



BULAN INSTITUTE
for PEACE INNOVATIONS

CENTRAL ASIA SECURITY REPORT

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ABOUT US

The Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations is a non-profit and non-governmental organization that aims to promote human rights and peace and build dialogue in Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian states. We conduct field-centered research, provide independent expert analysis and organize public debates. We implement innovative projects involving media, art and new technologies, which contribute to building dialogue, promoting human rights, tolerance and raising awareness.

The Bulan Institute has two programs: the Central Asia Program and the program on Kyrgyzstan that consists of projects focused on human rights and strengthening democratic values in the country. The Central Asia Program has broader agenda covering security and human rights issues in the whole region and its work is reflected mainly in the English version of the Institute's website.

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INTRODUCTION

This report analyzes security issues in the Central Asian region. It is the Institute's first such report in English that is devoted to the whole region. The Bulan Institute has previously published five reports focused on security issues in Kyrgyzstan. Two of these addressed the issue of Islamic religious education in Kyrgyzstan, analyzing the current state of Islamic universities and madrasas. The second report was devoted to exploring how Kyrgyz citizens get Islamic religious education abroad, and analyzed Islamic religious education institutions in countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey.

This report is published by the Bulan Institute's Central Asia Program, and consists of five chapters that explore the issues of food security, poverty, migration and corruption, religious extremism and terrorism, human rights and dictatorship, water disputes and their security implications in the region.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Central Asia is a region that encompasses five post-Soviet republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) and is located between China, Afghanistan and Russia. The region has many security challenges, some of which were inherited after the collapse of the Soviet Union and have yet to be resolved, and others that have emerged more recently. The Bulan Institute is publishing this report to give insights into the region's security issues, and how interstate relations are hampering their resolution through a lack of cooperation and consistent joint policies.

The region is well known for corruption, family rule, poverty and nepotism. Externally, the region of Central Asia has long been regarded as a "buffer zone" between major powers and spheres of influence. In particular, Russia and China have strong economic influence, and little concern for issues of human rights and corruption. In the region, the majority of states are run by Presidents-for-life who have held office since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and in light of growing threats of terrorism and religious extremism these leaders position themselves as

a guarantors of peace and stability in their home countries. Corruption remains pervasive in Central Asian countries, while thousands of Central Asian migrants are working in Russia and other countries because of unemployment and poverty in their home countries. According to the World Bank, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan stand out for their poverty levels, with 32% of the population living below the poverty line in Tajikistan and 32,1% in Kyrgyzstan. Both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are among the most remittance-dependent economies in the world.

In Central Asia, corruption and poverty are inseparably linked. Family rule combined with authoritarian regimes usurp the countries' resources and the consequences of corruption are devastating. In the reports of international organizations and international media, there are many extreme examples of corruption involving the family members of Central Asian Presidents. In all five countries, natural and other state resources are misused by a small, elite circle for their own benefit, while corruption reduces public trust in governmental institutions and hinders economic growth. In a variety of corruption indices all Central Asian countries continuously demonstrate very low scores, indicating rampant corruption in every sector. For example, Uzbekistan is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. It scores just 21 out of 100 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.

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Food security is another major issue driving security concerns in Central Asia. Based on FAO estimates, climate change is predicted to severely impact the region resulting in increased damage and production losses in the crop, livestock, fisheries and forestry sectors. The region has high levels of water stress and according to the World Resource Institute's predictions, these will have reached extremely high levels by 2020. While the current state of food security in the region is already characterized by undernutrition and the threat of poor quality foods coming from China, the region is not ready to counter the impacts of climate change or manage increased water stress.

Water disputes are one of the major security issues in the region. The five Central Asian countries inherited an integrated water system built by the USSR and hydropower stations that used to work to balance the water needs of each state during the Soviet period. However when the Soviet Union collapsed and the centralized system was dismantled, although the five governments signed the Almaty agreement on water management in 1992, water disputes and tensions mounted between upstream and downstream countries. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, two upstream countries that have surplus water but suffer from scarcity of natural resources, are increasing domestic water use for energy, thus decreasing the amount of water flowing to downstream countries. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan,

downstream countries that are rich in oil and gas, suffer from water shortages and are very frustrated with new efforts to build more hydropower stations in upstream countries. The tension between neighboring countries remains high, and attempts to seek adequate solutions have been weak.

Meanwhile, Islamization is growing fast in the region and there are concerns that external threats are coming from Afghanistan. Moreover, within the region there is a wave of radicalization among domestic populations and about 5,000 fighters from Central Asia have gone to Syria or Iraq and joined ISIS. It is clear that the fear exists that the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) may expand its actions and enter the region, so the Central Asian governments have to take immediate actions to counter violent extremism. First of all, government should improve quality of education in both secular and religious education institutions. At the same time, authoritarian regimes should stop justify crackdown on dissent as fight against extremism and radicalization.

The main cause of many problems in the region is the consolidation of power in the hands of authoritarian rulers and the failure to hold genuine democratic elections. Only Kyrgyzstan is an exception having held presidential elections and practiced democratic transitions of power, and even here the country has failed to build a truly parliamentary republic and eradicate corruption. Kazakhstan's

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President has ruled the country since 1990, while Tajik President Emomali Rahmon came to the power in 1992. Both the Turkmen and Uzbek presidents came to power after the sudden deaths of their predecessors, who had held their offices since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In every country torture and repression are practiced by security services and crackdown on dissent is widespread. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan adopted Russia-inspired “foreign agents” laws which have paralyzed NGOs.

In general, the region is characterized by family rule concerned only with consolidation of its own power, rather than attempting to solve urgent problems such as border conflicts, water disputes, corruption, poverty and stagnant economic growth. Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a so-called “danger discourse” has dominated discussions on Central Asia. Since 1991 there have been reports that Central Asia is “sliding into decay”, “falling into chaos”, turning into a “hotbed of Islamic insurgency and ethnic clashes” and related unpredictable and unmanageable security hazards. However, despite this theme and early difficulties, Central Asia has managed to move forward with a certain degree of peace and stability.

This peace and stability, however, does seem to come at a price; nearly the entire region is in the grip of dictatorial and authoritarian regimes. Ever after metamorphosing from Soviet to nationalist

leaders, authoritarian rule has remained and indeed entrenched itself with greater cynicism than any Soviet leader. Leaders have styled themselves as protectors of national identity, strongmen in the fight against Islamic extremism and other dangers that the region faces. They have also presented themselves as reliable partners to major world powers. In response, and with the justification of preserving stability, these world powers have opted to close their eyes to subsequent human rights abuses. Even the deaths of the first generation of leaders didn’t bring long hoped-for change, demonstrating that there is a tightly established authoritarian system in place that goes beyond any individual leader.

CORRUPTION, POVERTY AND MIGRATION

Corruption, poverty, and migration remain pressing and deeply interconnected issues throughout Central Asia. Deep-seated corruption, endemic in both government and society, compounds the already limited economic development of Central Asian countries. This in turn maintains high levels of poverty and often forces Central Asians to seek work abroad. While the region maintains a degree of stability, these three issues, and their governments' inability or unwillingness to address them, pose significant short- and long-term risks both within the region itself and to neighboring nations.

CORRUPTION

Central Asia has a reputation and history of long-standing corruption, perpetually holding low rankings in various global corruption indices.¹ The reasons are various: authoritarian regimes usurping resources for themselves and those close to the ruling elite; a lack of transparency and accountability in government bodies; an absence of genuine will to implement anti-corruption reforms; a long-standing culture of acceptance of bribery as a way to simplify bureaucratic procedures; and harsh prosecution of civil society and anyone speaking out and demanding accountability, among others.² The consequences of corruption are indeed devastating: corruption hinders economic growth, forces people to leave their countries and families behind in the search of better opportunities abroad, and contributes to poverty and a culture of impunity. In the most extreme cases, corruption constitutes a serious and deadly security threat, both in itself and through its consequences.³

A recent report by the Open Society Foundations discloses astonishing levels of corruption in Uzbekistan, where public resources are often misused to benefit those

¹ This is also the case with the recently released 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International. Of 180 reviewed countries, the five former Soviet Central Asian Republics' rankings currently stand at: Kazakhstan 122; Kyrgyzstan 135; Uzbekistan 137; Tajikistan 161; Turkmenistan 167. See: Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2017," last accessed June 21, 2018, <https://www.transparency.org/>

² For more details on reasons, consequences and common features of corruption in the region of Central Asia, see: RFE/RL podcast, "Majlis: The Perfect Storm of Corruption in Central Asia," filmed June 4, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/pp/27779299/ppt0.html>

³ BBC, "Corruption 'impoverishes and kills millions,'" September 3, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-29040793>

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in power.⁴ The most extreme examples, including those involving the former president's family, have even made international news headlines.⁵ Besides being endemic, corruption is utilized by authorities as a tool to buy loyalty and ensure their continued control. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who assumed office in 2016, promised changes upon coming to power, however few reform efforts are visible so far.⁶ This failure to carry out substantive political reform could, according to experts, lead to unrest, political or religious radicalization, or other security challenges among Uzbekistan's young and growing population.⁷

Tajikistan likewise is characterized by patronage and cronyism with all

sectors of the economy being dominated by a small group of families tightly linked to President Emomali Rahmon. According to various reports, corruption pervades all levels of Tajik society, from traffic police soliciting small bribes to multi-million-dollar embezzlement.⁸ President Rahmon, who effectively rules as President for life,⁹ positions himself as a guarantor of peace and stability in the country. However, observers increasingly question whether Rahmon's long-standing and deeply corrupt authoritarian regime is providing stability or in fact jeopardizing it. In its latest report, Crisis Group warns that Tajikistan is under dangerous pressure both internally and externally. A primary issue stemming from government corruption is the lack of a functioning domestic economy. According to Crisis Group, "The rough economic climate, however, is fundamentally of the government's making: years of endemic corruption have bled local businesses dry and limit the impact

⁴ Open Society Foundations, "Tackling Corruption in Uzbekistan," June 2016, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/tackling-corruption-uzbekistan-20160524.pdf>

⁵ One of these is the Gulnara Karimova corruption scandal involving the president's daughter that began in 2012 and continued throughout 2016. See, for example: *The Guardian*, "Uzbekistan's first daughter accused of pocketing \$1bn in phone deals," March 24, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/24/gulnara-uzbekistan-daughter-corruption>

⁶ There are however signs of positive change in both media and relations with neighboring states. See, for example: *The Diplomat*, "Mirziyoyev Keeping Up the Good Neighbor Act," November 2, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/11/mirziyoyev-keeping-up-the-good-neighbor-act/>; *Eurasianet*, "Mirziyoyev Flirting With Regional Reset?" September 29, 2016, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/80721>

⁷ Bakhtiyor Nishanov, "Uzbekistan: The Year After," Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2017/brief, August 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/uzbekistan%20brief%20final.pdf>

⁸ For a more detailed overview of corruption in Tajikistan, see: Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2017. "Tajikistan Country Profile," last accessed June 21, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/tajikistan>; Transparency International, "Overview of corruption and anti-corruption in Tajikistan," January 4, 2013, https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/helpdesk/356_Overview_of_Corruption_in_Tajikistan.pdf

⁹ In May 2016, a referendum approved changes to the constitution, declaring President Rahmon to be "Leader of the Nation," paving the way for him to remain in power indefinitely. For more, see: Catherine Putz, "Meet Central Asia's Newest President-for-Life," *The Diplomat*, May 23, 2016; <https://thediplomat.com/2016/05/meet-central-asias-newest-president-for-life/>; *The Guardian*, "Tajikistan votes to allow president to rule indefinitely," May 23, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/23/tajikistan-votes-to-allow-president-emomali-rahmon-to-rule-indefinitely>.

