

A Strategic Conflict Analysis of Central Asia

With a Focus on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

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A Conflict and Security Analysis of Central Asia

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Strategic Conflict Analysis of Central Asia with a Focus on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

1. General Security and Conflict Situation in Central Asia

The term Central Asia is normally used to describe the republics of former Soviet Union, south of Russia and East of the Caspian Sea, i.e. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The accuracy of this definition is disputed, both from a historical and modern point of view since it overlaps with the former Soviet colonial borders and not necessarily with the historical borders or with modern economic, cultural and political realities. Historically Central Asia, as defined today, has strong cultural, political and economic ties to areas south and east of the current five states. The northern part of Afghanistan and the Xinjiang province in western China are today largely populated by groups that are closely tied to the Central Asian cultural and linguistic groups. Uighurs are for example the second largest ethnic group in Central Asia after the Uzbeks, the largest ethnic community in the region with large minority groups and political interests in all Central Asian states.¹ There are also more Tajiks in Afghanistan, where they are the second largest group, than in Tajikistan. This ethnic diversification and spill-over into other regions has important implications for the situation in Central Asia, especially the smaller states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The five former Soviet states in Central Asia share a great deal of similarities and are logically connected when considering conflict potential and conflict prevention, given their similar experiences in regard to political and economic development since the fall of the Soviet Union. Since 1991, the states in the region have, however, developed in different directions and their individual situation is to a higher degree unique. Tajikistan is by far the weakest state, with low political and economic cohesion and appears increasingly as a developing state rather than a state in transition. Turkmenistan is isolated and ruled by a Sultanistic regime and not much is known about its internal political and economic development. Kazakhstan is on its part different from the other states through an economic development unparalleled in the other states, but still suffers from many of the political, economic and social problems that the region at large suffers from.

The most important links between the former Soviet states in the region are mainly among, but not limited to, border, energy, resource and environmental issues and in these areas both factors prone to conflict as well as to cooperation are found. Unfortunately, there is a lack of cooperation between the regional actors that has created a negative trend and increased isolation from each others problem, but also trans-national problems and conflicts such as water, terrorism, minorities and energy. The region is today characterized by non-cooperation and increasing hostility, even of not inter-regional military conflict.²

¹ Frederick Starr, ed. *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, M. E. Sharpe, 2004.

² Niklas Swanström, "The Prospects for Multilateral Conflict Prevention and Regional Cooperation in Central Asia", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 23 No. 1, March, 2004.

1.1. General conflict development

Central Asia has been spared the level of armed conflict that has characterized the Caucasus region, with the exception of the 1992-97 Tajik civil war. Nevertheless, conflict potential exists in the region along a number of conflict lines. Ethnicity, regionalism, resources, government, religion, and organized crime are the most apparent conflict lines. Unlike in the Caucasus, ethnicity has not been the major conflict line in the region, and a more diversified picture of conflict lines exists in the region. As the bloody ethnic riots between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh in 1990 indicated, though, ethnicity has a potential to provide a source of conflict. Regionalism is tightly connected to the low level of legitimacy and popular identification with the present-day boundaries in Central Asia – identities are formed more on a regional than on a national level. Indeed, regionalism was at the heart of Tajikistan's civil war, and is a strong political risk factor in Kyrgyzstan as well as Uzbekistan. Resources constitute a third category, mainly due to the abrupt division of the region's resources along geographical lines, with hydrocarbons almost exclusively in the western half and water equally exclusively originating in the eastern parts. Control over government is an important conflict line in the region at present, given the fact that no peaceful change of government has taken place in the region since independence, and the development of an international order increasingly intolerant of authoritarian rule. Religion has developed into an important issue, with radicalized forms of Islam developing in the region. These contributed to the Tajik civil war, and led to armed insurgencies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that fundamentally affected the region's security. Organized crime has grown immensely in size over the past years and transcends the other categories of conflict.

Concretely, the single most conflict prone sub-region in Central Asia today is the intersection area of eastern Uzbekistan, northern Tajikistan, and southern Kyrgyzstan, specifically the Ferghana valley area. Most of the conflict lines that will be discussed below are present in the Ferghana valley and are related to the artificial borders, economic decline, environmental crisis and rapid population growth.³ The state-to-state conflicts in the region have decreased in importance the last few years, even if tensions in the Ferghana valley are still high. Transnational problems, on the other hand, have increased in importance, with tensions over resources, transnational terrorism and organized crime destabilizing the region.

Conflicts over resources have been pointed out as one of the most important potential for conflicts in the region. The water issue is accentuated in the Ferghana valley which is an important agricultural region for all parties involved. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are heavily dependent on oil and gas from the other states and have proposed exchanges, but there has been a strong reluctance to change the status quo on the part of the downstream states. Uzbekistan has conducted training exercises that look worryingly appropriate for attacking the Toktogul water reservoir in Kyrgyzstan. It would moreover be strange if Uzbekistan's military did not plan for defending what they consider to be their legitimate right to water, due to their historical access to water and, moreover, the country's heavy reliance on water.

Land issues and so-called territorial enclaves are important reasons for possible tension, but they do not seem to be of immediate concern, although access to enclaves and their governance has been a neglected issue for the past 15 years. The border conflicts are however political, economic and military issues that needs to be dealt with. Official trade is decreasing in border areas and most affected are the poorer and more unstable states in the region and the poorest strata in

³ Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, *Analysis of Conflict Potential in Ferghana Valley*, 2005.

society; moreover the failure to establish local trade over the border has decreased trust between actors and increased the conflict potential. This can best be seen in the increased militarization of border areas, such as land mining, which creates increased tension. Part of the problem is that some of the poorest regions are in the border areas and the cross-border trade is imperative for economic development.

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

Narcotics and organized crime comes up as one of the more important questions when dealing with conflict prevention at the regional level. Organized crime has not only penetrated all economies of the region, but also increased trans-national violence due to the criminality that risks increase the tension between the different states. Specifically, narcotics trafficking have functioned as a financing source for the IMU. The political co-option from the narcotics networks has made political and legal economic interaction between the states more difficult. In addition, funds from organized crime can be used to mobilize and bankroll popular unrest, as seems to have been the case in Southern Kyrgyzstan in March 2005. Despite some attempts to deal with the narcotics trade, it is a tremendous problem that has increased corruption to levels that are unprecedented in Central Asia. Linked to this is the health problem that threatens to create severe problems in the region, especially in relation to women that have less access to medical care. There has also been an increase in national and trans-national petty crime and violence related to organized crime and narcotics abuse.

The gender and age dimension risk creating tension within states in the region, as women and youth often perceive themselves as being excluded, and often correctly so. The rapid demographic growth and limited land resources in the region aggravates such tensions. The potential social problems that could flow from increasing numbers of unemployed and undereducated youths need to be taken into account. With increased population, there has emerged an uncontrolled migration into more prosperous states that has created tension, especially as it often is associated with increased levels of crime.

Finally, the lack of interaction between different actors through closed borders and arbitrary border regimes increases the tension between the different states and reinforces the existing conflicts. It is by the day more difficult to create regional security mechanisms, as cooperation between states does not seem to improve, in spite of hope to the contrary. This does not only increase political problems, but maybe more importantly decreases the possibility for economic interaction and increased trade.

1.1.1. Multilateral security arrangements

Central Asia suffers from the lack of functional regional security mechanisms. This is due partly to the role of external actors and partly to the lack of cooperation between Central Asian states. Security mechanisms exclusively for the Central Asian states have failed due to the lack of trust between the different states, as exemplified by the conflict lines, and the growing perception that

Uzbekistan will dominate the rest of the region in such an arrangement. Apart from this there is a lack of incentives from the Central Asian states as they do not perceive that they share too many security concerns and finally the lack of functional infrastructure in the region to accomplish such an organization. The failure to cooperate has created a power vacuum since independence in 1991.

The power vacuum in Central Asia that resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union's overlay over the region led to an opening for a number of powers to pursue political, economic and cultural interests with the local states. With different degrees of success, China, Iran, Turkey, India, and Pakistan as well as other states have sought to make a mark on the region.⁴ Of these, China has undoubtedly been the most successful in developing an economic and political presence in Central Asia.⁵ Turkey, Iran and Pakistan have been successful in pursuing economic and cultural linkages, while their political roles in the region remain circumscribed – Turkey's influence in the South Caucasus being an exception. Russia, on the other hand, has tried to restore much of the influence Moscow had over these regions. But since the collapse of the Soviet Union, no clear geopolitical order, whether through a balance of power, a concert of powers, or mechanisms of collective security has emerged. Regional politics remain fluid and unpredictable. One major reason for this lies in the fact that Central Asia, while geographically central in the Eurasian continent, is despite its name and location not central to the interests of any of its neighboring powers. To Turkey, the European Union remains the main vector of its foreign policy. For Iran, the Persian gulf is still paramount in its orientation and security concerns. Pakistan and India remain focused primarily on their own bilateral relationship. China's main security challenges lie in the East, with the Taiwan issue looming large over its foreign policy, and relations to the Korean peninsula and Japan following closely; and Russia, for all its remaining interest in Central Asia, is more concerned with the Caucasus and its relations with the West. In this sense, Central Asia is an important interest to all these powers, but the location of their main concerns in other areas has implied that their interest in the region has been characterized more by irregular short-term efforts or initiatives rather than by consistent strategies. As a result, a stable regional environment in Central Asia has yet to emerge.⁶

The problem with the external actors is that all value their bilateral relations more than their multilateral, for example the major powers in the Commonwealth of Independent States, partnership for Peace and Shanghai cooperation organization, i.e. Russia, the US and China, have bilateral agreements that overrides all multilateral agreements. Moreover, the simple fact that no state views Central Asia as being crucial for its security or economic interests makes the Central Asian states exposed to changes in foreign policy changes of the larger states to a much higher degree. This has prevented any predictability of the development of the region and created a structural instability of Central Asia's regional politics.

1.1.2. Conflict management, resolution and conflict prevention

What is striking for the region is that there is no functional security mechanism. The Central Asian states even lack truly regional organizations for cooperation. There have been attempts but

⁴ Svante Cornell, "Regional Politics in Central Asia: the Changing Roles of Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Iran", *India and Central Asia: Building Linkages in an Age of Turbulence*, New Delhi: SAPRA Foundation.

⁵ Swanström, Niklas (2004) "Great Game or Vassal Relations? China and Central Asia", *China Journal*, forthcoming.

⁶ Starr, S. Frederick et.al., (2001), *A Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia*, Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council and the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute.

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

1.1.3. Major changes 2002-2005, summarily

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

The revolution in Kyrgyzstan in March will impact the regional political development and possibly also the military security. This is not necessarily in a positive way as there are clear indications that the revolution in the South was bankrolled by dubious individuals with political ambitions but closely connected to organized crime, such as for example alleged narco-baron Bayaman Erkinbayev. The political changes in Kyrgyzstan could propel more revolutions against corrupt governments and create a more open democracy. More likely, the changes in Kyrgyzstan could increase its position as a transit country for drugs and increase the instability in the region and tensions with Uzbekistan and possibly Kazakhstan.

On the positive side the Central Asian economies are improving, which has decreased potential conflict lines in the region. This is an important change from the period before 2000 when the regional economies where decreasing in strength, save Kazakhstan. However, the economic development is not sufficient to over bridge the problem of poverty in the region, and the regional differences in economic inequality. There is not only a growing cleavage between state when it comes to economic sustainability, but maybe more important the sub-national inequality is growing.

1.2. Conflict lines in Central Asia

There are several conflict lines in Central Asia but on a more structural level the militarization of society, the internal weakness of the states in the region has increased the military expenditure is threatening the peaceful development of Central Asia. The increase of weapons among states and on the streets is a tremendous problem. The aim for the central governments has been to combat

internal groups as IMU, separatists or political dissidents but a large degree of the focus has also been on external threats, i.e. its neighbors. This has led to a militarization of the society that leads resources away from economic development with increased tension and crack/down on peaceful movements that protest against the lack of economic development as a result.

1.2.1 Ethnicity and Border Issues

Political weakness and instability characterizes Central Asia, and before 1991 there had not existed any independent state with the current names or current borders. The five Central Asian states were created in the 1920s with little consideration to geographical, cultural or ethnic composition; or even possibly with the deliberate purpose to divide the region. This has created states whose borders fail to correspond to ethnic division, especially in the Ferghana valley, and significant ethnic minority populations as a result. On a general level, the novelty of the nation-state as an idea in the region and the artificial nature of the borders has generated a lack of legitimacy for the emerging sovereignties in the region and therefore also a weak state-society relationship, exacerbated by a lack of acceptance of current borders as well as of political institutions, that often are seen as corrupt and illegitimate. This affects other conflict lines as well, as discussed below.

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

The border dimension of conflicts in Central Asia is significant. Not only are the current Central Asian borders little but a colonial attempt to create administrative units. The borders that were drawn in the 1920s and 1930s were principally lines on a map and had nothing in common with the traditional borders that were drawn in accordance with nature and culture, but they were not systematically demarcated. In many areas of Central Asia, effective demarcation was not initiated mainly because demarcation during Soviet times filled little purpose. This led to increased tensions along the borders areas in the late 1990s, as the IMU incursions led Uzbekistan to mine its borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Since no clear border existed, numerous deaths and injuries were the result.

