

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262420563>

Traditional and Non-Traditional Security Threats in Central Asia: Connecting the New and the Old

Article · August 2010

CITATIONS

8

READS

22,003

1 author:



Niklas Swanström

Institute for Security and Development Policy

92 PUBLICATIONS 328 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



China and the outside World [View project](#)



the foreign policy of China [View project](#)

Traditional and Non-Traditional Security Threats in Central Asia: Connecting the New and the Old

*Niklas Swanström**

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes how traditional and non-traditional threats in Central Asia interact and reinforce each other. It argues that analysts need to overcome the intellectual separation between “hard” and “soft” threats and to better understand how “hard” and “soft” security issues overlap and in many ways reinforce each other. The weakness of Central Asian states seriously impairs their capacity to deal with security threats, especially non-traditional ones (including environmental threats). The result is that security problems in the region tend to multiply. The combination of weak states with old and new security threats in Central Asia weakens government structures even more and creates a vicious cycle.

Keywords • Greater Central Asia • Afghanistan • Narcotics Trafficking • Organized Crime; Islamic Radicalism • Non-traditional Security Threats • Human Security

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been growing awareness on the need to widen the concept of security and distinguish between “hard/traditional” and “soft/non-traditional” security threats. This is increasingly accepted, even if the implementation of strategies to face “soft” security threats has been less prominent.¹ The implementation has

* Niklas Swanström is Director, Institute for Security and Development Policy, Stockholm, Sweden.

¹ Many of the so-called new (soft) security threats are neither new nor particularly soft. Narcotics trade as one example has existed since time immemorial. Environmental security has as another example brought states to an end even far before modern man

improved somewhat in the last few years, even if there is much to be hoped for. One of the new challenges we now face is the intellectual separation between hard and soft security threats; a separation which has been almost total and in too many ways, artificial. The focus on non-traditional security challenges has been a positive trend in terms of elevating the soft security threats. However, there has also been a failure to understand how traditional and non-traditional security threats overlap, and in many ways, reinforce each other.

Non-traditional (which tends to be transnational) threats to security have risen to prominence, primarily in developing and post-communist areas and then particularly in Greater Central Asia.² Among these, the trade in illicit drugs arguably carries the largest societal, political and economic consequences in many areas. It threatens the fabric of societies through addiction, crime and disease. It exacerbates corruption in already weak states which impairs their economic and political functioning. Moreover, through links to insurgency and terrorism, the drug trade is an increasing threat to regional and international security in the most traditional, military sense.³ As such, the drug trade affects both “hard” and “soft” security. However, there are a multitude of other soft security threats that have a devastating potential to hurt the security of the state and society.

Arguably, nowhere is the damning effect of soft security threats higher than in the Greater Central Asian region. This is mainly because it is interlinked with traditional security threats and trans-national implications. One departure point for analysis would be the drug trade, which carries multiple dimensions of threats to security and has become

realized the importance of such threats. The terminology of soft/non-traditional and hard/non-traditional will be used interchangeably in this text.

² Much of the soft security threats have shown to be much more transnational in its structure than the traditional security threats. Economic and environmental threats are not only transnational but increasingly global in its stretch. See Niklas Swanström, “The Narcotics Trade: A Threat to Security? National and Transnational Implications,” *Global Crime* 8 (2007): 1-25; Niklas Swanström, “Political Development and Organized Crime: The Yin and Yang of Greater Central Asia?” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, 4 (2007): 83-101.

³ Saltanat Berdkeeva, “Organized Crime in Central Asia: A Threat Assessment,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 7, 2 (2009): 75-100. Tamara Makarenko, “Terrorism and Transnational Organised Crime: the Emerging Nexus,” in *Transnational Violence and Seams of Lawlessness in the Asia-Pacific: Linkages to Global Terrorism* (Hawaii: Asia Pacific Center for Strategic Studies, 2004). Kimberley Thachuk, “Transnational Threats: Falling Through the Cracks?” *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* 10, 1 (2001): 47-67; Sabrina Adamoli, et. al., *Organized Crime Around the World* (Helsinki: HEUNI, 1998); Barbara Harris-White, *Globalization and Insecurity: Political, Economic and Physical Challenges* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2002); Ian Griffith, “From Cold War Geopolitics to Post-Cold War Geonarcotics,” *International Journal* 30, 2 (1993-1994): 1-36; Richard Matthew and George Shambaugh, “Sex, Drugs, and Heavy Metal: Transnational Threats and National Vulnerabilities,” *Security Dialogue* 29 (1998): 163-175.

acutely visible in the Greater Central Asia region.⁴ With a galloping production of opium in war-torn Afghanistan and increasing trafficking of heroin northward through post-Soviet Central Asia to markets in Russia, China and Europe, the adverse impact of the drug trade on the wider region is becoming increasingly apparent. However, systematic research into this phenomenon has been relatively scant.⁵ Similarly, environmental, water, economic and other security threats have not received the attention they deserve and have drowned in the media attention regarding the terrorist threat and the soft and hard implications this threat could have on society.⁶ This is troubling as the current lack of economic development has most likely done more to create a base for terrorist recruitment than any other issues, as well as strengthening the position of illegal economic activity. Also, the water issue threatens to bring states to war and in extreme cases, deprive some regions in Greater Central Asia from any chance of human sustainability. The tension is particularly high between upstream states (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) and downstream states (Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and to certain extent Turkmenistan).

