
The Politics of Counterinsurgency in Central Asia

Gregory Gleason

Widespread insurgency movements threaten to destabilize Central Asia, hindering the development of democracy and law-based states.

A new politics of insurgency and counterinsurgency is reshaping the post-communist transition in the countries of Central Asia. For most of the 1990s, political developments in Central Asia focused on political consolidation. Organized opposition to the governments of the Central Asian states was primarily subterranean, with the exception of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), fighting in Tajikistan. When the June 1997 peace accord brought Tajikistan's opposing factions into a single united government, the region's last major civil conflict appeared to be nearing a resolution. Political conflict flared again in the fall of 1998, when a former commander in the Tajikistan civil war, Makhmud Khudaiberdiev, led a band of about 700 rebels into the city of Hujand in northern Tajikistan. Troops loyal to the Tajik government, outnumbering the rebels by four to one, soon recaptured the city. But the incident dramatized the willingness of Central Asian political opposition groups to use force to overthrow an internationally recognized government.

Following the Hujand uprising, political insurgency in Central Asia became more threatening. As political extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking, and lawlessness grew more severe, the regions' governments adopted bolder counterinsurgency measures to neutralize separatists, terrorists, and bandits. The crackdown cast a wide net, ensnaring legitimate critics and many innocent citizens. As the Central Asian political spectrum became polarized, international human rights organizations criticized governments and opponents alike.

The goal of the Central Asian revolutionaries was to sweep away governments regarded as illegitimate remnants of the Soviet era and establish an Islamic caliph-

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ate uniting Muslim faithful throughout the region.¹ Their call to *jihad*—a Muslim holy war—was in large part an outgrowth of the Afghanistan and Tajikistan civil wars. But the issues involved in the developing revolutionary program went far beyond the winners and losers in these two conflicts. What was at stake was a competition for hearts and minds throughout the Central Asian Islamic crescent, from Chechnya in the west to Xinjiang in the east.²

Central Asia was again becoming, in the phrase coined five decades ago by Owen Lattimore, the “pivot of Asia.”³ Its oil and mineral wealth were attracting the attention of the Great Powers in Asia as well as Europe and North America, not to mention the Minor Powers of the Gulf region and the Middle East. As Russia receded and China and India advanced, Central Asia was coming to be recognized as a new fulcrum of geopolitical change.⁴ While the Western powers appeared to have no vital interests at stake in the region in the traditional sense—at any rate no

Western state was seriously contemplating sending troops to the region to protect its interests—the possibility that the insurgency might spread mayhem beyond the region’s borders was undeniable.⁵

The terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, transformed the situation in Central Asia. Evidence quickly led back to Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda organization and its protector, the Taliban government of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The actions of the American-led coalition against terrorism and its Taliban protectors are shaping a new security terrain not only for Afghanistan, but for all of West Asia. The Afghanistan war and the post-conflict reconstruction will have profound effects on the former Soviet states of Central Asia. How can they most effectively combat terrorism and lawlessness without abandoning the pursuit of democratic government and relatively free and open markets? The answer to this question lies in the roots of Central Asia’s political insurgency. How have counterinsurgency programs affected regime opponents?

A Decade of Central Asian Independence

The five Central Asian countries that emerged from the Soviet breakup—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—were products of the Soviet system. None of these “republics” had existed within its present borders as an independent state prior to the Soviet period. They were artificial creations, products of the Soviet Marxist theory of economic and political development for underdeveloped regions.⁶ Indeed, during the Soviet period these “socialist republics” were not sovereign at all, but regions managed by Moscow. All serious political decision-making took place in the Kremlin, far from the republics’ capitals. Despite their common religious, cultural, and linguistic traditions, there was little republic-to-republic interaction. Moreover, the Central Asian republics were physically separated from the Middle East, China, and the countries of West Asia by the Soviet Union’s nearly impassible southern and eastern frontiers and by decades of northward-oriented infrastructure development.⁷

The Central Asian states were not prepared for independence in 1991. The local administrative systems were not configured for self-governance, revenue collection and self-financing, diplomacy, or national defense. These countries had no organized, powerful nationalist movements. There were no charismatic heroic leaders living in exile, waiting to be swept into power with a moral mandate to oust a corrupt, quasi-colonial political elite. Independence came to the Central Asian countries much as had communist control decades before—imposed by external forces.

At the dawn of independence, the opportunities for democratic progress were substantial. The initial reform trends were clearly oriented in the right direction. The Party leaders in the republics—transforming themselves into nationalist protectors of the interests of the newly independent states—advocated the establishment of secular, democratic, independent governments, market economic relations, and foreign relations based on international standards.⁸ Kazakhstan’s Nursultan Nazarbaev, one of the region’s foremost figures, for instance, declared that rejecting communism and adopting international standards was “merely common sense.”⁹

The five new countries became members of major international organizations, including the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, and set about establishing national sovereignty and transforming their communist-era institutions.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan made notable progress in meeting international standards of good governance, eventually adopting tax laws and civil codes that were said to be among the best in the post-communist world. In December 1998 Kyrgyzstan became the first post-Soviet country to join the World Trade Organization. Uzbekistan, despite its inability to liberalize prices and adjust its currency to international practice, strove energetically to develop a commercially oriented welfare state. Initially torn by war and internal divisions, Tajikistan moved in the direction of national reconciliation following the June 1997 peace accord. Even Turkmenistan, the least successful in making the psychological transition to an open, modern society, attempted to harmonize its laws with international practice.