On a political level, the Central Asian states have had a number of border conflicts. One important example has been the Uzbek-Kazakh border, whose demarcation has been practically concluded only in the past two years (96 percent of the border has been delimited), following significant tensions and protracted negotiations. Border delimitation between Uzbekistan-Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is under process, but it is slower. Part of the problem is the Ferghana Valley. Ferghana Valley is painting a picture of the situation in Central Asia at large with diversified ethnic, cultural and linguistic communities divided by artificial borders.⁷ All sides have

⁷ Azamat Temirkulov, “Tribalism, social conflict and the state-building process in Kyrgyz Republic”, Berliner Osteuropa, 21, 2004; Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, *Analysis of Conflict Potential in Ferghana Valley*, 2005.

high level intermarriages and kinship relations that make the border regions look like a mosaic pattern. The cross-border trade is significant and continued border conflicts in the region threaten to cut off the most important trade route that connects these three states.

1.2.2 Regionalism

If national identities have failed to secure the strong allegiance of significant parts of Central Asia's population, a main reason is the strength of sub-national identities. These have historically differed depending on the people in question. Central Asian states differ strongly in terms of historical social structure. Turkmen, Kazakh and Kyrgyz are Turkic populations of nomadic origin, where tribal structures are strong and geographically based identities for obvious reasons weak. On the other hand, Tajiks is a settled, agricultural Persian-speaking society, with stronger attachment to territory and concomitantly higher levels of regional identity. Finally, Uzbeks are Turkic and of historically nomadic origin, but settled centuries earlier than their northern and western cousins and hence social structure there has gradually become more settled and heavily influenced in both linguistic and cultural terms by interaction with Persian society.

Geographic divisions among states have contributed to keeping regional divisions important; hence Kyrgyzstan is divided into northern and southern halves by the Tien Shan mountain range, with only one road connecting the two parts, and significant communication problems in winter time. Tajikistan replicates this North-South division with the additional complication of yet another geographic division between its central areas and the eastern Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous province (GBAO). In both countries, the northern areas dominated power in the Soviet era, a fact that contributed strongly to the Tajik civil war, which ousted the north from power. Similarly, the Kyrgyz revolution in 2005 began in the Southern, impoverished and marginalized regions of the country, which have long felt discriminated against compared to the wealthier North. Here, a regional conflict line was mitigated by the general unpopularity of the ruling elite even in the North, and by the decision by President Akayev not to seek to stay in power by force. In Uzbekistan, regional divisions are more complex given the size and population of the country, which is roughly five times that of Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan. A half dozen regional units including Tashkent, Samarkand, Ferghana, Jizzakh, Surkhandarya, and Urgench exist, which all play important roles in the political balance of the country.

Despite formally adopting a democratic system, the traditional ways of life of Central Asian societies are determining political decisions. In the framework of the failure of states to become legitimate governing bodies, so-called 'clans', (referring to regional or kinship-based networks) that traditionally were the most important political identities, have regained importance.⁸ Clans are nevertheless not formal but informal structures that support selected leaders in their political ambitions. Kazakhstan's leaders owe much of their support to the *Zhus* (horde), and the current leaders belong to the *Ulu Zhus* (Great horde). Turkmenistan has five major political groupings, based on clans (tribes) and the three leading are the Akhalteke, Iomun Yomud and Ersary. President Niyazov is from the Akhalteke group, which has strong control over state politics. Uzbekistan is somewhat different as the main divide is not between clans but rather between regional groupings, primarily the Samarkand, Ferghana and Tashkent groups. Of these groups, Samarkand is thought to be the most powerful.

⁸ Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, *Analysis of Conflict Potential in Ferghana Valley*, 2005:11.

It should be noted that the Soviet economic system altered but strengthened regionalism in several ways.⁹ By vesting the province (oblast) level with important economic power, the Soviet regime strengthened the political role of the region in the politics of each republic. This was further exacerbated by Moscow's tendency to favor certain regions over other – i.e. the Ferghana region of Uzbekistan, the North of Kyrgyzstan, the North of Tajikistan. These histories of Soviet-time economic and political inequalities created and sustained by the Soviet elite have remained until this day. Regionalism, as illustrated by the Tajik and to a lesser extent Kyrgyz experiences, has a tendency to become especially important as a conflict line during political succession crises. Indeed, moments of political succession provide rare opportunities to alter and overturn the prevalent balances of economic and political power, and thereby also spur regionally based political groupings to action. In this sense, the issue of potential intra-state regional conflict is likely to be an important element in the eventual power struggles that will accompany regime succession in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and remain important in the politics of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

1.2.3 Natural Resources: Oil, Gas and Water Don't Mix?

The resource base in Central Asia is skewed and all states have a strong dependency on one or a few resources. As noted initially, Central Asia's western half possess the near totality of oil and gas resources, whereas water, a scarce resource in this arid region, originates almost entirely from the mountains of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The heart of the problem is that this problem – the need for water in the west for agriculture and the need for hydrocarbons in the east for wintertime heating and industry – was solved by Soviet planned economy through simple transfers between the republics. With independence, that system collapsed as oil and gas-producing states began to demand payment for deliveries while refusing, for historical and cultural reasons, to accept the notion of paying for water.

Oil and gas resources are limited to especially Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and to a lesser degree to Uzbekistan. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan's resource base is limited to water (the origin of 80 percent of all water in the Aral Sea Basin¹⁰). Even then, the importance of natural resources in the economies of these states is illustrated by the fact that Kyrgyzstan derives its greatest source of foreign exchange from the Kumtor gold mine, and Tajikistan from an albeit significant aluminum factory.

However, the possession of oil and gas has not been a recipe for economic development, only Kazakhstan has created an oil fund that is set to secure the development of other sectors and it has today a GDP twice as high as the other states. Turkmenistan, and to certain degree, Uzbekistan have failed to use the money from the oil and gas sectors well. In Uzbekistan, oil and gas have helped reduce the indebtedness of the economy and hence kept the economy from declining, yet in the case of Turkmenistan's President Niyazov, it has taken bizarre proportions, with income being spent on huge multi-million symbolic construction projects and even the planned construction of an artificial lake in the middle of the desert.

Water has been pointed out as one of the most threatening factors for regional disputes, and nowhere is that conflict potential more apparent than in the Ferghana valley and the Khorezm region near the Aral Sea. Agriculture is the backbone of the regional economy and water-

⁹ Luong Jones, Paper.

¹⁰ International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Water and Conflict*, ICG Asia Report No 34, Osh/Brussels, 2002: 2.

intensive crops as cotton and rice require intensive irrigation. In Uzbekistan, the largest consumer of water, 90 percent of agricultural production is produced on irrigated lands. Since all states in the region are heavily dependent on agriculture, water resources are under constant dispute. The situation is further complicated as more than 90 percent of the water resources in Central Asia are derived from only two river systems, the Syr Darya (from Kyrgyzstan through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan) and Amu Darya (from Afghanistan and Tajikistan through Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan).¹¹ There is, contrary to conventional wisdom, no water crisis in the region, but it is much more a question of the poor management of water resources and faltering infrastructure, which results in the region consuming half as much water than it needs.¹² The water scarcity that results from the waste of water has impacted the yield of crops, for example rice production in the Khorezm region has declined by 60 percent. Overall, there is increased tension over water in all agricultural production, especially water intensive cotton production.¹³

1.2.4 Conflict over Government and Political Succession

A major potential conflict line in Central Asia is the conflict over Government and political succession. In general, the region has seen a stalling and backsliding development of political reform, with high levels of corruption and low levels of civil liberties and political participation. As Stephen Blank notes, “talk of prospects for democratization in Central Asia seemingly represents the triumph of hope over experience”.¹⁴ This is reinforced by Freedom House’s ratings of post-communist states.

Table 1: Political rights and civil liberties in Central Asia.¹⁵

	1997	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004
Kazakhstan	5,30	5,50	5,71	5,95	6,17	6,25
Kyrgyzstan	4,65	5,08	5,29	5,45	5,60	5,67
Tajikistan	6,20	5,75	5,58	5,63	5,63	5,71
Turkmenistan	6,90	6,75	6,83	6,83	6,83	6,88
Uzbekistan	6,35	6,38	6,42	6,46	6,46	6,46

As the table illustrates, the situation across the region in terms of political rights has deteriorated in recent years, with the only country not following the downward trend being Uzbekistan, albeit it started from a low level. This fact nevertheless indicates that a potential for reform and

¹¹ International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Water and Conflicts*, ICG Asia Report No 34, Osh/Brussels, 2002; Madina Najimova, “Large potential for conflict on water share” Juliette Verhoeven (comp.) Conflict Prevention in Central Asia, European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 2002;

¹² See Analyst article, 2005, Abdullayev, on Water management techniques

¹³ See also International Crisis Group, *Central Asia’s Cotton Curse*, Osh/Brussels, Asia Report no. XX, 2005.

¹⁴ Stephen Blank, “Democratic Prospects in Central Asia”, *World Affairs*, Winter, 2004.

¹⁵ Freedom House, *Nations in Transit, 1997-2004* (freedomhouse.org). Nations in Transit ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level and 7 the lowest level of democratic development. The ratings follow a quarter-point scale. Minor to moderate developments typically warrant a positive or negative change of a quarter (0.25) to a half (0.50) point. Significant developments typically warrant a positive or negative change of three-quarters (0.75) to a full (1.00) point. It is rare that the rating in any category will fluctuate by more than a full point (1.00) in a single

progress exists in Uzbekistan, very much in contrast to conventional wisdom. How the recent incident in Andijan, Uzbekistan will impact the political stability in Uzbekistan is still unclear even if it is apparent that both domestically and internationally President Karimov faces pressure and demands on political liberalizations is likely to result from this incident.

In general, Central Asian states have been characterized by the lack of political change. Only Tajikistan changed its ruling elite after independence, followed just recently by Kyrgyzstan. Hence, over a decade in Central Asia passed without a change of regime, and both of these regime changes took place through the use of force.

The lack of political participation and civil liberties is especially true regarding women, who are severely restricted from political participation.¹⁶ For example, since the rejection of the Soviet quota system that allowed women to take 30% of the positions in parliament, only 7 percent of MPs in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were women, while in Tajikistan 12 percent of the parliament consists of women.¹⁷ There is currently no woman among MPs in the new parliament of Kyrgyzstan after the 2002 revolution, since female candidates collected less votes than men.¹⁸ This seclusion of women from political life is troubling and it is essential to increase political participation for women in the male controlled decision-making and security processes in Central Asia.¹⁹

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

Table 2: PPP \$ per capita.²⁰

	1999	2000	2001	2002
Kazakhstan	4951	5871	6500	5870
Kyrgyzstan	2573	2711	2750	1620
Tajikistan	1031	1152	1170	980
Turkmenistan	3347	3956	4320	4250
Uzbekistan	2251	2241	2460	1670

¹⁶ Jane Falkingham, *Women and Gender Relations in Tajikistan*, Country Briefing Paper, Asian Development Bank, April 2000; United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Women's Partnership and Co-operation in the Fergana Valley*, 2004.

¹⁷ United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Women's Partnership and Co-operation in the Fergana Valley*, 2004.

¹⁸ Three pro-Akayev female MPs have been excluded from the parliament by court decisions, because of evidences of a vote manipulation.

¹⁹ Anara Tabyshalieva, "Some Strategies for stability in Central Asia", Juliette Verhoeven (comp.) Conflict Prevention in Central Asia, European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 2002;

²⁰ European Health for all Database, World Health Organization, Regional office for Europe (updated January 2005), <http://data.euro.who.int/hfad/>. Some scepticism needs to be noted to the Turkmen figures as we know very little about the actual situation in the country. However, it seems as the economic situation is worse than the above figures suggest.

Nevertheless, there has been substantial economic growth at a national level in the past few years (2003-2005), but it seems not to have benefited the population at large. Instead, economic inequalities have grown exponentially, creating further social frustration and also increasing the popularity of movements arguing for social justice – such as radical Islamist political groups.

There are significant regional differences in economic development between the states, Kazakhstan being the most economically viable by far and Tajikistan being the poorest, but more problematic is the regional differences within each state that tends to create tension within the states. In the weaker states and areas, narcotics trafficking and other forms of organized crime and smuggling is the main or at least a very important industry. Narcotics trafficking increasingly seems to dominate political and economic life in border areas of Afghanistan.

Kyrgyzstan's recent revolution is an example of the political potential of dissatisfied and destitute masses. Yet it also shows the volatility their political use: indeed, the opposition forces that swept into government did so not by inciting and controlling the masses as Viktor Yushchenko and Mikheil Saakashvili had done; but rather by riding on and benefiting from a popular wave they could not control. The result was the looting of Bishkek, the influence of narco-barons that financed parts of the rebellion, and the disorder that developed after the take-over of power.

1.2.5 Religion

The growth of movements espousing a radical and millenarian version of Islam, which are often both anti-American and violent by nature, is a phenomenon spread throughout the Islamic world. These groups have made inroads in Central Asia and Azerbaijan since the early 1990s, but their influence remains limited. Central Asian Islam is very different from Arab Islam, especially the Gulf variety, and Central Asians have a centuries long track record of living peacefully with other religions and allowing for a plurality of views *within* Islam. Yet a set of factors has enabled radical movements to prosper. It is important to note that the rise of political Islam cannot simply be explained by the repressive character of regimes; it is equally due to socio-economic factors and external support for radical groups.

Since before the collapse of the Soviet Union, a religious revival has undoubtedly taken place, which is potentially benign and stabilizing, filling a void created by the collapse of the Communist value system. Governments initially embraced the religious revival, while trying to keep religious activity under state supervision. However, Tajikistan's descent into a murderous civil war in Spring 1992, pitting the former communist élite against an opposition force that contained strong Islamic elements, altered threat perceptions in the region. This conflict led to desperate efforts in the four other regional states to check the development of political opposition, which was considered disloyal and subversive by nature. In particular, Islamic currents in the opposition were targeted and outlawed.