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of donor aid.”¹⁰

In spite of recent economic improvements, particularly in 2017, Kyrgyzstan also struggles with widespread corruption and unemployment.¹¹ In Kyrgyzstan, “...corruption remains pervasive in the public sector, posing binding constraints to economic growth, competitiveness, and social equity.”¹² The involvement of several high-ranking officials in corruption came to light in 2016.¹³ Stephen Nix, International Republican Institute Regional Director for Eurasia stated that “continued unhappiness over issues such as corruption and unemployment suggests that the government should take this

opportunity to address these issues in a meaningful way.”¹⁴

Turkmenistan, while standing out as the most closed country in Central Asia, shares a deeply ingrained system of official corruption.¹⁵ Following the end of the paranoid Niyazov regime in 2006, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov’s coming to power did not bring desired improvements. Instead, President Berdimuhammedov established his very own cult of personality¹⁶ and concentrated power in his hands and the

¹⁰ Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°78, “Tajikistan Early Warning: Internal Pressures, External Threats”, January 11, 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/tajikistan/tajikistan-early-warning-internal-pressures-external-threats>

¹¹ For a more detailed overview of corruption as well as current economic development, see: [World Bank, “Kyrgyz Republic: A Robust Recovery...With Underlying Weaknesses”, Country Economic Update | Fall/Winter 2017.](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic/publication/economic-update-fall-2017) <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic/publication/economic-update-fall-2017>; Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2017. “Kyrgyzstan Country Profile,” last accessed June 21, 2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/kyrgyzstan>

¹² World Bank, “Kyrgyz Republic: A Robust Recovery...With Underlying Weaknesses.”

¹³ Freedom House, “Kyrgyzstan Country Profile.”

¹⁴ IRI, “Kyrgyzstan Poll: Relations with Uzbekistan Improve; Corruption Remains a Top Concern”, April 19, 2017, <http://www.iri.org/resource/kyrgyzstan-poll-relations-uzbekistan-improve-corruption-remains-top-concern>

¹⁵ For a more detailed overview of corruption in Turkmenistan, see: Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2017. “Turkmenistan Country Profile,” <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/turkmenistan>; Human Rights Watch. 2014. “World Report: Turkmenistan,” last accessed June 21, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/turkmenistan>

¹⁶ President Berdimuhammedov declared himself to be Arkadag - the Protector (of the Nation); in 2016 constitutional changes abolished term limits for the presidency, effectively making Berdimuhammedov president for life. See: Ferghana Information agency, “Turkmenistan: President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov is awarded the status of Arkadag – protector,” <http://enews.ferghananews.com/news.php?id=2003&print=1>;

“В Туркмении отменили возрастную планку для избрания президентом” [Turkmenistan abolishes the age cap for presidential candidates], Chronicle of Turkmenistan, September 14, 2016, <http://www.chrono-tm.org/2016/09/v-turkmenii-otmenili-voznrastnyuy-planku-dlya-izbraniya-prezidentom/>

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hands of relatives and close associates.¹⁷ Corruption has in turn captured all aspects of public life, extending from petty bribery at the local level to embezzlement at the highest reaches of the government and nepotism for the president's family. Rich natural resources are utilized to profit the small ruling elite as well as to invest in political patronage and fund pervasive security structures. Current financial difficulties, caused by low gas prices, have further exacerbated the level of corruption in Turkmenistan.¹⁸

Despite being the most economically dominant nation in Central Asia, Kazakhstan has shown no immunity to corruption. On the contrary, corruption here is also widespread, affecting political and judicial systems, police, public services and various administrations, as well as the distribution of natural resources.¹⁹

¹⁷ Freedom House points out that although nepotism and corruption are deeply entrenched in Turkmenistan, favoring family members is new to presidential politics. Unlike his predecessor, President Niyazov, who was an orphan, Berdimuhamedov has an extended family and deliberately promotes his relatives to high-ranking positions. See: Freedom House, "Turkmenistan Country Profile."

¹⁸ Freedom House, "Turkmenistan Country Profile", <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/turkmenistan>

¹⁹ Freedom House reports that the decline in Kazakhstan's corruption rating from 6.50 to 6.75 is due to ample evidence of pervasive corruption, such as high-profile cases of embezzlement around Kazakhstan's hosting of EXPO 2017, and the release of documents showing the president's grandson owning valuable assets in offshore accounts despite

Corruption also affects businesses and foreign investments, with companies reporting corruption as the number one constraint for doing business in Kazakhstan.²⁰

A common thread runs through all Central Asian countries when it comes to the problem of corruption, regardless of their relative level of development. In all five countries, available resources are misused to benefit those in power. Aside from reducing public trust in governmental institutions and fostering a lack of professionalism in government structures, corruption hinders economic growth, deters foreign investments and donors, promotes extremely uncompetitive markets and in turn exacerbates poverty for all but the elite few. This status quo does not allow for the diversification of economic activity, leaving all five countries dependent on vulnerable income sources such as natural resources or remittances from abroad. While these issues are not new for the region, the current economic crisis has turned the mere lack of

the president's call for Kazakhstanis to repatriate their wealth. See more at: Freedom House. Nations in Transit 2017. "Kazakhstan country profile," last accessed June 21, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/kazakhstan>

²⁰ The GAN Business Anti-Corruption Portal. "Kazakhstan Corruption Report," last updated: July, 2016, <https://www.business-anti-corruption.com/country-profiles/kazakhstan>

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domestic economic prospects and general poverty into an ongoing “brain drain” and even a potential security hazard.²¹

POVERTY

Studies show that corruption and poverty are inseparably linked, threatening the lives of many people, especially the poor.²² For example, a bribe demanded by a police officer may mean that a family can’t afford school fees or even food to eat; not being able to afford school means that children from poor families get a diminished chance for a better future – and so the cycle of poverty continues. Corruption also affects the basic services people depend on, such as drinking water or medical services, making them inadequate and expensive, since the monies allotted for those services go to the pockets of those in power. In countries rich with natural resources, corruption does not promote the use of wealth to benefit the broader population.

²¹ Bruce Pannier, “The Perfect Storm Of Corruption In Central Asia,” RFE/RL, June 4, 2016. <https://www.rferl.org/a/corruption-central-asia/27779246.html>

²² Having worked on the issues of corruption and poverty for a considerable time, Transparency International insists that corruption and poverty are inseparably linked; year after year, the Global Corruption Barometer confirms that corruption hits poor people hardest, with devastating consequences. Transparency International. “Poverty and Development,” last accessed June 21, 2018, https://www.transparency.org/topic/detail/poverty_and_development

In Central Asia, poverty remains widespread. In its report on poverty in Europe and Central Asia, the World Bank points out that although poverty statistics might look less extreme compared to regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, the region has its own specifics that make the consequences of poverty more difficult and expensive. For example, harsh and extremely cold winters that stretch for months lead to high heating bills and having to pay for more food (for more calories) to survive the cold, making essential needs more expensive than in other regions.²³ Statistically, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan stand out for their extreme poverty levels, with 32% of Tajikistan’s population living below the national poverty line and 32.1% in Kyrgyzstan. In Uzbekistan the figure is lower at 12.8%, and in Kazakhstan has the lowest in the region at 2.7%.²⁴ Recent data is not readily available for Turkmenistan.

In both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, poverty and the economic

²³ World Bank, “The Face of Poverty in Europe and Central Asia,” February 10, 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/02/10/face-of-poverty-in-europe-and-central-asia>

²⁴ The statistics are taken from Asian Development Bank and are for 2015; no data available for Turkmenistan. Asian Development Bank, last accessed June 21, 2018, <https://www.adb.org/>

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migration that results from it unfortunately play a central role in society. Of the roughly six million people in Kyrgyzstan, nearly two million live on less than \$2.50 each day. Thousands of families don't have electricity or running water.²⁵ Tajikistan in turn remains the poorest country in post-communist Eurasia. While money sent back from migrants working outside of the country comprises an equivalent of one third of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), it is a volatile income source, as exemplified by the fact that remittances fell by 67% in 2015.²⁶ Kyrgyzstan's economy similarly relies heavily on remittances from economic migrants.²⁷

In both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan people have profited very little from their countries' wealth of natural resources. Extraction and agricultural industries (gas in Turkmenistan and cotton in Uzbekistan), as well as other important sectors such

as healthcare and education, remain strictly under the control of the ruling elite, while the population increasingly lives in extreme poverty.²⁸

Kazakhstan, a regional leader in terms of economic development, has enjoyed relatively high economic growth in recent years, fueled mainly by its oil and gas industries. While the relative poverty numbers in Kazakhstan may look good, with only 2.7% of the population living below the national poverty line²⁹, there is a large portion of the population that hovers only slightly above it, and remains at permanent risk of destitution in the event of an economic downturn or personal crisis.³⁰ Therefore Kazakhstan's government must prioritize not only fighting poverty but also securing a stable middle class.

MIGRATION

Due to the economic pressures on most Central Asian countries, outward migration and its corresponding remittances

²⁵ World Bank. "Slideshow: Poverty Drives Daily Choices for People in the Kyrgyz Republic," February 7, 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/video/2014/02/07/face-of-poverty-in-the-kyrgyz-republic-slideshow>

²⁶ Freedom House, "Tajikistan Country Profile", <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/tajikistan>

²⁷ Eurasianews, "Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan greatly dependant on migrant labor," May 29, 2017, <http://eurasianews.info/en/important/kyrgyzstan-tajikistan-greatly-dependent-on-migrant-labor.html>

²⁸ For example, in Turkmenistan, President Berdimuhamedov's sisters allegedly control the healthcare and higher education sectors, both of which are highly corrupt and profitable. See: Freedom House, "Turkmenistan Country Profile."

²⁹ As of 2015. Asian Development Bank. Poverty in Kazakhstan, <https://www.adb.org/countries/kazakhstan/poverty>

³⁰ IRIN, "Poverty persists despite impressive economic growth," May 13, 2004, <http://www.irinnews.org/news/2004/05/13/poverty-persists-despite-impressive-economic-growth>

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are one of the main income sources for Central Asian families.³¹ The migration corridor between Central Asia and the Russian Federation, with labor as its driving force, is one of the largest and most stable in Eurasia and the world. It consists of an estimated 2.7 to 4.2 million people, or 10% to 16% of the economically active population of Central Asia.³² Labor migration and its associated remittances have been particularly important for Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, while Kazakhstan serves alongside Russia as an economic destination. At its peak in 2013, more than 2.7 million citizens of Uzbekistan, more than 1.2 million citizens of Tajikistan and almost 600,000 citizens of Kyrgyzstan were working in Russia.³³ In terms of remittances to GDP ratios, Kyrgyzstan was, in 2016, one of the most remittance-dependent country in the world (with 30.4% of

GDP coming from remittances), followed closely by Tajikistan (26.9% of GDP from remittances).³⁴ Anecdotal reports further demonstrate this with Shaun Walker, Moscow correspondent for the Guardian, noting that it is hard to find a man in his 20s or 30s in Tajikistan today who has not been to Russia to work.³⁵

Experts point out that labor migration and remittances have been key determinants of stability in the region. Remittances not only serve as a main source of income, but migration also takes pressure off local labor markets and the population of young men who might otherwise turn to domestic discontent or radicalization.³⁶ A downside to this exists, however, as an overdependence on remittances can suppress local economic development and, through inflation, artificially increase the cost

³¹ In 2013, the value of remittances sent back to Central Asia, was nearly US\$ 13.6 billion, of which US\$ 6.7 billion was sent to Uzbekistan, US\$ 4.2 billion to Tajikistan and US\$ 2.1 billion to Kyrgyzstan. Data compiled by the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, last accessed June 21, 2018.

http://www.cbr.ru/statistics/?Prtd=svs&ch=Par_17101#CheckedItem

³² Сергей Рязанцев, "Трудовая миграция из Центральной Азии в Россию в контексте экономического кризиса", № 55 Валдайские Записки, Август, 2016.

³³ Data compiled by the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation, last accessed June 21, 2018, http://www.fms.gov.ru/fms/activity/stats/Statistics/Svedeniya_v_otnoshenii_inostrannih_grazh

³⁴ The World Bank, "Personal Remittances, received (% of GDP)," last accessed June 21, 2018,

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRE.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=KG>

³⁵ Shaun Walker, "Democracy was hijacked. It got a bad name: the death of the post-Soviet dream," The Guardian, December 8, 2016,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/08/central-asia-tajikistan-kazakhstan-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-turkmenistan>

³⁶ Josef Lang, "Central Asia: the crisis of the migration model and its potential impact on the EU", OSW Commentary, April 25, 2017,

https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_237.pdf

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of living for an already vulnerable population.³⁷ A further issue is the ongoing “brain drain” of young, hard-working, and often intelligent youth to migrant destination countries, depriving Central Asian economies of local talent and ingenuity.

