

Human Security in Central Asia: Challenges Posed by a Decade of Transition (1991-2002)¹

*Report for the Commission on Human Security
March 2002*

I. An Overview of Human Security

The Commission on Human Security, an independent body created in 2001 with the support of the government of Japan, and endorsed by the United Nations, has identified Central Asia as a region where a combination of internal and external factors generates problems of concern to the international community, problems that deserve to be examined from a human security perspective. This report will provide an overview of those areas of human security that are most pressing in Central Asia, and that the Commission feels important to consider on the occasion of a Round Table meeting to be held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan on 22-24 April 2002.

The concept of human security is relatively new on the international scene but is gaining more attention as it aims at complementing more conventional approaches to security. It comes at a time of growing awareness that collective efforts are needed to reduce human suffering and insecurity where it is most acute and prevalent. Its aim was summarized by the UN Secretary-General at the recent Millennium summit when he called on the international community to advance the twin goals of “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want”. The Commission on Human Security takes as its starting point that the need for human security is universal; that people, both individuals and communities are central to its promotion; and, that all its components, whether they relate to conflict or development, are interdependent. Threats to the security of people in the region include potential or actual conflict, population displacement, economic deprivation, unemployment, deterioration of basic services, human rights violations, etc. These are the issues that this paper would like to address.

The subsequent sections of this report give an overview of Central Asia and its multiple transitions, with a specific focus on the consequences for human security. The report further addresses the regional consequences and threats to human security caused by the Afghan conflict. The report concludes by defining some areas for policy innovation in defense of human security.

II. An Overview of Central Asia in Transition

Central Asia is a region whose internal and regional crises drew relatively little attention from the international community during its first decade of statehood, after becoming independent of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Since September 11, 2001, however, Central Asia has been thrust into the global spotlight. Many international organizations and governments have realized their neglect of both existing and imminent crises plaguing this region. Human security issues in Central Asia have now become a matter of international attention, as various intergovernmental, governmental, and non-governmental agencies and actors seek to stabilize the region and prevent the escalation or eruption of new crises.

Central Asia is a geopolitical space extending from Turkey in the west, to the Xinjiang region of China in the east, and from Russia in the north to Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan in the south. Although the Soviet influence imposed significant institutional changes upon its sphere of Central Asia, very similar cultural, linguistic, and religious practices, and historical traditions, are still found across the entire

¹ This report was prepared by Dr. Kathleen Collins, Research Scholar and Assistant Professor of Political Science and Central Asian Studies, University of Notre Dame, USA.

region. For the purposes of this Round Table, this report will focus on the post-Soviet Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), and will make references to Afghanistan insofar as the Afghan conflict impinges on security issues in these five states.

Of primary concern are the threats to human security that have emerged since the Soviet collapse. Human capital was one of the greatest strengths of Soviet development policies. By the 1970s, even the Soviet periphery of Muslim Eurasia boasted a high literacy rate, advanced health sector, economic modernization, and a relatively equal standard of living; these factors that placed the region far above average developing countries. Yet, the post-Soviet period has thrust these new states into multiple transitions: 1) identity and nation-state building, 2) economic liberalization, 3) social reform, and 4) political liberalization. Each of these (interrelated) transitions has had profoundly negative implications at the human level, i.e., for human security.

For various reasons—including Soviet environmental and natural resource abuses, seventy years of uneven economic development, water scarcity, a strategic location unfavorable for trade or foreign investment, regional instability, and repressive regimes—the Central Asian states have generally been the least successful of the former communist republics in implementing reforms and making democratic and market transitions. Ten years after the transition, Russia, East Europe, and the Caucasus are starting to grow; however, the Central Asian states, in most spheres, have not yet reversed a decade of decline.

II. Identities, Nation-State Building, and Interethnic Relations

One primary issue that most post-communist countries have had to address is the need to create a nation-state, and a national identity within their newly inherited state boundaries. The example of Yugoslavia's breakdown from 1989-1992, and the subsequent wars in Nagorno-Karabagh, Moldova, Georgia, and Chechnya, suggested that nationalist elites playing the "national card" could be a source of virulent ethnic conflict throughout the region. Scholars and policymakers alike have directed enormous attention to discussions about potential ethnic conflict.