The linkage between the existing security threats (soft and hard) in the region and the weak political and economic performance not only reinforces the negative development, it could in fact threaten the very fabric of the states. Many of the mentioned security threats thrive in weak states, such as organized crime and terrorism. If one looks at the issue of environmental security in these states, it is apparent that this type of security threatens the very sustainability of the State, but not much is done to manage this security deficit. This is because such security threats are often seen as minor. Due to this reasoning, resources are focused on keeping the government in place rather than securing long-term security for the states, governments and the people.

⁴ Greater Central Asia is here defined as including the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as Afghanistan and the Western Chinese Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Province.

⁵ The literature on the drug trade in Central Asia consists mainly of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Reports and a handful of articles and working papers. These include: Martha Brill Olcott and Natalia Udalova, "Drug Trafficking on the Great Silk Road," Working paper 11, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 2000; Alexander Seger, *Drugs and Development in the Central Asian Republics* (Bonn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, 1996); Kairat Osmonaliev, "Developing Counter-Narcotics Policy in Central Asia: Legal and Political Dimensions," *Silk Road Paper* (Washington D.C. and Uppsala: Central Asia Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, January 2005).

⁶ Bo Libert, Erkin Orolbaev, and Yuri Steklov, "Water and Energy Crisis in Central Asia," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 6, 3 (2008): 9-20; Samuel Chan, "Breaking the Impasse in Afghanistan: Problems with Neighbours, Brothers and Guests," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 6, 4 (2008): 103-128.

What Are We Looking At?

The security debate has for too long focused on military threats towards the state and the “softer” issues such as environment, trade, transnational crime, human security, etc. have not been seen as potential security threats.⁷ One important reason for this is that traditionally, security threats could, by definition, only be directed towards “the state and the state is and should be about security, with the emphasis on military and political security”.⁸ Thus an issue or event would only be classified a security threat if the survival of the state as an entity was at risk.⁹ In this context, Lippman claims that security is when “a nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values, if it wishes to avoid war, and is able to, if challenged, to maintain them by victory in such war”.¹⁰ These old views of security has largely changed with the globalised world and an increasing number of international organizations that carry significant weight, not least the European Union that has made much of the state oriented security less important but also that strictly non-military issues has taken a prominent position in the discussions on security.

It is evident that security still is viewed in military terms and more importantly that, there is an enemy that is clearly defined (compared to terrorism, transnational crime, economic security and environmental issues) and can be defeated militarily. This way of looking at security has been in place since the Westphalian peace treaty in 1648, where today’s western concept of the nation-state was created. However, in the early 1970s, economic security began to get academic attention, and quickly received political interest. Later, in the 1980s, environmental issues began to increase in salience, at least academically.¹¹ Yet, the discussion on

⁷ Karl Deutsch, *et al.*, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957); Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962); Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

⁸ Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p. 37.

⁹ Security studies have traditionally focused on state or the classical phenomena of security complexes. This have changed as the international and regional systems are increasingly important, but also the emergence of subunits of the states, such as regions or ethnic groups, as economic and political actors. Niklas Swanström, *Regional Cooperation and Conflict Management: Lessons from the Pacific Rim* (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2003); Björn Hettne, Andras Inotai, Osvaldo Sunkel (eds.), *The New Regionalism and the Future of Security and Development* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001).

¹⁰ Walter Lippman, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1943), p. 53.

¹¹ Fred Hirsh and Michael W. Doyle, “Politization in the World Economy: Necessary Conditions for an International Economic Order,” in Fred Hirsch and Michael W. Doyle and Edward L. Morse (eds.) *Alternatives to Monetary Disorder* (New York: McGraw-Hill,

alternative security concepts did not gain real momentum until after the dissolution of the USSR and the end of the Cold War in 1991. Then the focus shifted from “hard” military security to “softer” issues, and societal, political, environmental and economic security became more prominent. These changes in the perception of security have created a debate between the academics who wish to see a widened security definition and those wanting to keep it narrow.¹²