Labor migration from Central Asia is pushed by multiple factors such as rapid demographic growth in Central Asian states, structural poverty due to corruption and a lack of economic development beyond agriculture, as well as being officially facilitated by authoritarian governments who treat emigrant workers “as a unique safety valve to rid themselves of the most active individuals, i.e. those who pose the biggest threat to the regime”.³⁸ There is also a pull factor, principally easy access to the Russian labor market and Russia and Kazakhstan’s demand for cheap labor.

This use of migration as a salve for both economic and security problems has obvious external vulnerabilities. It is highly dependent on Russian labor demand and ease of market

access. Due to the ongoing economic crisis in Russia, migration has slowed with remittances from migrants declining by 50% over the last three years.³⁹ Combined with crackdowns on both illegal and quasi-legal immigration in Russia, a slowdown in remittances combined with a returning population puts dual pressures on vulnerable governments. Nate Schenkkan, Project Director of the Nations in Transit publication at Freedom House, points out the danger of this dependency, highlighting that the sudden return of millions of unemployed laborers back home, in the case of an ongoing, or deeper, Russian economic crisis, might turn into a dangerous test for the region. While the economic decline on its own might not lead to mass mobilization, in combination with other factors it might lead to a dangerous explosion.⁴⁰

Experts are now speculating on possible scenarios: the economic situation in Russia might stabilize and the flow of migrant workers from Central Asia could recover; or migrants could be redirected to the Muslim countries of the Middle East

³⁷ World Bank, “Kyrgyz Republic: A Robust Recovery...With Underlying Weaknesses”.

³⁸ Lang, “Central Asia: the crisis of the migration model and its potential impact on the EU.”

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Nate Schenkkan, “A Perfect Storm in Central Asia”, Foreign Policy, January 22, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/22/a-perfect-storm-in-central-asia/>

(Turkey and Iran), to East Asia (South Korea) or to the Persian Gulf (Qatar, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia). The latter option has its own inherent risks with promoting a further vector for fundamentalism and radicalism.⁴¹

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Anti-corruption efforts must be taken: Corruption and poverty are inseparably linked. The only way to eradicate poverty is through fighting corruption at all levels. Campaigns against poverty and corruption should not be regarded as separate agendas. Governments, donors and aid agencies should recognize that and integrate anti-corruption measures into all development and aid policies;

2. Diversification of the economy: A wider, less resource dependent economy is needed to provide employment, protect against economic shocks, and reduce overdependence on monopolized and corrupted resource extraction economies;

3. Reduce economic dependence on remittances through

local education and private sector development: While remittances may be beneficial in the immediate term, the resulting “brain drain” robs the region of many of the individuals best able to contribute to local economic and civil society development, particularly among the youth. Reducing dependence on this income source could also reduce the risk of population shocks following economic downturns or anti-migrant activities in migrant-receiving countries.

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⁴¹ Рязанцев, “Трудовая миграция из Центральной Азии в Россию в контексте экономического кризиса”, № 55 Валдайские Записки, Август, 2016

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<https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/uzbekistan%20brief%20final.pdf>

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FOOD SECURITY

The current state of food security in the Central Asia region is discussed below, along with related challenges and a proposed set of policy actions.

For the purposes of this report, we use the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) definition of the term food security, which is defined as “a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.¹

This definition differs from the understanding of food security prevailing in Central Asian countries, where it is strongly associated with national food self-sufficiency.² Although self-sufficiency also

represents an important aspect of food security, the emphasis in this report will be on the four pillars of food security defined by FAO, namely food availability, economic and physical access to food, food utilization and stability over time.³

THE CURRENT STATE OF FOOD SECURITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

The current state of food security in Central Asia is characterized by **undernutrition** and **micronutrient deficiencies**.^{4, 5}

Undernutrition is the outcome of undernourishment, which is associated with an “inability to acquire enough food, defined as a level of food intake insufficient to meet dietary energy

¹ FAO, “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia 2017,” Budapest, Hungary, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i8194e.pdf>, p. 62

² Ibid.; Jennifer Clapp. “Food Self-sufficiency: Making Sense of It, and When It Makes Sense,” Food Policy 66 (2017): 88-96.

³ FAO, “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia,” p.62.

⁴ Malnutrition has been defined as a physiological condition that takes many forms, including abnormal child development or growth, undernutrition, underweight, overweight and obesity, micronutrient deficiencies, and noncommunicable diseases (International Food Policy Research Institute [IFPRI] 2016. Global nutrition report 2016: From promise to impact: Ending malnutrition by 2030. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute, <http://ebrary.ifpri.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15738coll2/id/130354>)

⁵ FAO, “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia.”

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requirements”.⁶ The main outcomes of undernutrition include being underweight, stunted (too short for one’s age), wasted (too thin for one’s height), and deficient in vitamins and minerals (micronutrient malnutrition).

Based on FAO estimates, Tajikistan has the highest prevalence of undernutrition in the Central Asian region, with 30.1% of the population (2.6 million people) classed as undernourished in 2014-2016.⁷ However undernourishment is still a concern elsewhere in the region, such as in Kyrgyzstan (6.4% of the population), Uzbekistan (6.3%), and Turkmenistan (5.5%). Kazakhstan is the exception in Central Asia, categorized as a country with “residual undernutrition, persisting micronutrient deficiencies and rapidly growing rates of obesity and overweight”.⁸

Micronutrient deficiencies, another form of malnutrition, are also widespread in Central Asia. Low intake of vitamin A, iron, vitamin D, folic acid, iodine and calcium⁹ are the most common causes

⁶ Ibid., p.62

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.: iv

⁹ Based on FAO calculations, 32.2% of children and 33% of adults have a vitamin A deficiency in the region (FAO, “Regional Overview of Food Insecurity: Europe and Central

of micronutrient deficiencies in the region.¹⁰ FAO suggests that micronutrient deficiencies are associated with populations with low household incomes whose diets have lower dietary quality and nutrient diversity.¹¹ Overall, micronutrient deficiencies affecting both adults and children are a public health concern resulting in reduced human capacity, and productivity losses. Micronutrient deficiencies can also lead to increased susceptibility to diseases, reduced cognitive development, pregnancy complications, and child growth failure.¹²

Although the prevalence of another form of malnutrition, overnutrition, is relatively low in Central Asia compared to other regions, obesity rates among the adult population are rapidly growing in the region.¹³ FAO reports significant growth

Asia. The Food Insecurity Transition,” Budapest, Hungary, 2016, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6877e.pdf>

¹⁰ FAO, “Addressing social and economic burden of malnutrition through nutrition-sensitive agricultural and food policies in the region of Europe and Central Asia,” Agenda item #6. 39th Session, European Commission on Agriculture. Budapest, Hungary, 2015, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mo398e.pdf>

¹¹ FAO, “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia.”

¹² Zulfiqar A. Bhutta, and Rehana A. Salam. “Global Nutrition Epidemiology and Trends.” *Annals of Nutrition and Metabolism* 61 (2012): 19-27.

¹³ FAO, “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia.”

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in overweight and obesity rates in Kazakhstan (41% growth from 2010 to 2014), and suggests that **overnutrition** could be a result of low income, with populations consuming cheaper foods with high levels of total fat, sugar and other refined carbohydrates, as well as a lack of awareness about healthy diets.¹⁴

CHALLENGES AND THREATS

Food security problems and challenges are associated with geographic, biological, economic, social, and environmental issues.¹⁵ Current challenges in Central Asia can also be grouped into 2 categories, depending on whether the problems are a result of difficulties related to food supply or demand.¹⁶

Academic literature highlights that **poverty** remains the most important obstacle to food security in developing countries.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ty Beal, and Daniel Ervin. "The Geography of Malnutrition." *The Professional Geographer* 70, no. 1 (2018): 47-59

¹⁶ Regmi, and Meade. "Demand Side Drivers of Global Food Security." *Global Food Security* 2, no. 3 (2013): 166-71

¹⁷ Alan D. Dangour, Rosemary Green, Barbara Häsler, Jonathan Rushton, Bhavani Shankar, and Jeff Waage. "Linking Agriculture and Health in Low- and Middle-income Countries: An Interdisciplinary Research Agenda." *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* 71, no. 2

Therefore, one of the primary challenges associated with food security and nutrition problems in Central Asia is **low household income**. Despite recent positive economic developments in the region, a large percentage of households (32% in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, 12.8% in Uzbekistan)¹⁸ still live below the poverty line, especially in rural areas.^{19, 20} The portion of Uzbekistan's rural population living on low incomes reached 75% in 2015.²¹

Rising food prices can also have severe effects on the Central Asian population, as large percentages of household incomes are spent on food, and many countries in the region

(2012): 222-28; Suresh C. Babu, "Poverty, Food Security, and Nutrition in Central Asia: A Case Study of the Kyrgyz Republic." *Elsevier*, vol. 25(6) (2000): 647-60.

¹⁸ Asian Development Bank 2017, Central Asian counties profiles, assessed April 10, 2018 <https://www.adb.org/countries/tajikistan/poverty>

¹⁹ For example, while 40% of the rural population in Kyrgyzstan is living in poverty, poverty affects only 24% of the urban population (FAO, "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia").

²⁰ Johan Swinnen, and Kristine Van Herck. "Food Security and Sociopolitical Stability in Eastern Europe and Central Asia." In *Food Security and Sociopolitical Stability, Food Security and Sociopolitical Stability*, Chapter 15. Oxford University Press, 2013.

²¹ United Nations Development Program, "Uzbekistan country information," accessed April 10, 2018. <http://www.uz.undp.org/content/uzbekistan/en/home/countryinfo.html>

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are highly dependent on food imports. For example, people in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan spend 80% of their household incomes on food.²² Furthermore, Tajikistan produces only 31% of its food domestically, leaving the country – like many in the region – exposed to fluctuations in international food prices.²³

The populations of Central Asian countries are projected to grow rapidly in the coming decades, with Tajikistan's population expected to expand by 68.5% to 5.8 million by 2050, and Kyrgyzstan's by 38.9% to 2.3 million over the same period.²⁴ This projected growth, as well as changes in lifestyle and consumption patterns, will put additional stress on natural resources (including land and water), and agricultural production.²⁵

²² Marlène Laruelle, and Sébastien Peyrouse. *Globalizing Central Asia : Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development*. Armonk, NY : Sharpe, 2013.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "World Population Prospects. The 2017 Revision. Key Findings and Advance Tables."

²⁵ FAO. "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia."

The above threats can be grouped around the dimension of access to food, which is vital for food security in the region.

A lack of investment in agricultural equipment and technology has contributed greatly to the challenges facing agricultural production systems in Central Asia, which have become less sustainable and more vulnerable to external shocks such as natural hazards.²⁶ The magnitude of the problem is increased by the overall investment climate, the difficulty of doing business in Central Asian countries and the discouragingly high interest rates (often over 20%) charged by commercial lenders involved in agricultural production.²⁷

Given the dependence of some countries' economies in the region on the agricultural sector,²⁸ investments in agriculture represent an important aspect of overall development of the region.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Kamiljon T. Akramov, "International Food Prices, Agricultural Transformation, and Food Security in Central Asia." *Development in Practice* 21, no. 4 (2011): 741-54.

²⁸ For example, in Tajikistan agriculture constitutes 27% of GDP, and the share of the total labor population working in agriculture is 58% (FAO, "Addressing social and economic burden of malnutrition through nutrition-sensitive agricultural and food policies in the region of Europe and Central Asia").