Since none of the Central Asian states either existed as states or even had modern state structures prior to the Soviet period, nation-state building was a particularly critical issue for new state leaders who needed to avert secessionism, prevent the redrawing of borders, and create respective state institutions and identities that would garner legitimacy from their multiethnic, multi-confessional, and multilingual populations.

Furthermore, the Soviet practice of reifying ethno-national differences left difficult legacies. The Central Asian ethno-national identities were created by Soviet nationalities policy. This policy had led to the creation of titular ethno-national republics, whose artificially drawn borders included many non-titular minority peoples. This policy in effect was an "affirmative action" program that promoted the titular ethnic group within each titular ethnic republic. For example, Kyrgyz received certain privileges within the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR); Uzbeks, Koreans, Russians, or other ethnic groups living within the Kyrgyz SSR did not benefit from affirmative action. However, while Central Asians benefited within their titular republics, many faced a glass ceiling within the Soviet institutions overall, and felt significant pressure to assimilate to Russian culture in order to succeed. Perhaps the most significant example was the status of Russian as the legal state language and the primary language of elites, while the Central Asian languages were primarily spoken by the rural, less educated, and less politically or economically powerful population.

The legacy of Soviet ethno-national policies for the new independent states was fourfold: 1) they needed to adopt citizenship laws, 2) they needed to adopt new state language laws, 3) they needed to

maintain peace between the Russian diaspora and the titular population, and 4) they needed to preserve peace between the titular group and other minorities (especially Central Asian ones).

On the whole, the Central Asian republics have been successful in accomplishing these goals and avoiding potentially catastrophic outcomes. The new Central Asian regimes have engaged in active nation-building; they have invested in extensive campaigns to resurrect and recreate their “national” histories and cultures of 3000-4000 years. Yet, since 1991, all five states have avoided interethnic conflict (either among Central Asians or between Russians and Central Asians).

This stability has been achieved through a variety of measures. First, they have adopted a “civic nationalism,” granting equal rights and citizenship to any ethno-nationality living within their territory at the time of the Soviet collapse. The Turkmen government has been the most progressive, in allowing the Russian diaspora to hold “dual citizenship” with Russia. Official state policies on ethnicity emphasize “interethnic inclusion and harmony,” and a continuation of the Soviet “friendship of the peoples.”

Second, the Central Asian states have adopted language laws giving status of “state language” to the language of the titular group, which is generally the majority ethnic group.² In Kazakhstan, Kazakh and Russian are now both official state languages. In the Kyrgyz Republic, after several years of debate, Russian is a state language, along with Kyrgyz, the national and state language. In Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, Tajik and Turkmen are state languages, but Russian has special status as the language of interethnic communication. Only in Uzbekistan does Russian not have a special status.³ However, given the overwhelming majority of the Uzbek population (approximately 75% in the early 1990s), the adoption of a single state language was not as hotly contested as in its neighbors. The large exodus of the Russian population, mainly from 1989 to 1993, has slowed and is primarily due to economic motivations, not ethnic discrimination.

Several areas remain problematic, however. First, there is a gap between de jure “interethnic equality” and the de facto potential for non-titular groups to succeed economically or to gain political representation in each republic. The case of the Uzbek population in Osh (Kyrgyz Republic) is one example. Uzbeks compose over 50% of Osh, and claim to be informally excluded from positions in the local and regional government, judiciary, police force, and even major economic enterprises. Now larger than the Russian population, they resent the lack of support for Uzbek language. The Uzbek minority in the Khodjent region of Tajikistan shares similar concerns. The large Slavic population of Kazakhstan is underrepresented in the Kazakh government. In Uzbekistan, ethnic Tajiks and Kyrgyz complain that they have been frequently removed as directors of state farms, and replaced by Uzbeks. Maintaining interethnic harmony over time will require addressing these issues.