Islam itself suffered heavily from the Soviet experience, and young and middle-aged people have a much weaker knowledge of the tenets of the religion than their parents, due to forced Soviet atheism. This considerably contributed to the secularization of society, but also created a moral and spiritual vacuum among the youth. Moreover, knowing their own religious traditions less well, youngsters in Central Asia are more susceptible to believe that views imported from the Arab world are *the* true Islam, especially as indigenous religious institutions are weak. Secondly, poverty, rampant unemployment among the young population, and increasing social and income gaps, together with official corruption, are playing into the hands of radical groups. Their message is really not only a religious one but also one of social justice and equality, stressing the

imposition of law and order and just rulers. Thirdly, the large financial sums available from the Gulf region to radical organizations helps them propagate their views effectively. Finally, the deficit of democratic debate and civil society in Central Asia may be pushing increasing numbers of politically active citizens to radical movements, in the absence of legal alternatives to political activity independent of the Government.

Radical Islam has been represented by a violent, terrorist variety, that of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan; and a self-avowedly peaceful variant, Hizb Ut-Tahrir al-Islam (the Party of Islamic Liberation). has gained significantly from this and has become one of the more important informal players in Central Asia.²¹ Hizb Ut-Tahrir is not primarily a religious movement, but rather a political party based on fundamentalist Islam. They advocate the overthrow of all Central Asia governments and the creation of an Islamic state in the form of a Caliphate. The movement is self-avowedly peaceful, yet its political program clearly has elements of violence, is heavily anti-Semitic, and inherently undemocratic and repressive. For this reason, it has been outlawed by most Muslim countries though only a few western states, especially Germany, have outlawed it. The Hizb-ut-Tahrir and IMU are likely to continue to be problematic but probably of a manageable magnitude in Central Asia for the foreseeable future.

1.2.6 Organized crime and state infiltration

Organized crime affects wakened states – states that lack a strong legal system, stable political processes and a legitimate state- in several different ways. The most serious from a traditional perspective is the connection between guerilla and terrorist movements and organized crime. The link between armed groups that aims at overthrowing the state or to control parts of its territory. Organized crime has increased the military capacity for these groups by providing for economic support and military competence. The direct result is that the states capacity to effectively control its territory decreases and its legitimacy diminishes. Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan uses the weakness of Tajikistan and operates from its southern provinces to attack targets in Uzbekistan. Secondly, the organized crime has direct impact on the political system of each state. Corruption and political co-option as a result of the interest of organized crime to control or decapitate states ability to fight organized crime. When corruption reaches certain levels it can control the state or destroys the state institutions through its attempts to corrupt and control.

Organized crime has increased the levels of political corruption and in some case it is even possible to speak about political co-option of the political structures in Central Asia. All five states end up among the most corrupted societies in the world, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan are number 8 and 9, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are all among the 30 worst affected states in the world and no state scores more than 2,3 which indicates rampant corruption according to the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index.²² This is partly, but not limited to, the narcotics trade and the illegal networks that work to take over vital sections of the state. Kazakhstan remains least affected by the narcotics trade and Tajikistan is by far the most affected, despite increased seizures of heroin.

In 2003 the international drugs trade was put on the regional agenda. The Central Asian states begun to communicate about possible ways to prevent the influx of drugs from Afghanistan and

²¹ International Crisis Group, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb Ut-Tahrir*, ICG Asia Report No 58, Osh/brussel, 2003; International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Islam and the State*, ICG Asia Report No 59, Osh/brussel, 2003

²² Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2004 (www.transparency.org/cpi).

how to prevent social and economic ruin of the Central Asian states. The problem has been the lack of coordination in these efforts between the Central Asian states. This is due to the great leverage the drug trade has over some national economies, especially Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, and the corruption that the drugs trade has created in the governments and the military. There seems to be few possibilities for a coordinated effort against the drugs trade, despite the negative effects it has on the Central Asian states. International cooperation seems to be one of the few ways out of the negative trend in Central Asia in regard to combating the drug trade, even if cooperation with Russian military forces are problematic due to their heavy involvement in the Central Asian drug trade.

1.2.7 Social

The social development in the region is facing a negative future in which the worsened health situation, increased organized crime, decreased resources to education and a system that in general is failing women. When dealing with the health situation in the region the situation is quickly worsening with decreased resources to the health sector and a situation where the population at large can not afford to see the doctor. This is in a situation where addiction and intravenous related diseases such as AIDS/HIV and Hepatitis C is spreading with tremendous speed through the region. Naturally, the worst cases are to be found in the transit regions of narcotics. A World Bank study estimates that among more than 500,000 drug users in Central Asia many share needles that leads to high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. About US\$ 1 billion would be needed for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment in Central Asia between 2004 and 2007. UNAIDS reported about a narrowing of the male-female ratio of newly detected HIV/AIDS cases from 4:1 to 2:1, that indicates women are increasingly at risk.²³ Moreover, it has been pointed out that in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan women access to health institutions has been restricted to a higher degree than men, there is nothing that indicates that this would be different in the other states.²⁴

This points to the growing problem of narcotics trafficking in Central Asia. Without doubt there is a significant economic component to the drug problem and military as it supports the operation of terrorist organizations such as the IMU. The economic component is not only bad, even if it co-opts political structures in the region, decreases the weight of the legal economy and control the political process in most countries. The narcotics trade supports large segments of the population and money is reinvested in the region; even if the bulk of the money is transferred to the western world. It is the cases that the narcotics networks can strengthen the social situation where the government has failed to assist people. Nevertheless there is an increase of petty crime, prostitution, violence and addiction in the tracks of the narcotics trade that are severe problems. Connected to this is the rapid increase of diseases related to needle sharing and prostitution.²⁵ According to recent figures the percentage of intravenous users among the HIV/AIDS cases are 88 per cent in Central Asia, this could be compared to 55 per cent in Russia, 72 per cent in China,

²³ Central Asia Issue Brief, The World Bank, Updated as of February 2005
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTECAREGTOPHEANUT/EXTECAREGTOPHIVAIDS/0,,contentMDK:20319451~menuPK:616563~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:571172,00.html>
Reversing the Tide: Priorities for HIV/ AIDS Prevention in Central Asia. The World Bank, Washington DC, November 2004, p.22-3.

²⁴ Jane Falkingham, *Women and Gender Relations in Tajikistan*, Country Briefing Paper, Asian Development Bank, April 2000; United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Women's Partnership and Co-operation in the Fergana Valley*, 2004.

²⁵ Currently XX percent of all commercial sex workers are estimated to have been affected by AIDS/HIV in Central Asia.

74 per cent in Burma, 80 per cent in Thailand.²⁶ This has serious health implications, especially in a region where prostitution, drug abuse and HIV/AIDS are severely stigmatized.

The educational systems in the region has been a negative trend with decreased participation, this is especially true for women that are excluded at the secondary and tertiary level. Though, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, despite commercialization and budget cuts in education an increasing share of female students in tertiary education in the last fifteen years demonstrates a good progress in advancement of women. The increased unemployment together with decreased possibilities for education and access to profession skills will undoubtedly create discontent, especially in a region with a relatively young population.²⁷

Finally, the old agricultural structures of collectivization and the much needed reform of these structures have been initiated in some countries, especially Kyrgyzstan, but the success have been debatable and tension is increasing in those states where agricultural reforms have not been initiated, this is especially clear in the Tajik province of Khatlon. Land reform issues and ownership of the land should be prioritized, but the elite are still controlling much of the land in Central Asia. Small farmers have very little power in the region and the cotton sector is an example how impoverished small farmers have become, with or without land, as they have been forced into a relationship with the cotton lords that best can be described as slavery as they have been caught in a debt trap. In transitional societies, women lack access to land and assets as a result of domination of the oral law and traditional views about gender segregation in economic activities. Tenure insecurity of women in privatization process of real estate, including irrigated land that caused by observance of oral law among many Muslims undermines the value of the land reforms in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

In central Asian context, several groups of women could be distinguished as the most vulnerable among poor female populations – disabled, divorced without/with children, widows, unmarried single mothers, co-wives, orphans, unmarried women, etc. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan a number of mostly young women respond to domestic violence by self-immolation. In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, practice of bride kidnapping ruin the life of women, men and children. In addition, current official statistics

The rise in prostitution and trafficking in women is alarming in all countries. Each year thousands of mostly young and under age women from Central Asia become victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Statistics on commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor remain inadequate and imprecise.

1.3 Actors in conflict

1.3.1 State, sub-state-group, civil society, external

Central Asia is a much diversified region when it comes to economic, political and military capability and this color the power composition of the region. Uzbekistan is by far the most

²⁶ United Nations Office on Narcotics and Crime, *Global Illicit Narcotics Trends 2003* (United Nations, New York, 2003:119-123); B. Lintner, "The Narcotics Trade in Southeast Asia", *Jane's Intelligence Review Special Report*, No. 5 London, 1995:12-13; P. Chalk, "Southeast Asian and the Golden Triangle's Heroin Trade: Threats and Response", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 2000:94; ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? (White Papers of the Chinese Government), ? ? ? ? ? ? (Narcotics Control in China), Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 2003:146.

²⁷ Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, *Analysis of Conflict Potential in Fergana Valley*, 2005:11.

important actor militarily and they are seen as a possible hegemon by the other states in the region. However, neither state has the economic or political coherence to fight a prolonged war without disastrous consequences. The situation is made worse by the fact that there are no regional structures that could deal with intra-regional conflicts and problems, such as water or terrorism. The internal weakness of the states impacts directly the regional arrangements and there is a failure to meet trans-national challenges and security threats.

Russia, China and the US are the most important external actors in Central Asia, even of Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India and Europe plays important roles in the region. However, none of the mentioned states view Central Asia as their primary region of interest. All external actors have their economic, political and security focus in other parts of the world and Central Asia is in many ways still isolated. The lack of cooperation between the Central Asians states enables the external powers to dominate the development of the region to a high degree. Unfortunately, the reality is that the external powers disagree about the future of the region and therefore it is caught in status quo, at best.

Informal actors have increased in importance in the region. Most important of these are trans-regional Islam that has grown in importance, especially the alleged peaceful organization of Hizb Ut-Tahrir. All states, with the partial exception of Tajikistan, have acted against the development of Islamic organizations. Paradoxically has the forceful isolation of Islam been the most important reason for its growth. Tajikistan, were Islam is allowed to have a political role, has the least problems with militant Islam today and the growth of the popularity of militant Islamic movements has been slowed down. This even if Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have had less significant problems with militant Islam, the conflict lines has been more of the regional character. Clans have reemerged as important actors in the region, even if they are still subordinated the governmental structures. It is however clear that no political transition is made with out the involvement of the clans, which in many cases are trans-national.

1.3.2 Peace agendas, incl. women's groups

There are very few groups or organizations that actively work for peace and conflict prevention in the region, most attempts are extra-regional such as the UN, OSCE or the attempts of several NGO's. Most active in the peace work is the women's groups that has been actively engaged to create structural improvements (economic, political and social), decreased border tension (as women according to some sources consist of up to 80 percent of the cross-border traders), and cross-border contacts. There are a few trans-national contact surfaces, but they are limited in scope and impact on the regional security. The UNIFEM project on conflict prevention in the Fergana valley have mobilized a number of civil society groups in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Similarly, UNDP, USAID, OSCE, SIDA and other agencies supports important regional programs on empowerment of women in Central Asia.

1.4 Mechanism to address conflicts

1.4.1 Existing conflict resolution mechanisms

Part of the problem in the region is that there is no existing conflict resolution mechanism and the fear of being dominated either by regional or external powers are high. Shanghai Cooperation Organizations has emerged as one of the more important actors in dealing with conflicts, but the resolution aspect of the organizations has been largely limited to the dealing with China and primarily on a bilateral level. When considering conflict prevention there is as in the case of

conflict resolution very few cross-border preventive mechanisms. There are factors that would indicate a more cooperative environment, such as common problems, need for political stability and economic development. The reality is however that these commonalities has increased tension rather than to create cooperation over them.

There is a need for new mechanisms to deal with regional problems, but with the lack of trust between the regional actors and the relatively weak infrastructure and lack of political stability in the region there are very few possibilities for the region to develop such mechanism. Moreover, as the regional states suffer form chronic instability and political weakness mechanisms imposed from external actors have limited possibilities to function. There is a need to strengthen the regional powers ability to agree and compromise with its neighbors as well as creating the infrastructural capabilities that are needed to be effective. These are fundamental aspects that need to be dealt with before any large scale project can be initiated.

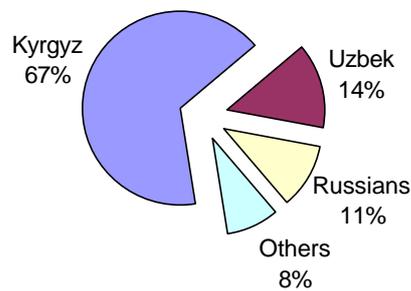
2. Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan share a lot of the problems that will be discussed, but they differ in degree and there are important differences. Both states share the problems of weak economic, institutional and geopolitical base for stable peace. Moreover, the share the problems of lacking resources (excluding water), erosion of social security and a staggering increase in organized crime. Today, both states are in principle de-industrialized states and the legal economy is heavily dependent on agriculture and the informal and illegal economy, including shuttle trade and various forms of smuggling, especially the heroin transit.