To be sure, progress toward post-communist structural reform was uneven. While important elements of economic and structural reform were put in place, they were not always accompanied by progress in democratization and the anticipated economic prosperity. After a decade of independence, all of the states of Central Asia were governed by “presidents.”¹⁰ But none of them had been elected in genuinely free and fair elections with true political competition. None of the governments was judged by international monitoring organizations to have fully conformed to international standards. While all of the presidents had been elected to specific terms of office, electoral laws and constitutions had been changed and amended to virtually eliminate term limits. All the countries had institutionalized this practice by establishing “presidential” systems, giving the leaders the power to rule by decree with the force of “constitutional law.” In all the cases the leaders had come from the former Communist Party system or high rungs of the Soviet establishment. None of the governments had what could be described as an independent judiciary. None of the governments established a functioning legislature with true powers of the purse. Even in the most open and liberal of the countries, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the parliaments had been routed by presidential decree.¹¹ But the imperfections of the domestic political and economic systems are not the source of Central Asia’s revolutionary movements. The revolutionaries’ ardor and preparation are rooted in the Afghanistan war, itself a product of the Soviet system.

Insurgency’s Afghan Roots

The Soviet Union inherited its Central Asian territories from the tsarist empire. The region’s southern frontier,

the border that separated the Soviet Union from Iran, Afghanistan, and China, was a product of the nineteenth-century Great Power competition between Russia and Britain. Afghanistan lies to the south of the frontier, beyond the Panj (Amu Darya) River. Moscow's direct political influence in the region did not cross beyond the Panj until the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), Afghanistan's Marxist party, overthrew the Daud government in April 1978. After the assassination of the PDPA's leader, Nur Muhammad Taraki, in September 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan to establish a puppet government and secure the region against foreign influence.

Moscow sought to stabilize Afghanistan by carrying out socialist-style "progressive" reform. But the outcome was a far cry from what was expected or desired. The Soviet occupation provoked fierce internal opposition, galvanizing Afghanistan's regional and ethnic factions into a unified opposition. Harkening back to long-standing traditions of guerilla warfare against foreign invaders, Afghanistan's seven main factions united in *jihad* against the Soviet occupation. The mujahideen resistance fighters sought and received assistance from the outside world. The Western powers, led by the United States, were anxious to see Soviet territorial expansion rebuffed by an indigenous opposition.¹² Most of the foreign security assistance was funneled through Pakistan, particularly to opposition encampments filled with Afghan refugees in Pakistan's North-West Frontier province. Afghanistan proved to be an intractable conflict for Moscow. It was an important factor in the wave of dissent that swept Soviet society in the 1980s, eventually leading to the union's disintegration.

In 1986, after years of brutal but futile conflict, the Soviet Union resolved to quit Afghanistan. By the terms of the April 1988 Geneva accord, Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to withdraw all Soviet troops by February 15, 1989.¹³ Although the Red Army pulled out, the Soviet-installed government, led by Muhammad Najibullah since 1986, remained in power.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the most important factions of the mujahideen opposition banded together to form an Afghan Interim Government, intent on displacing the Najibullah government. But it was three years before the mujahideen troops captured Kabul in April 1992. Najibullah was placed under house arrest and remained in the United Nations compound in downtown Kabul. Intense ideological and ethnic divisions between the leaders of the wartime coalition re-emerged, and the commanders turned on one another in a contest for control of the government. The internecine conflict quickly turned back to the instruments of war.

In the wake of the devastating fratricidal conflict among the Afghanistan factions, a new force emerged. The Taliban, or "students," was born as a movement in the refugee camps and madressahs (religious schools) of Pakistan's North-West Frontier province during the early 1990s. In 1994 the Taliban took up arms to cleanse Afghanistan of corruption and bring an end to the internal strife among the mujahideen warlords. Capturing the cities of Kandahar in November 1994 and Herat in September 1995, Taliban fighters pushed through southern and eastern Afghanistan, uniting the primarily Pashtu areas under strict Islamic rule. The Taliban captured Kabul in September 1996, murdering Najibullah,¹⁵ ousting the coalition government of Burhanuddin Rabbani, and establishing the Taliban supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, in power. The leaders of the Taliban refused to negotiate or compromise with the regional warlords. Their declared goal was the establishment of the world's most purely Islamic state, returning the faithful to the precepts of true religion and banning such idolatries as television, music, cinema, and pictorial representations. They proclaimed a campaign against official corruption. Their attempts to eradicate crime were reinforced by the introduction of Islamic law, including public executions and amputations. They soon adopted strict regulations forbidding girls from attending school and women from working.

Opposition to Taliban rule remained active, however, in the northern and eastern parts of the country. Commander Abdul Rashid Dostam's National Islamic Movement, consisting mostly of ethnic Uzbeks, controlled several north-central provinces. Commander Ahmad Shah Masood controlled the primarily ethnic Tajik majority areas of the northeast.¹⁶ The "Northern Alliance" thus came to be composed of former mujahideen forces that had fought together against the Soviet invasion through the mid-1980s, struggled against one another after the Soviet withdrawal, and then were reunited in opposition to the Taliban.

The spread of Taliban control in Afghanistan spawned some very unusual alliances. The prospect of the Taliban gaining control of portions of northern Afghanistan was a major factor inducing the warring sides in the Tajikistan civil war to return to the negotiating table and, eventually, develop a plan for national reconciliation. The U.S. and Russian governments, formerly on opposing sides in the Afghanistan conflict, found themselves drawn together against the Taliban.¹⁷ In October 1999 the United States and Russia jointly sponsored United Nations Security Council Resolution 1267, demanding that the Taliban authorities extradite Osama

bin Laden.¹⁸ When Kabul refused to cooperate, the UN imposed sanctions against Afghanistan in November 1999. In December 2000 the United States and Russia sponsored Security Council Resolution 1333, imposing even more comprehensive sanctions.¹⁹ The Taliban's refusal to comply resulted in the imposition of new UN sanctions in January 2001.