Questions for Discussion

- Should the Central Asian governments institutionalize ethnicity by adopting ethnic quotas for parliamentary seats, for executive appointments, the police, or judiciary? Do these states need new affirmative action policies, or will they merely aggravate ethnic tension?
- Is the oft-discussed tension in the Ferghana Valley really about ethnicity and ethnic competition, or do we need to address other causes?
- How is interethnic competition aggravated by other identities, such as Islamic and clan identification? Do we need institutions to ameliorate a broader set of identity conflicts?

² In 1991, Kazakhs were actually less than 50% of the population of Kazakhstan, but a bare plurality.

³ Before 1995, Russian was also recognized as the official language of interethnic communication.

III. Economic Transition and Human Security

Overall, the economic situation since 1991, and especially its consequences for the average individual, can be summed up as negative. The situation varies somewhat by country, and we should address issues of unemployment, job prospects, and standard of living in both the industrial sector, and the much larger rural economy.

In looking at various economic data, a recent upward trend is evident. It suggests that the economy may be finally turning around. GDPs are rising between 5 and 17%, according to official figures, and between 1-6%, according to unofficial estimates.⁴ Exports are slightly up and inflation is down. Given that Kyrgyz Republic's economy bottomed out in 1994-95, after an initial attempt at rapid reforms, and that Tajikistan's started from a post-civil war low in 1997, this news is tentatively promising. Kazakhstan's macroeconomic growth is largely driven by the oil industry; it is the only one of these republics to have major foreign direct investment spurring growth. These three states may have passed the worst stages. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, by contrast, saw little significant downturn in the 1990s, and now claim to be growing at a steadily greater rate. However, given lack of transparency in their figures, these numbers should be counter-posed to other sources of data. Neither has yet undertaken substantial land reform, or industrial reforms other than privatization of trade and small enterprises.

Furthermore, the official statistics do not capture a number of "human" phenomena. Across the board, GDP per capita and living standards are still far below Soviet levels. In Kyrgyz Republic, for example, GDP in 2000 was still only about 70% of its 1991 level, and GDP per capita was about 65% of the 1991 level.⁵ Poverty is rising significantly as well.

Underemployment and Unemployment

Official data denies employment problems by underreporting unemployment (officially ranging from 1-4%; unofficially about 30%), and ignoring underemployment, which local specialists estimate at 30% to 50%. The overall GDP figures further do not take into account the general decline in agricultural and industrial production. Underemployment, that is, keeping employees on the books and payroll, even while a factory is dormant or when the state farm does not pay them for months on end, is common practice.

Rather than register as unemployed, many individuals spend a fraction of their time at their "official" jobs, and most of their time in the second economy. Their "unofficial" jobs are sometimes in the service sector; for example, a former professor drives a taxi, or a former engineer works in the unofficial home construction business. More often than not, unofficial jobs involve small-scale bazaar trade and smuggling, especially of alcohol, cigarettes, and other goods. While the second economy may be adding to economic activity and production, it is not significantly contributing to long-term development and growth.

Agriculture and Industry: Hope for Reform?

This report lacks space to discuss the specifics of agricultural and industrial policies within each country. However, when focusing on economic aspects of human security, we should note several points. First, the majority of Central Asia's population and labor force is rural. Yet, development and reform of the agricultural sector has been a low priority. With the exception of Kyrgyz Republic, very

⁴ Economic data are drawn from: UNDP reports on the central Asian states, all years; World Bank reports; *Nations in Transit* report (2000); and *Central Asia 2010: Prospects for Human Development* (NY: Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS, 1999).

⁵ *Kyrgyz Republic, Human Development Report, 2001* (Draft version).

little land reform or land privatization has actually taken place. Much reform legislation is on the books, but in reality “private farmers” (*dehqonlar*) face enormous difficulties in acquiring land from the state farms (now called “private joint stock companies”). Those rare few who are approved to buy land still face state quotas on land use, and state control of the sale and export of their harvest. In short, across the region, the state has kept in place enormous disincentives and obstacles to private farm production. By contrast, the more liberalized land system in Kyrgyz Republic has by most accounts driven economic growth since 1996.⁶

In the Kyrgyz economy, where industry remains nearly defunct, agriculture both keeps the population fed, and provides a large surplus for export. Had the drought of 1999-2000 not affected growing conditions in Tajikistan, the small private Tajik rural sector may have seen larger gains as well. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, produce grown on private plots has fed into the large second economy, while many state cotton farms continue to suffer losses.