2.1 Conflict Lines in Kyrgyzstan

2.1.1 *Ethnicity, regionalism and border conflicts*

Despite the existence of a number of minorities in Kyrgyzstan, there are only a few minorities that the state views as a potential problem. The “European problem” has diminished since a great deal of the Germans left the country (from over 100,000 at independence to less than 20,000) but also numerous Ukrainians and Russians that emigrated after independence. These emigrants were in many ways the elite, and emigration created important problems for the state in many ways, especially in the economic sector. The inter-ethnic relations between Kyrgyz and “Europeans” are however, relatively good and the potential for conflict is low. The main ethnic tensions are between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, even if a conflict with the ethnic Chinese is persistent in the northeastern Naryn and Yssyk-Köl provinces. Tension with the Uzbek minority is due to several reasons. These include perceptions of the Uzbeks as a “Fifth Column”, as being financially more successful, that Uzbeks would be involved in radical Islamic movements. Another is that Uzbeks feel excluded from the political and economic life in Kyrgyzstan.



Kyrgyzstan. Common Country Assessment 2003. ²⁸

The ethnic conflict has been most apparent in the Osh and Jalalabad and it was also in the Southern Cities of Özgön and Osh that the largest ethnic unrest occurred in 1990, with the largest ethnically motivated killings Central Asia had seen for decades. There is little evidence that ethnic hatred is supported by the respective states. The reasons for the ethnic conflict seem to be much more local, and related to water issues, disputes over land ownership, border crossings, etc. This puts the ethnic conflicts more at the local level than a conflict between the groups at large, yet the perception of hostility between the two groups remains. This conflict should not be confused with the cleavage between the South and the North of Kyrgyzstan. This is true even though the South is known as “half Uzbeks and half Kyrgyz” while the North is almost exclusively Kyrgyz with little or no Uzbek population. The North-South conflict is much more a conflict over political and economic power and has only modest amounts of ethnic tensions. The divisions between the north and the south should moreover not be exaggerated. There is undoubtedly competition over political and financial resources and impact, but the regional differences do not exclude cooperation. The tensions between the South and the North also has a religious touch, since the South is by far more conservative Islamic than the North, partly due to the influence of the more religious Uzbek community. This argument is problematic in areas such Talas and Yssyk Köl which have almost no Uzbeks but nevertheless a religious awakening has emerged there which Hizb-ut-Tahrir has taken advantage of.

Uzbekistan has been seen as a potential adversary for Kyrgyzstan and there is some conflict potential in this relationship. A first incompatibility is the dispute of water. Tashkent has repeatedly stated its determination to defend what it considers its right to water with all available instruments, and moreover the border disputes between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan involve both a significant proportion of people and potentially economically lucrative areas. Uzbekistan also accuses Kyrgyzstan of harboring Islamic militants of the IMU, which is odd given the widespread Kyrgyz fear of militant Islam. However, the feeling in Tashkent is that Kyrgyzstan, like Tajikistan, is incapable of preventing the IMU and other radical movements from using its territory and that

²⁸ The Kyrgyz are 66.9 percent, Uzbeks 14.1, Russians 10.7, Ukrainians 0.8, Tajiks 0.9, Tatars 0.8, Uigurs 1, and Dungans 1.1. The UN system in the Kyrgyz republic. Common country assessment. 2003 Bishkek, 2003. Addendum.

it therefore by default poses a danger to Uzbekistan's security. The recent killings in Andijan, Uzbekistan and the subsequent flight of the rebels over to Kyrgyzstan has increased the potential of conflicts between the both states.

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan share one of the best bilateral relations in the region, despite a number of troubling border issues that remain to be solved. A reason for their good relations is the common fear of Uzbekistan and the fact that both states are severely impoverished and would not gain from taking up a hostile attitude towards each other. On the contrary, there are several positive examples of cooperation between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan which all three have show evidence of working well together.

2.1.2 Regional powers

The regional powers surrounding Kyrgyzstan undoubtedly include Uzbekistan with its 26 million population and by far the strongest army in Central Asia. Uzbekistan has, as noted, reasons to consider military operations against Kyrgyzstan under extreme circumstances, but the threat is not acute. Tajikistan is a friendly power with little possibility to influence the regional security, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are not of concern of Kyrgyzstan as the other states are.

China and Russia are two regional actors that have a political as well as a military interest in Kyrgyzstan. This interest is accentuated by the U.S. involvement in the region and the War on Terrorism. Russia's influence is decreasing in the region, even if it remains the most important actor in Kyrgyzstan, while China's influence is increasing by the day. American interest and military presence is officially going to be present only as long as there is a connection to the War on Terror. Yet increasingly, the stabilization of Afghanistan is raising the question whether American troops will stay in the longer term for strategic reasons.²⁹ Indeed, these are forward positioned troops with the ability to monitor both Russia and China closely from Kyrgyzstan. The drawback for Kyrgyzstan is that none of the major states has a primary interest in Kyrgyzstan and their interest is dependent on developments in areas of greater interest to each regional power. Over the long term, China is likely to emerge as the most important actor especially in an economic sense, as it has ordered its provinces to increase their trade with Central Asia. This is likely to increase trade for China's western provinces, but also to increase the dependency of the Central Asian states to China politically and financially over the long term.

2.1.3 Governance and reform

Kyrgyzstan has often been characterized as an 'island of democracy', and since independence the political climate has been more liberalized. This resulted in a greater tolerance of political opposition than in neighboring states. Since 1997, this situation began to change, and since 1997, the Kyrgyz record has worsened by the year in ratings of freedom, for example Freedom House's figures. The presidential position has been gradually strengthened, and authoritarian rule was in practice consolidated. This was the leading factor that led to the revolution in March 2005, where opposition groups with origins mainly in the south took power. The form of authoritarian and corrupt government of the Central Asian states shares numerous similarities across the region, but what distinguishes Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan from the other countries is their comparative lack of repressive powers. This is one of the signs of state weakness in Kyrgyzstan. Both in the

²⁹ Svante Cornell, "The United States and Central Asia: In the Steppes to Stay?", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 17 no. 2, Summer 2004.

case of the killing of demonstrators in the Aksy region in 2002 and during the revolution in 2005, demonstrators were met with retreat and compromise.

There is nevertheless a more troublesome development in Kyrgyzstan, and that is the 'privatization' of state power, by the fact the ruling elites are using the state for their own economic benefit, by abusing investments and the state apparatus to control the economy. Increasingly important is also the criminalization of the economy and political power. The 2005 revolution brought a new leadership to power, but the revolution saw an important role, not least in financial terms, by Bayaman Erkinbayev, member of the People's assembly and allegedly the leading narco-baron in Kyrgyzstan and one of the richest people in the country. If this is the case, and the political power in Kyrgyzstan is co-opted by narcotics networks, it could be expected to take a more lax attitude against the drug problem. Most interviews in Bishkek but also outside the capital confirm this picture and it seems as organized crime is increasingly controlling the political situation in Kyrgyzstan. This is a phenomena that is not only limited to the political power or to a single political party. All levels of society have been affected by organized crime and to an extent that Kyrgyzstan risks being termed a narco-state if the current situation is not reversed.

Regardless of the directions in the current changes, it is apparent that Kyrgyzstan is less open and democratic than it had been before 1997. Moreover, it seems as if other power structures than political parties have increased their political power. It should however be noted that Kyrgyzstan remains the most liberal political entity in the region and the country easiest for international organizations and donors to affect. Domestically, this is noted both by the fact that the killing of five demonstrators in the Aksy district in 2002 led to the firing of the entire Government; and following the rigged election of 2005, President Akaev fled the country himself. Apart from this, the influence of public opinion and the parliament on the executive was apparent when these factors forced the Kyrgyz regime to change its policies toward China after the regime conceded a large part of its territory to Beijing in 2002.

NGOs play a significant role in the Kyrgyz political development, especially as the political parties are seen as either corrupt and/or weak. The weakness of over forty political parties is often seen as strength for NGOs as international donors focus on NGOs in the absence of non-corrupt political parties.³⁰ This is in particular interesting when dealing with women's organizations.

Gender equality and the position of the women have been significantly worsened since independence and this is especially the case in the southern parts of Kyrgyzstan and in the rural areas. Traditional values have increased with significant strength, and women's access to political power has decreased significantly. In the top positions in the state administration, there were ca. 20 percent of women, while at the most junior level there was, in contrast, 43,9 percent women.³¹ Out of 43 registered political parties only five had women as their leaders in 2003, despite the fact that women consist of 53 percent of the voters. That said, it should be noted that Kyrgyzstan's women, in the urban areas, seem to have better access to power and career opportunities than in Tajikistan or Uzbekistan.

Political Islam is prohibited in Kyrgyzstan, and the emergence of radical Islamic groups has been effectively prevented. Currently, there is no overwhelming threat of any Islamic organization,

³⁰ Reto Weyermann, *A Silk Road to Democracy*, FAST Country Risk Profile Kyrgyzstan, Swiss Peace, 2005:12.

³¹ Council of NGO's, *Alternative Report to the Second Periodic Report by the Kyrgyz Republic to the CEDAW Committee*, December 2003: 7.

fundamentalist or militant, but Hizb-ut-Tahrir is gaining influence in Kyrgyzstan and offers an appealing alternative for some to a state that has not been able to deliver what is needed.

2.1.4 Human rights development and social factors

Despite the fact that the Kyrgyz state allows for a large amount (more than 7 thousand) of free NGO's to operate in the state, this does not imply that Kyrgyzstan is an open state in all ways. Most active NGOs are highly dependent on external funding and compete with each other for grants. Education has been a problem since independence, where from almost 100 percent literacy levels, gaps in the educational system have developed. These are gaps that have regional, economic and gender perspectives. The access to education and economic possibilities to attend school are limited in poorer areas. This is partly due to the fact that the state only provides US\$16 per capita in education, which has forced parents to substitute teachers; this in combination with the need for children to provide for the household rather than to become a cost makes poorer regions and families less prone to go to school. Moreover, the quality of education is sharply decreasing in poorer areas. Not only does this create inequalities between regions and classes, it also creates a breeding ground for Islamic radicalism and potentially the madrasa system of education in the long run. A number of students attend madrasas in Pakistan. There is gender inequality in the system, and girls are often taken out of school earlier, especially in the more conservative and rural areas.

Health care has been deteriorating even more than education since independence, and currently the Kyrgyz government invests a mere US\$8 per capita in health care. Diseases such as tuberculosis and smallpox are increasingly taking lives in Kyrgyzstan. Due to the low government investment in health care, health has become a class question. Costs are paid by the patients, and with a country with half of the population in poverty, large parts of the population are unable to afford even the most modest medicines and treatments. The budget expenditure on the social and health services plummeted: between 1990 and 2002 a percentage of the budget spent on healthcare and education fell from 3.7 to 2 and 7.6 to 4.5, whereas a proportion for defense, public order and security increased 9.5 times.³²

The inequality in the social sector have increased tension between regions and 'haves and have-nots'. This is one of the most prominent risks for continued conflict in the country over time, especially as the cleavages in society seem to increase rather than decrease. In Kyrgyzstan, some communities and families accept bride kidnapping as a tolerable practice for economic reasons. According to a survey in Kyrgyzstan 19% of kidnapped women do not know their kidnappers. Approximately 17% of kidnapping does not result in marriage.³³ Women, men, and children trafficked to Kazakhstan and Russia for the purpose of forced labor, and to the United Arab Emirates, South Korea, Turkey, and China for sexual exploitation. Women's NGOs effectively advocate promotion of the women's rights.

2.1.5 Organized crime and corruption

Kyrgyzstan has emerged as one of the more important actors in the transit trade of heroin and opium; this is seen both in the increase of seizures but more importantly in the rapid increase of

³² The UN system in the Kyrgyz republic. Common country assessment. 2003 Bishkek, 2003, p.48.

³³ The result of research was based on 225 cases. Kleinbach Russell. Frequency on Non-Consensual Bride Kidnapping in the Kyrgyz Republic. August 7, 2002, paper, p. 3.

drug users and HIV/AIDS cases. The penetration of organized crime is not as high as in Tajikistan, but there are grave suspicions that the narcotics trade has corrupted and to a certain degree co-opted the political process in Kyrgyzstan. During the parliamentary elections in 2000, it was suspected that at least six parliamentarians, especially from the south of Kyrgyzstan, used narco-money to get elected, and it is no secret that many of the parliamentarians have criminal or dubious connections with the criminal networks. In the election of 2005, this was once again the suspicion and Bayaman Erkinbayev is suspected to be an important actor behind political co-option and also behind the subsequent revolution. If this is the case it would indicate that the current regime has to thank one of the greatest drug lords in the region for much of its powers. President Akayev stated, and was supported by Nikolai Bourduzha, secretary general of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, that radical Islam was not a threat but that the narcotics trade was and that “criminal elements connected to the drug mafia are in complete control of Osh and Jalalabat, and are struggling to gain power”.³⁴ It is evident that Akayev is not impartial in the matter, but it is also equally evident that the increased transit of heroin and political co-option is increasingly a problem. Top-level corruption was one of the causes of the March revolution in the country. As the acting vice-primer minister Daniar Usenov stated, the family of Akayev took from the budget 50 million USD annually. “There was not corruption but organized criminal group in the country. Its goal was to get money by any means. Even at expenses of children, adolescents and youth. Money has been withdrawn from health care sector, local budgets through various foundations led by members of the family. There was situation that twenty years the country did not develop”.³⁵ The “revolution” that took place in early 2005 changed a lot, but not primarily political but rather in terms of organized crime and its access to power. It is evident that the “revolution” was financed by money from organized crime and that the current political structure is largely financed by criminal money. This is not even denied when interviewing politicians and people in the civil society, but rather seen as a necessary evil to be involved in the economic or political spheres.