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More **efficient use of natural resources** is another challenge to be addressed to ameliorate the state of food security. Based on the FAO overview of Central Asian natural resources, the region is particularly rich in land resources suitable for agriculture.²⁹ However, much land is already experiencing degradation, depletion and overexploitation.³⁰ Research by Nkonya et al. (2016) compares the costs of investing in more sustainable land management to the costs of inaction, demonstrating a powerful argument in favor of these types of investments in the region.³¹ Furthermore, it shows that the major drivers behind soil degradation in Central Asia include population growth and climate change, which also have an adverse impact on the region's limited natural resources and land management practices.

Both factors of investment and efficient use of natural resources influence food availability, which is central to food

security in the region.

Likewise, **extreme weather events such as droughts and floods** have caused considerable damage and production losses in the crop, livestock, fisheries and forestry sectors. For instance, a severe drought in 2000 and 2001 in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan led to the unavailability of drinking and irrigation water, and caused an increase in slow and chronic forms of malnutrition due to a reduction in household consumption of meat and dairy products.³² In addition, due to the drought of 2007-2008 in Tajikistan, crop yields fell by over 40%, which resulted in undernourishment of 2.2 million people.³³

Another problem is substantial **water withdrawal** for agricultural use, which causes higher levels of water stress in Central Asian countries. According to the World Resource Institute's projections, Central Asia will be experiencing 'high' or 'extremely high' levels of water stress by 2020.³⁴

²⁹ FAO, "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia."

³⁰ The estimated annual cost of land degradation in Central Asia in 2001-2009, due to land use and cover change, was approximately USD 5.85 billion, constituting high shares of the countries' GDP (Ephraim Nkonya, Alisher Mirzabaev; Joachim Von Braun, "Economics of Land Degradation and Improvement. A Global Assessment for Sustainable Development." Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016.)

³¹ Ibid.

³² FAO, "FAO's Role in the 2008/2009 Humanitarian Food Security Appeal for Tajikistan", http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/emergencies/docs/tajikistan_appeal_2008_2009.pdf

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Luck, M., M. Landis, F. Gassert. "Aqueduct Water Stress Projections: Decadal Projections of Water Supply and Demand Using CMIP5 GCMs." Technical Note, 2015. Washington, D.C.: World Resources Institute.

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Furthermore, **climate change** severely impacts agricultural capacities by affecting precipitation regimes in the region, and contributing to frequent heat extremes and increasing aridity.³⁵ According to FAO, climate change is resulting in increased damage and losses to the region's crop, livestock, forestry and fisheries subsectors.³⁶ Research has found that irrigation demand in Uzbekistan could increase by up to 16% by 2080 with an increase in mean temperatures in the region of 6.5°C.³⁷ Meanwhile, studies confirm that, without implementing adaptation measures or technological progress, yields for almost all crops in Uzbekistan are expected to drop by 20–50% by 2050 (in comparison to the 2000–2009 baseline) due to a combination of factors including heat and water stress.³⁸

wri.org/publication/aqueduct-water-stress-projections.

³⁵ Reyer, Christopher P.O, Ilona Otto, M. Adams, Sophie Albrecht, Torsten Baarsch, Florent Carlsburg, Matti Coumou, Dim Eden, Alexander Ludi, Eva Marcus, Rachel Mengel, Matthias Mosello, Beatrice Robinson, Carl-Friedrich Schleussner, Olivia Serdeczny, and Judith Stagl. "Climate Change Impacts in Central Asia and Their Implications for Development." *Regional Environmental Change* 17, no. 6 (2017): 1639-650.

³⁶ FAO, "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia."

³⁷ World Bank, "Uzbekistan—overview of climate change activities", World Bank, Washington DC, 2013.

³⁸ Sutton W, Srivastava J, Neumann J. Looking beyond the horizon. How climate change impacts and adaptation responses will reshape agriculture in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. World Bank, Washington, D.C, 2013.

The aforementioned climate-related and geographical factors affect overall food stability in Central Asia, the fourth pillar of food security.

Another problem both contributing to agricultural supply chain malfunction and food insecurity are **food losses**, which are defined as "the decrease in quantity or quality of food, [which] occurs during production (harvest-mature stage) and at various distribution segments of the food supply chain, up to retail".³⁹ The bulk of losses in the Central Asian region occur at the agricultural production and post-harvest handling and storage stages of food supply chains. According to FAO, these losses are largely due to inadequate harvest, post-harvest and storage equipment and technologies.⁴⁰ Food losses are linked to the third pillar of food security – food utilization.

All of these factors affect the ability of Central Asian countries to produce the food necessary to meet the nutritional needs of their populations, and contribute to the issues of undernutrition

³⁹ FAO, "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia," p. 52

⁴⁰ Ibid.

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mentioned in the previous section. This means that the region is increasingly dependent on food imports, which brings with it its own set of challenges.

Furthermore, the growing dependence of some Central Asian countries on food imports, and the overall poverty of the region's population, give rise to the import of **cheap low-quality or even fake foods**, which is considered another threat to food security in Central Asia. Being one of the world's largest food-producing countries, China exports counterfeit or contaminated food worldwide, and fake food supplies have begun to be a global concern. Fake and toxic foods include mislabeled meat, plastic rice, fake eggs, salmonella-tainted seafood, carcinogenic recycled cooking oil and pesticide-soaked fruit.⁴¹ Recently, Chinese authorities prosecuted the persons involved in the production and supply of rat, fox and mink meat, sold as mutton for restaurants in Shanghai and neighboring provinces.⁴² Another striking example,

⁴¹ Jonathan Kaiman, "China arrests 900 in fake meat scandal", May 3, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-china-22460711/china-in-spotlight-over-mislabelled-meat-and-poor-hygiene>

⁴² BBC news, "China media: Fake food scandals", May 6, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22424129>

the sale of diseased pigs that were not destroyed, indicates the chaotic state of dead livestock and poultry processing.⁴³ Although, to the best of our knowledge, there are no officially registered cases of fake food supply in Central Asia, the prospect of consumption of low-quality, contaminated and fake foods imported to the Central Asian region could pose a serious threat to food security and public health.⁴⁴

Given the challenges facing Central Asian countries' agricultural sectors, the ability to source quality, safe food imports is vital to the region's ability to meet the food security needs of its population.

ACTIONS

This overview of key challenges confirms that food security is a complex problem that warrants attention and action on the part of Central Asian governments.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Emma O'Brien, "Cracking down on China's dangerous fake food sector." Bloomberg, August 7, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-fake-food-sector-unlicensed-products-knock-offs-supply-chain-contamination-public-health-a7880341.html>

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FAO suggests that Central Asian countries are recognizing the importance of addressing nutrition issues in order to achieve food security and improve the wellbeing of their citizens, but argues that such recognition needs to be combined with coordinated measures – such as **social protection, rural development, and nutrition awareness programs** – and a focus on the underlying causes of each type of malnutrition.⁴⁵

As mentioned in the second section of this chapter, one of the challenges for the region remains ensuring access to food for low-income groups and populations living below the poverty line. To address this challenge, a set of **programs** should be implemented **to ameliorate proper access to food for the Central Asian population** and resolve the problems of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. According to FAO, **well-designed social protection policies and programs** are important instruments for improving the well-being of the poorest people.⁴⁶ For example, in 2015, the Kyrgyz government adopted the National Social Protection Program for 2015–2017, which aims to shift up to 45%

of social assistance spending toward the Monthly Benefit for Poor Families with Children Program.⁴⁷ Other Central Asian countries should also implement similar policy measures to enhance national and regional food security.

Scholars highlight that achieving food security requires **an integrated approach** that addresses all forms of malnutrition, the productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, resilience of food systems and the sustainable use of biodiversity and genetic resources. They also propose to incorporate food security into the larger human security agenda in order to stress its relevance to conventional security requirements.⁴⁸

Furthermore, FAO encourages improving nutrition in ways that are culturally appropriate and economically, politically, and environmentally sustainable. FAO advocates for the development of sustainable food and agricultural systems that are resilient to natural hazards and climate change which is especially

⁴⁵ FAO, "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia."

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Mark L. Wahlqvist, John Chang, and Ya-Chen Chiu. "Rethinking the Food Security Debate in Asia: Some Missing Ecological and Health Dimensions and Solutions." *Food Security* 4, no. 4 (2012): 657-70

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relevant for the Central Asian region.⁴⁹ These measures will help not only to increase productivity and incomes, but also to safeguard the natural resources on which production depends.

As a measure to increase and sustain agricultural growth rates and food production, scholars suggest that Central Asian countries need concerted efforts **to improve farmers' access to agricultural machinery and services**, modern inputs, and markets.⁵⁰ FAO also calls for strengthening the rule of law, as well as providing immediate government **support to existing and potential investors** through targeted and coordinated actions.

Scholars also note that agricultural policies often focus on production rather than on building resilience.⁵¹ In many instances, comprehensive strategies for improving the resilience and adaptability of agricultural systems to climate change are

missing in practice. In addition, as concluded by FAO, there is limited or no inter-ministerial cooperation on tackling climate change and implementing policy responses.⁵² Consequently, there is also a need to mainstream disaster risk reduction and climate change into national planning instruments, covering agriculture, environment, natural resource management and rural development.⁵³

In addition, **increasing resource efficiency** by reducing food losses and waste could contribute to meeting future food needs and safeguarding the region's scarce natural resource base. Finally, moving beyond the realm of improving agricultural production, measures to guarantee the safety of food imports as well as locally-produced food are vital. Experts have recommended measures such as strict food safety regulations, and corruption-free administration displaying maximum transparency and a willingness to share information.⁵⁴ Instant food safety tests that

⁴⁹ FAO, "Regional Strategic Review Paper: Europe and Central Asia," Budapest, Hungary, 2016, <http://www.fao.org/3/b-i6102e.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Akramov, "International Food Prices, Agricultural Transformation, and Food Security in Central Asia."

⁵¹ Volk, T., Erjavec, E., Rac, I. and M. Rednak, "Policy Report", prepared under the EU 7th Framework Programme AGRiCiSTRADE project, 2015.

⁵² FAO, "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia."

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ O'Brien, "Cracking down on China's dangerous fake food sector."

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can be used by consumers, companies and government agencies complement food safety measures and help with the identification of fake or toxic food.⁵⁵ Experts also propose to develop and use technology to detect fake and contaminated food supplies. For example, Alibaba, a Chinese multinational e-commerce, retail, Internet and technology conglomerate is already using blockchain technology to trace the provenance of food.⁵⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above overview of the current food security situation and challenges in Central Asia, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The definition of food security in Central Asian countries should be reframed to reflect the FAO's food security dimensions, i.e. food availability, economic and physical access to food, food

utilization and stability over time. Likewise, food security should be incorporated into the larger human security agenda in order to stress its relevance to conventional security requirements.

2. Government policies need to address not only the problem of undernutrition, but also micronutrient deficiencies and overnutrition. Coordinated measures in social protection and rural development, together with nutrition awareness programs, will help Central Asian governments to advance in resolving food security crises. Targeted support to existing and potential investors is also a necessary measure for agricultural growth and increase of food production.

3. As recommended by FAO, sustainable food and agricultural systems resilient to natural hazards and climate change should be developed. The governments of Central Asian countries should specifically acknowledge the need for adequate policy responses, aiming to reduce disaster risk and climate change threats.

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In 2017 a series of terrorist attacks in Istanbul, St Petersburg, Stockholm, and New York brought stark international attention to Central Asia, once again portraying the region as a hotbed of terrorism and religious extremism.¹ This so called “danger discourse” is nothing new to the region: ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asia’s rich and multi-faceted character has been increasingly reduced to the ethnic and radical Islamist threats that it poses to the region and abroad.² While very real, the threat of terrorism and religious

¹ The four deadly attacks, all in 2017, were carried out by ethnic Uzbeks. See: Goktug Sonmez, “Violent Extremism among Central Asians: The Istanbul, St. Petersburg, Stockholm, and New York City Attacks”, CTC SENTINEL, December 2017, https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2017/12/CTC-Sentinel_Vol10Iss11-18.pdf

² John Heathershaw, Madeleine Reeves, David Lewis, “Discourses of Danger and Western Policy Towards Central Asia in Light of Recent Events”, Chatham House, September 13, 2010,

extremism is not exclusive to this region, but rather a global phenomenon. In Central Asia, the threat of radicalization is itself a consequence of numerous unresolved social, economic and political problems. These include authoritarian governments, weak economies, endemic corruption, the absence of opportunities, and the restriction, if not total absence, of basic rights and freedoms. It is these issues that provide the spark for ethnic tensions and conflict rather than any natural regional predisposition towards chaos and radicalism. Despite this, the relative stability that has been maintained so far is indeed fragile and, if systemic issues are not addressed, terrorism and religious extremism could continue to grow and metastasize both regionally and globally.

