranian Samanid in the tenth century to Turkic and subsequently from Turkic to Tsarist in the nineteenth century.12

Most of the existing ethnicities and their denomination in Central Asia are of recent origin and continue to alter in response to the changing circumstances. Though the names of some ethnicities, like Uighurs, Tajiks may be very old; but

10 Moonis Ahmar, op. cit., no.9, p.63.
12 Ibid., p.37.
often the same name has been used by very different people, who had little or no genetic or social connection between them. The ethnic structure had to withstand fierce and recurrent onslaughts when borders of the republics and their autonomies were re-carved, multiethnic capitals raised, entire people deported, enormous labour immigration encouraged, atrocities committed against peasants, collectivization established, and sidentarization of nomads achieved before ethnic elements could arrange into a new order. The ethnic structure appeared to be on its way to radical transformation, but all eponymic people managed to redeem their structural weights. As far as the political factor is concerned, no political party or ruling group deliberately determined to change the lives of identities of every member of Central Asian society until the installation of Soviet Nationality policy by Stalin, and the continuation of that policy by Moscow later. Prior to this, an official, politically significant ethnic identity was quite important in so far as extended sedentary families or clans and tribes in pastoral nomadic areas were partially based on ethnic association.

Central Asia is something of an ethnic tinder-box with an intermixture of ethnic groups in large numbers in each state. It must be said to the credit of the Central Asian leaders, however, that they have managed to contain these conflicts, keeping their adverse fallout to the minimum level. The ethnic composition of the Soviet Central Asian states is as follows:

(a) Kazakhstan: Population 14,873,700, Kazakhs-53.4%, Russians-30.0%, Ukrainians-3.7%, Uzbeks-2.5%
(b) Kyrgyzstan: Population 4,908,000, Kyrgyzs-65.7%, Uzbeks-13.9%, Russians-11.7%, Ukrainians-0.9%.
(c) Uzbekistan: Population-27,700,000, Uzbeks-80%, Russians-5.5%, Tajiks-5%, Kazakhs-3%, Tatars-1.5%.
(d) Tajikistan: Population-7,076,598, Tajiks-65%, Uzbeks-25%, Russians-3%.
(e) Turkmenistan: Population-5,136,262, Turkmens-85%, Uzbeks-5%, Russians-4%.

Ibid., pp.27-28.
Ibid.
From the above mentioned facts it appears that these states are a patchwork of several ethnic groups. Till recently Kazakhs were a minority in their own land. There is a sizeable Russian minority in Kyrgyzstan. The most assertive ethnic group parallel to Russians is Uzbek. There are 16 million Uzbeks in Uzbekistan alone and several million in other Central Asian states. Tajiks and Uzbeks claim cultural superiority over Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs and Turkmens. Tajiks consider themselves to be the most cultured nation, by virtue of belonging to the ancient and rich Persian civilization. They are biggest non-Turkic community in Central Asia. Turkmens are considered to be uncultured, whereas Kazakhs and Kyrgyzs are sometimes called as semi-barbarian nomads who recently converted to Islam. Except for the Tajiks, all ethnic groups in Central Asia speak a language close to Turkish. Slogans of Pan-Turkism are raised purely on linguistic and ethnic grounds.

Central Asia does not constitute a uniform mass of Muslims or Turks. The differences among people of Central Asia are vast. Turkmen is as different from Uzbek, as Italian is to Spanish. The Turks of course speak Persian, an Indo-European language. Persian was the native language of the Tajiks and second language of Uzbeks.

The arguments concerning one political order in Central Asia are unacceptable to those who assert their ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural identities. Century of Russian rule has divided the people of Central Asia at various levels. Though the people of Central Asia share so many common things that the possibility of an institutionalized cooperation does not seem to be remote. But the existence of ethnic, linguistic and religious contradictions undermine the endeavours for cooperation among the Central Asian Republics.16

The series of ethnic riots that rocked Central Asia since 1989 have profoundly created problems at regional as well as in global context.17 In all the central Asian countries, the difficult economic situation has put the ethnic minorities under pressure and not surprisingly there have been many violent group clashes in recent years. The Uzbek and Kyrgyz groups were involved in violent clashes over the land dispute in Uzbekistan’s Andizan oblast in 1989.18 Again in 1990, competing

17 Ibid., pp.67-71.
claims made by new ethnically based association in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan led to violence between the above groups. Similarly a dispute over claims to irrigation and farm land led to violence between Tajiks and Kyrgyzstan villagers on the border of the two republics in 1989. Equally, the tension between the Tajiks and Uzbeks reached in crisis proportion in August-September 1992, when thousands of Uzbek refugees left Tajikistan as a result of what they describe as “pogroms” in Uzbek speaking villages.

Ethnic Kazakhs, and Uighur nationalities overlapping into the Kazakhstan-Xinjiang frontiers may create potential irredentism and border conflicts between Kazakhstan and China in the Pamir region. Xinjiang has been restive since early 1989. The *Xinjiang Daily*, the official newspaper frequently issues stern warning against Muslim militancy and Turkic nationalism saying thatSeparatists will be seen as traitors, hence, will be prosecuted. The trend of ethnic conflicts within Central Asia in the recent years shoes that there have been more cases of non-Russians killing non-Russians rather than ethnic Central Asian killing Russians. In other words the region is more fertile for intra-ethnic rather than inter ethnic conflicts.

As far as complex ethnic make-up of Central Asia is concerned, the Uzbek nationalism is the most potent factor. There have been numerous fights between the Uzbeks and Kyrgyzs. The Uzbeks also fought Mekshketian Turks in Tashkent and Ferghana valley in 1989. The hatred of Uzbeks is high and growing among the non-Turkic people especially, among ethnically Iranian Tajiks who are of the ancient Persian civilization, which dominated Central Asia before the nomadic Turks came into the region.

Besides the Alma-Ata riots of December 1986, all other ethnic movements were the consequence of unsettled economic and social issues. But it is important to note that the events in Dushanbe, Ferghana velley, Novyi Uzen, Ashkabad, Osh and elsewhere were primarily the consequence of pressure from below rather

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21 Ibid., p.37.
manipulation from above. Although there was greater casualty in these ethnic strifes, but disturbances were not aimed at political sovereignty.  

The origin and dynamics of the ethno-political situation are highly complex and depend on many domestic and external factors. Social fragmentation is a new feature of the Central Asian reality that forms a potential threat to the new states stability, ethnic instability, along with mass pauperization and criminalization seems to be the most vulnerable aspect of central Asian states. It is only in the last six years that the newly born states, sharing a common legacy of the past, have chosen different paths in almost all realms. Paradoxically, with the rapid fragmentation of the region, a greater deal of cooperation is needed. But fulfilling such a need appears unlikely in the present circumstances. The combination of religious and corresponding ethnic differences may greatly destabilize the region and more effective methods of managing these differences have not been developed. Ferghana valley, which has recently been the scene of two massacres is a vivid example of central Asia’s conflict potential. According to some expert analysis, at the beginning of the 21st century Central Asia may become the epicenter of world economic, political and military conflicts. During the Soviet times, not only a serious process of ethnic crystallization took place, but there was also approbation of different models of development. Currently each Republic has to face its own combination of possibilities in order to move forward or regress to the past. Frequently ethnic divisions between the Central Asian Republics are perceived as the primary source of conflict throughout the region. During the Soviet period, all citizens were united under the banner of a new historical community, with an army of ideological workers advocating the idea of friendship of the peoples, now ethnic unity has completely fragmented. Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, ethnic conflicts between mainly Central Asian Muslims began to emerge. This polarization among the ethnic and religious communities also overlaps other sources of social and economic identity.

Central Asia has never been a monolithic set of people or states. The diversity of the region is quite obvious today. The increasing political polarization between newly independent states acquires ethnic coloration and is more acute in Central Asia than elsewhere in the former Soviet space. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have adopted relatively open and democratic free-market system. While Uzbekistan is not willing to reform its political institutions, remains stuck with an authoritarian regime and a relatively closed economy. Turkmenistan is an extreme case of totalitarian states which reverted to medieval tyranny. Justifying his authoritarian rule, the Uzbek leader points to the need to combat the Islamic threat, facilitate market reforms and “prepare” the society for democracy: Turkmenistan’s president uses his own personality cult as the basis of his authority. Initially, Tajikistan had all but collapsed under a quite unpopular, pro-Russian government that was unable to control the country’s situation from regional and clan-based clashes. The second level of fragmentation was between the Slav and the indigenous population. In the current ethnic mosaic of Central Asia, Russians still constitute the second largest ethnic group, in contrast to the region’s titular nationalities which are rapidly increasing in number, mainly due to high birth rates. The share of Russians in each Central Asian state varies considerably: 30 per cent in Kazakhstan, 11.7 per cent in Kyrgyzstan, 4 per cent in Turkmenistan, 5.5 per cent in Uzbekistan, and 3 per cent in Tajikistan in the period 1995-1996. If other Slavic populations are included, such as Ukrainians and Belorussians, the numbers would be greater.

Russians are concentrated in the urban areas, mostly in the capitals and northern areas. Despite the fact that the capitals are undergoing a gradual process of indigenization, the natives still constitute a minority in Almaty and Bishkek. As a result, they frequently see their own major cities as dominated by outsiders. In Kyrgyzstan, some homeless descendants of the nomads try to end the historic injustice by demanding ownership of land. Any local attempt to undermine the privileged status of the Russian minority will be counter productive. Besides that the ethnic tension among the central Asian groups, conflicts among the Uzbek minority in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and the Tajik minority in Uzbekistan is a case in

28 Ibid.
point. In the post-Soviet period, the absence of a clear-cut nationality policy in the Central Asian states has made the position of non-titular nationalities/groups even more precarious.