The withdrawal of the Russian border guards from Tajikistan will undoubtedly increase the transit trade with Kyrgyzstan, both as it will increase the reliance to transit through Tajikistan from Afghanistan,, but also that the border against Kyrgyzstan will become more porous. Kyrgyzstan share 420 km border with Tajikistan and there area allegations that the Tajik border guards is bought by the criminal networks. Similarly, there are suspicions that the Kyrgyz border guards are bought, this especially in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan.³⁶ Currently there are four major directions for the transit of heroin: 1) Khodjent (the most important), Jirgetal (Batken), Khorog (Osh-Khorog), and Kyzyl-Art (Bordoi). Southern Kyrgyzstan has increased its political, but also economic advantages after the “revolution.” in 2005 and today it should not be excluded that we could have a political elite from the south that are largely financed by narcotics money, this even if the northern elite is also involved in criminal activity but more related to gold and corruption than to narcotics.

Transit of narcotics also has direct consequences for the health situation in the country. The use of heroin and other stimulants have increased all over the country, but mostly in the major transit regions. The estimated number of users are over 50,000 and with 15,000 in the city of Osh itself,

³⁴ CNN, Kyrgyz protests'part of coup', 22 ;Arch 2005.

³⁵ Information agency "yrgyz Press", <http://pr.kg/news2005/050512allinformationfromprkginformationfrom.php>

³⁶ Alisher Saipov, et al, Parallel power in Kyrgyzstan, IWPR, 6 April 2005.

due to easy access and low prices. It is estimated that 7-8 percent of users in Kyrgyzstan are women, and this is still a low figure. Due to the intravenous use and sharing of needles, HIV/Aids, Hepatitis C and tuberculosis follow in the paths of the narcotics trade. The UN has estimated that 88 percent of the HIV/AIDS cases are intravenous users in Central Asia and most of the HIV/AIDS cases are in Osh, Batken and Jalalabat regions where the largest transit comes from. Trafficking in persons is also a lucrative business that thrives in the country. According to the International Organisation on Migration (IOM) estimation approximately 4,000 women and girls are trafficked annually to Russia, Turkey, Germany and the UAE for enforced prostitution.³⁷

2.1.6 Economic development and resources

More than two thirds of Kyrgyzstan's population lives in rural areas and close to two thirds of the population depends on agriculture for its survival. Additionally, the only economic sector that experienced positive growth between 1992-2002 was the agricultural sector which today accounts for 40 percent of the legal GDP.³⁸ According to the *Economist*, the figures were 33 percent in 2003 from 35.6 percent in 2002.³⁹ Kyrgyzstan has experienced a highly successful agricultural reform; more than 70 percent of all agricultural land has been redistributed to more than 2.6 million individuals, of which 50.5 percent was women.⁴⁰ This has resulted in that most rural households have gained ownership of land. The success of the agricultural revolution has been mixed, and there is no effective modernization of the agricultural sector, as most land is still organized under old cooperative arrangements. At the same time, women lack access to land and collaterals to apply for loans. According to the World Bank study, despite progressive written laws, traditions favor male inheritance of land and other assets.⁴¹

Poverty is a great problem and according to the World Bank up to 56 percent of the population lived below the poverty line and possibly 25 percent lived in extreme poverty.⁴² Poverty disproportionately affects women: the feminization of poverty has long-term consequences for the country as the poor spend much less money on education, health and nutrition of girls. Poverty is also regionally based, first of all being much higher in the rural areas of Kyrgyzstan. Mountainous Naryn has the highest population living in extreme poverty (61 percent) while Bishkek and Chui have less than 10 percent in extreme poverty. The regional tensions risk increasing with this extreme diversification in financial resources in the country. This situation also has a gender bias to it, as women have only ca. 67 percent of men's average salaries (964 Som versus 1427 Som).⁴³ Predictably, this has created tensions and a large number of women's groups have reacted strongly to the problem.

The Kyrgyz economy is in dire need of diversification. There are some industries, especially gold and the water/hydropower industry. However, it remains problematic that a country's economic

³⁷ The UN system in the Kyrgyz republic. Common country assessment. 2003 Bishkek, 2003, p. 21. <http://www.undp.kg/english/publications.phtml?3>

³⁸ Reto Weyermann, A Silk Road to Democracy, FAST Country Risk Profile Kyrgyzstan, Swiss Peace, 2005:19.

³⁹ The UN system in the Kyrgyz republic. Common country assessment. 2003 Bishkek, 2003

⁴⁰ Council of NGO's, *Alternative Report to the Second Periodic Report by the Kyrgyz Republic to the CEDAW Committee*, December 2003: 21.

⁴¹ See more Renee Giovarelli, Chinara Aidarbekova, Jeniffer Duncan, Kathryn Rasmussen, Anara Tabyshalieva. Women's Rights to Land in the Kyrgyz Republic. The World Bank. Bishkek, June 2001.

⁴² World Bank, Kyrgyz Republic Enhancing Pro-poor Growth, Report no 24638-KG, 2003.

⁴³ Council of NGO's, *Alternative Report to the Second Periodic Report by the Kyrgyz Republic to the CEDAW Committee*, December 2003: 9.

development rest on a weak sector that will give very little foreign exchange in return. A continuation of this trend would increase the position of the illegal economy, including narcotics, human trafficking etc., and could potentially lead to the co-optation of political as well as economic structures.

The resource base for Kyrgyzstan is weak and the only resource that could currently generate significant resources to the country is water. There is however very little interest or understanding from the downstream states (Uzbekistan primarily) that water could be taxed or controlled by a weak state upstream. Apart from this, there are few resources in the country and a diminutive internal market. Regarding human resources, there has been a drain of educated and skilled people when not only Europeans (mainly Germans, Russians, and Ukrainians) but also 700,000 Kyrgyz left the country, and presently there is a lack of skilled people to develop industry.

2.2 Actors in conflict

2.2.1. State, sub-state-group, civil society, external

Ethnic tensions in Kyrgyzstan exist but they do not seem to be at the national level, rather much more at a local level and primarily over resources and land rights, and not in the form of age-old hatred between ethnic groups. It would be a mistake to disregard their potential, however, as ethnic cleavages are present in people's minds and is used for propaganda purposes by different actors.

A more troubling cleavage is the one between real or perceived haves versus have-nots, with special emphasis on perception as the cleavage may be more perceived than real. Regardless of the recent improvements in economic development, the cleavages between the very rich and the very poor have increased, and most troublesome is that some regions, such as Naryn, Talas and Batken, are by far more affected than other regions. This regional cleavage of resources could drum up a resistance against the richer provinces.

Organized crime is increasingly important, both at the economic level as well as the political. There have been rather strong indications that the political process is influenced or at least supported by organized crime. Increased consumption of narcotics and the more frequent use of Kyrgyzstan as a transit state have strengthened the criminal elements in Kyrgyzstan. If organized criminal networks were, as it seems, a factor facilitating the 2005 revolution, the political development in Kyrgyzstan would be in danger of being affected and it is possible that Kyrgyzstan could become a runner up to Tajikistan in terms of political and economic co-option by criminal networks.

On the positive side, there is a strong civil society in Kyrgyzstan and there is a wide variety of NGOs that work for political, economic or social improvements. Media and civil rights are in a relatively good situation in regional comparison, and the academic community is relatively free. Public opinion, together with parliament, has forced the president to several concessions, and finally the President's resignation. The positive effects of the NGOs are not only a result of the effectiveness of the NGOs, but rather a result of the lack of institutional strength of the political and economic state institutions in Kyrgyzstan. Corruption is endemic in political life, but NGOs have been relatively free from this.

Uzbekistan is the most influential regional power in Kyrgyzstan and tensions between the states over water issues and border delimitations are troubling for the government in Bishkek. There is also a conflict over Islamic fundamentalism that crosses over the border that is perceived in

Kyrgyzstan to be ethnically Uzbek; but understood in Uzbekistan to be caused by Kyrgyz laxity towards extremism. Tajikistan is also a factor for Kyrgyzstan, but the relations are in contrast to Uzbekistan rather positive despite some border issues. Tajikistan is however a source of the heroin problem as it functions as the main transit route from Afghanistan. With the withdrawal of the Russian border troops, there is an expectation that increasing amounts of drugs will move through Kyrgyzstan.

China, Russia and the United States are all actors in the Kyrgyz future. Russia has traditionally been the dominant power but is declining gradually. China is taking up the slack and now is exporting consumer goods to Kyrgyzstan, both formally and informally. Trust vis-à-vis China is nevertheless relatively low in many areas of Kyrgyzstan, especially in Naryn and Yssyk Kul. This is especially the case since the border delimitation that was perceived as unfair from the Kyrgyz side, and which the President had to rescind after signing it. The U.S. is of lesser economic importance, apart from the war against terror and its leasing of air bases, which is a considerable income for the state. China and the U.S. share an interest in combating militant Islam, and in the Chinese case, preventing Kyrgyzstan from being a source of support for Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang in their struggle for independence. What is characterizing all three states is the lack of commitment and long-term interest, as all actors have their major interest in other regions, and possibly China is the country with the most to gain by sticking to Central Asia; it also probably has the most long-term strategy in the region.

2.2.2 Peace agendas, incl. women's groups

There are no formal peace agendas in Kyrgyzstan at the official level, currently most actors are involved in consolidating their power or to gain from the recent changes. The weakness of the political elite, and the vulnerable condition that the interim President and the parliament are in, are impeding a more active policy and attempts to work more constructively. However, it is important to note the vibrant civil society that has been a characteristic of Kyrgyzstan since its independence. Meanwhile, it should be mentioned that the press and other important organizations central in civil society have been co-opted through bribes, appointments, and threats in order not to criticize the current developments. Nevertheless, women organizations and civil society at large are still working for positive aims and an end of the criminalization of society. Women have as a group been increasingly marginalized, and the decrease of women in the political process has been particularly notable in the early 2005 after the “revolution”.

2.2.3 Mechanisms to address conflicts

With the current situation in Kyrgyzstan there is a limited amount of potential mechanisms to address conflicts. There is without doubt local mechanisms, but these are limited in impacts especially as the security sector reform is much needed and the traditional mechanisms such as the clans has a very limited impact in larger communities. Before any effective mechanism to address conflicts can be developed there is a need to improve the internal security situation, decrease criminal influence on the society, fight corruption and improve the legal structures. With the current structures there is simply no possibility to succeed in developing new mechanism to handle conflicts.

3. Tajikistan

Tajikistan is by far the worst affected state in the region by socio-economic problems and conflict. Already during Soviet times, it was by far the poorest republic, and subsidies from Moscow are estimated to have amounted to some 30-40 percent of the public expenditure. Today, Tajikistan suffers from a variety of economic, political, social and security problems that hamper sustainable development.

3.1. Conflict lines in Tajikistan

3.1.1 Ethnicity, regionalism and border conflicts

Tajikistan is the only country in Central Asia that was affected by a civil war after independence, a tragic war which cost Tajikistan 50,000 lives and close to 700,000 refugees and internally displaced persons who fled the war. The scars from the war are not healed, but the atmosphere is relatively optimistic for the continuation of the Tajik state. The peace treaty in 1997 was in practice a sharing of power between the neo-communist government led by Imomali Rakhmonov and the United Tajik Opposition, which had a significant Islamic identity. The peace treaty from the beginning suffered from the fact that it in practice excluded two of Tajikistan's regions, the formerly dominant and wealthy Khojent region in the north and Gorno-Badakhshan (GBO) in the east. These regions are inhabited to significant degrees by Uzbeks (over 40% in Khojent) and Pamiris (a majority of Gorno-Badakhshan) respectively, and very little has been done to incorporate these in the political process. Most conflicts within Tajikistan today nevertheless have more to do with economic and political issues than with ethnicity.

There has been some concern that the northern Soghd region (formerly Leninabad Oblast) would secede from Tajikistan. Indeed, Soghd has a significant Uzbek population and was a part of Uzbekistan before the final territorial delimitation of Central Asia in the late 1920s.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, these fears have proven to be premature. The concern is today more the Khatlon province, the most dissatisfied province in the country – particularly its southern Kurgan-tyube part, which saw the worst destruction in the civil war, retains significant inequalities and remains underdeveloped. However, there is little risk that civil war would re-emerge, especially as the state is so weak that most regions in practice have already gained far-reaching autonomy.

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have experienced very troubled relations since independence, to the extent that no airline flights between the two countries exist. Relations are characterized by a lack of trust on institutional and personal levels between the leadership of the two republics. The specific problems are questions of water, terrorism and political Islam, especially the IMU. Moreover, there is a large minority of Tajiks in Uzbekistan, especially in Bukhara and Samarkand. Relations are complicated by the mining of the borders between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Border demarcation has improved the situation, but there are still areas that remain unresolved, and the militarization of the border areas is bound to create tension for the foreseeable future.

Afghanistan frequently comes up as a country of concern when discussing Tajikistan. Tajikistan is a major (second only to Iran) transit route for Afghanistan's heroin, and more Tajiks live in Afghanistan than they do in Tajikistan. This links the destiny of Afghanistan and Tajikistan closely together. The political stability of Tajikistan is directly dependent on the development of the political process in Afghanistan due to its close economic (illegal) and ethnic relations.

⁴⁴ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*, New York: New York University Press, 2000.

3.1.2 Regional powers

Tajikistan is today a state dominated by Russian influence, especially in the form of the presence of the 201st Motorized Rifle Division, which has been guarding Tajikistan's borders with Afghanistan since independence. Nevertheless, Russian troops are handing control of the border to Tajik border guards by 2006, and Russia's military presence will change form as a permanent Russian military is being established. The Russian influence on the country's economic and political development has been without comparison. Before independence, Tajikistan was the poorest republic in the Soviet Union and therefore heavily subsidized and dominated by the influence of Moscow. This has continued ever since, and Russia during 2004 had 25,000 troops in Tajikistan, most of them locally recruited but under Russian command.