Bhavna Davé, a senior lecturer in Central Asian politics with the School of Oriental and African Studies, explains that radicalization is not a single phenomenon, but is in fact connected to numerous social, economic and political problems, such as the nature of the government and its

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/130910summary.pdf>

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inability to provide welfare and proper education, development, respect for freedoms, etc. It is also related to propaganda, lack of education, and the lack of in-depth knowledge and accurate understanding about Islam.³ The factors contributing to radicalization in Central Asia therefore are complex and varied, and are both internal and external.

Internally, there are unresolved questions of identity as well as the complicated relationship between religion and the state. Islam enjoys almost one and a half thousand years of history in the region of Central Asia. Despite persecutions during the Soviet period, Islam never fully disappeared.⁴ Since the end of the Soviet Union the newly independent countries of Central Asia, both with and without government approval, sought to build or recreate national identities bridging culture and religion. Researchers have noted that because of institutional limitations in these new countries, often led by their previous Communist

leaders, “the lack of national, visionary, and long-term policies in the country [Kyrgyzstan] has meant that many have turned to religion to find the sense of identity and natural belonging that was a trademark of the Soviet Union but disappeared with its collapse.”⁵ Confronted with contradictory discourses on identity within the Central Asian republics, many have searched for identity and self-determination in Islam, including ideas and variants imported from abroad such as Wahhabist traditions from Saudi Arabia.

The State has often attempted to co-opt this, promoting “good” verses “bad” Islam, persecuting variants or beliefs that don’t conform to the government line. This in turn has led to dissatisfaction and further radicalization among practitioners of non-approved Islam. According to Mariya Omelicheva, “to be able to exercise control over the processes of Islamic revival, the governments of Central Asia have relied on a dual strategy of co-optation and oppression of religion. Government repression

³ Bhavna Dave, “The Complex Reality of Radicalisation in Central Asia”, *New Eastern Europe*, October 31, 2017, <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2017/10/31/complex-reality-radicalisation-central-asia/>

⁴ Despite the longstanding perception, that there was no place for religion in the Soviet Union, experts argue, that even during the Soviet period, there was a certain recognition of religion. For more, see Abashin S., “A Prayer for Rain: Practicing Being Soviet and Muslim”, *Journal of Islamic Studies*. Vol. 25. No. 2 (2014). P. 178–200.

⁵ Aidai Masykhanova, “Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan Is No Myth”, *The Diplomat*, June 22, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/radicalization-in-kyrgyzstan-is-no-myth/>; Anna Matveeva, “Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan. On the Way to the Caliphate?” *The RUSI Journal*, Volume 163, 2018 - *Issue 1*, pages 30-46, <https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/gXEVaGDNChmtBTJGUXJe/full>

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has served as a temporal deterrent that drove some Islamists underground. Yet, over time, it resulted in more militancy and terrorism.”⁶

As an example, the Fergana Valley has become a center for the formation, development, and dissemination of radical Islam in Central Asia. Being ethnically and culturally divided among the three countries of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, this region has become a focus of difficult problems: disputed border territories, interethnic tensions, and the activities of Islamic radicals.⁷ A network of semi-underground madrassas and mosques was active even in Soviet times. Following social and economic pressures arising from the fall of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and 90s, authorities responded by adopting restrictive and repressive measures against any form of uncontrolled political participation, which resulted in growing tensions and the emergence of radical groups fighting against the

Central Asian states. Opponents either fled abroad or created militant groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), one of the main terrorist organizations in Central Asia at the time. Its fighters often acted as Al Qaeda and Taliban allies in neighbouring Afghanistan. At first, they fought against then Uzbek president Islam Karimov, with the goal of establishing an Islamic state in Uzbekistan.

However, the IMU progressively turned towards the promotion of internationalist Islamism rather than the resolution of national issues. This was most clearly demonstrated in 2015 when the IMU leader publically announced that he was joining the Islamic State.⁸ This event provoked a schism between the regionalist and internationalist parts of the IMU, diminishing but not eliminating the movement.

This radicalization quickly spread across borders. In 2002 an earlier splinter group, the Islamic Jihad Union, was the first Central Asian organization to use suicide attacks as a modus operandi. This group has also been affiliated with both Al Qaeda

⁶ Mariya Omelicheva, “Terrorism in Central Asia: Dynamics, Dimensions and Sources”, Education about Asia, Volume 18, Nr. 3 (January 2013), file:///C:/Users/Admin/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wekyb3d8bbwe/TempState/Downloads/OmelichevaterrorismCentralAsia.pdf

⁷ Igor Rotar, “Will the Fergana Valley Become a Hotbed of Destabilization in Central Asia?” The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, October 3, 2012, <https://jamestown.org/program/will-the-fergana-valley-become-a-hotbed-of-destabilization-in-central-asia/>

⁸ Damon Mehl, “The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Opens a Door to the Islamic State”, CTC SENTINEL, June 2015, <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2015/06/CTCSentinel-Vol8Issue610.pdf>

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and the Taliban, and its fighters are operating throughout Uzbekistan. Tajik fighters who left the IMU have created the Jamaat Ansarullah in 2006, while Katiba Tawhid Al Jihad is another group particularly active in Kyrgyzstan and mainly involved in recruiting fighters for Syria. Finally, the Jamaat Imam Bukhari is another fighting movement in Syria composed of approximately 400 Uzbek citizens – most of them having past military experience in Afghanistan.⁹

Continuing with internal factors, issues contributing to dissatisfaction and radicalization include authoritarian regimes, corruption, and the absence of opportunities. Observers have noted that, “Central Asia’s biggest problem is not conflict, but stagnation: the consistency of corruption, the chimera

of change”¹⁰ and that “some of the best weapons against extremism may be as simple as a good job and a regular talk with the imam.”¹¹ As noted in previous chapters, the absence of opportunities at home has had the effect of forcing many to go to work in Russia. While there, Central Asian migrants, suffering from discrimination and isolation, are particularly vulnerable to radical propaganda and recruitment by violent extremist networks.¹² The precarious position of migrant workers from Central Asia in Russia has further worsened with the deterioration of Russia Central Asian migrants, suffering ultimately caused by the inability of Central Asian governments to provide their citizens with opportunities at home.

⁹ A comprehensive overview of various radical groups in Central Asia is not possible within the frames of this paper; for an extensive overview, see: Erlan Karin, “Central Asia: Facing Radical Islam”, Ifri, February 2017, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/mv98_erlan_karin_central_asia_radical_islam_eng_2017.pdf.
Józef Lang, “Exporting Jihad – Islamic terrorism from Central Asia”, The Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), 12 April 2017, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_236.pdf as well as numerous reports by Crisis Group, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia>

¹⁰ Sarah Kendzior, “The Curse of Stability in Central Asia”, Foreign Policy, 19 February 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/02/19/the-curse-of-stability-in-central-asia/>

¹¹ James D. Durso, “Deradicalization in Uzbekistan: It’s About the Economy”, The Diplomat, 8 February 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/deradicalization-in-uzbekistan-its-about-the-economy/>

¹² For a more thorough exploration of this topic, see: Mohammed S Elshimi, Raffaello Pantucci, Sarah Lain and Nadine L Salman, “Understanding the Factors Contributing to Radicalisation Among Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia”, RUSI Occasional Paper, April 2018, https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/RUSI-report_Central-Asia-Radicalisation_ENG_24042018.pdf

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Externally, the region of Central Asia has been long regarded as a “buffer zone” between major powers and spheres of influence. Stability in the region is therefore considered a major value, leading Western powers (in addition to Russia and China) to close their eyes on human rights abuses and corruption, giving existing regimes carte blanche in repressing any discontent in order to maintain power.¹³ Additionally, in light of the growing threat of religious extremism, there is a widespread belief that stability can be guaranteed only by long-serving presidents and repressive police systems. The paradox, however, is that in the long run, authoritarian leaders themselves are the ones hindering positive development and contributing to dissatisfaction and hopelessness, which in turn leads to further radicalization and the strengthening of underground Islamist groups, as well as anti-state animosity.¹⁴

Additionally, external conflicts such as the constant instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan have also allowed Central Asian fighters to

train intensively and acquire technical expertise. Criminal enterprises such as drug trafficking from neighboring countries, combined with weak borders, have also provided a steady supply of financial resources. The 9/11 attacks and the ensuing military campaign against the Taliban and Al Qaeda heightened the cross-border nature of terrorist groups, linking the increase of threats in Central Asia with the deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan. The United States-led “war on terror” in 2003 did little to suppress the threat.

Many experts see a new wave of radicalization taking place in Central Asia in recent years.¹⁵ Growing geopolitical hotspots, and the ongoing Syrian war in particular, have attracted foreign fighters from around the region and the world.¹⁶ According to data provided by the Soufan Center, as of 2016-17, around 5,000 foreign fighters from Central Asia

¹³ Nate Schenkkan, “Getting Real(ist) on U.S. Policy in Central Asia”, Freedom House, 1 February 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/blog/getting-realist-us-policy-central-asia>

¹⁴ Cholpon Orozobekova, “Central Asia’s Presidents-for-Life”, The Diplomat, February 5, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/02/central-asias-presidents-for-life/>

¹⁵ Erlan Karin, “Central Asia: Facing Radical Islam”, IFRI, February 2017, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rmv98_erlan_karin_central_asia_radical_islam_eng_2017.pdf

¹⁶ Although the number of fighters from Central Asia is often exaggerated, the problem is nonetheless very real. Over the years, Central Asian citizens have created a number of ethnic brigades in Syria and Iraq, which form part of well-known terrorist organisations like ISIS and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham; hundreds of Central Asian citizens now fight in their ranks, often as part of conflicting radical groups. See, Erlan Karin, “Central Asia: Facing Radical Islam”, IFRI, February 2017, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rmv98_erlan_karin_central_asia_radical_islam_eng_2017.pdf

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have gone to Syria or Iraq, with around 500 returnees.¹⁷ This breaks down among the five Central Asian countries as follows: more than 500 from Kazakhstan, more than 500 from Kyrgyzstan (44 returned), around 1,300 from Tajikistan (147 returned), more than 400 from Turkmenistan, and more than 1,500 from Uzbekistan. The creation of the ISIS, while temporarily decreasing domestic threats due to the division of fighters, has contributed to the long-term problem of more radicalized and trained returnees.

CONCLUSION

Determining the causes of radicalization and offering solutions for preventing it is not an easy task, as the nature of radicalization is not fully understood. In any attempt to do so, it is crucial not to jump to easy but false assumptions and conclusions. The International Crisis Group itself has faced accusations of this, with a collection of specialist scholars in the region stating in an open letter that it is crucial to better understand the nature of religious change in Central Asia in order to put the small minority of genuinely extremist groups in Central Asia in their

¹⁷ The Soufan Center, "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees", October 2017, <http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf>

proper context.¹⁸

While there have been notable victories against violent extremism, specifically against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, there is no doubt that radical ideology and contributing institutional factors remain.¹⁹ According to the latest report by the Soufan Center, even after losing territorial control of its caliphate, ISIS and its global sympathizers will survive in some form and continue to pose a security threat. Furthermore, returnees will present a serious challenge to the countries they return to for years to come.²⁰ Returnees, experts point out, are not a monolithic entity: "while some will continue to remain unreconstructed jihadists and will re-enter militant life as soon as they are given a chance, others, are disillusioned, traumatized, and wanting to return to normal life."²¹ Children and

¹⁸ An open letter from Central Asia scholars to the International Crisis Group, along with Crisis Group's response "Understanding Islamic Radicalization in Central Asia", The Diplomat, 20 January 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/understanding-islamic-radicalization-in-central-asia/>

¹⁹ Bendaoudi Abdelillah, "After the "almost 100 percent" Defeat of ISIS, What about its Ideology?" Aljazeera, May 8, 2018, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2018/05/100-percent-defeat-isis-ideology-180508042421376.html>

²⁰ The Soufan Center, "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees."