Surprisingly, none of the Central Asian states has invested much into agricultural infrastructure or agricultural industry. Large-scale industry is widely viewed by Central Asian regimes as the priority of the modernizing “developmental state.” And yet, since real privatization has been limited, most large industries remain grossly inefficient, operate at half capacity, and are drains upon the state budget. Most “privatization” has meant subsidized sale to insiders, a practice that generally prevents industrial reform. Other than the oil, natural gas, and gold industries (all are state-owned or state-joint ventures with foreign investors), most large industries are in decline. Small and medium size industries have sometimes been privatized, but generally produce little.

Almost all industries face a similar problem: lack of capital investment, either national or foreign. Outside of the natural resource industry, neither the Central Asian states nor foreign direct investors have been willing to sink significant capital into the Central Asian economies. Without capital, industry is unlikely recover. In fact, with this general de-industrialization of the economies, Central Asia has become an increasingly rural population and economy. With neither industrial nor agricultural expansion, the Central Asian states are not likely to move back into the “second world,” and investment in human capital will also continue to contract.

Distortion of Economic Growth and Socioeconomic Equality

The recent positive trends in GDP figures in large part reflect major investment projects, that is, the state-owned and state-controlled natural resource sector: oil and gas in Kazakhstan, gas in Turkmenistan (and to a lesser extent in Uzbekistan), and gold in Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan. The revenues from such projects have not generally been redirected to investment in other economic sectors, but instead much has been siphoned off by rent-seeking state elites. The rise in socioeconomic inequality is especially worrying in a region where people have long been used to the relative equality of socialism. The current situation is causing both a brain-drain of those who can get jobs elsewhere, and also rising social discontent and de-legitimization of the stagnant political and economic systems.

Questions for Discussion

- Should the Central Asian governments be devoting more energy and resources to agricultural production and agricultural industry, rather than to their current policies of import-substituted industrialization?

⁶ Based on author interviews with local World Bank experts on land reform, unpublished bank documents on land policies, author interviews with Farmers’ Associations, and UNDP reports.

- Are oil and natural resource dependency having a negative impact on democratization, socioeconomic equality, and social stability, as in Nigeria, Algeria, and Venezuela? What can be done to counteract this effect?
- What strategies can be implemented to attract broader foreign investment capital? Would regional cooperation better enable these countries to attract such investment?

IV. Social Transition and Human Security

Unlike most developing countries, the Central Asian states often suffer from too much infrastructure and too much development. Much of the infrastructure that the Soviet regime put in place can no longer be maintained, much less upgraded to deal with a new range of problems. Secondly, while various Soviet social and economic schemes led to growth in the 1950s-1960s, many of these projects are now exhibiting deleterious effects, and may create more negative social externalities than in a developing country where the level of social development was consistently low.

Decline in Literacy and the Educational System

One of the great achievements of the Soviet Union was the educational system. Even in remote rural areas, a decent education was possible; indeed, schooling was compulsory through grade 9. Overall literacy figures are still high, especially by comparison with Africa or South Asia. Yet since 1991, due to economic constraints of both the state and society, fewer youth are receiving a high-quality basic education, and fewer go on to university and technical training.

One cause of the decline is the lack of resources and investment by the state. Across the region, the states have tried, unsuccessfully, to protect the education budget, but the drop in spending relative to GDP, has been significant.⁷ A second factor is the exodus of many high-quality teachers who simply cannot afford to live on a \$10/month wage. Third, a number of Russian-speaking teachers have also left because of the shift in language laws. Finally, the introduction of fees for education has made many families unable or unwilling to send their children to school. Given the rise of personal connections, money, and influence in the economy and political system, and the corresponding lack of opportunities for merit, many families, and especially young men, view education as less important than previously.