During 1999 and 2000 the Taliban gradually extended its control northward, eventually ousting Ahmed Shah Masood's Tajik troops and capturing the city of Taloqan in September 2000.²⁰ With the defeat of the opposition around Taloqan and the fall of the northern Afghanistan provinces, the Taliban exercised authority throughout the country, except for parts of the Panshir Valley. The conflict entered a new phase when the Taliban sought to obtain diplomatic recognition as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.²¹

In April 2001, after a publicity tour through European capitals and an opportunity to address the European Parliament, the leading chieftain of the Northern Alliance, Shah Masood, returned to Afghanistan to rally the remaining anti-Taliban forces for a renewed joint military offensive. Masood recruited Ismail Khan, who had ruled in the western city of Herat; General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the former communist-era leader who later controlled northwestern Afghanistan and had recently returned from exile in Turkey; and Karim Khalili, head of the pro-Iranian Shi'ite Muslim group Hezb-i-Wahdat in northern Afghanistan.²² The assassination of Masood, just two days before the terrorist attack on the United States, greatly complicated the process of identifying a unifying figure for the post-Taliban political reorganization of Afghanistan. Many factors, including essentially unpredictable political events in neighboring countries, will determine the shape of the post-Taliban coalition. It is significant, however, that in appointing an ambassador to the Northern Alliance in November 2001, the U.S. government conferred what amounts to diplomatic recognition of a post-conflict government.²³

Afghanistan and the Tajikistan Civil War

Tajikistan lies to the north of Afghanistan, just across the Panj River. A picturesque though relatively underdeveloped corner of the former Soviet Union, it rapidly dropped from a lower-income country to one of the world's poorest states.²⁴ Tajikistan probably would have moved toward post-communist reform sooner if it had not succumbed to an internal contest for power in the

first years of independence. The contest plunged the country into five years of civil war.²⁵ This resulted in a blockade of Tajikistan by its neighbors, further compressing the collapsing economy. The modest level of civil normality in Tajikistan was largely the result of foreign peacekeeping forces. Tajikistan's economy grew to be based primarily on subsistence agriculture, foreign assistance from donor organizations, barter relations with neighbors, and the commercial export of a few commodities. As much as 80 percent of Tajikistan's foreign-exchange earnings resulted from sales of three commodities: aluminum, cotton, and illegal drugs.

The events that precipitated the Tajikistan war took place in April and May 1992, but the underlying causes of the conflict were lodged in territorial and ethnic identities that pre-dated the Soviet period. Before the Soviet takeover, no single authority had ruled the peoples of Tajikistan's rugged mountains and fertile agricultural valleys. The Soviet government brought unified rule but never displaced traditional regional and clan-based loyalties. The territorial division of Central Asia during the Soviet period had long-enduring implications.²⁶ Democratization and economic reform in the core regions of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s brought greater self-rule to the outlying regions. In Tajikistan, this was manifested primarily in a resurgence of local territorialism rather than Tajik national self-determination.

In the chaotic changes following the disintegration of Soviet power, a former first secretary of the Tajik Communist Party, Rakhmon Nabiev, assumed political control in 1991. The country was swept up in waves of escalating tension that resulted in armed groups vying for control in the streets of the capital. In September 1992, Nabiev, a native of the northern Leninabad region, was forced to resign at gunpoint. Dushanbe then fell under the control of a coalition led by Tajikistan's Islamic Renaissance Party.²⁷ Nabiev returned to the northern province of the country. Civil war ensued, and Tajikistan was briefly divided into north and south. Then, aided by military assistance from Russia and Uzbekistan, a coalition of forces from the southern regions of Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab and the northern industrial region in Leninabad oblast collaborated to recapture the capital and reunite the country. These combined forces attacked Dushanbe on October 24, 1992. Thousands of civilians and soldiers were killed, while thousands more fled the capital. This early, violent phase of the civil war was resolved in favor of a coalition based in the valley region centered on the city of Kulyab. The coalition selected as its leader a former Kulyab district Communist Party official, Emomali Rahmonov.

During the fighting in Tajikistan, the Russian 201st Motorized Rifle Division, already deployed in the country to guard the Soviet Union's southern border, was given a new domestic peacekeeping mission. Officially, Moscow was neutral. In practice, however, the peacekeepers favored the communist-era political elite. The Russian troops had to delicately balance the goals of peacekeeping and stability with Russia's long-term intention of maintaining a reliable outpost in the sensitive mountain passes of Inner Asia. Russia assumed primary responsibility for Tajik military operations, and its military presence gradually transformed the country into what Lena Jonson characterized as a "Russian protectorate."²⁸

The fighters displaced by the recapture of the Tajik capital—the groups that eventually comprised the United Tajikistan Opposition<<**in the 1st paragraph it is United Tajik Opposition**>>—were scattered in the mountain areas to the north and east of the capital.²⁹ Large parts of the country remained under military control, because commanders who were victorious in the war divided the territory among themselves. In the wake of the war, normal political and governmental activities were suspended. The civil war divided Tajikistan on several dimensions simultaneously, splitting region against region, clan against clan, religion against religion, and internationalists against nationalists. Most important, the conflict divided the country into victors and vanquished. Many of the vanquished retained their weapons.

After the intense fighting in the autumn of 1992, Tajikistan followed a tortuous path of gradual normalization. Some vanquished fighters fled to Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, or Iran. Others continued the conflict from small pockets in Tajikistan. Rebel groups continued to control certain regions of the countryside, particularly the Garm Valley. The country's urban areas were subject to continuous harassment and conflict. Hostage taking became an important mechanism for settling outstanding wartime disputes. Assassinations and contract killings became commonplace. The United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (1994–2000) established itself as the center of international donor activity.