²¹ Tatiana Kanunnikova, "As ISIS fighters return, Central Asia braces for attacks", Asia Times, February 4, 2018, <http://www.atimes.com/prevent-looming-nightmare-central-asia/>

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women among them need particular support. Therefore, working out a strategy for dealing with returnees, including rehabilitation programs, will be of a great importance.

The vulnerability of Central Asian states to external factors such as international terrorist networks and returnee extremists will depend largely on domestic considerations. The unresolved questions of identities, freedom of religious expression, corruption, stagnant authoritarian regimes, and the development of local economies need to be addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendations for preventing radicalization and reintegrating those who seek to leave must recognize the complex nature of radicalization, emphasizing international cooperation, economic development, improving state institutions and anti-corruption efforts, and developing effective reintegration strategies.

1. International support for human rights: For international partners, Central Asia should not be viewed only as a buffer zone. Governments must not close their eyes to human rights abuses in

the name of stability;

2. Improving the economy and battling corruption: Real economic reforms must provide opportunities for people to work and stay in the region, rather than search for tenuous opportunities abroad;

3. Improve both secular and religious education: Schools should meet basic standards and prepare students adequately for employment or higher education. Additionally, religious schools, if applicable, should meet minimum standards of education;

4. Recognize free religious expression: Human rights violations, particularly in regards to non-violent religious expression, must stop;

5. Greater regional cooperation to address violent extremism: No Central Asian Republic is immune to the threats posed by radicalization. The region should cooperate in regards to information-sharing as well as improving institutional competence and local economic opportunities. Ideally this should involve cooperation with Russia and the significant Central Asian diaspora;

6. Develop and/or improve a strategy to address the return of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) to Central Asian countries:

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Rehabilitation programs must be created and funded. As former fighters will be returning home, stability is vital in order to rehabilitate those coming back and offer them real employment and educational opportunities at home. Special attention should be paid to youth returnees.

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WATER DISPUTE AND POOR MANAGEMENT OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATER RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

Water management and water allocation in Central Asia are becoming an important policy area in the region. Academic literature suggests that by investigating water relations in the region, overall political trends regarding conflict and cooperation could be identified.²²

It has been also noted that upstream-induced water stress

²² Leila Zakhirova, "The International Politics of Water Security in Central Asia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 10 (2013): 1994-2013.

has an important influence on the nature of transboundary relations.²³

Recent analysis conducted by De Stefano et al. (2017) where environmental, political, and economic metrics were assessed, has identified Central Asia as a region with a high risk of hydropolitical tensions.²⁴

THE CAUSES OF WATER DISPUTES IN CENTRAL ASIA

Water disputes among the Central Asian countries can be explained by historical, geographical, climate-related, political, socio-economic and other factors.

In the USSR the main principles of water allocation were set

²³ Munia, H., Guillaume, J.H.A., Mirumachi, N., Porkka, M., Wada, Y., Kumm, M., "Water stress in global transboundary river basins: significance of upstream water use on downstream stress". *Environ. Res. Lett.* 11 (2016), 014002.

²⁴ De Stefano, Petersen-Perlman, Sproles, Eynard, and Wolf. "Assessment of Transboundary River Basins for Potential Hydro-political Tensions." *Global Environmental Change* 45 (2017): 35-46.

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up by the Soviet Ministry of Water Resources, which decided on the amount of water that should be released for irrigation purposes during the growing season.²⁵ The highly integrated network of irrigation systems in the region functioned across the Soviet countries and was based on geography, without taking into account the existing administrative boundaries of the Soviet Central Asian republics. Consequently, the collapse of the USSR led to a breakdown of the centralized water management system.

Furthermore, as a result of the dissolution of the USSR, coal, oil, gas, and electricity supplies from the resource-rich downstream countries (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) to upstream countries (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) have declined dramatically from 1991.²⁶ To compensate for the significant loss in imported energy, Kyrgyzstan changed the operation of its Toktogul reservoir from irrigation to electric power production

²⁵ Thomas Bernauer, Tobias Siegfried, and Nils Petter Gleditsch. "Climate Change and International Water Conflict in Central Asia." *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 1 (2012): 227-39.

²⁶ Kai Wegerich, Kai. "Coping with disintegration of a river-basin management system: Multi-dimensional issues in Central Asia." *Water Policy* 6(4) (2004), p.33

mode.²⁷ Hence, the share of hydropower in Kyrgyzstan's total energy supply grew to 90%, and water supplies to downstream countries decreased.

In the absence of a centralized system of water allocation, approaches to the shared use of water resources vary from "an idea of sole ownership by the upstream riparian" to "a more liberal approach where the resource is managed collectively for the common good".²⁸

The non-participation of some Central Asian countries in international water treaties²⁹ and the slow development of

²⁷ Bernauer et al., "Climate Change and International Water Conflict in Central Asia"

²⁸ Raf Stewart, David I. "Water Conflict in Central Asia – Is There Potential for the Desiccation of the Aral Sea or Competition for the Waters of Kazakhstan's Cross-Border Ili and Irtysh Rivers to Bring about Conflict; and Should the UK Be Concerned?" *Defence Studies* 14, no. 1 (2014): 76-109.

²⁹ Among the agreements regulating water supply and allocation are the Agreement on Cooperation in Joint Management, Use and Protection of Water Resources of Inter-State Sources (1992), the Agreement on Joint Action to Address the Problem of the Aral Sea and Surrounding Areas, Environmental Improvement and Ensuring Socio-economic Development of Aral Sea Region (1993), the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Use of Water and Energy Resources in the Syr Darya basin (1998, signed by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), and the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Environment for Sustainable Development in Central Asia (2006, signed by Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan) Kushkumbayev, S., & Kushkumbayeva, A. "Water and Energy Issues in the Context of International and Political Disputes in Central Asia." *Chinese Journal of International Law*, 12(2) (2013): 211-218..

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inter-state agreements on water use in the region provide evidence that countries are reluctant to follow a cooperative strategy regarding shared water resources. The key documents regulating water regimes³⁰ specify that “all decisions on the use of transboundary rivers, including the construction of hydropower facilities, should neither cause significant damage to the environment nor infringe upon the interests of neighbouring countries”.³¹ Uzbekistan, which is currently experiencing problems with its water supply, is the only Central Asian state which is party to these agreements.³²

The lack of cooperation is also explained by upstream countries’ deficiency in economic and political leverage.³³ Water is considered a commodity by Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, similar to the oil and gas possessed by Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan

and Turkmenistan.³⁴ Hence, upstream countries have begun to think of transboundary rivers (namely the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya) as sources of hydropower, and to view their national control of water as a means for further economic improvements.³⁵

De Stefano highlights that although dams and water infrastructure help to manage water supply (i.e. provide water in times of drought or reduce the effects of floods), they can become sources of transboundary water conflicts.³⁶ This was also confirmed by other studies on the construction of large dams, where the absence of agreement on construction was an indicator of potential hydropolitical tension.³⁷

Scholars also suggest that borders between the Central Asian countries do not resemble the borders of other national states, as

³⁰ International documents regulating water regimes are the European Economic Commission Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (1992) and the UN Watercourses Convention (1997).

³¹ Kushkumbayev & Kushkumbayeva, “Water and Energy Issues in the Context of International and Political Disputes in Central Asia.”

³² Ibid.

³³ Zakhirova, “The International Politics of Water Security in Central Asia.”

³⁴ Kushkumbayev & Kushkumbayeva, “Water and Energy Issues in the Context of International and Political Disputes in Central Asia.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ De Stefano et al., “Assessment of Transboundary River Basins for Potential Hydro-political Tensions.”

³⁷ Wolf, A.T., Yoffe, S.B., Giordano, M., “International waters: identifying basins at risk.” *Water Policy* 5 (2003), 29–60.

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the Central Asian countries were not formed on ethnic or national principles.³⁸ Furthermore, there are numerous small ethnic enclaves inside the neighboring states, “which can always be subject to pressure by cutting off roads, water, or power”.³⁹ The presence of regional fragmentation is likely to exacerbate existing disputes over water and possibly destabilize the region.⁴⁰

Unsustainable and inefficient water use, and the limitations of existing water infrastructure are also important factors. According to World Bank estimates, Central Asian countries consume at least twice as much water per capita as industrialized states. The limitations of water infrastructure, mostly associated with the degradation of irrigation infrastructure, also intensify competition for water resources and contribute to unsustainable water use. Moreover, unsustainable agricultural practices contribute to the accumulation of salts and pesticides in soils, which has further aggravated disputes over water allocation. One of the most

severe examples of unsustainable and inefficient water use is the desiccation of the Aral Sea, which is extensively used for irrigation by Kazakhstan – it is estimated to have lost 90% of its pre-1960 water volume.⁴¹

Studies also suggest that climate change will decrease the amount of water available for irrigation, and thus augment the risk of water conflicts.⁴² However, there is an opposing view which holds that snow and glacier melt as an outcome of increasing temperatures will contribute to additional river run-off and thus avoid a deterioration of the supply-demand ratio.⁴³ The model projected by Siegfried et al. (2011) suggests that glacier melt will continue to contribute to river flow during the first half of the 21st century, however these contributions

³⁸ De Haas, Marcel. “Security Policy and Developments in Central Asia: Security Documents Compared with Security Challenges.” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 29, no. 2 (2016): 203-26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: p. 219

⁴⁰ Zakhirova, “The International Politics of Water Security in Central Asia.”

⁴¹ Micklin, P., “The Aral sea disaster”. *Annual Rev. Earth Planet. Sci.* 35 (2007), 47–72.

⁴² Christopher P.O. Reyer, Ilona Otto, M. Adams, Sophie Albrecht, Torsten Baarsch, Florent Carlsburg, Matti Coumou, Dim Eden, Alexander Ludi, Eva Marcus, Rachel Mengel, Matthias Mosello, Beatrice Robinson, Carl-Friedrich Schleussner, Olivia Serdeczny, and Judith Stagl. “Climate Change Impacts in Central Asia and Their Implications for Development.” *Regional Environmental Change* 17, no. 6 (2017): 1639-650.

⁴³ Malone EL, “Changing glaciers and hydrology in Asia—addressing vulnerabilities to glacier melt impacts. Tech. rep., USAID

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will likely remain small compared to the natural runoff regime.⁴⁴ To ameliorate the situation, measures such as the targeted construction of new storage and conveyance infrastructure and better water management need to be put in place to control rivers' additional run-off.⁴⁵

The Asian Development Bank (2013) also indicates that factors such as population growth and urbanization are also contributing to tensions among countries already strained by conflicts over water resources.⁴⁶

MAIN WATER DISPUTES IN THE REGION

Although the mathematical modeling by Jalilov et al. (2018) shows that building dams on the Amu Darya River could bring economic

benefits to Central Asian countries, in reality they are already straining relationships between countries.⁴⁷ The construction of new dam projects in upstream Kyrgyzstan (Kambarata I and II) and Tajikistan (Rogun) are provoking hostile reactions from downstream Uzbekistan, whose agricultural communities are affected by the lack of water supply.⁴⁸

Rogun, to be constructed by the end of 2018, could become the highest dam in the world (335m) with a reservoir that would take 16 years to fill to capacity.⁴⁹ However, the giant reservoir behind the Rogun dam will likely affect the flow of water needed for irrigation of Uzbek cotton fields.⁵⁰ In reaction to the continuing

⁴⁴ Siegfried, et al. "Will Climate Change Exacerbate Water Stress in Central Asia?"