Women's Issues

In general, women are more adversely affected during transitions than are men. In Central Asia, the effects of the transition on women are in many ways worse than the average, due in large part to a conservative and patriarchal culture.

First, the post-Soviet transitions in Central Asia have led to higher rates of unemployment for women; women appear to be the first laid off from state enterprises. As always, women's salaries are significantly less than men's, and the gap is worsening. Many women are now forced to stay home, because they have few, much less profitable, work opportunities. They cannot afford to pay for childcare on their meager salaries. A related phenomenon is the decline of female political representation from about 30% of parliamentary seats (1991) to about 5% (2000).⁸

Second, the emergence of a secondary and tertiary educational system which demands an annual fee, and within which it is difficult to be admitted or proceed without paying substantial bribes, has had an adverse effect on women. Most Central Asian families, even within the more "Western-oriented" urban areas, cannot afford to pay such fees; when faced with a choice, they send their sons rather than daughters for an education. Especially in rural, cotton-growing areas where female labor is the

⁷ *Central Asia 2010*, p. 50.

⁸ *Central Asia 2010*, p. 8.

predominant means of collecting cotton, girls are now removed from school at earlier ages to assist in cotton production. The situation is so bad in parts of Tajikistan that the World Food Program has implemented a policy of giving families food in exchange for sending their daughters to school. The consequence of the decline in the number of years girls attend school is a rise in the rate of early marriages and early childbirth.

Official statistics appear to underreport the decline in female literacy. They similarly underreport the number of teenage female suicides, and parental and spousal abuse of girls desperately trying to get an education. Finally, official statistics do not capture what journalists report as a sharp rise in “soft prostitution,” or girls selling themselves to university officials in order to stay in school.

“Hard prostitution” and the sale of women is also a little-documented trade, but one which has been on the rise across the CIS, even in Central Asia. The economic deprivation of women increasingly puts them at the mercy of these mafia prostitution networks. Unlike in Russia, Muslim women can far less easily exit the prostitution business and return to their families or find respectable jobs. They have exiled themselves from their community. The rise in this underground business is yet another factor leading to the rapid spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

Health Issues

One overarching issue directly affecting human security has been the breakdown of the Soviet health care system throughout the CA states. This breakdown is due primarily to the lack of an adequate state budget. Hospitals outside of the capital cities often lack not only medical supplies and equipment, but even electricity and clean water.

The decline in health is caused by a number of factors, including poor diet and malnutrition, problems due to higher levels of poverty. Environmental problems (such as the salinization of rivers due to over-irrigation) and the disrepair or lack of sanitation systems have caused a scarcity of clean water. This in turn has fed the rise of disease carried through contaminated water. Again, the effect of these conditions on women is particularly serious, especially during their reproductive years.

An issue of urgent concern is the appearance of AIDS in Central Asia, and a sudden rise in the number of reported cases. The regional hospital in Osh, Kyrgyz Republic views this as an impending crisis. In the past year alone, over 100 new cases have appeared. Health officials believe that, given the shame of reporting HIV/AIDS in a Muslim society, the official figure is likely only 1/10 or less of the actually number of cases in Osh alone. Figures for the rest of Central Asia are harder to come by, but the problem is likely uniform. Officials believe AIDS is being spread due to a rise in two other social problems reflecting poverty: the rise in narcotics use (coming cheaply from Afghanistan and Tajikistan), and prostitution.

Environmental Crises: The Problem of Water

As noted above, a number of major health issues are directly caused by the lack of safe drinking water. Water pollution and shortages are not simply due to poverty. These problems are the result of decades of Soviet misuse of water resources in Central Asia. The Virgin Lands campaign in Kazakhstan and the cultivation of cotton and rice throughout the desert and steppe of Uzbekistan, were massive agricultural schemas that involved a complex irrigation system and the redirection of water from the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers.

The consequence has been threefold. The Central Asian states are largely dependent upon cotton production for the bulk of their hard currency, and hence resist turning over the land to a less water-intensive crop. Second, the misuse of water resources has led to a steadily increasing salinity of soil and

downstream water, making it both unfit for drinking and bad for irrigation. The draining of the Aral Sea, which has shrunk to less than half of its size in the last fifty years, is the most visible consequence, and the population that previously lived off of the sea's fishing industry is now virtually unemployed. Data on health of women and children reveals higher malnutrition and birth defects in this region than anywhere else in Central Asia.