China has increased its presence in Tajikistan, even if its influence remains limited. The focus has been on trade, and preventing the trafficking of weapons and narcotics as well as preventing Islamic fundamentalism. China's main interest has always been concern of Islamic fundamentalism and the risk of support for the Uighur rebellion in China. That said, the increased amount of heroin that crosses the Chinese borders is increasingly perceived as a problem in Beijing. Similarly, the U.S. presence in the region is limited to the struggle against terrorism. To the extent the U.S. is involved in Tajikistan, its interest seems focused on monitoring the government itself and possible terrorist groups in the country.

Regionally, both Afghanistan and Uzbekistan are important players in the development of the state and its stability. Afghanistan has a negative influence as it is the sole provider of the significant quantities of heroin and opium that transit Tajikistan. The effect is increasing local consumption and the fact that a large chunk of Tajikistan's economy derives from the narcotics trade. However, the stabilization of Afghanistan since 2002 has had positive effects on Tajikistan's political consolidation. As in the case of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan is an important security challenge. Uzbekistan has, just as in the Kyrgyzstan, threatened to militarily solve the water issues and address by force and unilaterally, if necessary, the problem with the IMU finding sanctuary in Tajikistan. There is no doubt that Uzbekistan would be able to do so as Tajikistan is very weak militarily and would not be able to resist Uzbekistan, at least not without considerable Russian intervention.

International support for Tajikistan's development and the struggle against the narcotics trade is limited. Due to the lack of effective political and economic institutions, international aid and lending have been relatively modest until recently. Tajikistan has been remote to the interests of most international actors and donors, a situation that has changed slowly in recent years, with NGOs and some states increasing their presence. Yet aid organizations face a multitude of problems, not least the weakness of the absorption capacity of the state as well as of civil society. In addition, the problems of corruption and weak state institutions are seeing little change.

3.1.3 Governance and reform

Tajikistan underwent a civil war with devastating consequences, but despite the negative aspects resulting from the war, war tiredness and conflict aversion have emerged as a potentially positive bi-product of the war. There is great reluctance to go through another civil war, and accordingly most actors are willing to sustain significant hardship before considering militarized conflict. Therefore the risks for civil war are limited, although Tajikistan continues to suffer greatly from economic, social and political instability.

Since the peace treaty in 1997, which was hailed as a very positive development, there has been an increased limitation of political freedoms. The president has increased his power over political parties and marginalized the opposition. In a sense, this has been a necessary development as the President targeted warlords in the central and eastern parts of Tajikistan. The consolidation of the President's powers has led to the development of a more secure and stable Tajikistan, but also to a strengthening of the power of the members of the Kulyab "clan". Changes to the constitution in 2003 made it possible for Rakhmonov effectively to remain President until 2020.

The biggest challenges that Tajikistan face are the presidential elections in 2006, which will test the principle of power-sharing. Already, parliamentary elections in February 2005 led to a pro-presidential parliament, but the election was not recognized by leading opposition parties. It seems unlikely that Rakhmonov would lose the presidential election, not due to his popularity but due to the likelihood that the election will be closely controlled by the executive branch. The majority of the population shows little interest in elections, there are no institutionalized ties between voters, candidates, and activists, and all share the same problem of a lack of coherent party programs and infrastructure.⁴⁵ There is little dialogue between the political parties and the marginalization of the opposition makes the elections a foregone conclusion. Kyrgyzstan's recent developments could lead to a change, although it is unclear whether the fear of public revolt will make the current regime follow the electoral rules. For instance, in Tajikistan, a decree banning women's attendance of mosques was issued in November 2004. One of the objectives of the decree is to collect more female votes in the forthcoming presidential elections because there is a fear that a number of women might not support incumbent president. The Tajik Islamic Party of Revival considered this decision as a violation of women's rights.⁴⁶

A major problem in Tajikistan's political development is that women have been effectively excluded from the political arena. Currently, women only make up three per cent of the members of parliament and 7 percent of the senior posts within government ministries.⁴⁷ The situation is not better at the regional level, but as Falkingham notes, the only positive aspect is that unlike the high quotas from the Soviet times these women are voted in for their skills and not due to a quota. Yet a serious problem remains, in that half of the population is practically and increasingly excluded from the political process.

3.1.4 Human rights development and social factors

In terms of social security, several problems remain to be solved. The public sector and the social services are under-funded and are unable to meet the social challenges. In 2004, total public spending amounted to US\$320,000 USD, or US\$48 per capita. This is far from sustaining even the most modest levels of social security for the population.

More than anywhere else in the former Soviet Union, Tajikistan has been affected by economic collapse and internal conflicts, i.e. civil war. This affected the health system to a great extent, and health care receives today only a modest US\$4 per capita. In 2000, 21 per cent of children were not vaccinated, and cases of Tuberculosis increased by 25-30 percent per annum. The general

⁴⁵ Kamoludin Abdullaev & Sabine Freizer, *What Peace Five Years After The Signing of the Tajik Peace Agreement?*, UK Government Global Conflict Prevention Pool, 2003.

⁴⁶ Tajikistan: Ban on women attending mosques debated, Dushanbe, 24 Nov 2004, IRIN.

⁴⁷ Jane Falkingham, *Women and Gender Relations in Tajikistan*, Country Briefing Paper, Asian Development Bank, April 2000: xiii.

disease incidence increased by 27 percent between 1995 and 2000. During 1994-1999, health expenditure in percentage of GDP dropped from 6,4 percent to 1,5 percent.⁴⁸ In 2002, public expenditure on health was down to 0.8%.⁴⁹

Part of the problem but also one of the positive aspects, is the youth of Tajikistan's population. 51.3 percent of the population of Tajikistan was under 20 in 2004.⁵⁰ Less than US\$9 per capita was spent on education, an amount that fails to guarantee that all children finish primary school. In fact, some 20 percent of all schools were destroyed during the civil war, and official figures indicate that possibilities to enroll at school today is lower than in 1990, in spite of the population increasing by 12 percent since then. From a literacy level of almost 100 percent during Soviet times, some regions today cannot accept even 70 percent of students to school.⁵¹ Worst affected are mountain areas in geographical terms; and in general, girls are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to education. A recent survey found that 89 percent of boys aged 12-16 in urban areas were enrolled in school, compared to 75 percent of the girls. In rural areas, 90 percent of boys and 80 percent of girls were enrolled.⁵² In 2001, 36.7% of girls and 63.3% of boys completed 11 years of secondary school.⁵³ According to the ADB study, women in their 20s are less educated than those in their 30s.⁵⁴

The decline in education is in stark contrast to the population explosion that Tajikistan is experiencing. The positive aspect of the population growth is the abundance of a potentially active labor force, but on the other hand, if the state fails to generate an environment where jobs are generated, this demographic trend could increase social unrest and political dissent in the country. The fertility rate of Tajikistan was 3.9 in 2004, indicating that population growth will continue in the coming years.⁵⁵ The population explosion is exacerbated by the decline in legal economic activity and unemployed people are absorbed by the illegal economy, especially as narcotics smuggling networks are increasingly strong in Tajikistan.

The war greatly deteriorated the plight of women and children in the society. The incidence of rape and sexual harassment during the war is unknown. The war left about 55,000 orphans and 26,000 widows most of whom face resurgence of patriarchal traditions and material hardship. As a result of war and followed out-migration of men to Russia, a number of women agree to a co-wife status to protect themselves and their children in gender-discriminative environment. Despite a criminal ban of polygamy its revival is seen as part of re-Islamization and women's de-emancipation processes. A spread of polygamy and its impact on the Tajik society remain under-researched. The post-Soviet law failed to resolve numerous problems on property rights of co-wives and their children caused by a restoration of plural marriages. A group of Tajik women, the

⁴⁸ WHO Regional Office for Europe, Health for all Database (<http://data.euro.who.int/hfad/>).

⁴⁹ The TransMONEE Database 2004, <http://www.unicef-icdc.org/resources/download.html>

⁵⁰ Tajikistan in Figures 2004, Dushanbe, State Committee on Statistics, 2004:21-23.

⁵¹ Interview with V.B. Tulasidhar, Deputy Resident Representative, Asian Development Bank, Bishkek, 12 July 2004.

⁵² Jane Falkingham, *Women and Gender Relations in Tajikistan*, Country Briefing Paper, Asian Development Bank, April 2000: 58-63.

⁵³ UNDP. Progress toward the Millennium Development Goals. Tajikistan. Dushanbe. 2003, p. 20.

⁵⁴ ADB. Report and recommendation of the President to the Board of directors on a proposed loan and technical assistance grant to the Republic of Tajikistan for the Education sector reform project. November 2003. RRP: TAJ 37175, p. 17.

⁵⁵ Tajikistan in Figures 2004, Dushanbe, State Committee on Statistics, 2004:21-23.

co-wives applied to the national parliament to legitimized their status.⁵⁶ Domestic violence is one of the most sensitive and hidden problems in the Tajik society.⁵⁷

In the last decade commercial sex trade, including child prostitution rapidly increased in the country. Women, men and children are trafficked to Russia, Kazakhstan and the Gulf States for sexual exploitation and forced labor.⁵⁸ According to the IOM about 1,000 women from Tajikistan have been trafficked in 2000 alone.⁵⁹ Civil society groups initiated public discussion on domestic violence in the country. In Tajik society a part of women responds to gender violence by self-immolation: approximately thirty women a month are hospitalized with severe burns linked to self-immolation practice.⁶⁰

3.1.5 Organized crime and corruption

Tajikistan has become one of the major transit states for heroin and opium from Afghanistan, second only to Iran. As opium and heroin production has increased significantly, including in Afghanistan's northern region bordering Tajikistan, the country has increased in importance for smuggling, especially as it is a weak states with severe economic problems. Organized crime has affected all sectors of the Tajik state, and corruption is endemic. The weakness of the Tajik state has created possibilities for militant organizations to use its territory for military operations, as illustrated by the IMU's ability to move in and out of the country at will. This might however not be the most direct problem for Tajikistan; the single most important problem seems to be state infiltration and political co-option by criminal networks. Numerous sources point to the involvement of high level decision-makers in the narcotics trade, on a level and depth that makes Tajikistan a candidate for the term 'narco-state'.

It seems apparent that Tajikistan is one of the countries in the world where organized crime has reached the highest level of political cooption and economic impact on the economy. It is widely assumed that the illegal part of the economy is over 50 percent. Through its political weakness and fragmented border control, Tajikistan has developed into a major transit route for heroin from Afghanistan. The narcotics trade has created a free haven in Tajikistan. The political and institutional weakness of Tajikistan has made it very easy to penetrate and use the country both as a transit state and possibly as regional headquarter for criminal gangs.

⁵⁶ Zamira Eshanova. Central Asia: Increase In Polygamy Attributed To Economic Hardship, Return To Tradition. 10/20/02, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/culture/articles/eav102002.shtml>

⁵⁷ In 1999, the World Health Organization conducted a study on violence against women in Tajikistan, surveying 900 women above the age of fourteen in three districts of the country (World Health Organization, 1999 Pilot Survey in Tajikistan: Violence Against Women," distributed at Workshop on Violence against Women in Tajikistan, Dushanbe, 29-30 March 2000). Among the respondents, ten percent had entered into an unofficial polygamous marriage or *nikoh*. Martina Vandenberg, Women, Violence, and Tajikistan, http://www.eurasianet.org/policy_forum/vand022001.shtml

⁵⁸ Trafficking in Persons Report, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, June 14, 2004 <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/>

⁵⁹ Deceived Migrants From Tajikistan. A Study of Trafficking in Women and Children. Capacity Building in Migration Management Programme. IOM. Dushanbe, 2001, http://www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/tajikistan_study_august2001.pdf.

⁶⁰ Moving Mountains. A United Nations Assessment of Development Challenges in Tajikistan, UNDP, p. 9.

The social implications of the narcotics trade are grim. It is assumed that some 100,000 drug users exist in Tajikistan and that 70 percent use opiates, increasingly heroin. As noted earlier, over 80 percent of HIV-positive cases are intravenous drug users in Central Asia today. If the increase of drug transit continues, an uncontrolled situation could develop regarding disease epidemics related to narcotics use. In relation to declining healthcare, this is exacerbated by the fact that most intravenous users are from poor families and areas. The excess of new HIV/AIDS cases has increased the risk of spreading the epidemic to other groups than intravenous drug users. Most users are in a sexually active age and heroin users are sexually active outside their own groups, especially in the early stages of their abuse. Experts believe that in trafficking in persons, women serve to transport drugs “as they themselves are being trafficked into sex work, either out of the country or being forced to service men moving along the trafficking routes. Many of them become users themselves, increasing their risk of HIV epidemics.”⁶¹

3.1.6 Economic development and resources

The core problem in Tajikistan is the weak economy and the failure of the state to see to its citizens' needs, in spite of the fact that between 1999 and 2004, Tajikistan's economic growth averaged 8.4 percent, which has increased the per capita GDP from US\$150 in 1999 to US\$244 in 2004.⁶² This still puts Tajikistan among the poorest states in the world, and 64 percent of the population remains below the poverty line. 18 percent suffer from extreme poverty, although the positive trend in the economy should be noted. According to the World Bank Living Standard Survey in 2003 the overall poverty rate is the highest in GBAO (84%) and Khatlon (78%).⁶³ Only 3.1% of the country's population live in GBAO, however, it consists of 6.9% of the poor.⁶⁴

Tajikistan still suffers from an extremely poor economy, and currently the public debt of Tajikistan is approximately 60 percent of GDP, or US\$1 billion.⁶⁵ Although not as large as Kyrgyzstan's debt, this level of debt is unsustainable with the current level of the Tajik economy. Russia has written off debts, but the problem still remains. Part of the problem is that there is little foreign exchange that comes into Tajikistan, except for narcotics money. A stronger economy would result in more foreign exchange, but currently the illegal and informal market dominates economic life.