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Asian Development Bank 2017, "CA counties profiles", Accessed April 10, 2018 <https://www.adb.org/countries/tajikistan/poverty>.

⁴⁷ Amer Jalilov, and Ward. "Managing the Water-energy-food Nexus: Opportunities in Central Asia." *Journal of Hydrology* 557 (2018): 407-25.

⁴⁸ Siegfried et al. "Will Climate Change Exacerbate Water Stress in Central Asia?" *Climatic Change* 112, no. 3 (2012): 881-99; Kushkumbayev & Kushkumbayeva, "Water and Energy Issues in the Context of International and Political Disputes in Central Asia"; Zakhirova, "The International Politics of Water Security in Central Asia."

⁴⁹ Rustam Qobil, "Will Central Asia fight over water?" *BBC Uzbek*, October 25, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-37755985>

⁵⁰ Marcel De Haas, "Security Policy and Developments in Central Asia: Security Documents Compared with Security Challenges." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 29, no. 2 (2016): 203-26.

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construction of Rogun, Uzbekistan “repeatedly stopped the natural gas exports to Tajikistan, refused to allow the transit of Kyrgyz and Turkmen electricity through its power grid, and blocked the transit of all rail freight into Tajikistan”.⁵¹

Another water dispute is associated with the Toktogul water reservoir in Kyrgyzstan. The contestable water resources associated with this dam provoked a number of border clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan with the deployment of military troops on March 24, 2016. The main reasons for the clashes are the mismanagement of the Toktogul Dam that led to water shortages in Uzbekistan, as well as existing inter-ethnic cross-border conflicts between these Central Asia states. Furthermore, Uzbekistan’s attempt to reclaim the Ala-Buka water reservoir in Kyrgyz territory led to a deterioration of bilateral relations.⁵²

Additionally, the CASA-1000 project (involving Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan), which aims to

facilitate the export of electricity produced by hydropower in Central Asia to consumers in South Asia, was set up in 2015. The downstream Central Asian republics, which are not a part of CASA-1000 (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) are highly concerned by this project.⁵³

Water relations are also complicated between upstream Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The Kyrgyz–Tajik border area is primarily agrarian, and farmers on both sides of the border shared irrigation systems for decades prior to independence.⁵⁴ In March 2008, a group of 150 Tajiks crossed into Kyrgyzstan to destroy a dam where they were met by Kyrgyz border guards. Consequently, a violent clash ensued between the Tajik and Kyrgyz farmers, intensifying conflict between the members of two separate river basins.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 221

⁵² Fuad Shahbazov, “Will Central Asia Fight Over Water Resources?” February 6, 2017 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2017/02/06/will-central-asia-fight-over-water-resources/#429c581c4c1f><https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2017/02/06/will-central-asia-fight-over-water-resources/#429c581c4c1f>

⁵³ De Haas, “Security Policy and Developments in Central Asia: Security Documents Compared with Security Challenges.”

⁵⁴ Zakhirova, “The International Politics of Water Security in Central Asia.”

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PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION OF WATER CONFLICTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Scholars highlight that political and administrative cooperation, financing, water management and water allocation remain challenging tasks for the region.⁵⁵

Given the deficit of water resources in the region, cooperation is the only alternative for the Central Asian countries.⁵⁶ However, regional cooperation has not been successful so far and countries experience difficulties in negotiating water allocation.⁵⁷

One possible solution would be the establishment of international legal architecture in the region regulating water supply and allocation. Scholars suggest that treaties play an important role in setting up an initial dialogue between

conflicting countries.⁵⁸ Furthermore, regulatory frameworks backed by treaties and the existence of river basin organizations can decrease the likelihood of hydropolitical conflicts.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the adoption of these international norms is voluntary, and there is no effective supra-state body to enforce them.⁶⁰

Bernauer & Siegfried (2012) argue that water conflicts between upstream and downstream countries can be resolved by “adequate compensation mechanisms”.⁶¹ Specifically, a change in the compensation scheme from receiving hydrocarbon energy equivalents to paying for “winter water savings” and “summer

⁵⁵ Amer Jalilov, and Ward. “Managing the Water-energy-food Nexus: Opportunities in Central Asia.”

⁵⁶ Demin, A. “Problems with Water Use in Countries of East, South and Central Asia.” *Geography and Natural Resources* 37, no. 3 (2016): 181-91.

⁵⁷ Kushkumbayev & Kushkumbayeva, “Water and Energy Issues in the Context of International and Political Disputes in Central Asia.”

⁵⁸ Tir, J., Stinnett, D.M., “Weathering climate change: can institutions mitigate international water conflict?” *J. Peace Res.* 49, 211–225 (2012).

⁵⁹ Wolf, A.T., Yoffe, S.B., Giordano, M., 2003b. International waters: identifying basins at risk. *Water Policy* 5, 29–60; Wolf, A.T., Stahl, K., Macomber, M.F., 2003a. Conflict and cooperation within international river basins: the importance of institutional capacity. *Water Resources Update* 125, 1–10 (University Council on Water Resources); De Stefano, “Assessment of Transboundary River Basins for Potential Hydro-political Tensions.”

⁶⁰ Stewart Raf, David I. “Water Conflict in Central Asia – Is There Potential for the Desiccation of the Aral Sea or Competition for the Waters of Kazakhstan’s Cross-Border Ili and Irtysh Rivers to Bring about Conflict; and Should the UK Be Concerned?” *Defence Studies* 14, no. 1 (2014): 76-109

⁶¹ Bernauer et al., “Climate Change and International Water Conflict in Central Asia.”

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releases in a mixed incentive scheme” for Kyrgyzstan could be one of the solutions to water conflicts.⁶² However, from the perspective of downstream Uzbekistan there is a strong resistance to paying for water. It insists that, according to international transboundary water conventions, it is entitled to receive a fair share of the Syr Darya’s waters and hence it refuses to pay for water per se.⁶³

Moreover, the settlement of water conflicts will require an assessment of related climate change risks impacting the amount of available water in the region.⁶⁴

⁶² Siegfried, et al. “Will Climate Change Exacerbate Water Stress in Central Asia?”

⁶³ Bernauer et al., “Climate Change and International Water Conflict in Central Asia.”

⁶⁴ Siegfried, “Will Climate Change Exacerbate Water Stress in Central Asia?”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. As outlined in the previous section, development of legal architecture regulating water supply and allocation could help in setting up a dialogue between conflicting countries. In addition, to make cooperation on water resources possible Central Asian countries need to strengthen institutions for transboundary dialogue.
2. Development of other instruments such as adequate compensation mechanisms could also be an alternative for mitigation of water conflicts. Involvement of NGOs and international agencies that are already conducting projects on water supply in the region could also support the building of more sustainable water systems.
3. Investments in water infrastructure could

stop its continuing degradation and reduce water withdrawal and unsustainable water use.

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HUMAN RIGHTS AND DICTATORSHIP

INTRODUCTION

The five Central Asian countries present a unique picture with respect to human rights and authoritarian regimes. Despite recurring alerts of impending crisis, the republics' systems, inherited from the Soviet Union, have remained more or less stable since their independence 26 years ago. In a region ruled mainly by Presidents-for-life, Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary system is an exception.

In Turkmenistan, the first president Saparmurat Niyazov ruled until his sudden death in 2006, when he was succeeded by the current dictator Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov. Nursultan Nazarbayev has ruled Kazakhstan since 1990, when it was still a Soviet Republic. Emomali Rahmon came to power in Tajikistan in 1992, in the middle of a civil war, and has since consolidated his position as the head of the country. Uzbekistan's first president, Islam Karimov, passed away in 2016 after 26 years of rule and was succeeded by Shavkat Mirziyoyev. International commentators have a tendency to portray the region as

being on the brink of collapse, a tinderbox where Islamic insurgency and ethnic clashes mix with drug trafficking and criminal mafias. This characterization has helped the rulers portray themselves as guarantors of stability and valuable partners in the fight against global dangers. This sensationalism also overshadows other characteristics of the region and valuable political systems. The presidents rely on a mix of family nepotism, corruption, crackdown on dissent inside and outside the country, and a facade of democratic procedures to continue their rule. The relative weight of each ingredient varies for each republic, but the general recipe has proven its worth over more than a quarter of a century. However, its inability to meet citizens' economic and political demands could well be a more pressing issue than the putative dangers of radicalisation.

FAMILY BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

The regimes of Central Asia are informally organised around the heads of the executive. Wider or narrower circles benefit from the presidents' largesse through being granted political positions and possibilities for private enrichment often two faces of the same coin. Nepotism and corruption permeate public (and private) life, with a difference in degree of centralisation rather than style, across Central

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Asia – with the partial exception of Kyrgyzstan, where political groupings are more numerous and changeable.

In Turkmenistan, relatives and close associates of Berdymuhamedov concentrate power, controlling all aspects of public life and dividing the wealth of natural gas and oil.¹

The recent demise of the former president of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, spelled an end to the good fortunes of some members of his family, such as his daughter Gulnara Karimova, who had more than 1.5\$ billion frozen in European countries and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and has not been heard from or seen since his death². Yet the Soviet-inherited system of rent distribution and political control based on cotton crops does not seem to have

¹ See: Human Rights Watch 2018, "World Report: Turkmenistan." <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/turkmenistan>;
Chatham House 2016. "Turkmenistan: Power, Politics and Petro-Authoritarianism." <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-03-08-turkmenistan-bohr.pdf>;
Crude Accountability 2012. "The Private Pocket of the President (Berdymukhamedov): Oil, Gas and the Law." <https://www.osce.org/odihr/94147?download=true>;
The U.S. Embassy in Turkmenistan. "Trafficking in Persons Report 2017 Turkmenistan." <https://tm.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/official-reports/trafficking-persons-report-2017-turkmenistan/>.

² El Pais. « Sin noticias de Gugusha, la hija del dictador uzbeko,» April 18, 2018 https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/04/11/gente/1523461730_510354.html.

changed since the arrival of Mirziyoyev to power.³

In Tajikistan in 2016, Emomali Rahmon passed a reform of the Tajik Constitution which, besides allowing a significant crackdown on faith-based politics in the country, removed limits on the number of times he can run for president. Furthermore, by lowering the age requirement for a presidential candidate from 35 to 30, the reformed Constitution allows Rahmon's son access to the presidency in 2020 (Rustam Emomali will be 33 by then⁴). In recent years the security services have carried out a campaign of harassment and disintegration of the former official opposition. The Islamic and Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) was party to the civil war that shook the country in the early years of independence, and signed the peace accord through which it held %30 of the positions of power in the state. Rahmonil consolidation of power has all but eliminated this alternative political centre.

In Kazakhstan, the region's richest country, Nursultan Nazarbayev

³ Crisis Group, "Uzbekistan: Reform or Repeat?" Report no 84 (2016). <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/uzbekistan/84-uzbekistan-reform-or-repeat>.

⁴ The Diplomat. "Tajikistan: The Iron Fist Closes," June 8, 2016 <https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/tajikistan-the-iron-fist-closes/>.

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In Kazakhstan, the region's richest country, Nursultan Nazarbayev rules unchallenged. He has kept his daughter Dariga close to him and in various high-level political roles, including as founder of an amicable opposition party (Asar) that was to merge with the ruling Nur Otan, as deputy speaker of the parliament, as deputy prime minister, and as head of a Senate committee.¹

These networks of wealth distribution cannot extend to all the population. Some of the Central Asian countries are engaged in projects of modernization and economic diversification to raise standards of living and diversify the economy. The most successful, to date, has been Kazakhstan. Yet demands for civil and economic fairness led to the Zhanaozen events in 2011, where at least 16 workers were killed amidst labour protests.² Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are amongst the countries in the world that are most dependent on remittances, which bring in much-needed cash and social support. Emigration in search of work also acts as a social valve by sending millions of young men abroad. The system depends on the good health of the Russian economy, slowdowns are felt deeply in Central Asia and a deeper economic crisis might mean the return of millions of unemployed laborers at once.

¹ The Diplomat. "Central Asia's Presidents-for-Life," February 5, 2016
<https://thediplomat.com/2016/02/central-asias-presidents-for-life/>.