A third but equally threatening consequence of environmental damage to the water system, is the persistent inter-state, and occasionally inter-village, conflict over control of the sources of water in the upstream region, where Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan meet. The Kyrgyz and Tajik mountains are the source of the water, and Uzbekistan is the downstream recipient and major cotton producer in the region. The Kyrgyz and Tajik governments and local residents have periodically sought to stop the flow of the water, and to charge their Uzbek neighbor for its use. Since Uzbekistan is the main supplier of gas in the region, international experts have recommended a deal trading water for gas. Recent agreements (fall 2001) within the Central Asian Union suggest that this may be possible.

Questions for Discussion

- How can the Central Asian states rebuild their human capital and prevent ongoing brain-drain? On the other hand, is too much education necessarily good, especially in areas where job opportunities are scarce? An overly educated urban and rural elite has often lent substantial support to radical Islamic movements in the Middle East.
- What can be done to reverse or ameliorate the negative economic and political consequences of the transition for women? How can women's rights to safety, education, and participation be protected in an increasingly rural and conservative society?
- What more can be done to avert what could be a new HIV /AIDS epidemic?
- Various ad hoc water arrangements have prevented either inter-state or serious intra-state conflict over water thus far; what tools have been successful, and can we build on them to promote greater accord, stability, and efficiency in water resource management?

V. Political Transition and Human Security

Political Liberalization and Subsequent Retrenchment of Reforms

The initial post-Soviet period saw a divergence of political trajectories: Kyrgyz Republic adopted a rapidly democratizing agenda, Kazakhstan more limited democratic reforms, and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan underwent little or no liberalization. Tajikistan was in the midst of civil conflict, during which any pressure for political reform was long subverted. Since 1995, however, the political trajectories of these five states have increasingly converged towards more heavy-handed and less pluralistic government. The Central Asian elites have all sought to consolidate their power, appease various clan and regional groups, and control ethnic, Islamic, or other political dissent. The Central Asian governments defend these practices, arguing that, as with economic reform, political reform must be gradual. Nonetheless, the consequences of such a closed political system are complex and often negative; human security is jeopardized.

Four important issues of political reform which are directly related to human security, include: 1) promoting democracy and empowerment of people, 2) advancing a responsible media and mass information, 3) curbing the rise in corruption, and 3) understanding the causes of the rise of Islamic activism.

Democratization and Empowerment of People

One of the most basic elements of human security is human freedom and protection from abuses by the government. Many transitional countries see a rise in government oppression of democratic and human rights abuses, and governments try to maintain stability. The Central Asian countries have experienced this dilemma since 1991, and have widely sought to prevent the development of a plurality of political parties, media, and other components of civil society. Stability is a critical goal, especially during transition, and the Afghan or Tajik scenario must be avoided. However, high levels of government repression and closing off the political system to alternative viewpoints often creates more opposition. To prevent instability, the alternative is to promote discussion and dialogue within the political system, thus avoiding opposition to go outside the system and use violent means to achieve its ends and promoting a healthy, democratic exchange of views and peaceful competition. Allowing civic groups and civic dialogue to thrive, and promoting links between state and society (such as political parties) would make violent opposition less likely, and enhance the stability of these states over the long term. Democratization would especially make Islamic fundamentalism and violent Islamic movements less likely to receive social support. Finally, a more active civil society at the local and national level would help promote people's participation, reform, development, and economic growth in other areas.

Control of the Mass Media

A pervasive trend in the region, especially since the 1999/2000 election cycle, has been for those partly liberal regimes (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan) to retrench on a number of civic and political freedoms. Foremost among these has been freedom of the media and access to plural sources of information. The governments have at times even used physical threats to subdue "independent" journalists or "opposition" figures who used the press as a vehicle of dissent. The crackdown on the free media has cut off the primary means by which such actors had a peaceful voice inside the system; the consequence is a range of greater human rights abuses. The Central Asian governments have turned to increased control in a climate of rising social dissatisfaction.