The de-Russification process has almost been completed in all the five former Soviet Central Asian republics. Even various street names have been changed, for example, is Almaty (Kazakhstan), the major avenue, Gorkey street, has been renamed Jibek Joly; the Great Silk Road; to honour the famous ancient trade route traveled by Marco Polo. On January 28, 1993, Constitutional resolution passed by the Kazakh dominated parliament, undermined the position of the huge Russian population treating them as second class citizen. Whereas it has encouraged Kazakh nationalism, it is likely to promote disunity between Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs, a negative factor for regional cooperation in the region.

Dissolution of multi-ethnic Soviet Union resulted in still unresolved territorial problems. According to an estimate of the Geography institute under the Russian Academy of Sciences, there are 1020 territorial ethnic dispute, spots in the territory of the former Soviet Union. At present, regional conflict is exacerbated by the ethnic factor. In the view of president Karimov of Uzbekistan, the multi-ethnic factor is undermining both national and regional stability in the Central Asian republics the ethnic factor might become more pressing as more and more ethnic frontiers unravel in Central Asia.

Though there is potential for Kazak nationalism coming in to sharp confrontation with the republic, there is also potential for ethnic or territorial disputes between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, given the large number of Uzbeks who live in the Southern region of Kazakhstan along the Uzbekistan border. The Karakalpak Autonomous Region of Uzbekistan is also ethnically closer to the Kazakhs than to the Uzbeks, making it a potential trouble spot, if borders in the region begin to be rearranged along more ethnic lines. Kyrgyzstan a heavily mountainous region and referred to as the Switzerland of Central Asia is besieged

31 R. Abtulatipov, Plot Against Nation: National and Nationalistic Points in Peoples (Fate: St. Petersburg, 1992), p.137.
with internecine rivalries and regional divisions. With Russians constituting 11.7 per cent of the population, it faces ethnic tensions which could threaten its survival. A considerable Uzbek minority (13.9 per cent) also exists in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan has had one very serious ethnic clash with Uzbekistan in 1990 in the oblast of Osh in the Ferghana valley and Kyrgyzs fear Uzbek expansionism. Also, the Uzbeks are likely to become the country's second largest ethnic group within 2-3 years due to continued Russian emigration. With Islam Karimov whipping the Uzbek nationalism, the Kyrgyz republic could face a renewal of the 1990 enter-ethnic rioting in Osh.33 One of the most explosive issues is the north-south divide in Kyrgyzstan. The sub-regional rivalry and suspicion between the two halves of the country is lying latent. In 1993, Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev expressed concern that with an estimated 50,000 drug users, Kyrgyzstan had one of the largest drug abuse problems in Central Asia. His fears about drugs and drugs abuse in the Republic may be based on his concern that personal political ambition, the drug mafia and rumblings of South-Kyrgyz separation may be connected.34

Tajikistan has realized the full impact along its southern border of the war and large scale drug trafficking in neighbouring Afghanistan. Its own resulting civil war has been exacerbated by divisions among Tajikistan's leaders, a paucity of resources and a populace awash in Soviet weaponry.35 Tajikistan has the most active movement of militant Islam within the former USSR. The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) is deeply embroiled in politics. The Republic is beset by conflicts among northern and southern clans, between Uzbeks and Tajiks (Uzbeks constitute 25 per cent of the population and Tajiks constitute 65 per cent), between communists and reformers and between the poor and the establishment. This volatile situation can cause a spillover effect in the rest part of the Central Asia.36

Uzbekistan has a population of about 27.7 million, with Uzbeks constituting 80 per cent of the population and Russians 5.5 per cent. Uzbekistan lies in the geographic centre of Central Asia and has vast political, intellectual and economic assets, as it was the hub of activity before the break up of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Uzbekistan possesses a sense of national self-identity, and other states in the

33 The Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Report, 1st Quarter, 1996, p.17.
region tend to feel the threat posed by Uzbek dominance. Uzbekistan is the chief rival of Kazakhstan for regional influence over its neighbours, and Uzbekistan is most likely to have a conflict with Tajikistan. Given the fact that 5 per cent of the Uzbekistan’s population is Tajik, who constitute a majority in Samarkand and Bukhara, there are increasing demands from the Tajiks for greater cultural autonomy and more widespread use of the Tajik language.\(^{37}\) Equally significant is the large Uzbek population in Tajikistan (25 per cent) which is mainly concentrated in the northern part of the republic and who also regard themselves as victims of discrimination.\(^{38}\) Fundamentalist leaders have a strong presence which is potential challenge to state stability since they tend to question the legitimacy of the existing government and call for an “Islamic government” and an “Islamic way of life”. While such movements are kept in check through strict police measures they can become factors for popular national dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, Islamic Parties have been known to be functioning in Tashkent also and a strict watch is maintained on their activities.

Language has an important position among the various factors that are considered important for ethnic identity. Generally, the language people speak is seen as an important shaping aspect of their culture and particularly their cognitive categories. Most Scholars analysing nationalism give more emphasis on linguistic aspects of ethnicity as being important for identity. However, others have pointed out that as distinct from language, other factors such as territorial attachment, genealogical grouping may well have been of crucial significance.\(^{39}\) This is not to ignore the importance of language as one important element in the intricate pattern of ethnic identity.

In central Asia, an examination of linguistic affiliation in determining ethnic identity becomes crucial. The goal of Soviet nationalities policy in the region in the 1920s was to create separate national republics by means of a national territorial delimitation based mainly on ethno-linguistic criteria.\(^{40}\) As such it is necessary to examine the nature of linguistic identity in the region prior to the division, particularly since the linguistic situation was extremely confused and complex one.

\(^{37}\) Fuller in Benuazizi and Weiner, no.38, p.30.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., p.30.
The divergence between language use and ethnic identity is interesting since it belies the Soviet claims to linguistic identity as crucial in the determination of ethnic frontiers and leaves open at least one territorial claim that is made by the Tajiks on Uzbek lands. It is now widely acknowledged that to satisfy the criterion of nationhood, two new literary languages, the possibility of "Turkicisation" of Tajik or of "Iranisation" of Uzbek was denied. It was maintained that the original language of Samarkand and Bukhara was Uzbek, Samarkand Uzbek Simply having more Tajik elements and Tashkent Uzbek more Turkic one. It is now widely acknowledged that to satisfy the criterion of nationhood, two new literary languages, the possibility of “Turkicisation” of Tajik or of “Iranisation” of Uzbek was denied. It was maintained that the original language of Samarkand and Bukhara was Uzbek, Samarkand Uzbek Simply having more Tajik elements and Tashkent Uzbek more Turkic one. The Uzbek and Tajik cultural and historical heritages were also defined chiefly on the basis of linguistic and territorial criteria. However, since the Uzbeks and the Tajiks had occupied the same territory and had similar religio-cultural background, whose chief linguistic vehicles were Arabic and Persian, this compartmentalization created confusion and overlap.

Language issue is most important ethnic predicament in central Asia. Majority of the people in Central Asia speak languages which are closer to Turkish, the only exception is Tajikistan where Persian is spoken. The slavik minorities speak Russian and Ukrainian. There is also noticeable German speaking community in Kazakhstan. The lingual discord in Central Asia has its basis in Stalin’s policy of ethnic division of that single geographical area into several republics. The linguistic contradictions in Central Asia are of a complicated nature.

Until recently, the Kazakhs and Kyrgyzs were considered one people speaking two very similar dialects. During the Soviet period, these dialects were given separate literary forms to discourage creation of so called national identity. When Turkey changed to Latin script under Ataturk, Stalin decreed that all the Central Asian languages had to be written in Latin and later in Cyrillic (Russian) character. Such a policy disoriented the Central Asian people from their centuries old cultural heritage and divided them on lingual, ethnic and territorial basis.

Russian language is still an indispensable language for the most urban central Asian region and for more professionals. It continues to be important for people who are at the most productive stages of their lives, between the ages of twenty-five and

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sixty-five. They use Russian for communication, particularly outside their own
Republics.44

It is also likely that Russian will continue to play an important role in the
educational system of the newly independent states of Central Asia, if they are to
create a large local skilled cadre to take care of their future requirements. Most state
laws provide for the continued use of Russian language. Turkmen law even talks of
national-Russian bilingualism; Tajik law proclaims that “the Russian language as the
language of inter-ethnic communication functions freely in the territory of Tajikistan
and the laws of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan proclaim freedom of choice
of language of instruction.45

Kazakhstan is an important flash point in the language controversy in Central
Asia. On January 28, 1993, the Kazakh-dominated parliament passed constitution
which declared Kazakh as the official language but declared Russian as the main
language of communication among various ethnic groups.46

However, according to the constitution of Kazakhstan, it is essential that the
head of the state must speak Kazakh fluently. Such a step of the Kazakh parliament
had created resentment among millions of Russian speaking population of the state.
Russians have blamed the Kazakh president of fanning the flames of hatred and
animosity by undermining the status of their language by giving it second class-
status.47 The declaration of Kazakh as an official language has encouraged Kazakh
nationalism that alienates the Russians.

In the post-independence period, the Central Asians are in a dilemma as to
what to do with their native languages and with the status of Russian and other
Slavic languages. Some Central Asian states are reverting back to the Latin script,
whereas, there is a possibility that Tajikistan may adopt the Arabic script. Russia is
aware of the fact that the switch over of the Central Asian Republics from Cyrillic to
Latin or Arabic script would undermine decades old cultural supremacy of the
Russian inhabitants over Central Asian Republics.