The lack of economic alternatives in Tajikistan has increased unemployment and half a million to a million of Tajikistan's six million inhabitants are thought to live outside the country in search for work. In the short term, this is a blessing for Tajikistan as it receives much-needed foreign exchange as well as losing a large portion of unemployed, young, and potentially frustrated men. Over a longer time span, this might nevertheless generate conflict if these migrants, primarily in Russia, are forced to return home. There is tension over the Tajiks in Russia and an increasing number are forced to return to Tajikistan. As Tajikistan currently fails to produce enough crops to sustain its own economy, an additional million people and the loss of remittances would make the country's situation untenable. Nevertheless, it should be noted that most crops are harvested

⁶¹ Julie Stachowiak, and Chris Beyrer. HIV follows heroin trafficking routes, http://www.eurasianet.org/health.security/presentations/hiv_trafficking.shtml

⁶² International Monetary Fund, *Republic of Tajikistan – Third Review Under the Three Year Agreement Under the PRGF*, 2004.

⁶³ *Moving Mountains. The UN Appeal for Tajikistan*, 2005, p.9. www.MovingMountains/UNAAppeal2005Eng.pdf.

⁶⁴ UNDP, *Progress toward the Millennium Development Goals*. Tajikistan. Dushanbe. 2003, p.13.

⁶⁵ World Bank, *The Republic of Tajikistan, Public Expenditure and Institutional Review*, Dushanbe, November, 2004:27

below capacity and it would potentially be possible to improve the size of the crops. This is imperative as Tajikistan's population growth is rapid, and more crops, residential land and economic opportunities are needed. The government has argued that the labor-intensive agricultural sector could provide large segments of the population with work, while at the same time diminishing the consequences of population growth. However, large segments of laborers go unemployed and, in for example the Khatlon province, half of the population is unemployed and approximately one third migrate seasonally to Russia. The failure to bring this population into the local economy is one reason for the failure to produce crops and a partial reason for the weak economic situation in these areas.

Part of the problem of increasing unemployment and dissatisfaction is the failure to implement a land reform. Currently, 65 percent of the population competes for 4 percent of arable land, and there is tension between the poorer farmers and larger collectives. As the land, by law, belongs to the State, it is not a privatization of the land in itself but rather the right to use it that should be distributed.⁶⁶ Clearly, many of the impoverished people would benefit greatly from this reform and it would over the short and long term decrease tension between the poorest and the state and take away one tool that radical Islamic forces are using against the government – increased economic inequalities. Problems with this approach include the debt inheritance from the old collective farms (kolkhozes). When a single farmer privatizes his business, he inherits his share of the collective's debt, which in practice makes it impossible for these farmers to cope since the debt tends to be much higher than the potential income. This cements old structures unless debt relief is implemented. In Kyrgyzstan, some of the debt was written off, but it is still a problem both in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Cotton debts are likewise increasingly a problem and a symptom of the problems that the agricultural sector is facing. According to UNDP, the cotton revenues in Tajikistan were about US\$111 million in 2001, and 30 percent of the country's exports. According to informal sources at the Asian Development Bank, total debts amounts to US\$156 million.⁶⁷ The situation is most acute in Khatlon, which is the major cotton producer in Tajikistan. The negative development in the cotton industry has made the main cotton producing regions the most corrupt and impoverished regions in Tajikistan, the best example being Khatlon. Cotton is also a favored crop over others and the tax for each hectare of cotton is often lower than for many other crops, which indicates that the cotton industry and its structures are there to stay.

Elite control of resources is a problem as there are very few incentives to reduce their control unless elites' power are at stake. These elites control legal institutions, financial institutions, and the political framework. The level of corruption is endemic and there seems to be a minority that suppresses a majority with financial tools. It is important for the elite to control the resources they possess such as agriculture and cotton, as it is the only two substantial resources in the country except for water. It should be noted that most indications point to an almost complete co-optation of the economic power, but there are few governmental sources that support this view.

As in Kyrgyzstan, but more rapidly, there is a widening gender gap in Tajikistan, with less and less resources granted to women. Men control all economic activity in Tajikistan, even if women have

⁶⁶ Tim Greenhow & Pontus Förberg, *Land Reform in Tajikistan: Assessment and Recommendations on the Way Forward*, Swedish Institute of Public Administration, October 2003: 6-7.

⁶⁷ Tim Greenhow & Pontus Förberg, *Land Reform in Tajikistan: Assessment and Recommendations on the Way Forward*, Swedish Institute of Public Administration, October 2003: 10.

increasingly come to dominate cross-border trade and small-scale economic activities. In regard to land reform, women are facing a problem as the local land committees are able to refuse persons land if they deem that person unable to manage a farm.⁶⁸ This is a condition that affects women far more than men, especially if women are the de facto household heads, although women-headed households often have a stronger economy.

3.2 Actors in Conflict

3.2.1. *The State, Sub-State Groups, Civil Society, External Forces*

Tajikistan suffers from numerous weaknesses, but the lack of institutional strength is one of the more important. This has led to diversified groups of potential actors in a conflict. Politically, power is divided between the current government and the opposition (UTO), but in practice the president has centralized power around himself during the past few years at the expense of other political actors. The centralization of power has decreased tension in the country, but at the same time decreased the political rights for the population. More power has been ceded to clan/regional structures, especially from the President's native Kulyab region.

Tensions exist on an ethnic basis between Tajiks, Pamiris and Uzbeks, but as pointed out above, most of these conflicts are local rather than national. In the longer term, the tensions do however have a potential to increase locally, posing a risk of increased ethnic tensions. The other ethnic minorities in Tajikistan are not involved in inter-ethnic tensions to a significant degree, but are often excluded in the political power struggle due to their minor importance. According to the population census of 2000, there were 4,9 million Tajiks, (80%), 937,000 Uzbeks (15,3%), 68,000 Russians (1,1%), and 65,000 (1,1%) in the country.

Similarly to Kyrgyzstan, the more troubling cleavage is the perceived cleavage between haves versus have-nots. Regardless of the recent improvements in economic development, the cleavage between the very rich and the very poor has increased and most troublesome is that some regions, such as Khatlon, is by far more affected than the regions in the north. This regional cleavage of resources could drum up resistance against the richer provinces. The poorest regions are also regions with minority population, which can increase the perception of an ethnic and religious cleavages. The poorest provinces are GBAO and Khatlon. The GBAO population is geographically isolated and culturally different from most Tajik people, who are mainly Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school. The Badakhshani people are Shia Muslims of the Ismaili branch,⁶⁹ followers of the Aga Khan, who supports development in GBAO specifically and Tajikistan in general. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the political leaders of GBAO called for Badakhshan's independence. Currently, Badakhshan, with ca. 5% of Tajikistan's population, does not experience strong tensions with the government, in great part given the government's weakness in the region.

Civil society and NGOs are very weak in Tajikistan and they play a very modest role, however international NGOs and aid organizations have increasingly had an impact on education, women's rights, etc. With external aid the number of women's NGOs rapidly increased from 3 to

⁶⁸ Tim Greenhow & Pontus Förberg, *Land Reform in Tajikistan Assessment and Recommendations on the Way Forward*, Swedish Institute of Public Administration, October 2003: 11

⁶⁹ The Ismailis constitute the second largest Shia community after the Twelvers in the Muslim world. http://www.iis.ac.uk/ismailis/ismailis_12.htm

120 between 1992 and 2001.⁷⁰ However, the cost borne by women in the transition remains high. Widespread unregistered [religious] marriages and divorces, polygamous families, underage marriages, male inheritance traditions and many other gender-sensitive indicators are beyond official statistics and public discussion. Criminal organizations and other underground activity, such as Islamic radicalism, increase their influence by the year and criminal organizations in some provinces have more influence than the state. The growing influence of criminal organizations over the political and economic processes puts them in a prime position to control the political and economic future of Tajikistan.

Afghanistan is one of the more important external actors, for several reasons. Tajikistan has been active in the support of the Northern Alliance (primarily consisting of ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks), the stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan, and the inclusion of the Northern Alliance in the Afghan government has been positive for the Tajikistan's political stability. More problematic is the Northern Alliance's involvement in the narcotics trade. The Northern Alliance is implicated in large parts of the heroin trade to Tajikistan and is in this sense responsible for the criminalization of the Tajik state.

As noted above, there are very few states that are directly interested in Tajikistan. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have an interest in Tajikistan's stability and economic development, but their influence should not be exaggerated. Tajikistan's relations with Kyrgyzstan are positive, but the relations with Uzbekistan are tense. China and Russia still have an interest in the development of the Tajik state, for their own purposes. Russia is however a declining power in the region and its commitment to Tajikistan is decreasing. China is more concerned, mainly for its own domestic reasons. Firstly, it would increase trade for financial purposes, but more important for Beijing is the combat against terrorism and separatism. China views its relations with Tajikistan primarily in terms of controlling its own Muslim minority and to prevent militant Islam from gaining a foothold in China. The commitments from both Russia and China are nevertheless short-term and are not based on Tajikistan's needs.

3.2.2 Peace Agendas, including Women's Groups

In line with the Kyrgyz case, there are not many formal peace agendas in Tajikistan. However, the civil war has made the Tajiks less prone to conflict and despite several tense situations, there is relatively little risk for a new civil war. The government has put very little effort in the creation of a peace policy in the country and to decrease socio-economic and political differences. Women as a group have been increasingly marginalized and despite the fact that they often are the most trans-cultural actors they seem to play a more modest role in the peace building. In Tajikistan as in Azerbaijan, Abkhazia and Chechnya, women have not been included into the peace talks and top-level discussions on peace-building developments. Currently with external aid, a number of women's groups are trained and involved in the programs to empower women through increased educational and economic opportunities. According to local NGO activists, women have been successful in the civil society sector, heading over 35% of Tajik NGOs. Women's capacity for conflict prevention and a peace agenda should not be neglected.⁷¹ Women's groups mobilize populations to respond to conflict potential on family, community and national levels.

70 UNDP, *Progress toward the Millennium Development Goals*, Tajikistan, Dushanbe. 2003, p. 26.

71 PeaceWomen. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, <http://www.peacewomen.org/WPS/Tajikistan.html>

3.2.3 Mechanism to address conflicts

In essence there are very few mechanisms that could deal with internal or external conflicts, whose potential exists as far as Tajikistan is concerned. War weariness seems to be one of the major factors that speaks for a continuation of status quo. There are no mechanisms to deal with regional, socio-economic differences, organized crime or the criminalization of the state. The weakness in the security sector is the most apparent problem in Tajikistan as well as in Kyrgyzstan.

4. Scenario analysis

Despite the differences between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan there are several similarities that need to be dealt with before any effective programs can be initiated in either states. All three scenarios take their departure point in security sector reform as this has been deemed essential to improve the current situation and a failure to improve this sector would be devastating for both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, but even for the region at large. These scenarios are not organized according to likelihood but rather as a rough roadmap of possible developments. It should be noted that the reality will with great likelihood be a combination of all or two of the scenarios.

4.1 Scenario One: Security Reform and Economic Stability

The most positive scenario for both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is if the political situation comes under control with the assistance of the international community. This is made possible by strengthened reforms in the security sector with effective measures against corruption and criminalization of the state structures. When security reform is implemented, socio-economic and gender cleavages can be managed, as well as including increased efforts to reduce the cleavage between the South and the North. This would be implemented simultaneously with improved political representation for minorities and people in the regions who have limited representation today. Organized crime reduces its leverage over the national economy when legal areas or trade and production are made possible without high levels of corruption and the narcotics trade is reduced in both states as the legal economy increases in strength. Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan agree to pay for their usage of the water from the two impoverished upstream states and the border issues between the Central Asian states are resolved. Trans-border trade is reopened. The economic development provides women with a greater role in the economic sphere and eventually in the political, and equally important, the younger generation is given new possibilities to economic self-sufficiency without having to leave the countries or engaging in criminal activities. This is all made possible by increased international attention and increased financial aid, first primarily in the security sector and later in the socio-economic sectors to reduce inequalities and poverty.

4.2 Scenario Two: Status Quo

The continued criminalization of the political power is prevented, but important segments of the political power is under the control of the criminal interests and a few decision-makers are directly involved in criminal activity. The security sector reform is initiated, but due to the lack of interest and financial resources from the international community the progress is limited. Large segments of the economies are under criminal influence and control; corruption is a grave problem for economic development as investments are decreasing. Political power is limited to a few individuals and there are still significant regional differences and severe tensions over political control between the different regions. Not only are regional cleavages increasing, gender

imbalances and increased tension between age groups are mounting due to the lack of work for the younger generation and women. Both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan develop into important transit routes for organized crime and harbors several important criminal networks. The criminalization of poorer regions continues and develops a strong division between areas under the control of organized crime, where organized crime groups guarantee security and social benefits, and the less criminalized areas where the state has some impact over the socio-political development. Unrest in Uzbekistan intermittently affects the two countries.

4.3 Scenario Three: State Failure and Criminalization of the Region

The worst possible scenario is that the criminalization of the political power continues and the political elite at all levels of society is directly involved in organized crime, and the shadow economy is mainly dependent on narcotics trafficking. Most political and economic activity is controlled by illegal interests; even nominally legal markets are brought under the control of criminal networks, making both states worthy of the term narco-state. Security is no longer guaranteed by the state, but rather by criminal groups or regional warlords. This would not only result in economic deprivation and alienation from the international community, regionalization and possible annexation or separatism in some areas would be highly likely as the state disintegrates. Legal economic alternatives are not lucrative enough to compete and corruption makes any international attempt to engage in the countries deemed to fail. This would be a result of the increasing regional cleavages and socio-economic differences as well as increased violence both due to socio-economic reasons as well as 'wars' between criminal networks. Instability in the region is made worse by serious internal unrest in Uzbekistan, spreading across borders into the Kyrgyz and Tajik sectors of the Ferghana valley. At this stage the question of a failed state arises, in which numerous economic and political interest groups are combating each other. This would guarantee a relatively secure base of operations for potential separatist and terrorist organizations against western and Asian interests.