Corruption and Undermining the Rule of Law

Corruption is fed by a number of factors in Central Asia: low wages, a poorly professionalized state bureaucracy, decades of patronage and clientelism, lack of confidence in the state, weak state capacity due to partial economic and political transitions. Most Central Asians believe there has been rampant corruption among state officials, and certain blatant cases have been made public in recent years. In fact, a recent EBRD study, as well as Transparency International, evaluated most of the CA states as among the most corrupt of states in transition.⁹

With such a rampant growth of corruption, implementing a rule of law is nearly impossible. This then causes lack of investment, little growth, and a vicious circle leading to de-legitimization of the regimes in power (both of the more democratic and less democratic ones).

Rise of Support for Islamic Groups

Sensationalist expectations of a mass wave of neo-fundamentalism or Wahhabism in Central Asia have ignored the moderate historical, cultural, and apolitical role of Islam in the region. Islamic cultural and religious practices have been on the rise in most of Central Asia since the 1980s. In contrast to many outsiders' expectations, Islam has not resulted in a mass movement or violent conflict. Nonetheless, Islamic cultural identities have become both increasingly vibrant and strained in the turbulent socioeconomic and repressive political circumstances of the transition.

⁹ Joel Helmann, "Capturing the State: Transition in the Post-Communist Bloc," unpublished EBRD and World Bank study, spring 2000.

Nonetheless, popular support for “peaceful” Islamist groups does appear to be on the rise. Hizb-ut-Tahrir, an underground, transnational Islamic party, has gained several thousand, and perhaps tens of thousands of, adherents in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyz Republic since 1997.¹⁰ The current crisis in Afghanistan may exacerbate Islamism in the surrounding Central Asian states, especially if the current regimes use the war on terrorism to justify further indiscriminate repression of Islamic practices.¹¹ Continued economic and social decline, together with political repression, may yet trigger violent conflict or the formation of an ongoing “Islamic” guerilla movement, as in several Middle Eastern cases.

Questions for Discussion

- Is political liberalization as great a threat to stability as some fear? Assuming that Central Asian societies demand a different non-western model of reform, how gradual should gradual political reform be?
- What is the relationship between the rise in Islamic activism and the political situation?
- Is U.S. and international intervention in the region promoting human rights and human security, or is it having an adverse effect?

VI. Afghanistan, the Geopolitical Situation, and Implications for Security

Afghanistan presents a number of real threats to its Central Asian neighbors, both directly to the integrity and stability of their borders, and indirectly to their populations. The lack of a clear and comprehensive regional security framework makes the Afghan threat even more severe. No regional organization exists to provide concrete assistance or act quickly in the event of either a Taliban Afghan attack, a refugee crisis, or the more likely scenario of a new guerilla insurgency by the IMU and other militant groups.

Indeed, beginning in 1996, the Taliban was making claims to the territory of Uzbekistan, and from 1999 through 2002, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan launched guerilla incursions from Afghanistan into Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyz Republic. Recent reports have suggested that the IMU was receiving funding and training from Al Qaeda in northern Afghanistan. Violent insurgencies based in Afghanistan have not been imminent threats for Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Still, their governments have shared the concerns of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyz Republic about the spread of arms or fundamentalism across their porous borders, from Afghanistan. They also share concerns about the proliferation of nuclear and chemical warfare materials from Russia and Kazakhstan to Afghanistan. Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan have been major transit routes for such trade.

Not just proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, but also the proliferation of conventional arms, of narcotics, of violent fundamentalism, and even of refugees, has had a negative impact on regional and state stability (most especially in Tajikistan), and indirectly on human security in the other Central Asian state. Until the Afghan situation is resolved, regional security will be at risk. Afghanistan is surrounded by weak states, and the negative externalities of the Afghan conflict must be addressed not only within Afghanistan, but on a regional basis.