44 Eden Naby, “The emerging Central Asia, Ethnic and Religious Factions” in Mohiaddin Mesbahi,
(ed.), Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union: Domestic and International Dynamics,
45 Shams-ud-din (ed.) Geopolitics and Energy Resources in Central Asia and Caspian Sea-Region
46 “Explosion of Ethnic Unrest Feared in Kazakhstan”, Dawn (Karachi), February 11, 1993
47 Ibid.
As far as religious conflicts are concerned, a single most important aspect in this regard is the revival of Islam and Christianity in the former Soviet Union. In most of the Central Asian Republics, Islam is a convenient symbol which allows local nationalists to distance themselves from Slavic culture and aspirations. However, for some observers, the revival of Islam in the newly independent Central Asian states is conceived as a threat to regional integration in the region. The reopening of mosques, the growing activities of the Islamic Renaissance Party (banned in nearly all the Central Asian states) and the role of the Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in this regard is viewed with suspicion and distrust. The neighbouring country of Afghanistan is an Islamic theocracy, from where Islamic ideology is exported. In this case, radical preachers from some Muslim Countries are paving the way for it in the ideological vacuum. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have become hotbeds of Islamic extremism. According to some reports, the Jordanian born Chechen field commander Khatlab and Central Asian fellow militant Jumabai Namanghani have declared that the creation of new Islamic states in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is their main objective. They propose to do so with the backing of the fundamentalist movements in Afghanistan, Pakistan and West Asia. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), financed by Osama Bin Laden and extremist Wahabi groupings, is said to be operating in Fergana valley creating instability in the region.

The native population of Central Asia is overwhelmingly Sunni, and among the Sunnis secular power has had greater legitimacy than it has among the Shias for centuries, the Caliph, spiritual leader of the Sunni’s, was also the Sultan, ruler of the Ottoman Empire. The clergy, although important, has not had the influence or independent power it enjoys among the Shias of Iran or Lebanon. It is therefore unlikely that the Central Asian Republics would turn into a theocracy of Iranian type. This, however, does not mean that the influence of Islamic fundamentalism will not continue to grow and affect the daily life of the population. The Islamic fundamentalism of the Sunni or Shia variety is not merely resistant to democracy but wholly contemptuous of and hostile to entire structure of regional cooperation in

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49 Dadan Upadhy, “Central Asian Nation to Back Russia in Fight Against Terrorism”, Indian Express, September 27, 1999.
Central Asian region. However, Mushahid Hussein, a leading Pakistan political analyst, sees the Islamic Reassertion as positive in at least three dimensions. Politically as challenging the existing status quo; culturally as the assertion of an Islamic identity differentiating between modernization and westernization and in foreign affairs, as assertion of sovereignty over natural resources, struggle for liberation and matching military power. It has every potential to exacerbate regional tensions, which could even lead to direct conflicts in Central Asia. However, the revival of Islamic fundamentalism in the newly independent Central Asian Republics is conceived as a threat to the regional cooperation in that region. Islam has been a dominant factor in Central Asia. Samarkand and Bukhara were traditionally great centers of theological studies and the region had never remained isolated from the Islamic mainstream. Now, there is a sudden resurgence of Islam in all the republics. The prospect of a rising Islamic bloc out of there newly independent states in alliance with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, as well as the possible incorporation of China’s western Muslim province of Xinjiang, is one kind of scenario which paves the way for growing tension and instability in this region. The idea of Pan-Turkic bloc to form “Turkistan on the other hand, could endanger the territorial integrity. It has the potential to exacerbate regional tension, which could even lead to direct assumed conflicts in that region.

5.3 Border Disputes

After the ethnic, linguistic and religious problems, the territorial boundaries are the most important area of conflict. The borders of Central Asia were changed since 1921 and around 90 territorial changes have been made since then. Out of 23 internal borders existing between 15 former Republics of the former Soviet Union, 20 are still disputed.

The resolution of border issues peacefully and transparently would have a positive impact on regional security, economic cooperation, ethnic relations and efforts to combat drug trafficking and religious extremism. But progress has been

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slow, and no immediate breakthrough can be seen in an antagonistic process that is defining the new map of Central Asia.

Independence of Central Asian states reopened a pandora’s box of border disputes. Many of the current difficulties can be traced directly back to a difficult Soviet legacy. Moscow established administrative borders of its Central Asian republics in the mid-1920s which followed neither natural geographic boundaries nor strict ethnic lines. Ethnic populations that had long enjoyed access to friends and families just across border were now isolated and often faced visa requirements and other access difficulties. Much of the population views these new restrictions with hostility and has felt the disruption in traditional patterns of commerce and society acutely.

The resolution of territorial disputes is obviously emotional and goes directly to each country’s definition of national interests. No nation wants to make territorial concessions. Nonetheless, the failure to resolve border issues prevents neighbours for normalizing relations and dealing with pressing social and economic issues which directly creates hurdles for the regional cooperation.

The borders are particularly problematic in Fergana valley. Most of the valley within the territory of Uzbekistan is bordered by Kyrgyzstan on the north east and south, and by Tajikistan in the Southwest. Kyrgyzstan shares a 1300 Km. with Uzbekistan, while the Kyrgyz-Tajik border is 990 Km. long. The Uzbek-Kyrgyzstan and Uzbek Tajikistan borders in the Fergana valley zig-zag back and forth across the valley’s main east west road and rail transit routes pass through northern Tajikistan enroute to Uzbekistan. The result is a situation in which virtually all traffic and freight repeatedly crosses several international borders. Monitoring of these and other Central Asian borders is complicated in an age of globalization when people, capital, goods, services and ideas can move more swiftly across frontiers than ever before.

The territorial disputes have long been a source of problems between the Uzbeks and other groups in Central Asian region. Today many of these disputes

53 The Times of Central Asia, April 11, 2002, p.5.
54 Ibid.
have become grounds of secessionist and irredentist sentiments within Central Asia.56

Many of the current state borders result from a Moscow appointed commission to re-draw Central Asia in 1924. During the Soviet period, the borders were never well surveyed or marked. Today, several borders particularly between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have been established not by legal demarcation but by popular usage.

Turkmenistan border with Uzbekistan is defined by the water course of the Syr-Darya river at some points creating a continuous possibility of border redefinition. After talks with respect to the border, Turkmen and Uzbekistan officials issued a protocol saying neither had territorial claims on the other.57 In early 2000, Uzbekistan unilaterally commenced a survey of its border with Kazakhstan. After Kazakhstan officials publicly objected, a bilateral demarcation commission was established in February 2000 to settle the problem.58

Tajikistan officials similarly objected to Uzbekistan’s unilateral border survey.59 In June 2000, the Tajik and Uzbekistan governments signed a memorandum to setup a joint intergovernmental commission on the delimitation of their state border, the delimitation was to be based in the existing administrative territorial border. The goal was to establish a framework for cooperation between border guards on issues of customs, migration and other forms of control.60 In September 2000, despite protests from Tajikistan the Uzbekistan government began mining some portions of the common border with Tajikistan as counter-insurgency measure. During 2001, Uzbek and Kyrgyz officials were in almost continuous negotiation over their common border.

At present, the border problem is delicate. The Kyrgyz and Uzbek government delegations held a talk on the delimitation and demarcation of the state

60 Tajikistan, Uzbekistan Agree to set up Commission, ITAR-TASS, 15 June 2000.
border between the two states in Bishkek on 17 February 2000 at the Institute of Geology and Cartography.\(^{61}\)

Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev and his Uzbek counterpart Islam Karimov agreed to speed up the process of negotiating the issue of delimitation on the border between the two states on a telephone conversation on 16 March, 2001.\(^{62}\)

To settle the Tajik and Kyrgyz border issue, a group of representatives from the Tajik Border Protection Committee went to the Tajik-Kyrgyz border in Tajikistan’s northern Sughd region to hold talks with senior representatives from the border department of Kyrgyzstan, to settle the border dispute in January 2003. Nuralisho Nazarov, (First Deputy Chairman of the Tajikistan Border Protection Committee) told *Asia-Plus* that the purpose of the delegation’s trip was to solve problems that have arisen on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border in the area of the Isfara district in northern Tajikistan.\(^{63}\)

Uzbekistan has officially rejected a request by Kyrgyzstan for maps of Uzbek mine fields along the country’s common border and also for the removal of some of the mines on February 26, 2003.

Uzbek Foreign Ministry spokesman Kadyr Yusupov told a press conference in Tashkent that Uzbekistan insists on the right to defend its borders in the face of international terrorism. Kyrgyzstan formally protested to Uzbekistan over the death of a Kyrgyz citizen who was killed by the Uzbek mine.\(^{64}\)

According to some sources, Uzbekistan is considered as an expansionist state given its territorial claims over other states. It is the most powerful Central Asian state in terms of population, economic resources and military buildup. In this scenario, territorial conflicts in the former Soviet Central Asian republics are explosive in nature and have a potential for outbreak of hostilities. Such a situation may lead to further disintegration of Central Asia and emergence of Several states on ethnic lines, which will be the main obstacle for regional cooperation in that region.

\(^{61}\) "Documents", *Contemporary Central Asia*, vol.4, No.1-2, April-August 2000, p.93.

\(^{62}\) "Documents", *Contemporary Central Asia*, vol. V, No.1, April 2001, p.66.


\(^{64}\) *The Times of Central Asia*, vol.5, No.10 (209), March 6, 2003, p.1
5.4 Drug Trafficking

Trans-regional drug trafficking and, in its wake, growing illicit drug consumption pose an escalating danger to the stability and development of the Central Asian states and the people within them. Starting in the late 1990s, Central Asia has become the main drug trafficking route for the Western and Eastern European markets transporting not only drugs from Afghanistan, but increasingly also from other parts of Asia, including China and Southeast Asia. The drug business has become one of the main sources of finance for criminal and extremist groups and organizations in the region, some of which are connected to global criminal networks.

Drugs have taken a high toll on human security in Central Asian states. The number of addicts has risen, and with high levels of poverty, younger people especially have been lured to the world of crime and drug trafficking. The implications are serious, touching public health, economic development and social stability. Since the drug trade and its attendant problems know no borders, regional cooperation to stop them is imperative.