At the insistence of the international organizations, the government and the leaders of the opposition entered into a dialogue on national reconciliation. On June 27, 1997, President Rahmonov and Said Abdullo Nuri, the putative leader of the United Tajik <<**note earlier query**>> Opposition, signed the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan. The signing of the Agreement and the sub-

sequent convening of the Commission on National Reconciliation launched a period of transition. According to the terms of the agreement, refugees were to return to their homes, UTO fighters were to be demobilized and their leaders were to be reintegrated into the governmental structures, the armed forces, police, and security service were to be reformed, and democratic processes in the country were to be reinvigorated. Despite numerous temporary setbacks, the peace process moved forward. During 1999 more than 6,000 ex-fighters were registered and amnestied, and many were integrated into the Tajik armed forces and border guard. By late 1999 the reintegration quota of 30 percent of the ministerial posts <<**which ministry?**>> was satisfied by the appointment of UTO personnel. A September 1999 referendum provided a mandate for the Rahmonov government, and Rahmonov was re-elected to a seven-year second term in November 1999. On March 27, 2000, a joint session of the two newly elected houses of parliament declared the peace process officially complete and dissolved the Commission on National Reconciliation. A single post-conflict government was officially proclaimed.

The peace process produced a coalition government devoted to post-conflict reconstruction yet consisting of representatives of factions that had been mortal enemies only a short time before. In post-conflict reconstruction, the choices are few. The usual formula is a de facto separation of the warring parties brought about by exiling the vanquished. The exiles then either dissipate in foreign countries or gradually develop an opposition movement that threatens to return to the homeland. A more difficult formula was attempted in Tajikistan—victors and vanquished sit down at the negotiating table to develop a *modus operandi* within a single state, not denying the legitimacy of either side but not allowing hegemony by either. The Tajikistan model of reconciliation is truly a heroic one. It might have succeeded if not for the ongoing threat of intervention from Afghanistan.

Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is the linchpin of Central Asia. It is the most populous and in many respects most advanced of the Central Asian countries. Uzbekistan's strongman leader, Islam Karimov, has charted a highly nationalistic, independent political path while encouraging an Uzbek cultural renewal.³⁰ In ways reminiscent of Turkey's Kemal Ataturk, Karimov has engineered a determined national consolidation that subordinates government,

economics, and culture—the entire spectrum of policy arenas—to the drive to “recover” Uzbekistan’s natural heritage.

During the Soviet period Uzbekistan’s political elite was deeply entrenched in the system through extraordinarily strong, but nearly invisible, relationships of patronage, clan, and family. The formal political institutions sometimes functioned merely as representational, not representative, institutions. A political culture of authoritarianism pervaded the public bureaucracy. Polarization between the regime and its ideological opponents drove the opposition into hiding or exile, and transformed much legitimate dissent into opposition. There was virtually no organized political opposition until the very last days of Soviet power. In the period 1990–92 a political opposition emerged from the intelligentsia and Party cadres that spanned a wide ideological spectrum, ranging from exponents of a constitutional framework and secular state in the European mold to advocates of a unified “Turkestan” or an Islamic caliphate.

After the attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed from the center outward. Once it was clear that Moscow could not re-impose its authority, and would not attempt to do so, Uzbek government and Party officials, led by Karimov, formed a new nationalist government. A crackdown on the local opposition movements swiftly followed. Virtually every variety of political opposition was treated in heavy-handed fashion by the government. Some of the regime’s opponents re-educated themselves, eventually accepting the single vision of the Karimov state. Others went into exile in Moscow, Ankara, Teheran, or Washington, while still others went underground. Some members of the opposition went to Tajikistan, where ideological conflict was becoming the fuel that would sustain the Tajikistan civil war.

Independent Uzbekistan has emphasized economic progress as a precondition to political liberalization. During the 1990s the executive branch of government evolved toward complete domination of the country’s political life. The electoral system, political competition, supremacy of law, civic development, judicial independence, and press freedom were broadly subordinated to its strategy for national economic development. On a rhetorical level, Uzbekistan’s constitutional and legal framework provided for internationally accepted principles of civil rights and good governance. Yet in reality Uzbekistan became a highly authoritarian state where fundamental human political freedoms were severely restricted. The gov-

ernment circumscribed the rights to speech, assembly, and religion.³¹

Many of newly independent Uzbekistan’s young men had done their military service during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. When they returned home from Afghanistan, they were confronted by a society in flux. The communist paradigm had been discredited by the Afghanistan war and the inability of the Soviet system to deliver on its promises of prosperity in an era of quickly advancing globalization. Some veterans saw the rigid transition from Soviet authority to Uzbek authority as offering little hope for improving their way of life. One movement that won adherents during the early period of independence was the Hizb-ut-Tahrir. This clandestine revolutionary group was identified early on as a threat to state stability. Uzbek authorities carried out a quiet but extensive campaign against the movement’s “wahabbis” during the early 1990s. The Hizbi Tahrir had links to Hamas, to Egypt’s Islamic Brotherhood, and to groups in Afghanistan, Algeria, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, and Pakistan.

Armed opposition to the Karimov government was dangerous in tightly controlled post-independence Uzbekistan, but the war in Tajikistan offered both ideological and mercenary opportunities to Uzbek revolutionaries. Two natives of Uzbekistan’s Fergana Valley who joined the United Tajik Opposition forces were Takhir Yuldash (Takhir Yuldashev) and Juma Namangani (Djuma Khodzhiev). Like many others in the Tajikistan conflict, Yuldash and Namangani fled to Afghanistan after the defeat of the UTO forces. While in Afghanistan, they gradually developed personal connections, financial sponsors, and a more systematic program for revolutionary action in Central Asia. In 1998 the two returned to Central Asia to establish the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and declare war on the region’s secular governments.