Questions for Discussion

¹⁰ The Hizb-ut-Tahrir organization does not register or release a list of its members. The numbers are based on interviews with Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani journalist, May 2001, and Ivan Rotar, a Russian journalist in Tajikistan, June 2001.

¹¹ International Crisis Group Report on Central Asia, November 27, 2001, www.crisisweb.org/projects, and Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

- How much of a threat remains from the situation in Afghanistan? Has the US intervention there significantly reduced the threat from the IMU or other forms of Islamic radicalism to the Central Asian states?
- How the illegal drug trade originating from Afghanistan is affecting stability in border areas and aggravating social problems in Central Asia?
- Is the US and other international presence in the CA states likely to stabilize or otherwise improve the domestic situation there?
- Are either the CIS Collective Security Agreement (and its May 2001 decision to create a Rapid Reaction Force) or the Shanghai Group, both of which have adopted policies for fighting terrorism and religious extremism, promoting regional and internal security in the CA states?
- Or are these organizations justifying discrimination, harassment and abuse of the Uzbek, Uighur, Chechen and other “more Islamic” minorities in the CA states?

VII. Potential Strategies for Improving Human Security

The range of threats to human security in Central Asia is broad. Likewise, the nature of the threats, many of which are tightly interrelated, is deep and unlikely to be addressed easily. The above description and analysis of the major issues we find in the region suggests some potential policy strategies for improving the state of human security.

- International organizations could foster enhanced intra-state dialogue between the state and minority ethnic groups in order to obtain a greater de jure and de facto commitment to protection of minorities. Yet, such dialogue should stress that democratic representation does not have to mean ethnic quotas; in fact, quotas may have a negative outcome for minority rights. Regional organizations could also discuss strategies for preventing conflict over ethnic borders and for obtaining commitments that none of the Central Asian states will seek to mobilize minority secession in its neighboring states.
- Greater cooperation between states and international actors could foster state deregulation of industry and agriculture, and thus substantial investment of foreign capital. While the Central Asian governments typically advocate Chinese-style gradual reforms, for good reason, they seem excessively focused on large-scale industrial development. Many of the East Asian countries have experienced steady, long-term growth initially through agricultural privatization and production, and later through the development of small and medium-size industries (manufacturing and then high-tech sectors). These success stories did not depend on natural resource exploitation, and they created employment and lifted the standard of living very broadly. By contrast, numerous African and Latin American cases have seen growth through oil exports followed by huge socioeconomic inequalities and attendant political problems.
- One recurrent theme in this report is the rapid decline in human capital over the past decade. Given the amount of current government debt, there is little likelihood of a reverse trend in the near future. If state budgets are unable to address many issues of education, health, environmental degradation, and women’s rights, we should identify other sources of assistance. What can the UN agencies, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and bilateral donors do to prevent a further decline in human capital across the region? Better coordination and greater transparency in the flow of loans are two key factors in producing better outcomes.
- In addition to international aid, many studies find that locally sponsored-NGOs, civic organizations, and the local media are critical elements in addressing social problems. They can address these issues in a culturally and politically sensitive manner. For example, local civil

society can play an active role in protecting women and children, and especially in changing local norms about the rights and treatment of women and children. The state should support these initiatives where possible.

- In other transitional and democratizing regions of the world, civil society has been extremely important in both making an initial transition to democracy and in sustaining democratic rights and responsible and effective governance. In Central Asia as a whole, few civil society organizations exist to perform these functions. Fostering local civic action and a better relationship and mutually responsible interaction between society and the state is one critical means of ensuring both social stability and effective, democratic governance.
- The relationship between political and economic reform is complex. The Central Asian states, working with the international donors, could better develop and clarify their phased strategies for development. The current situation suggests that they should pursue both agendas in a way that preserves short-term stability—one of the most basic elements of human security—without undermining long-term stability, growth, and the potential for human fulfillment.
- Finally, the Central Asian states and international organizations should collectively use the US intervention in Afghanistan as a means of drawing global attention and aid to the human security threats they have long faced. Rather than focusing narrowly on military or refugee aid, the Central Asian states could use this opportunity to develop closer ties to the West, and attain much needed development aid and capital investment.