Central Asia borders on the world’s main centre of opium production—Afghanistan. Global demand for opiates has traditionally been concentrated in Western Europe, but is now also expanding rapidly in Russia and China. Prices increase according to the distance from their place of origin; every time drugs cross a state border, their cost tends to double at least. While in Dushanbe a kilogramme of high-purity heroin would cost around $6,000, by the time it reaches Western Europe, it sells at the retail level for up to 30 times that amount.

There are currently three main routes for drugs out of Afghanistan: from the northeast into Tajikistan and on to Russia; into Pakistan and to its ports; and westward across the desert into Iran. Since the border with Iran is heavily guarded, and since Pakistani authorities have tightened border security, the northern route through Central Asia has become the favoured option. Corruption among some law enforcement and border authorities along the way facilitates the trade. One measure

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of increased illicit drug flows is the rise in drug seizures, which probably has more
to do with the growing quantities of trafficking than with improved law
enforcement.\textsuperscript{68} Since 1993, according to research published by the Silk Road Studies
Program, there has been a 30-fold increase in heroin seizures in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{69}
UNODC noted a doubling of heroin seizures from 2000 to 2002.

The drug-trafficking problem is endemic in all five republics, although a
large proportion of heroin seizures have taken place in Tajikistan. In 2002,
Tajikistan alone intercepted 2.3 tons of opium and 5.6 tons of heroin, which equal 80
per cent of the total intercepted in the region.\textsuperscript{70} This boosted Tajikistan from the 23\textsuperscript{rd}
position to the fifth place in the world for interception. Up to 100 tons of heroin are
estimated to pass through Tajikistan each year, which is equivalent to the estimated
annual North American and West European demand.

Uzbekistan is also affected by drug trafficking, most of it coming from
Afghanistan. More than 600 kilograms of drugs were seized during the first six
months of 2004, including 295 kilograms of heroin. This is twice as much as in the
same period in 2003. It is estimated that approximately 100 to 150 tons of
Afghanistan’s narcotics moved through Kazakhstan in 2004, approximately 30 per
cent of which sold there. In Kyrgyzstan, during 2004, narcotics seizures increased by
9 per cent over 2003.

\textbf{Causes of regional drug problem}

The factors driving the booming drug industry in Central Asia are many,
with geography playing a central role, given the region’s location between the
powerful poles of supply in Afghanistan and demand in Europe, China and Russia.
Increased drug production in Afghanistan is worrying for Central Asian countries. In
north-eastern Afghanistan, a burgeoning opium crop feeds into dozens of heroin
production facilities, each capable of producing 10 to 20 kilograms a day. In 2000,
the Taliban Government’s ban on opium cut output to relatively insignificant
amounts, but the post-Taliban years have seen a dramatic resurgence. The drug-crop

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Osmonaliev, Kairat, “Developing Counter-Narcotics Policy in Central Asia: Legal and Political
Dimensions”, A Paper Prepared for the Central Asia – Caucasus institute Silk Road Studies
Programme, 2005, (online) www.silkroadstudies.org
\textsuperscript{70} Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Programme, 2004.
area in Afghanistan increased considerably in 2004, reaching about 131,000 hectares according to UNODC, although 2005 projections show a slight decrease.\textsuperscript{71}

The war against drugs in Afghanistan is hampered by a number of problems, including the lack of alternative income sources for Afghan farmers, the limited effectiveness of crop eradication and substitution programmes, the lack of government political control in broad sections of the country, links to warlords and organized crime, and the lack of effective strategies and proper coordination. As one researcher put it, campaigns to eradicate opium in Afghanistan have been counterproductive in the mid-term as prices are driven up and rural poverty is exacerbated, leading to displacement of production rather than eradication.\textsuperscript{72} Central Asia is ideally placed to absorb this displaced production.

Although Central Asia is today more significant as a transit route, the countries face a real risk, at least in the case of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, of becoming producer countries in the future. The main concern is that a potentially drastic decrease in opium poppy cultivation and production in Afghanistan will trigger a corresponding increase in Central Asia (the so-called ‘balloon effect’). With significant amounts of arable land in many parts of the region, high poverty and unemployment, weak local government and law enforcement agencies, and strong external demand, the risks of becoming a future drug production hub should not be dismissed lightly.

Even in the absence of local production, a combination of vast potential earnings and dire socio-economic conditions provide fertile conditions for the drug trade. The narcotics industry has become deeply embedded in the economies of some states, with local populations increasingly involved as couriers, distributors and users, and governmental and military structures subject to drug-related corruption. Poverty encourages many to risk the harsh punishments for drug trafficking, which include the death penalty.\textsuperscript{73} A World Bank report on Tajikistan estimates that between 30 to 50 per cent of Tajikistan’s economic activity is linked to narcotics trafficking, and 30 per cent of the population is dependent on the illicit drug business. Those attracted by the high returns include women and youth, who


\textsuperscript{72} Chouvy, “The Dangers of Opium Eradication in Asia”, Jane’s Intelligence Review 17 (1), April, 2005.

\textsuperscript{73} Lubin, et al, Narcotics Interdiction on Afghanistan and Central Asia: Challenges for International Assistance, pen Society Institute, New York, 2002.
serve as drug couriers in exchange for food to feed their families and payments in
drugs rather than cash. For traffickers, a single successful deal can amount to the
equivalent of several years’ wages.

Drug trafficking in the region is facilitated by the porous borders between
Afghanistan and the countries of Central Asia, with corruption at the borders once
again a problem.\textsuperscript{74} There is some hope among outside observers that the broader
struggle against terrorism in the region may assist governments to improve their
abilities to monitor and disrupt the flow of drugs through their territories.\textsuperscript{75} Tighter
border controls intended to prevent the flow of arms and the infiltration of extremists
could also be effective against drug smugglers.

Most importantly, however, it is the high demand for heroin in Europe and
increasingly Russia that proffers the large amounts of money flowing through
Central Asia, ensuring that employment in the drug trade will pay everyone better
than almost any alternative.\textsuperscript{76} No serious effort is under way to cut back this
demand, although in Europe heroin consumption is stagnant or falling on its own
account, while cocaine is making a big comeback. As mentioned earlier, however,
opiate demand has picked up in China and Russia, and will likely also increase along
the trafficking routes, including in Central Asian.

The stark reality is that as long as the demand and supply forces abroad
continue unabated, the drug transit problem in Central Asia will likely remain
intractable. In the absence of efforts to drastically curb drug demand and supply,
Central Asia will continue to face major disruptions and associated human costs
from its location along the primary routes of the illicit drug trade.

Two types of regional strategies for fighting drug trafficking in Central Asia
have been tried: efforts to join in curbing trafficking from Afghanistan, and
cooperation on drug transiting between countries. Neither of these approaches has
yielded much success.

The first approach involved an attempt to create a security belt around
Afghanistan to intercept the outflow of drugs. In 2000, as part of the Tashkent
Declaration of fundamental principles peaceful settlement of the conflict in
Afghanistan, members of the ‘six-plus-two’ group (China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan,

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Clark, John, “A Strategy of Preventive Development in Kazakhstan”, Hudson Institute White
Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, plus Russia and the United States) expressed their deep concern at the increased cultivation, production and trafficking of illicit drugs in and from Afghanistan, and discussed the establishment of a mechanism to enable them to cooperate more closely on counter-narcotics issues. A Regional Action Plan was approved in September 2000 by China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, the United States and Uzbekistan to strengthen cooperation in drug control. UNODC was slated to implement the plan, but it became obsolete with the commencement of military actions against the Taliban in October 2001, and the subsequent engagement of the United States and coalition forces in Afghanistan. As a result, the 'six-plus-two' group suspended its efforts.

As for the second approach, there have been numerous regional memoranda and agreements on inter-state cooperation among Central Asian states to control drug-trafficking, including a memorandum of understanding signed by the five Central Asian governments and UNODC in May 1996 on sub-regional drug-control cooperation. Despite annual review meetings and the reiteration on several occasions of a desire for cooperation—such as an agreement in 2000 between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on joint actions in the struggle against terrorism, political and religious extremism, and transnational delinquency—these efforts have not paid off. Regional institutions have also tried and failed to advance the cause of drug control, including CACO's Interstate Commission on Drug Control, established in 1996, and Coordinating Body on Drug Control, which has operated under the ECO secretariat since 1999.

There also have been some bilateral initiatives. Russia's federal drug control agency signed an agreement on cooperation in fighting the trafficking of illicit drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors. Tajikistan signed bilateral agreements with Kyrgyzstan in 1998, Uzbekistan in 1999 and Kazakhstan in 2000. A memorandum of cooperation was also signed by Afghanistan and Tajikistan to allow the representation of the Tajik Drug Control Agency in Kabul and Afghan provinces. While these agreements are helpful in principle, their effects have been quite limited in practice, primarily due to the weak capacities of national drug control agencies and the limited cooperation among the different law enforcement

agencies in each country. These factors also explain why multilateral efforts have stumbled.

Recently, intensified cooperation within regional organization such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the SCO has evolved as a way to simultaneously fight crime, drugs between the CIS and the SCO. In 2003 and 2004, members of the CSTO held preventive operations against narco-trafficking in Kyrgyzstan; some included the participation of other CIS countries and the United States. It remains to be seen whether this kind of approach can yield better results than those that were tried earlier. Since it involves mostly the repressive form of drug control, it should in any case be complemented by development initiatives.

One big gap in regional drug control efforts had been Turkmenistan’s unwillingness to cooperate with other Central Asian countries on drug issue and its lack of participation in any regional level initiatives organized by UNODC. Turkmen officials were also reluctant to provide information to international organizations about drug seizures on Turkmen borders. Since Turkmenistan has a border of some 700 kilometres with Afghanistan, this had become a major concern to international drug control agencies, including the International Narcotics Control Board. Turkmenistan was the only country neighbouring Afghanistan that was not participating in the Topaz initiative for international monitoring and operations aimed to combat drug production and smuggling in Central Asia. However, since April 2004, in a promising shift, the Turkmen Government has begun cooperating by joining operation Topaz, launched in 2001 to target acetic anhydride, a critical chemical in illicit heroin manufacturing.