In February 1999 a series of terrorist bomb explosions in downtown Tashkent took sixteen lives and, according to Uzbek press accounts, narrowly missed President Karimov. The IMU claimed credit for the bombings. Karimov declared what amounted to a war against terrorism and appealed to major governments and international organizations for help. Many outside actors had difficulty distinguishing Karimov’s campaign against extremists from his campaign against domestic opponents, however. Thus at first he found little support outside Uzbekistan for what looked like an internal dispute.

As summer thaw came to the mountain passes of Tajikistan in 1999, bands of insurgents claiming allegiance to IMU leader Juma Namangani descended from

their mountain redoubts into staging areas in Kyrgyzstan in preparation for an attack on Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley. As they moved down through the mountain passes of the Altai mountain range into the ill-defined border areas of Kyrgyzstan, the rebels captured a number of Kyrgyz villages, taking hostage both villagers and four Japanese geologists who happened to be traveling through the area at the time. Their kidnapping escalated the action into an international incident, focusing the attention of major world governments on the potential for instability in the region. After tense negotiations, the foreign hostages were released, reportedly for a ransom. Tajik government troops escorted the rebels across the border into Afghanistan.

The IMU rebels returned the following summer, sweeping through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan en route to Uzbekistan. The rebels attacked and occupied villages in Kyrgyzstan. Some of them reportedly advanced to within 60 miles of Tashkent in August 2000 before being driven off by Uzbek security forces. In early 2001 reports circulated that the rebels had established a staging area in the inaccessible Tavildara region of central Tajikistan.³² The Tajik government denied the reports, but the tone of the denials gave credence to the idea that some members of the former United Tajikistan Opposition sympathized with the rebels and were secretly aiding them. Throughout the spring and summer of 2001, Central Asian chancelleries were anxiously developing plans for a coordinated inter-state program to repulse widely expected terrorist attacks.

Meanwhile, Washington was becoming more receptive to pleas from the Uzbek government to support the anti-terrorist effort. In September 2000 the State Department officially condemned the IMU and identified it as a terrorist organization.³³ But at the same time, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called for international cooperation to combat terrorism, with the reservation that the "United States will not support any and all measures taken in the name of fighting drugs and terrorism or restoring stability. One of the most dangerous temptations for a government facing violent threats is to respond in heavy-handed ways that violate the rights of innocent citizens."³⁴ Albright argued that the best way to defeat terrorist threats was to increase law-enforcement capability while simultaneously promoting democracy and human rights. Albright's response was at least in part a recognition of the arguments of the International Crisis Group and other organizations, which maintained that the most effective way to combat insurrection in Central Asia was by expanding employment and educational opportunities and ensur-

ing respect for the rule of law—a rule of law that would make governments themselves subject to the constraints of fair play and due process.³⁵

Regional Cooperation to Combat Insurgency

The unrest in Central Asia has forged a consensus among the countries of the region and the regional Great Powers, based on recognition that they are all threatened by a syndrome of lawlessness that involves political opposition, radical religious doctrines, gun running and narcotics trafficking. As Kyrgyzstan's president, Askar Akaev, put it, the traffic in drugs and weapons has become "problem number one" for his country.³⁶ Similarly, Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbaev, warned that drugs, terrorism, and competition over the region's scarce water resources were the main threats to stability in Central Asia.³⁷

The Russian imbroglio in Chechnya and the related terrorist war against civilians in Russia was a major factor in Russia's effort to defuse *jihad* movements that it believed were intellectually and financially supported from Afghanistan. Moscow believed that the war in Chechnya, the terrorist acts in Russia and Uzbekistan, and the hostage taking in Kyrgyzstan all had links to Islamic extremism that led back to training camps in Afghanistan. Russia saw the Central Asian states as an imminent battleground in the contest between civilization and lawlessness. During a visit to Astana, Kazakhstan, in March 2000 Defense Minister Igor Sergeev informed his Central Asian colleagues that, "the military-political situation in this region suggests that the Central Asian states are in the vanguard of the struggle against international terrorism and religious extremism."³⁸

The consensus on the seriousness of the threat brought forth a new spirit of cooperation among the states of the region. The evolution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is one result. Regional leaders began meeting in 1993 to discuss the normalization of their West Asian borders. In April 1996, the presidents of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan met in Shanghai to sign a package of fourteen agreements on border issues, including related economic and security measures. But the "Shanghai Accord," as the agreement came to be known, soon took on a broader mandate.³⁹ The Shanghai Five (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan) invited Uzbekistan (which shares no border with China or Russia) to participate as an observer with the intention of extending their coopera-

tion beyond border issues to include broad diplomatic initiatives including security cooperation against Taliban-inspired insurrectionism.

The U.S. government also found it had grounds to spur the countries toward greater regional security cooperation. Initially Washington was interested primarily in any nuclear weapons capability that the region had inherited from the Soviet Union. When the last of the special nuclear material was removed from Kazakhstan in early 1995, U.S. interest in Central Asian security arrangements flagged. Two things began to change the situation in the late 1990s. One was the actions of Osama bin Laden's terrorist group. The other was the emergence of Afghanistan as the world's major opium producer.