² Radio Free Europe, "A Year After Deadly Riots, Zhanaozen Is Quiet But Angry," December 16, 2012.
<https://www.rferl.org/a/zhanaozen-a-year-after-the-riots/24798726.html>.

DISSENT AND REPRESSION

Social demands for fairness, stemming from concerns about the economy, justice, religion, and/or human rights, are viewed with extreme suspicion and often met with harsh responses from governments. In Uzbekistan, the Andijan Massacre saw around 700 peaceful protesters killed in 2005, followed by a campaign of terror and threats to shut down any information about the events. Tajikistan is engaged in a campaign against the former civil war foes of the IRPT, while simultaneously cracking down on religious symbols, for example through forcibly shaving beards.³

Media freedom is also abysmal in the region.⁴ The internet is tightly controlled, independent newspapers are closed down, journalists and bloggers are routinely jailed, and media outlets are under the direct control of close allies of the president.

Non-governmental organizations operate under intense scrutiny and if they receive any funding from abroad, are subjected to Russia-inspired

³ BBC Russian Service. "Tajikistan's battle against beards to 'fight radicalization,'" January 21, 2016,
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35372754>.

⁴ Kyrgyzstan is listed 99th in the ranking of freedom of the media of 180 countries. Tajikistan is 149th, Kazakhstan - 158th, Uzbekistan - 165th, and Turkmenistan at 178th place, before Eritrea and North Korea. Reporters Without Borders. "2018 World Press Freedom Index". Last accessed June 22, 2018.
<https://rsf.org/en/ranking>.

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laws on ‘foreign agents’. Individual activists, involved for example with human rights NGOs are jailed for extremely long sentences and their families are threatened or harassed. For example, the Kyrgyz activist Azimjan Askarov is serving a life sentence in jail.⁵ The security services of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan practice torture.⁶

Repression is increasingly transnational. While the profits of corruption are stacked in Western banks or fiscal paradises, the Central Asian security services go global. Opponents in exile are forcibly brought back and landed in jail thanks to cooperation with Russia and other countries (as in the case of Tajik opposition members Mahmadrusi Iskandarov and Sobir Valiev) or directly assaulted or assassinated abroad (Tajik Group 24 member Umaraly Kuvatov was shot dead in Istanbul while other members were jailed in Tajikistan).⁷ These Tajik cases are part of a worrying trend of use of legal and illegal means to pressure and repress opponents inside

and outside Central Asia. International cooperation mechanisms such as Europol become part of the toolkit of ‘Dictators without Borders’, including official or unofficial bilateral security cooperation, including official or unofficial bilateral security cooperation, regional security treaties, lists of ‘extremist’ individuals and organizations, airport alert mechanisms, international litigation, and hired thugs, to name a few.⁸

DEMOCRATIC FACADE

Each country in Central Asia holds regular elections and is formally governed by democratic institutions (presidency, parliament, courts of justice etc.). However, Kyrgyzstan is the only country in the region where there is a real choice of candidates, campaigns are open and consequential, and transfers of power take place in an orderly manner – even if its political system has at times been violent and elections are marred by significant irregularities.⁹ Elections in the rest of Central Asia are largely opportunities for the presidents to assert their power and maintain a pretense of democratic credentials, with

⁵ Amnesty International Country Profile. Kyrgyzstan 2017/2018. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/kyrgyzstan/report-kyrgyzstan/>.

⁶ See: Amnesty International Country Profiles. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/>.

⁷ The Diplomat, “Tajikistan: The Iron Fist Closes.” June 8, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/tajikistan-the-iron-fist-closes/>.

⁸ John Heathershaw and Alexander Cooley, “Dictators without Borders” OpenDemocracy, April 30, 2014 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/john-heathershaw-alexander-cooley/dictators-without-borders>.

⁹ For example, see: OSCE, “Kyrgyzstan, Presidential Election: Final Report”, October 15, 2017, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/374740>.

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results above 90% in their favor. The Central Asian states thus increasingly rely on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or the Commonwealth of Independent States to monitor their elections as a way to dilute Organization of Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or EU criticisms.¹⁰ The legislative and judiciary are more focused on distributing power, keeping an eye on elites, and preparing the succession should the president retire or die, than on providing checks and balances on the executive power.¹¹

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For the rulers of the Central Asian countries, the concern for a solid democratic process ranks well below concerns with keeping an eye on elites, and preparing the succession should the president retire or die, than on providing checks and balance or hint of a social movement. Some security concerns are not unfounded – for example, borders are at the same time porous and heavily militarized, allowing for a flow of illegal traffic in arms, drugs and

people while simultaneously being the scene for episodes of violence such as shoot-outs between border guards or injured crossers.¹²

However, many of these security concerns arise ultimately from the doings of the governments themselves. Closing down legal avenues for complaint and reform only leaves underground, more radical avenues for change. For the population, distrust of the security services means vulnerability to their arbitrariness, but also to crime and abuse left unchecked because of fear of reporting or inefficiency of the legal system.

Finally, what are on their own surmountable internal and external issues (such as lack of economic opportunities, inability to voice discontent, abuses by the police, lack of confidence in the legal system) can come together in unpredictable ways in moments of crisis to challenge the much sought-after stability. Respect for

¹⁰ Alessandra Russo, and Andrea Gawrich. "Overlap with contestation? Comparing norms and policies of regional organizations in the post-Soviet space." *Central Asian Survey* 36.3 (2017): 331-352.

¹¹ Jennifer Gandhi, and Adam Przeworski. "Authoritarian institutions and the survival of autocrats." *Comparative political studies* 40.11 (2007): 1279-1301.

¹² See: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Drug Trafficking on the Great Silk Road: The Security Environment in Central Asia," July 5, 2017. <https://carnegieendowment.org/files/drugs.pdf>; Eurasianet. "Tajikistan: Border Incidents Highlight Drug Trafficking Threat" <https://eurasianet.org/s/tajikistan-border-incidents-highlight-drug-trafficking-threat>; The Diplomat. "2 Killed in Skirmish on Tajik-Afghan Border," March 7, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/03/2-killed-in-skirmish-on-tajik-afghan-border/>.

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human rights should not be a luxury to be addressed once all other issues are solved. Instead, it underpins many of them, and should be a priority for the governments and their international partners.

1. Respect human rights including the right to freedom of speech. The main problem of the region is entrenched family rule and nepotism. The governments should comply with and respect democratic principles and stop crackdown on free media and civil society.

2. Increase awareness about corruption and democratic governance. Develop national and regional programs focused on raising social awareness about democratic rights and democratic models of governance. Increase awareness about corruption and bribery incidents.

3. Develop anti-corruption trainings for governmental officials. Provide professional exchange of experience among governmental officials and bring the anti-corruption movement into the public eye. Pressure the trial of corruption cases.

4. External monitoring of the election process and the governance regimes. Build close cooperation with international organizations in order to open channels for elections' monitoring. Respect the rights of population for democratic elections as only Kyrgyzstan among the Central Asian countries has an experience of conducting competitive elections.

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CONCLUSION

This report has shed light on the fact that a lack of consistent cooperation among the five Central Asian countries has created serious security concerns in a region already affected by the economic and political games of neighboring major powers. The main issues explored in the preceding chapters are: corruption, poverty, migration, food security, poor management of transboundary water resources, dictatorship and religious extremism.

The region's precarious economic situation, high levels of poverty and major labor migration all have their roots primarily in a cultural pattern of corrupt governance. A lack of trust in government institutions hinders economic growth and causes thousands of workers to flee the country to seek work abroad. A multitude of corrupt and authoritarian practices contribute to a culture of impunity that hampers external investment and discourages potential donors. These include the usurping of countries' resources by authoritarian regimes, the lack of transparency and accountability of government institutions, the absence of genuine anti-corruption reforms, the longstanding

cultural preference for bribery as a means of avoiding bureaucratic procedures, the persecution of civil society and the lack of serious engagement in political reform.

The population in the region is deeply affected by the instability of the economic sector. First, because the economy is contingent on remittances, which leaves it vulnerable in the face of high inflation rates and over-dependence on external labor markets. Second, because the region's natural conditions – specifically the extremely long, harsh winters – make the costs of essential needs such as food and heat higher than in other regions. Poverty reduction is contingent on the level of corruption which means fight against corruption will consequently reduce poverty. At the same time, both poverty and the high level of corruption within government cause labor migration, aggravating the lack of development and vulnerability of the economy. This chain of problems can be addressed only by an integrated, holistic approach, tackling the root cause by reducing corruption and economic dependence on external remittances.

Central Asian countries face serious challenges related to food security. Each of the FAO's four pillars of food security –

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Central Asian countries face serious challenges related to food security. Each of the FAO's four pillars of food security – food availability, economic and physical access to food, food utilization and stability over time – are under significant stress. First, undernutrition and micronutrient deficiency are caused

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by low household incomes and low quality food coming from a neighboring market known for its exports of counterfeit and contaminated food worldwide. This causes a serious concern for the health of the population and has the potential to impact future generations. Second, the food security is undermined by lack of investment in agriculture, the misuse of natural agricultural resources, soil degradation caused by population growth and climate change. Natural hazards, such as extreme droughts, aridity, floods and water withdrawals for agricultural purposes make Central Asia's agricultural sector extremely vulnerable. The complexity of the problem calls for complex measures. The proposed actions and recommendations stem from an integrated approach based on government involvement: development of social protection, rural development and nutrition awareness programs (following the Kyrgyz example), improvement of farmers' access to agricultural machinery and services, improvement of the resilience and adaptability of agricultural systems to natural hazards, increase in resource efficiency and fostering a favorable climate for external investments.

A large contributing factor to the region's food-related chain of problems is hydro-political tension. After the centralized

Soviet water management system came to an end, the newly independent countries were not able to reach an agreement concerning the use of natural water resources. Thus, the 5 countries face an unsustainable pattern of water use resulting in an accumulation of salts and pesticides in the soil, a lack of an integrated irrigation network and an imbalance in use among the upstream countries, which are poor in other natural resources, and downstream countries, which are rich in oil and gas. Dam projects have intensified the already tense relations among the 5 countries and have generated water disputes, both at the government level and among people living in border towns. The only way forward is to promote cooperation and dialogue among the governments in the region, to work towards the development of an adequate legal framework to regulate the sharing of water resources, establish compensation mechanisms and to foster investments.

The lack of cooperation among the 5 governments on questions of utmost importance for their populations is partly due to a dictatorial political environment, insensible to human rights imperatives. With the exception of Kyrgyzstan, all of the Central Asian countries are governed by Presidents-for-life,

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concentrating the whole governmental apparatus in the hands of their closed circles of family interests. Against a 'danger discourse', these presidents have established themselves as guarantors of security and prosperity of the region. In direct contradiction to this claim, however, the dictatorial regimes usurp natural resources for the enrichment of the presidents and their families, exert control over all aspects of public life, fail to adhere to basic democratic processes, and repress civil society movements and NGOs. This leads to an atmosphere of general distrust in the government, and a lack of economic opportunities for the population.

In addition, Central Asia is a region seriously concerned with the threat of terrorism. Internal instability and a lack of economic opportunities are reflected in deeper social problems, aggravated by complicated questions of identity, religion and the relationship between religion and state. On that basis, radicalization and fundamentalism have resonated with part of the population and have caused a serious threat of religious extremism. In order to overcome this challenge, there is a

need for international support for human rights, recognition of freedom of religion and expression, improved rehabilitation programs for former extremists, improved economic conditions and reduced corruption, increased secular and religious education and most importantly, committed regional cooperation among governments to address the issue of violent extremism.

The problems identified in this report are complex and entangled with the social and political features of the region. Their solution calls for an integrated approach that considers the interconnection between the dictatorial regimes, the misuse of natural resources, food insecurity and corrupt governance, with labor migration and the threat of extremism. In order to do so, all the facets of the above-mentioned issues need to be considered and evaluated, and political and social reforms elaborated accordingly. There is much work to be done to ensure that security in the Central Asian region does not mean just security for its governing regimes, but security for all people.