5.5 International Dimension of Regional Instability in Central Asia

Strategic circumstances have led many global and regional powers to pursue an activist policy in Central Asia. The policies and goals of these powers have a bearing on the process of regional cooperation in Central Asia. Among these countries important are Russia, US, China, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and India.

Central Asia’s landlocked location requires the five countries in the region to maintain good relations with neighbouring countries for international trade (markets

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78 Ibid.
and supplies), for transport and transit routes beyond the region and to major international shipping ports, and for dealing with external threats from terrorism, the drug trade and human trafficking. The immediate neighbours, Afghanistan, China, Iran and Russia, have become important partners in many of these areas. Except for Afghanistan, their relative size and wealth offer opportunities to obtain investment capital as well as access to new technologies, and expanding markets for Central Asia’s natural resources, agricultural products, other raw materials and some manufactured goods. Even Afghanistan offers business opportunities to its Central Asian neighbours due to the flow of foreign and military assistance to that country. At the same time, Central Asia’s relations with its neighbours reflect complex national interests and risks that can spark tension in bilateral relations, and regional organizations and programmes.

Russia

Russia plays a special role in Central Asia by virtue of its history as the former imperial power in the region for more than a century, and as the architect of its modernization and industrialization. The relationship between the republics and Russia are intricate and deep. Russia remains the ‘economic engine and economic pole of attraction’ for Central Asians, the region’s largest trading partner, a supporter of the status quo for the current political elite, and a source of technical and military assistance. The Russian language is widely used as the lingua franca in the region.

Russia’s principal goals for Central Asia are generally aligned with the Central Asian governments’ own aspirations for economic growth and political stability. While Russia’s primary focus has been on developing its bilateral relations with each country, it has also participated in an array of regional organizations. These include CACO, the EEC, the SCO and the CSTO. CACO, which Russia joined in May 2004 at Uzbekistan’s initiative, may turn out to be the most important instrument through which Russia is able to achieve its economic objectives in the region. According to some observers, Russia’s recent accession to CACO reflects a

80 Hill, Fiona, “Eurasia on the Move: The Regional Implications of Mass Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia”, A Presentation at the Kennan Institute, September 27, 2004, Washington, DC.
new ‘southern policy’ that indicates a shift away from Russia’s traditional focus on CIS-wide regional approaches and organizations to a leadership role in regional sub-groupings within the commonwealth.\textsuperscript{82}

Although Russia does not have a big foreign assistance programme, its state-owned and private companies pursue strategic direct investments and joint ventures in key sectors that help boost the region’s economic growth, while also yielding economic and political benefits for Russia, including a growing political stature in Central Asia. Russian investments have been particularly focused on the energy sector and are expected to play a major role in the long-term development of the region’s large oil, gas and hydropower resources. But in recent years, Russian firms have also ventured into other sectors. For example, Russian firms are investing in manufacturing operations in Kyrgyzstan, where low wages make it attractive for Russian firms to outsource manufactured goods for export back to Russia.\textsuperscript{83} In 2004, Moscow-based Mobile Telesystems acquired 74 per cent of Uzdunrobita, Uzbekistan’s cell phone company, for $121 million, with an option to buy the rest of the company for $38 million within three years.\textsuperscript{84} Russian state owned and private firms have also been active investors in Tajikistan, including through barter deals that trade equity in state-owned Tajik firms for debt relief owed to the Russian Federation, on a scale that may give Russian investors control over a significant portion of the Tajik economy – in particular, Tajikistan’s important hydropower and aluminium sectors.\textsuperscript{85}

Aside from such investments, the most important economic links between Russia and Central Asia are the remittances from Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek workers who have migrated to Russia. Remittances have been a significant factor in combating poverty in these three countries, but also represent a risk factor, should the economic or political situation in Russia ever result in a serious disruption of their flow. Most of the migrant workers are illegal immigrants with no employment rights. They tend to work in the lowest-paid jobs, are subject to being fired at any time, and are often poorly treated by their employers and by local officials if they get into trouble. Recognizing the importance of these workers’ remittances to their


\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.

home countries’ economies, the Russian Government is trying to improve the legal framework for migration. However, as in other countries that receive a lot of immigrants from relatively poor neighbours, resentment is growing in Russia about the increasing numbers of Central Asian migrants. This pressures the government to take steps to limit and control their presence. The situation is a difficult one, because if the Government severely restricts immigration, the resulting loss of remittances could cause serious economic instability in all three of the source countries. But if illegal immigration continues to expand uncontrolled, the Government faces domestic political fallout. Proposals have been under consideration in the Russian Parliament that would require installing identification and registration systems, and issuing biometrical passports and visas at fees that could be prohibitive for poorer workers from Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan.

Russia also has security interests in Central Asia. Under an agreement involving the withdrawal of Russia’s troops from Tajikistan’s borders, Russia has gained free, indefinite use of a military base and ownership of a former Soviet space surveillance centre in Tajikistan. The new military base will hold 5,000 Russian soldiers from the 201st Motorized Rifle Division with air support. It will formally control the Russian space-monitoring centre. From Tajikistan’s perspective, the continued Russian presence provides security against potential terrorism, internal violence, drug trafficking and military threats from neighbouring countries. In Kyrgyzstan, Russia has leased the Kant air base since December 2002. Regionally, Russia has been an active participant in the discussions on security in the SCO.

Despite the significant positive economic benefits that accrue to the Central Asian republics from their relationship with Russia, there are risks. For example, the gas and oil pipeline monopoly that Russia exercises over Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan limits these countries abilities to reap the full benefits of world market oil and gas prices that direct access to broader world markets would allow. A similar concern could arise over Russia’s emerging dominance of the Tajik power sector. Another possible risk relates to the fact that Russia places little priority on human

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86 Summary of World Broadcast, BBC, (online) October 18, 2004.
87 Hill, Fiona “Eurasia on the Move: The Regional implications of Mass Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia”, A Presentation at the Kennan Institute, September 27, 2004, Washington DC.
89 Daly, John C.K “Sino-Kyrgyz Relations Alter the Tulip Revolution” Association for Asia Research, June 7, 2005
rights or on democratic political structures and freedom of the press, in contrast to its support for governmental control over all opposition as a way to ensure political stability. This could undermine the long-term development of stable political institutions and economies in the region.

China

China's general geopolitical strategy aims to establish its international influence in regional and world affairs. In addition, China needs energy and other natural resources to fuel its rapid economic expansion and ensure its growing importance in the global economy. Close relations with the Central Asia republics are valuable to China as sources of energy and a bridge towards expanded international influence in the Middle East and Europe. It also seeks political stability in the region to assure a stable neighbourhood and to minimize any risk of outside support for Uyghur separatism in its Western province of Xinjiang.

China has adopted a highly pragmatic policy towards Central Asia. Ties are principally bilateral, with trade and investment in the energy sector a major cooperation through its active engagement and lead role in the SCO. This offers China a framework within which it can pursue its strategic goals. In particular, the organization's military initiative against terrorism provides China with a basis on which to cooperate with its neighbours to suppress terrorism in the region, as well as separatist movements within its own borders. An added benefit is the counterbalance to what it perceives as the undue growth of US influence and military presence in the region. A case in point is the call by leaders at the 2005 SCO summit for the United States to set a timetable for withdrawing its military forces from Central Asia. The organization is also a useful mechanism for China to assure border security, and combat drug trafficking and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

For Central Asia, Chinese investments bring needed capital and technical knowledge, and Chinese development assistance offers trade credits and investment capital. At the 2004 SCO summit in Tashkent, China agreed to provide $900 million in trade credits to other member states to buy Chinese goods. China also agreed to

contribute to a $20 million Development Fund to support a variety of projects to enhance the infrastructure for regional economic cooperation. In announcing the Chinese assistance, China’s President Hu Jintao pointed out that China was not just trying to tamp down domestic Uyghur separatism, but also was seeking to address the relationship between poverty and terrorism in Central Asia. “Efforts should be made to tackle the problem of regional confrontation and poverty, which are considered the roots of terrorism. Terrorism is not automatically related to certain ethnic groups or religions”, he said.

Kazakhstan has particularly strong economic ties with China. At least 40 Chinese companies and 70 Chinese-Kazakhstan joint ventures were operational in Kazakhstan in 2004. Between 1992 and 2002, total Chinese investment in Kazakhstan reached some $800 million, principally in the energy sector, but also in banking, food processing, construction materials and car assembly. Since 2002, Chinese investment has continued to grow rapidly, putting it among the top five foreign investors in the country. The Bank of China, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China and China’s General Administration of Civil Aviation have all set up offices in Kazakhstan, while Kazakhstan has established a visa office and civil aviation office in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang.

In Uzbekistan, China has been engaged in helping develop the small oil fields in the Fergana Valley, and Chinese investors have established some manufacturing plants in electronics and agricultural processing. One company, the Harbin Xiandai Group, set up liquefied petroleum gas and water meter factories in Tashkent. During the 2004 SCO summit, President Hu and President Karimov signed 10 cooperation documents related to drug traffic prevention, technology and economics, including one that allows Chinese firms to bid on construction projects in Uzbekistan and Uzbek firms to participate in the development of Xinjiang. China agreed to make several loans to the Uzbek Government, and the two state-owned energy firms, Uzbekneftgaz and CNPC, signed a memorandum of cooperation to

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93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Wu and Chen 2004, p.1074.
96 Ibid.
98 Wu and Chen 2004, p.1074.
further attract mutual investment in each country. In addition, China’s Eximbank signed credit agreements worth $300 million with Uzbekistan in 2004. For example, China provided a 20 years, $30 million, interest-free loan for Uzbekistan buy irrigation project. Subsequently, economic relations between China and Uzbekistan have further improved, as reflected by President Karimov’s visit to Beijing in May 2005, shortly after the violence in Andijan. China, along with Russia, strongly backed the Uzbek authorities handling of these events, in contrast to Western governments and the OSCE, which called for an independent investigation.