Following the attack on U.S. troops in Somalia in 1993, Washington began to suspect that Osama bin Laden's organization was a major exporter of mayhem. After the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi in 1998 killed 224 people, including twelve Americans, the U.S. government became convinced that bin Laden's al Qaeda group was at the root of numerous anti-American operations. When four members of al Qaeda went on trial in early 2001 in New York for the embassy bombings, Washington demanded the extradition of bin Laden to stand trial on terrorism charges. The Taliban, however, refused. In response, on August 20, 1998, Cruise missiles were launched at a training camp in Afghanistan believed to belong to al Qaeda. American and Yemeni officials believe that bin Laden was behind the October 12, 2000, bombing of the Navy destroyer USS *Cole* that killed seventeen American sailors in the Yemeni port of Aden.

Afghanistan has been a leading producer of poppies for centuries. But most of the production was for the domestic market and not for cash export of narcotics. The war and Soviet occupation disrupted opium production. After the Soviet withdrawal, poppy production for export began rising rapidly. According to the annual report of the UN's Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, in 1999 Afghanistan accounted for 42 percent of global poppy cultivation and 79 percent of global opium production.⁴⁰ The expansion of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan was particularly evident in the northern part of the country, which, the report noted, could result in the "preferred use of Central Asia as a transit zone for opium and heroin trafficking."⁴¹ In the first years of opium expansion, production was earmarked for markets outside West and Central Asia, primarily in Europe and Russia. But true to the pattern of

development of many Latin American countries, indigenous demand soon soared.⁴²

Opium cultivation in Afghanistan may have been a contentious issue within the Taliban. Mullah Omar, the movement's spiritual leader, decreed a ban on opium in August 1997, and in 1999 ordered a one-third decrease in poppy cultivation.⁴³ On July 28, 2000, Mullah Omar decreed that the cultivation and trade in opium was forbidden. This prohibition was repeated in October 2000. The UN drug-monitoring program in Afghanistan reported in early 2001 that the Taliban's anti-drug measures appeared to be having an effect.⁴⁴

International cooperation to combat terrorism and drug trafficking led Moscow and Washington to jointly sponsor UN Security Council Resolutions 1267 (October 1999) and 1333 (November 2000) calling for sanctions if the Taliban government failed to curb the export of drugs and terrorist activities. The UN resolutions constituted a new and ironic stage in international cooperation.⁴⁵ The United States and Russia, formerly rivals in the confrontation over Afghanistan, now stood together to counter the threat of terrorism and lawlessness that constituted the legacy of the Afghanistan war.

Looking Ahead

As the experience of Central Asia over the last decade amply illustrates, efforts to fight insurgency may foster counterinsurgency measures nearly as damaging as the violence they seek to combat. Balancing civil rights with public order in contemporary Central Asia will not be easy. Whatever the ultimate arrangement in Afghanistan, whether partition or the establishment of a mandate territory under the trusteeship of an outside power or consortium, Uzbekistan's role will be critical. The Islamist rebels have defined Uzbekistan as the prize in the regional competition for hearts and minds. It is Uzbekistan that they have repeatedly attacked, for as the home to Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand, they see it as the key to Central Asia. Their choice of targets is not accidental.

The Uzbeks have a distinctive political culture, very different from that of their Kazakh, Kyrgyz, or Tajik cousins. Traditions of tribal democracy and inter-tribal confederation were strong among the nomadic peoples of the mountains and the plains but not in the sedentary culture of Uzbekistan. Its leaders have always celebrated traditions of hierarchy and authoritarianism. Among the nomadic peoples of Central Asia's plains and mountains, it is considered gracious to discuss and deliberate, whereas among the oasis peoples of Uzbekistan, it

is considered gracious to obey, impolite to disagree, treachery to oppose. The Uzbek government has met treachery with ruthlessness, impoliteness with subtle manipulation. In the early 1990s Karimov succeeded in co-opting many proponents of the nascent opposition, the pre-independence nationalist Birlik (Unity) movement, isolating and hounding its leaders while simultaneously inviting talented young activists into his Soviet-based, but cosmetically reconstituted, “nationalist Uzbek” government. Guerilla warfare is, above all, a competition based on skill at deception. Karimov will be a formidable competitor in this realm. So far he has succeeded in outmaneuvering his nationalist opponents. The difference now is that the groups carrying the banner of revolution are less nationalist than internationalist, and less movements than organized obsessions.