4.4 Assessment

Of these three scenarios, the first is the most unlikely currently due to the lack of international engagement and financial resources to commit to such thorough reforms in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The third scenario is also less likely as it would imply a total disregard from the international community in terms of both pressure and aid. The second scenario seems more likely, even if a combination of the second and third could be deemed the most likely as organized crime has made significant inroads and the international community has been slow to react to this.

Moreover, the Russian troops that have been stationed in Tajikistan have been involved in the trade or narcotics, but when these troops leave the region, there is ground to assume that the narcotics trade will increase as the little protection that was present will then disappear. Regional cleavages seem to increase in both states, and unless infrastructure improves and trans-regional projects are initiated that decrease economic, social and other regional differences, this is likely to continue.

5. Strategies and options

The situation in Central Asia and specifically in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is characterized by political instability and weak states in combination with rapidly increasing levels of criminalization of the state. The weakness of the state and decreasing levels of legitimacy of the states are direct

reasons behind both decreased economic development as well as many of the conflict lines and their ability to deal with internal conflicts. Dealing with state legitimacy and stability is also what most donors have avoided in their programs in the region. Due to the state weakness, the focus has been on civil society and projects disengaged from the ruling elites. This is a serious problem as the state has been left in disarray and the criminalization of the political and subsequently the economic elites has been significant. This has in turn led to the fact that the projects on the civil society level have been made impossible due to endemic levels of corruption and cooption (or limitation) of civil society groups. With decreased state legitimacy, the state has been unable to deal effectively with perceived regional differences and regional cleavages have increased both factually and in the perception of people.

The OSCE and a small number of donors have engaged in limited attempts to improve police performance, but this has been at a level that is far from the local needs. Indeed, in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan security and justice do not seem always to be in the hands of the government any longer. Individuals in leading positions, as well as whole regions, are today under the influence of criminal organizations, and justice has become a meaningless word for many people. This situation also obstructs investments and foreign engagement in the region, which has further increased the severity of the situation. In essence, political and social insecurity increases economic volatility and in the worst case, economic decline which are important factors behind increased conflict development.

5.1 Security sector reform in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan

The most apparent need in Central Asia generally and specifically in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is security sector reform – the improvement of the function and performance of the military, police, interior ministry, customs and the judiciary system. This is the basic foundation of good governance and sustainable economic development. Both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are heavily criminalized societies where the political and economic power has been co-opted to a large degree. Tajikistan has been a well-known problem and the “revolution” in 2005 in Kyrgyzstan has increased the criminal co-optation at all levels of society. National as well as regional politics have reached alarming levels of criminalization and this is apparent in all sectors of both societies. This situation impedes any political and economic reform that is attempted, both at the national as well as the regional level. The dysfunctional character of the security sector constitutes a risk in several ways. Firstly, it impedes the resolution of conflicts as the salience of private interests in the security forces creates narrow self-interest in sustaining the status quo. The lack of strict control over military forces, and weak hierarchy and discipline, increases the risk of military mutinies and unrest. The combination of corruption and dysfunctional institutions is particularly deadly. In addition, the weakness of the security sector impedes the building of democratic and accountable states across the region. Indeed, their primitive practices have alienated many loyal citizens, exacerbating existing socio-economic frustration.

Seeing this, western aid programs and foundations long kept their distance, focusing their assistance instead on such sympathetic entities as unregistered political parties and NGOs, and treating local officialdom and the police as unredeemable pariahs. Not surprisingly, police behavior remained as bad as ever. Across the former Soviet Union, the police and the Ministries of Internal Affairs that control them are the most unreformed part of the governments, along with the military. In all Central Asian states, they represent a powerful and backward-looking faction, locked in struggle with reformist elements concentrated in other parts of the government. The strength of these forces implies that the Presidents cannot ignore or override these factions.

What should be noted is that too strong a civil society in relation to the state could also be problematic in itself: the state's functions decrease and are taken over by civil society. This could lead to a conflagration especially in Kyrgyzstan, where the civil society still has an important role, but it is less likely in Tajikistan where there is no strong and vibrant civil society.

Western disengagement from the states in general and in specific the Ministries of Internal Affairs and police helped perpetuate the very practices that development cooperation has been intent on counteracting and rooting out. Against this background, it is clear that stable societies cannot be built in disregard for the security sector and legal system, indeed in dissonance with state institutions. Where a large section of the police force is corrupt, strengthening civil society will be futile. Instead, successful development cooperation strategies will need to focus more closely on the security sector, balancing support for civil society with efforts to build the state institutions that lie at the basis for, and are prerequisites for a functioning and influential civil society in the first place. This is no easy task. Indeed, there was a reason for western donors to stay away from this sector. But the work of the OSCE and USAID in numerous post-Soviet and other states indicate that it is possible to work with reform of these institutions and indeed make a lasting difference.

Increased openness of the political and economic system with fair rules and regulation will increase not only the potential for conflict resolution and prevention, but also the taxation base and the possibilities to collect taxes. Increased potential for taxation will not only strengthen the state in itself, but also the socio-economic situation as it will increase funding for education, health etc.

Despite the fact that many conflicts are locally based, there is a need for the state to act and prevent these conflicts through both direct and structural means – by decreasing real and perceived economic inequality through decreasing economic cleavages and increasing information and cooperation over regional borders. Local structures such as clans and religious organizations can act in some cases, but especially in trans-regional conflicts, a functioning state is needed barring which regional cleavages are likely to increase.

5.1.1 Corruption and organized crime

Both in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan the most apparent threat to the state and its functions today are the rampant corruption and the role organized crime plays in the states. Increased focus needs to be put on combating corruption and organized crime to prevent further de-legitimization of the state. Improvements of the security sector is crucial in this, but more importantly, there needs to be a long-term strategy to educate people in just and fair procedures and increasing the understanding that corruption is not only a threat to the state but also to the individuals themselves. The social acceptance of corruption as a part of daily life is very problematic and needs to be addressed. There are several cases where regionally based criminal networks have taken over parts of state functions and are de facto running political and economic affairs in some regions, especially apparent in the south of Kyrgyzstan and in parts of Tajikistan. Political co-optation and infiltration of the legal economies has to a great extent led to a beginning of infiltration of the state at a national level due to its weakness.

Closely related to this is the abundance of small arms that are traded by criminal networks and owned by virtually each and every family in parts of these countries. Increased efforts need to be made to decrease the availability of small arms, a step that would increase local and national

security. Demilitarization of local societies needs to become a priority for the international donors.

5.1.2 Political legitimacy and power

The need to increase political legitimacy and power for the states is fundamental for the continuation of a peaceful development in both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Regional segregation increases as the legitimacy and power of national governments decreases regionally to the benefit to organized crime and regional interests (which do not necessarily have to be the same, but often are). A continued situation of state weakness and illegitimate rule would not only increase regionally based conflicts and criminal control of the state; it would moreover increase socio-economic instability for citizens of both states. There is therefore a need to build the political legitimacy, economic sustainability and outreach of the state into its entire territory. To accomplish this, reform of the Ministries of Internal Affairs would be crucial to increase political legitimacy and security. This would create the legitimacy to reform the taxation system and increase taxation that could be used to increase socio-economic stability and economic sustainability of the state.

5.2 Decreasing Regional Differences

There are severe regional differences both when dealing with criminalization, political participation and economic development, and to a large degree this is more important than the proposed ethnic divisions. As an example, in the south of Kyrgyzstan, the ethnic Uzbek as well as ethnic Kyrgyz populations are equally poor in comparison to the more wealthy Kyrgyz North. It is however evident that the criminalization of society has different origins, in the south the heroin business is prevalent, and in the north the most important factor is corruption, often in relation to gold or ordinary business. This is also why there are potential regional cleavages between different sectors of organized crime, even if the increased cooperation between different criminal networks would significantly increase their strength. Similar cleavages are prevalent in Tajikistan where illegal activity is strong nationally, but specifically salient in the regions bordering Afghanistan and the transit routes to neighboring states.

Political participation in Kyrgyzstan has been significantly limited for the southerners in comparison to the northerners for a long time, even if the “revolution” has meant a step toward changing that. The potential conflict between political interests can however increase conflicts related to the outcome of presidential or parliamentary elections. Similar tendencies have been seen in Tajikistan where the Uzbeks and the Pamiris has been excluded politically, as well as other Tajik groups, given the increasing concentration of power in the Kulyab “clan”. In both states, there are increasing regional tensions, that are based in regional and not necessarily ethnic differences, which pose a risk to generate violence.

Socio-economic problems are devastatingly high in both states, the regional differences between rich and poor regions are increasing. Access to health, education and economic prosperity is significantly reduced in poorer regions. New economic alternatives need to be developed that are sustainable; this especially as both states have limited economic resources excluding water. Water management seems to be one of the more important economic alternatives that could be developed in the sector of national resources; however, the drawback is that neither of the states downstream intends to pay for the water. In essence, there is not only a problem in terms of distributing the resources of the two states, but also to create a resource base that is possible to distribute to avoid regional cleavages.

Organized crime is the single most important problem that needs to be resolved and this can only be done through security sector reform. However, organized crime can also be addressed at a regional level. Most of the narcotics entering Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are directed from Afghanistan and through Osh. To alleviate the problems in the regions of transit, there is a need for improved health structures, education and police that could prevent the inflow of narcotics as well as their usage. Regional efforts to reduce these problems are probably more effective than a centralized policy as the problems are to a high degree regional.

It is however unlikely that the socio-economic cleavages will be reduced before the security sector reforms are initiated as corruption and criminal behavior will impede economic and social development in both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In the short term, increased dialogue between the different actors is recommended as well as trans-regional information exchanges. The international donor society can assist in both strengthening information exchanges, both through television, radio as well as newspapers but also through the creation of platforms of dialogue between the different political actors. This can not only increase understanding between the different actors in the region but also assist in creating alternative political elites and cross-cutting identities.

5.3 Infrastructural improvements

Infrastructural improvements in the region are necessary if the regional cleavages and regional tensions are to be dealt with. Strikingly, in both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan there are infrastructural barriers between the capital cities and the regions with the highest proportion of dissatisfaction. Infrastructural projects need to focus on the improved connectiveness between regions that today are excluded from the state in itself, as in practice it is easier to travel to Bishkek from the South of Kyrgyzstan through Uzbekistan than to travel through Kyrgyzstan. Similar problems are prevalent in Tajikistan. Roads, trains but also air connections are poor and there is problems reaching different parts of the country you are living in. Interesting to note is that the transports from southern Kyrgyzstan to Bishkek during the “revolution” is alleged to be organized by criminal interests as they would be the only structure that could organize such a large transport organization. Needless to say, these projects need to be initiated in cooperation with the state and aiming at keeping the state intact.

Working together on projects that tie firstly the state together and secondly ties the region together such as TRACECA are highly valuable for regional integration and economic development as well as peaceful development within the states in question. The reality is that TRACECA has not accomplished what was expected and this mainly due to the lack of political commitment and economic resources on the part of Europe. In general there is a lack of coordination and resources in the infrastructural projects that could tie them together and make a valuable economic and integrative contribution. In large-scale projects such as in infrastructure, there is a need for international cooperation and direct joint ventures to make any real impact. These simply too large projects financially for one single state to handle these commitments.

5.4 Multilayered approach to change the current situation

There is no easy way out of either of the positions that both states has put themselves into. Reforms in the security sector are necessary, but this has to be done simultaneously as improvements in the economic and political sectors. Without a functional legal and judiciary system there is no possibility that there will be any improvements, but at the same time without

simultaneous improvement of the socio-economic situation there is no incitements to agree to the security reforms.

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

5.4.1 International cooperation

Engagement of the international community is a prerequisite for the region in general and in particular Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the political and economic weakness makes it virtually impossible for them to deal with these issues by themselves. The failure of the international community to engage the state and the ruling elite has made a problematic situation worse and much effort is today needed to reverse the situation.

A strong recommendation for the international donors, and especially smaller ones, is to focus their resources on larger projects with high impact on the state and the security sector reform. This is best done by working together in larger projects with the state in question and improving the basic conditions for economic development, political participation and a non-corrupt society. This can be done through so called "silent partnerships" or direct joint ventures, but the current focus on smaller projects have not had an impact to make substantial change possible.

5.5. Window of Opportunity and the Lack of Political Will

The current situation in Kyrgyzstan might pose a window of opportunity for political commitment to a development in favor of change and democratic values. The government that takes over after the presidential election will have to seek international support and is very likely to gain it, despite their apparent linkages to organized crime. However, the chances that there will be political or economic changes in favor of a positive change are limited. It seems likely that the upcoming presidential election will be dominated by candidates that may not, once in power, manage to fend off organized criminal networks. If this is the case, Kyrgyzstan risks becoming a narco-state that could become a major hub of organized crime.

Tajikistan has lacked political will for a long time and in contrast to Kyrgyzstan where the situation has worsened over the past few months, Tajikistan has been an important hub for organized crime for years. The level of political and economic co-optation is very high, and organized crime has been politicized to a very high degree. It seems unlikely that any positive changes will take place in the short run with peaceful means, short of a revolution there seem to be few changes ahead. In both states, the level of corruption and criminalization has co-opted the political process and there are very few incentives for the political elite, save a few brave politicians, to combat organized crime and strengthening the state at the expense of organized crime.