With its WTO membership, Kyrgyzstan has become an important gateway for Chinese exporters and buyers in other Central Asian countries, particularly Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It is trying to transform this role into status as the region’s permanent de facto trading centre. China plans a number of investments in the republic, including in the development of Kyrgyz oil fields and the hydroelectric sector. Other projects are in the works to exploit iron deposits, tungsten and tin, and to finance a $1.5 billion highway from Xinjiang to Central Asia that will go through Kyrgyzstan.

Chinese economic engagement in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan remains limited so far. Trade between China and Tajikistan picked up after the Karasu border crossing was opened in 2004, which is facilitating transport between the provincial capitals of Kashgar and Khorog. Tajikistan has gone on record to welcome China’s support of regional economic cooperation. In Turkmenistan, China’s Huawei Technologies has been engaged in supplying telecommunications equipment and assisting in the development of the Turkmen telecom industry since 2004. More generally, however, China is mostly interested in long-term energy supplies from Turkmenistan, as reiterated by the Chinese Deputy Prime Minister during his visit to Turkmenistan in July 2005.

While China's engagement in Central Asia is still in its early stages, the signs of its growing commitment to involvement are evident. The economic ties with Central Asian countries are likely to expand rapidly, providing mutual gains.

100 Ibid.
102 Bransten 2004.
103 Uyghur Information Agency 2004.
104 Oresman 2004.
105 Blagov, 2005 b.
Other benefits from close cooperation may also come from the political and security domains, especially in the context of the SCO. As in the case of Russia’s engagement in Central Asia, the challenge for China and its Central Asian partners will be to assure that the political pressures by disaffected parts of their populations are channeled into constructive opposition in transparent political processes, rather than into explosive violence met by official repression.

**Afghanistan**

In recent history, Afghanistan has not been a significant economic or political partner for Central Asia, although, in the absence of formal contact during the Taliban period, some economic interaction was maintained in the form of illegal drug trafficking and unofficial trade in certain agricultural products, carpets and wool from Afghanistan, and light manufactured goods, automobiles and used clothing from Central Asia. Central Asian governments shunned Afghanistan as a source of illegal drugs and financial support for Muslim extremists, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2002 and the launch of the international effort to reconstruct the Afghan economy and political structure, there has been renewed Central Asian interest in Afghanistan as a potential partner for trade and collective security. International donor agencies are also cooperating on transport investment programmes that will improve old transit routes and create new ones throughout Afghanistan. This could greatly facilitate trade throughout the region from Iran to Pakistan to Central Asia, provided security and peace are fully established and maintained in Afghanistan. Bridges have been constructed between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and more are under construction with US assistance, including a bridge across the Panj River; ground-breaking took place in 2005. The Asian Development Bank has financed a pre-feasibility study on building a pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan through Afghanistan to meet both Pakistani and Indian demand for natural gas. The United Kingdom has funded improvements in a border facility between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. 106

Officially recorded trade between Central Asia and Afghanistan rebounded quickly in the early post-Taliban era—one example is between Afghanistan and

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Uzbekistan. From a 2001 base of close to zero, trade between the two countries in the first seven months of 2002 reached $36 million, almost all of it exports from Uzbekistan. The principal items sold were fertilizer, petroleum products, metals, construction materials, and electric equipment and generators. Uzbekistan also re-exported 300 tons of humanitarian goods to Afghanistan through the Termez border crossing. Furthermore, for Uzbekistan, Afghanistan’s reconstruction opportunities immediately began attracting business people, many of them managers of state-owned firms or join-stock companies. Almost immediately, Uzbek construction and road-building firms began to compete against, or work in partnership with, European, Turkish and US firms for major donor reconstruction contracts. The volume of trade and reconstruction contracts has grown rapidly since 2002, with Uzbek contractors, in particular, reaping large benefits from this new source of business.

For the future, there are a variety of economic opportunities in the region linked to Afghanistan’s economic development that can be realized only through effective regional cooperation. Electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan could be sold to Afghanistan and transported across power lines to energy-deficient India and Pakistan. Afghanistan itself is a potential market for oil, wheat, banking and engineering services from Kazakhstan. There have been employment opportunities in Afghanistan’s reconstruction period and afterwards. And there is a multitude of legitimate trade opportunities in both goods and services once the necessary infrastructure is completed. Afghanistan’s positive embrace of region cooperation offers hope that some of these opportunities will be realized. The Karzai Government in Afghanistan has been especially keen to expand its economic and political connections with the Central Asian republics. Afghanistan attended the last three summit meetings of the SCO as an observer, and has expressed interest in becoming a full-fledged member. There is support for that positions within the organization, particularly if it would mean greater coordination to combat the illegal narcotics trafficking that originates in Afghanistan.107

In an effort to facilitate Afghanistan’s economic cooperation with all of its Central Asian neighbours, UNDP, together with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, sponsored the Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation

in Bishkek in 2004. Government and private sector representatives from the five republics, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan participated in plenary sessions and small discussions to identify actions on topics such as how to expand trade, how to capitalize on Afghanistan’s location as a land bridge between Central Asia and Iran on one side and South Asia on the other, and how to enhance access to Afghanistan’s reconstruction effort for firms in all of these other countries. UNDP subsequently developed an implementation plan to follow up on five recommendations coming out of the conference. In its May 2005 meeting, the SPECA Regional Advisory Council invited Afghanistan to join its programme.

From Central Asia’s perspective, two factors will be of central importance for Afghanistan’s future: peace and control over illegal drug production. Without peace, Central Asian countries will not be able to expand trade with their neighbours to the south, nor develop transit routes to the nearest ports. And unless drug production drops dramatically in Afghanistan, illicit drug trafficking with all its corrosive implications will continue to plague Central Asia.

Iran

Iran’s approach towards Central Asia combines a pragmatic quest for economically beneficial cooperation with a search for political engagement as one potential counterweight to difficult political relations with the United States and Europe. Iran’s membership in the ECO is one manifestation of this approach; the ECO’s regional cooperation framework—primarily to combat drug trafficking and to promote regional trade—complements Iran’s ‘good neighbour’ policy of backing peace, prosperity and friendly assistance. Iran has also expressed interest in joining the SCO, in part as a means to work more closely with China and Russia in reaction to the stronger strategic engagement by the United States in Iran’s neighbourhood.

At the July, 2005 SCO summit, Iran was granted observer status.

Among the Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan views Iran as a critical access route to world markets, and Tajikistan, partly for cultural reasons (as the Tajik language is part of the Iranian language group), has entered into a variety of

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cooperative economic ventures. Turkmenistan also has significant economic ties with Iran, especially in the energy sector. Iran’s engagement in Central Asia represent only a small number of the ongoing bi-and multilateral agreements that Iran is initiating. Particularly in the longer term, open borders and close economic cooperation could provide important potential benefits from mutual trade, transit and investment for both sides in this evolving partnership.

Other regional players: Turkey, India and Pakistan

Turkey, India and Pakistan each tend to operate on a bilateral basis with respect to economic assistance, but also encourage regional approaches. As ECO members, Turkey and Pakistan support regional cooperation with and within Central Asia. They welcomed, for example, the results of the 2004 ECO summit in Dushanbe, which highlighted the importance of the Trans-Asian Railway main line connecting Almaty to Istanbul, and the need to strengthen the Drug Control Coordination Unit at the ECO Secretariat. However, neither country has the resources to provide ECO with the level of funding and support needed to realize its goals. India and Pakistan joined the SCO as observers in 2005. Turkey’s focus on combating religious extremism and drug trafficking is handled through the ECO and bilateral military assistance.

A large part of Turkey’s interest in Central Asia centres on energy. It has signed an agreement with Iran and Turkmenistan to purchase Turkmen gas through a swap arrangement involving the Iran-Turkmen gas pipeline, Turkmenistan’s only gas pipeline that does not transit Russia. More generally, Turkey, with its growing energy needs and ambitions as an energy transit country, has a great interest in accessing energy supplies from Central Asia and the Caucasus, while Central Asian countries have an interest in diversifying their energy transport routes outside Russia.

Turkish firms have had numerous private construction contracts and investments especially in the retail and hotel business in Central Asia, and an extensive network of air and telecommunications links is in place between Turkey

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112 Khan, 2004, p.57.
and the region. Moreover, Turkey has common linguistic and cultural ties to Central Asia and has been active in the education sector, offering over 10,000 scholarships to Central Asian students to study in Turkish schools and universities. The Turkish Ministry of Education and Turkish entrepreneurs have opened schools and universities throughout Central Asia, while Turkish International Cooperation Agency provides technical assistance and training for Central Asian businesses and diplomats.

India's principal interest in Central Asia also relates to energy. Among Indian investments in the region's energy companies are a 15 per cent holding in Kazakhstan's Alibekmola oil fields and a 10 per cent holding in that country's Kurmanagazi fields. India has been exploring significant investments in Uzbekistan, as well as in several hydropower projects in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Fearful of the potential security issues associated with pipelines through Afghanistan or Pakistan, India has supported consideration of a controversial 1,400-kilometre, $2 billion 'energy highway' that would run from Russia through Central Asia to the Indian-controlled portion of Kashmir. India has also intensified its relationship with Central Asia in sectors in which its expertise can contribute to Central Asia's development, including oil and gas, and technology. There was a major regional trade show on energy-related equipment in Delhi in 2005 that was billed as "India and Central Asia 2005". Through this two-track system—one at a business–business level and the other at a government-to-government level India has succeeded in enhancing its diplomatic and economic stratus in the region.