Notes

1. The idea of the caliphate evokes the state established by the successors of the prophet Muhammad. In the early Islamic period the Muslim world was united under a single ruler, the caliph (or khalifa, literally, “successor”).
2. June Teufel Dryer, “The PLA and Regionalism: Xinjiang,” in *Chinese Regionalism: The Security Dimension*, ed. Andrew N.D. Wang and Richard H. Yang et al. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 249–76; Felix K. Chang, “China’s Central Asian Power and Problems,” *Orbis* 41, no. 3 (summer 1997): 401–25.
3. Owen Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia: Sinkiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China and Russia* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950), p. 32.
4. See Rajan Menon, “In the Shadow of the Bear: Security in Post-Soviet Central Asia,” *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995): 149–81.
5. For an assessment of the geostrategic relationships in the region, see *Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future with Nongovernment Experts* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2001). See also Charles Fairbanks, C. Richard Nelson, S. Frederick Starr, and Kenneth Weisbrode, *The Strategic Assessment of Central Asia* (Washington, DC: Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, January 2001).
6. This is not to say, however, that there is no historical basis for the claim of Central Asian nations to national self-determination and statehood. For an analysis of the ethnogenesis of the region, see Beatrice F. Manz, ed., *Central Asia in Historical Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).
7. For background on Central Asia, see William Fierman, ed., *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Denis Sinor, ed., *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994); Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammad: The Changing Face of Central Asia* (London: HarperCollins, 1994); Roald Z. Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower, eds., *Central Asia: Conflict, Resolution and Change* (Washington, DC: Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1995); Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam & Politics in Central Asia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995); Shireen T. Hunter, *Central Asia Since Independence* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996); R.D. McChesney, *Central Asia: Foundations of Change* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1996); Gregory Gleason, *Central Asian States: Discovering Independence* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997); Lena Jonson, *Russia in Central Asia: A New Web of Relations* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998); Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).
8. Soon after independence the leaders of all the countries of the Central Asian region could be described as assenting to the general principles of the international community: namely, the sovereign equality of states, non-interference in domestic affairs, territorial integrity of the state, the obligation to abide by international agreements, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and the obligation to engage in international cooperation as consistent with national interests.
9. See Nazarbaev’s speech to the Supreme Soviet of the Kazak Soviet Socialist Republic, December 10, 1991, “Vybor—Tsvilizovannoe Demokraticeskoe Obshchestvo,” <<trans. of title?>> *Pyat_’ let nezavisimosti* (Almaty, 1996), pp. 19–24. <<TRANS?>><<unable to confirm>>
10. Nursultan Nazarbaev, president of Kazakhstan, is a former first secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party. Islam Karimov, president of Uzbekistan, is a former first secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party. Saparmurad Niyazov, president of Turkmenistan, is a former first secretary of the Turkmen Communist Party. Emomali Rahmonov, president of Tajikistan, is a former Kulyab district official of the Communist Party. His predecessor as president, Rakhmon Nabiev (who died under mysterious circumstances in May 1993), was a former first secretary of the Tajik Communist Party. Among the Central Asian presidents, only the president of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, does not belong to the former Party *nomenklatura*, although in some respects even Akaev, a physicist who trained in Leningrad and served briefly as the president of the Kyrgyzstan Academy of Sciences, can be considered a member of the Soviet-era elite.
11. For additional background on human and civil rights in these countries, see Amnesty International’s *Annual Report 2000* (New York: Amnesty International, 2000); Committee to Protect Journalists, *Attacks on the Press in 1999* (www.cpj.org/attacks99/frameset_att99/rightframe_att99.html); Freedom House, *Freedom in the World, 1998–1999: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties* (New York: Freedom House, 2000); *U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000* (Washington, DC: Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, February 2001).
12. The Soviet justification for the invasion included the claim that foreign powers were providing financial assistance to the opposition to the pro-Marxist government. Zbigniew Brzezinski, in an interview published in 1998, explained that the U.S. government had been providing assistance prior to the December 1979 date of the Soviet invasion. Vincent Jauvert, “Les Révélations d’un ancien conseiller de Carter: ‘Oui, la CIA est entrée en Afghanistan avant les Russes,’” *Nouvel observateur* 1732 [Paris] (January 15–21, 1998). See the discussion in David N. Gibbs, “Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Retrospect,” *International Politics* 37, no. 2 (2000): 233–46.
13. See Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
14. *Washington Post* (September 2, 1989): A1; Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985); Zalmay Khalilzad, “Soviet American Cooperation in Afghanistan,” in *Soviet-American Conflict Resolution in the Third World*, ed. Mark N. Katz (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1991), pp. 67–94; Ralph H. Magnun and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).
15. Najibullah had remained under the protection of the UN compound until invading Taliban troops captured, tortured, castrated, and hanged him from a lightpost in downtown Kabul in September 1996. See Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 49–50.
16. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar leads the Hezb-e-Islami (Party of Islam); Ahmed Shah Masood led the Jumbesh-e Melli-ye Islami-ye Afghanistan. <<translation?>>
17. As Ahmed Rashid noted, “By walking away from Afghanistan as early as it did, the USA faced within a few years dead diplomats, destroyed embassies, bombs in New York and cheap heroin on its streets as Afghanistan became a sanctuary for international terrorism and the drugs mafia.” Rashid, << *Resurgence of Central Asia or Taliban ?* >>, p. 209.
18. UN Security Council Resolution 1267 of October 15, 1999, S/RES/1267 (1999).
19. UN Security Council Resolution 1333 of December 19, 2000, S/RES/1333 (2000).
20. Associated Press (September 7, 2000).

21. Shortly after the capture of Taloqan, President <<first name?>> Niyazov of Turkmenistan dispatched a special envoy, Boris Shikhmuradov, to Islamabad to initiate a dialogue on political recognition for the Taliban government with Pakistani officials. Reuters (August 31, 2000).

22. Reuters (April 23, 2001).

23. James Dobbins, a State Department career foreign service officer, was nominated ambassador to the Northern Alliance on November 5, 2001.

24. "Republic of Tajikistan: Recent Economic Developments," International Monetary Fund Staff Country Report No. 00/27 (March 6, 2000) (www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2000/cr0027.pdf).

25. Mohammad-Reza Djalili, Frédéric Grare, and Shirin Akiner, eds., *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

26. Tajik and Uzbek populations in Central Asia have historically been intertwined. At the time of the territorial division of Central Asia into republics, only about 300,000 of the total population of 1,100,000 ethnic Tajiks in Central Asia found themselves within the newly established state of Tajikistan. The gerrymandering of borders is "explained by the desire of the Uzbeks to have the historically important cities of Bukhara and Samarkand as part of Uzbekistan, despite the fact that for centuries the majority of the cities' population was Tajik. This was a matter of prestige rather than a political necessity, for, when the Russians conquered Central Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century, they made Tashkent the political, administrative, and cultural center of Russian Turkestan, replacing the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand, which had been regional centers for centuries." Sergei Gretskey, "Civil War in Tajikistan: Causes, Developments and Prospects for Peace," in *Central Asia: Conflict, Resolution and Change*, ed. Roald Z. Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (Washington, DC: Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1995), pp. 217-48.