Pakistan's interests in Central Asia are not dissimilar to India's. Within ECO, Pakistan has called for joint financing of regional energy projects and transport infrastructure, as well as lower tariffs and a variety of agreements for cooperation in engineering, tourism, technology, business requirements, etc. The prospect of establishing a regional electricity grid that could meet its energy requirements is of great interest. Pakistan has modern capacity in all of these areas, and is anxious to send Central Asian exports through its ports on the Indian Ocean. It has urged Tajikistan to upgrade its consulate in Islamabad to an embassy, encouraged a Pakistani bank to open an office in Dushanbe, and rescheduled payments from its $13 million loan to Kyrgyzstan. While Pakistan's principal

relationships remain bilateral, it is entirely supportive of regional cooperation in the priority areas being addressed by the SCO.\textsuperscript{114}

In sum, for now the engagement of these three countries in Central Asia is of limited significance, but for the longer term—especially if Afghanistan’s security situation settles down; if there is a resolution of the India-Pakistan conflict; and if Iran’s tensions with Europe and the United States subside, permitting ready transit to Turkey–Central Asian countries individually and as a group will find many opportunities for engaging much more intensively with the rapidly growing markets of India, Pakistan and Turkey.

5.6 Economic Constraints on Regional Cooperation

The regional states of Central Asia had to encounter a number of controversial processes. These states retained elements of the common economic space in the first years after the demise of the USSR. Thus they recognized and strongly believed in the possibilities to speed up local economic processes through the organizational and political methods. Having plunged into the euphoria at the initial years after independence, the states appeared to overestimate the real factors of economic integration. These factors might have been essential in the long-run, but turned out to be inadequately poor at the early stages so far. According to the analysts, most probably, the process of integration came to begin initially at the higher level.

Therefore, the states had to face fierce, but probably some objective reality in the combination of socio-political, economic and natural factors in the new development terms. The main socio-economic factors, which subsequently exerted influence on inter-states cooperation in the past, were the following:

- National strategy of economic reforms and future prospects for development;
- National trade policies;
- Difficulties in the financial field, as well as related problems with enter-state payments and non-payments;
- External shocks.

\textsuperscript{114} Khwaja 2004.
One of the main factors which influenced the lay-out in Central Asian states could be found in the differences in the approaches to both the development and implementation of domestic socio-economic reforms through the prism of future development. Despite all the states committed themselves to one common strategic goal, i.e. to build up an open market economic system with a particular emphasis on its social component, the paths the national governments chose to move towards the final goal, came to be different. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan embarked on the path of radical reforms. It resulted in that very soon all domestic prices had been liberalized drastically; most part of local state enterprises had been privatized by the middle of the 1990s; and foreign trade operations had been liberalized with free account convertibility of national currencies in place. This in turn eventually allowed the two countries to open up the economies to the inflows of foreign capital and foreign assistance from bi-and multilateral resources.\footnote{Pomfret R. Central Asia since 1991; the Experience of the NIS, OECD Development Centre Technical Paper 212, Paris, July 2003.}

Thus, the Uzbek path emphasized the maintenance of local industrial capacities, full employment, rural development and diversification of the economy, which implies relatively restricted and step-by-step liberalization. While foreign direct investments were prioritized too, the strong reliance on multinational foreign aid was practically ignored. To achieve these goals the five principles of domestic reforms, known as "the Uzbek model" was developed.

Tajikistan up to 1997 was fully unable to undertake any reforms, being engaged in lasting and severe civil war. As a result, the country was turned into the poorest nation in the whole CIS space.

These general divergences laid the ground for mutual discontent very soon, since national actions to carry out reforms were understandably implemented unilaterally, very often driven by some steps to protect national interests too. For example, when Uzbekistan's government maintained subsidies on its basic consumer goods, price for the flour in the country was used to be lower than its domestic production costs. It meant that in new market terms and almost transparent national borders in the region, this flour was naturally finding its way into neighbor countries (Kazakhstan) where it could have been sold at higher prices. For this reason, Uzbekistan was to certain degree concerned in showing the process of price liberalization in Kazakhstan down, while Russia, as a leader and initiator of price
liberalization, - in urging the later to go faster. And when Kazakhstan was unwilling to slacken the tempo of its movement towards liberalization, it provoked adequate responsive measures from its regional neighbours.116

In the frame of strategic national priorities, each country also implemented its own trade policy, which has not always dovetailed with regional interests. After the independence, practically all the countries had to deal with substantial deficits in trade balance related above all to the close integration into the former Soviet economic complex. According to some data, the former system resulted in the exceptionally high level of intra-Union trade for region: 89% - for Kazakhstan’s trade turnover (import plus export), 86% - for Kyrgyzstan, and 89% for Uzbekistan.117 On the other hand, at the outset of 1990s, the share of net material product supplied by the other Soviet republics to Kazakhstan was equal to 39.9%, Tajikistan -41.8%, Uzbekistan -43.2%, Kyrgyzstan – 50.2%, Turkmenistan – 50.7%. It meant that all the states remained significantly dependent on external supplies, especially on strategic raw materials (oil, energy products, metal) and food products. Hence, it induced to look for the stable sources of foreign exchange to keep up current domestic social and physical needs on the one hand, and to realize reforms on the other.

For this reason, all the countries reoriented their trade towards the far distant foreign markets where natural resources could have always been easily sold, i.e. Uzbek cotton and gold; Kyrgyz gold; Turkmen gas; Kazakh oil; Tajik aluminum. Therefore, in all the countries of the region the share of non-CIS countries exceeded over the half of total trade after the middle of 1990s: from 37.5% in 1994 to 60.3% in 2001 for the whole region. In these terms the national trade priorities, both as to structure and geography of exports and imports were different in several aspects, which subsequently had an impact on the vectors of the geoeconomic and geopolitical interests in each state. Moreover, the economies of the region seemed to lie in investments to be attracted from industrially developed countries.

On the other hand, infrastructure shortages could be of a particular concern too, Poor land, rail and air connection within the Central Asian region due to economic and historical development within the former system proved to be another

major constraint on intra-regional trade. Although the railway system was a priority for development on the Soviet policy agenda in comparison with other forms of transport, the majority of such connections were developed vertically which prioritized the relations with Russia and other European republics. On the contrary, little attention was given to intra-regional linkages. Besides, the main regional roads were not only accustomed to ensure cargo traffic, but also got out of the order very soon in view of lack of an appropriate maintenance. In the new terms of post-independent development, it implied that regardless of geographic proximity, the countries of Central Asia de facto remained economically secluded from each other.

The consequences were deleterious for intra-regional trade. Its volumes dropped by 1.4 times, from $2133.4 mln. USD in 1994 to $1579.4 mln. USD in 2000. During the period 1994-2001, the volume of trade between the four countries as share of their exports and imports, as well as in trade with the CIS, reduced too from 15.6% to 7.2%, and from 25.6% to 18.1%, respectively. Thus, the indicator of intra-regional trade came to be must less than the same figure in other regional groupings in the world.

This situation was exacerbated by the mutual protectionist policies in each country. Non-tariff barriers emerged on the basis of imperfect national legislation and eventually resulted in cumbersome customs procedures, low regulatory transparency in the operation of transport services and corruption practices.\textsuperscript{118} As a result, the conflicting trade policies and non-tariff barriers inhibited the interaction of private business groups and individual traders, including those in transboundary areas, stifling their potential contribution to the creation of the autonomous interstate linkages necessary for the evolution of informal regionalism.\textsuperscript{119}

### 5.7 Territorial Water Conflicts

Another source of conflicts in Central Asia is related to resources and environmental issues which emphasize the need for regional cooperation in Central Asia. Two striking examples for the type of problems and the resulting need for regional cooperation are the ecological crisis around the Aral Sea and controversy between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan over the use of water.


The ecological crisis around the Aral sea has received worldwide attention has been addressed through projects sponsored by western donor countries. Since 1963, the Aral Sea has lost more than 75% of its volume and continues to dry up further. This development is the result of the excessive diversion of water the two large rivers in Central Asia, the Amu Darya which originates in Pamirs and the Syr Darya which has its sources in the Tien Shan mountain range, with a combined volume of about 110 kms. These two rivers carry approximately 90% of Central Asia's total river water. During 1969, the inflow rate into Aral sea was between 50 and 60 km per year, whereas today the sea receives hardly any river water. By the late 1980s, as a result of intensified agricultural production and the expansion of cotton monoculture, nearly 90% of the river water was used for agricultural purpose. Only 3% was used to supply cities. Numerous plans for saving the Aral sea have been proposed. However, a fundamental solution to this problem can only be achieved by coordinating the activities of all states in the affected region. The situation around the Aral sea can only be stabilized if the amount of water withdrawn from its tributaries is drastically reduced.

Controversy over the use of surface water in Central Asia is yet another example of this phenomenon. Particularly notable are the disagreements between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan with regard to the use of the Syr Darya river. Through numerous hydroelectric stations and dams such as the Toktogul Dam in the Naryn region, Kyrgyzstan can exercise control over the amount of Syr Darya water flowing into Uzbekistan. A dispute developed shortly after both states became independent, initially over the prices of Uzbekistan's natural gas supply to Kyrgyzstan filled their water reservoirs capacity to boost the production of hydroelectric energy. Since, the natural gas shipments has been discontinued by Uzbekistan, electric power was increasingly used for heating by Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan was faced with the unpleasant situation during the summer months when considerably less water than before was available for purposes such as irrigation. Conversely during the winter months, Kyrgyzstan drained for the production of electricity, its reservoirs more frequently which caused flooding in Uzbekistan. This issue continues to place a major strain on the relationship between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. This factor has the potential of creating political strife within Central Asia. It will make

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confrontation over control of water likely between states, especially between upstream and those down stream. These developments raise apprehensions about serious conflicts among the Central Asian states on the issue of sharing existing water resources.

5.8 Environmental Challenges and Opportunities

Many of the environmental challenges in Central Asia are closely linked to regional water and energy issues. The massive diversion of water for irrigation has resulted in the widespread destruction of ecosystems, especially in the Aral Sea and the river deltas. Mismanagement of irrigation infrastructure has caused land salinization, swamping, desertification and declining ecosystems. Environmental changes such as deforestation and climate change are in turn affecting the formation of river flow and availability of water throughout the region. And environmental pollution aggravates water scarcity by making water resources unsuitable for agricultural or domestic use.

Similarly, extraction, transportation, transformation and use of all forms of energy have had significant environmental impacts, caused by oil drilling, coal mines, pipelines, dams and thermal power stations. While many of these investments were made in Soviet Union, and to support rapid increases in the region's population, they also sowed the seeds of environmental destruction, as documented by the great Central Asian author Chingiz Altmatov. In a region where 60 per cent of the population is engaged in agriculture, land has been a central component of development. Soviet policy was to bring more land into cultivation by extending the irrigated area by more than 70 per cent between 1960 and 2000. Population growth largely negated this development, however, with per capita land availability actually decreasing by more than 40 per cent over the same period. Land is in particularly short supply in the mountainous countries of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and in the densely populated regions of Uzbekistan (Samarkand and Khorezm Provinces, and the Fergana valley).

Since 1991, regional agricultural yields have reportedly declined by 20 to 30 per cent, causing annual losses in agricultural production of as much as $2 billion. A major contributing factor has been poor management of water. Between 1990 and

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122 Asian Development Bank Report, 2004b
2000, the share of land in Central Asia with high groundwater levels increased from 25 per cent to 35 per cent of the total irrigated area. The area of salinized territories in the Amu Darya basin increased by 57 per cent and in Syr Darya basin by 79 per cent from 1990 to 1999. More than 30 per cent of irrigated land is salinized in Tajikistan and up to 40 per cent in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, some 51 per cent of agricultural lands are suffering from erosion in Kyrgyzstan and some 97 per cent in Tajikistan.

In Central Asia, as elsewhere, people depend not only on cultivated land, but also on natural and semi-natural ecosystems for food and various other life support functions. Today, the useful productivity of such ecosystems is under significant threat, most notably in the degradation of the marine and coastal ecosystems of the Aral Sea. Other regionally important ecosystems—such as dry grasslands, river deltas and the mountains—are also declining at an alarming rate.

Greatly impoverished saline deserts, solonchaks, have developed over an area of four million hectares affected by drainage water. Flooded meadow soils in the deltas have dried up and transformed into takyr desert soils on over 1 million hectares. In recent decades the area of natural lakes in the Amu Darya and Syr Darya deltas declined from 640 and 833 square kilometers to 80 and 400 square kilometers, respectively, leading to the disappearance of once profitable fishing and musk-rat hunting and the complete loss of marshy areas for commercial use. In the Syr Darya delta, the biological productivity of commercially valuable reeds decreased by a factor of 30 to 35.

Between 1970 and 1999, the area of old-growth tugai delta forests shrank by almost 90 per cent. Whereas in 1960 more than 70 species of mammals and 319 species of birds (including the Khivin pheasant, raptors, the wild boar, the khangul or Bohara deer, and the reed cat) lived in river deltas, nowadays there are only 32 mammal and 160 bird species left.

124 Interstate Commission for Water Coordination, 2004
Mountains are another category of regionally important ecosystems, occupying 93 per cent of Tajikistan, 87 per cent of Kyrgyzstan, 23 percent of Uzbekistan, 20 percent of Uzbekistan, 20 percent of Turkmenistan and 12 percent of Kazakhstan. More than 5.5 million people live in mountains in central Asia. The main causes of mountain degradation include deforestation, overgrazing, unmanaged tourism and hunting, and poorly designed development projects. It is important that efforts to protect mountain ecosystems run concurrently with those to alleviate rural poverty.

Central Asia is also experiencing climate change, which affects water resources. In low-water years, the water flow in the Syr Darya basin can already be 37 per cent less than average, and in the Amu Darya basin about 26 per cent less than average. Many experts believe that the Central Asian climate will significantly warm up, resulting in major environmental, economic and social disruptions. Glaciers are already shrinking, which may eventually decrease water flows. From the 1950s to the 1990s, the Pamir-Alai glaciers lost 19 percent of their ice, with the process now gaining in intensity. For several decades, the areas of glaciers in different regions of Tien Shan, Gissaro-Alai, Pamirs and Dzhungarskiy and Zailiyskiy Alatau has decreased at the average rate of about 1 per cent per year.

According to some model predictions, the availability of water in Syr Darya may decrease by up to 30 per cent and in Amu Darya by up to 40 per cent. Some other models do not predict such dramatic declines, but no scenario shows an increase in water flow; in all models, the demand for water grows faster than the natural supply. Increasing occurrence of droughts and decreased grain productivity are also widely predicted.

Given high uncertainties over these projections and the potentially serious consequences for human security and development in the region, it is necessary to constantly update and improve the knowledge (and its use in policy decisions) of natural processes in glaciers and mountain areas. No single country is capable of

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128 Intergovernmental Commission for Sustainable Development 2001
131 Cherkasov, P.A.2002
conducting such research on its own; as it stands, the last estimation of regional water resources using a common methodology was made 40 years ago.\textsuperscript{132} Scientific research in high mountains based on a network of monitoring stations and regular expeditions practically terminated with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Given the rapid changes in critical natural systems, such research and monitoring is an important regional priority that should be undertaken on a cooperative basis.\textsuperscript{133}

While climate variations and changes in the mountain ecosystems seriously affect water quantity, environmental pollution reduces its quality, often making it unsuitable for irrigation, drinking or commercial purposes. Since the 1960s, the water quality in Central Asia has drastically deteriorated. The main reason for this has been the discharge of heavily polluted water through drainage systems currently making up to 15 per cent of the river flow volume of the Aral Sea basin.\textsuperscript{134} Effluent from municipal and industrial sewers and runoff from waste disposal sites and mining industries are other significant sources of pollution.\textsuperscript{135}

The most visible result of pollution is the increasing salinity of water, especially in downstream areas. In the Republic of Karakalpakstan, for example, river water is unsuitable for drinking 10 months a year due to excessive mineral residues.\textsuperscript{136} Since the 1960s, mineralization of water in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya has at least doubled, and water has also become unacceptable for drinking or harmful to health in the medium reaches of Syr Darya. The decline in industrial production of the 1990s did not significantly change the high levels of water pollution.\textsuperscript{137}

Water contamination by metals (including mercury, copper, zinc and chromium), organics and other substances also poses significant risks. In Uzbekistan, only about two percent of the population lives in an area with good water quality, while some 50 percent live in areas with bad or very bad quality. Sources of such pollution include primarily industrial and mining wastes. Issues for human security and regional stability associated with trans-boundary environmental pollution are well illustrated by the situation around the Tajik Aluminum Plant

\textsuperscript{132} Global International Waters Assessment 2005
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid
\textsuperscript{134} Kipshakbayev and Sokolov 2002
\textsuperscript{135} SPECA 2004b
\textsuperscript{136} Kamalov, 2002
\textsuperscript{137} Rubinova, F. "Regularities of Anthropogenic Changes of Flow of the Central Asia Rivers," State Hydro meteorological Service, Tashkent, 2000
(TADAZ) in Tursun-sade, in south-western Tajikistan, 10 kilometres from the Uzbek border.

If there is a common thread that runs through all the major environmental issues in Central Asia, it is the allocation, use and protection of water resources. With the region connected through its rivers, lakes and seas, a regional approach to protecting these resources is essential. In addition, the quality of water needs to be protected by limiting sources of pollution, improving the treatment of industrial and residential effluents, and protecting mountain, desert and savannah ecosystems in terms of their sustainability, biodiversity and survival of endangered species. But there are other important environmental issues facing Central Asia, many centred on 'hot spots' of regional significance.

5.9 Regional Groupings

The Central Asian states have been spanning political and economic associations to shape their regional identity. In February 1992, the newly independent Central Asian States were invited to become members of Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) founded 25 years ago by Iran, Turkey and Pakistan, then called the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD). Except for Kazakhstan which preferred to be an observer, the other four opted for full membership. In the ECO summit, the major emphasis was given to create a powerful Islamic common market and elimination of all tariff and non-tariff barriers. It also talked about common faith, cultural affinities and shared experiences of history. President Rafsanjani of Iran viewed the organization as an Islamic political and economic organization which could develop into a world power. With Bangladesh also having applied for membership in the ECO, the Islamic leaders hope to expand their organization. "Ironically, it is this strength which is causing nightmares in some western capitals, raising scary scenario of the emerging coalition of states particularly Iran, Pakistan and Kazakhstan producing Islamic nuclear bombs and becoming a citadel for Islamic fundamentalism." Admission of non-Islamic states such Armenia to the ECO is also debated. Turkey aims at keeping the ECO as an economic entity and not an Islamic group.

Indications are clear that in the name of economic cooperation, political and strategic motives are promoted to influence the course of events in Central Asia. At the moment there are divergent interests of each country particularly Iran and Turkey which have their own rival regional interest in forming economic institutions. To sum up regional grouping like ECO is also a factor which does not facilitate regional cooperation in Central Asia.

In the wake of these problems a number of practical issues arise, which need to be addressed. The high number of agreements forged and extensive efforts to build a regional institutional framework has not resulted in substantive cooperation. This evidence highlights a key finding of this thesis that regional cooperation in Central Asia exhibits the characteristics of shallow regionalism, and not a robust regionalism.