27. Outside military and financial assistance played a role in the consolidation of the opposition forces during this early period, but the newspaper accounts, particularly by Moscow journalists, indicating that Iran and other Islamic states bankrolled the IRP are not well founded. Virtually all the weapons and ordnance in the Tajikistan war was of Soviet manufacture.

28. Lena Jonson, *The Tajik War: A Challenge to Russian Policy* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998).

29. The UTO was composed of three main groups: the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, and the Rastokhez national-revival movement. These groups were mostly defeated by Tajik government forces in the spring of 1993, but isolated units continued fighting from bases in Afghanistan and in areas in the southeast of the country until 1997, when the UTO became the recognized opposition in the reconciliation plan. Some UTO figures, such as Said Abdullo Nuri, continued to play a significant role in post-war reconstruction politics.

30. Islam Karimov's justification of authoritarianism is presented in his *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century: Challenges to Stability and Progress* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). Some scholars taken an optimistic view of Uzbekistan's policies. Frederick Starr argued in the pages of *Foreign Affairs* in early 1996 that Kazakhstan might have won accolades for its democratic rhetoric and for relinquishing its Soviet-era nuclear weapons, but that Uzbekistan showed greater promise of promoting enduring reform and stability in the region. Starr viewed Kazakhstan's prospects for reform as dimmed by its ethnic and territorial divisions, the absence of a strong scientific intelligentsia, the weakness of local administrative institutions, and an underdeveloped industrial base. He saw Uzbekistan as the most likely candidate for regional stabilizer to fend off Russian and Iranian stratagems in the region. And finally, Starr saw in Uzbekistan the first tentative indications of a model that could be adopted to move the other newly emergent societies of Central Asia toward international standards of governance and economic functioning. Starr asserted that despite Uzbekistan's "flirtations with Middle Eastern and Asian models of authoritarianism," the country was developing the groundwork for a civil society. S. Frederick Starr, "Making Eurasia Stable," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 1 (January/February 1996): 80-92.

31. U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Human Rights and Democratization in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000). See also "Straightening Out the Brains of One Hundred: Discriminatory Political Dismissals in Uzbekistan," *Helsinki Watch* 5, no. 7 (April 1993) <<couldn't find>>; *Christian Science Monitor* (May 24, 1994): 7.

32. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* reported on January 10, 2001 that IMU troops under the command of Juma Namangani, who had just months before been escorted out of Tajikistan as a result of the deal to release the hostages, had returned to Tajikistan and were ensconced in the Tavildara valley east of Dushanbe. But on January 17, Sherali Khairullaev, who at the time was the Tajik defense minister, denied foreign news reports that Namangani and his rebels had returned to Tajikistan, saying that a special government commission dispatched two weeks earlier to the Tavildara region had established that no members of the banned Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan had taken refuge there. On January 30, the Moscow newspaper *Kommersant-Daily* reported that the Tajik Ministry for Emergency Situations, headed by former UTO field commander Mirzo Zieev, had flown some 250 members of the IMU and Juma Namangani out of the country. See *RFE/RL Newsline* (January 11, 17, and 31, 2001).

33. The State Department designated the IMU as a foreign terrorist organization in September 2000. Press statement by Richard Boucher, U.S. Department of State (September 15, 2000) (secretary.state.gov/www/briefings/statements/2000/ps000915b.html).

34. Madeleine K. Albright, speech at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (April 17, 2000) (secretary.state.gov/www/statements/2000/000417.html).

35. International Crisis Group Asia Report no.14, *Central Asia: Islamicist Mobilization and Regional Security* (Brussels: ICG, March 2001). Also significant is the effort of the OSCE to promote responsible counter-terrorism legislation in Uzbekistan. The OSCE prepared draft legislation which the Uzbekistan government took into consideration in preparing its own counter-terrorism legislation in March 2001.

36. RFE/RL Newsline (December 15, 1998).

37. Reuters (February 25, 2000).

38. Interfax (March 29, 2000).

39. Gregory Gleason, "Policy Dimensions of West Asian Borders after the Shanghai Accord," *Asian Perspective* 25, no. 1 (2001): 107-31. <<couldn't find>>

40. Research Section of the UN International Drug Control Program, Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, *Global Illicit Drug Trends, 2000* (2001), p. 31 (www.undcp.org/global_illicit_drug_trends.html).

41. Research Section of the UN International Drug Control Program, Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, *Global Illicit Drug Trends, 1999* (2000), p. 20 (www.undcp.org/global_illicit_drug_trends.html).

42. *New York Times* (April 19, 2000): A1.

43. United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention press release, "Afghanistan Opium Cultivation in 2000 Substantially Unchanged: Country Still the Largest Opium Producer in the World" (September 15, 2000) (www.undcp.org/press_release_2000-09-15_1.html).

44. *New York Times* (February 7, 2001): A3.

45. In late March 2000, George Tenet, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, visited the Central Asian capitals of Astana and Tashkent. Somewhat later, in early April 2000, Louis Freeh, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, visited Tashkent for discussions on cooperation in the fight against crime and terrorism. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made an official visit to Central Asia on April 14-20, 2000, stopping in Astana and Tashkent. General Anthony Zinni, commander-in-chief of the U.S. Army's Central Command, visited the region in May 2000. The Department of State hosted a regional Central Asian Counter-Terrorism Conference on June 13-15, 2000, in Washington. The conference focused on means for strengthened counter-terrorism cooperation and efforts to combat other trans-border threats, underscoring the proposition that national strategies needed to be based on the rule of law and respect for human rights if they were to succeed. Stephen Sestanovich, former ambassador at large and special adviser to the secretary of state for the newly independent states, visited Central Asia in July 2000.

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