The debate can, in simplified terms, be divided into military versus non-military sources of threat and state versus non-state actors.¹³ The political economy and the political sector have however become more closely connected to the military sector and this politico-military focus has been widely used among “reformed” traditionalists.¹⁴ Despite a slight widening of the analytical focus, the state remains the basic referent object for traditionalists. Individual states are supposed to have very little reason for cooperation as the international system is anarchic and states’ only goal is survival. If cooperation is initiated, it will crumble as soon as the strategic factors weaken.¹⁵ It is proposed that this has changed with increased globalization and the importance of international trade and greater interaction in international and regional organizations. The interests of states are no longer singular. Furthermore, sub- or trans-national actors, such as large corporations and political parties, have interests that are transnational and might be against state’s interest. This can be seen in the sub-regional cooperation between different regions in Europe. This is partly due to globalization and increased interdependence between states, but also to the financial and moral influence which companies, international organizations and NGOs carry and the

1977), pp. 11-66; Donella H. Meadows, et al., *The Limits of Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Potomac Associates, 1972); John Gerard Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order,” *International Organization* 35, 2 (1982): 379-415.

¹² The arguments to keep it more narrow is that if the security concept was expanded it would include everything and nothing, each single factor could potentially be a security threat. The arguments for widening the security concept is simply that the world is more complicated than the classical definitions allowed for and that there are plenty of security threats out there that are equally or worse security threats to states, individuals and other sub-national entities.

¹³ For a more detailed discussion see: Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, op. cit.; Richard Ullman, “Redefining Security,” *International Security* 8, 1 (1993): 129-153; Ole Waever, “Securitization and Desecuritization,” in Ronnie Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press 1995).

¹⁴ Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995); Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Edward Mansfield, *Power, Trade and War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹⁵ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, op. cit.; Kenneth Waltz, “Anarchic Orders and Balances of Power,” in Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

increased importance they have in international affairs. The diversification of the interests of the state, its actors and globalization process has increased the importance of non-military security threats. This has also increased the need for cooperation because new questions have been raised by new actors.¹⁶ Arguably, these threats have been prevalent earlier but it is the end of the Cold War that made it possible to have a more diversified view on security. The overriding cleavage between the communist and capitalist world crumbled and in the dust we could see security threats that thrived behind the walls between the West and the East. For example, in the Soviet Union, issues such as the environmental degeneration (Aral Sea) and societal security (AIDS, poverty and narcotics abuse) was prevalent before 1991, but they had been overshadowed by the military security and the threat from the West.¹⁷

There are still close and legitimate connections between security and the state as a political unit, but the argument among new security theorists is that security should incorporate more than just the state as the analytical object. This is especially apparent in a world where international organizations (World Trade Organization (WTO), United Nations (UN), etc.), regional groupings (European Union, North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Shanghai Cooperation Organizations (SCO), etc.), and sub-national entities are flourishing.¹⁸ Buzan *et al* has attempted to construct a wider definition of security, without making everything and nothing security.¹⁹ These endeavors are not new but some more inclusive theories have been criticized by traditionalists. Even so, this new way of approaching security is important because it is a dynamic field where changes can be seen in the security perceptions of individual states over time.

The new attempts have led to the development of a framework that will take the newly emerging challenges and threats into consideration (securitization), such as transnational issues. This is because the traditional approaches based on the military-political sectors are not

¹⁶ Niklas Swanström, *Regional Cooperation and Conflict Management: Lessons from the Pacific Rim*, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Both in China and Russia AIDS/HIV, organized crime and narcotics problem was swept under the carpet for political reasons. It was unconceivable that the perfect political problem could have these problems, which were a result of Western decadence. The result is that high numbers, and increasing, is detected in both states and that the unchecked problem was allowed to spread in areas where it could have been prevented.

¹⁸ Niklas Swanström, *Regional Cooperation and Conflict Management: Lessons from the Pacific Rim*, *op. cit.*; Chia Siow Yue and Lee Tsao Yuan, "Subregional Economic Zones in Southeast Asia," in Ross Garnaut and Peter Drysdale (eds.), *Asia Pacific Regionalism: Readings in International Economic Relations* (Pymble: Harper Educational Publishers, 1994); Edward K.Y. Chen and C.H. Kwan (eds.), *Asia's Borderless Economy: the Emergence of Sub-regional Zones* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1997).

¹⁹ Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

sufficient to explain “softer” threats and also make it difficult to develop appropriate solutions. The security concept is therefore being revised and broadened to include sectors such as economic, environmental and societal developments. It is also Buzan *et al* that offers the most interesting and operational definition, where a security issue is presented as posing an existential threat (which is anything that questions the recognition, legitimacy, or governing authority) to a designated referent object (which could be a state, but not necessarily).²⁰ This approach provides for wider definitions of security. It incorporates factors such as the failure of states to fulfill the expectations of its individuals and international actors, as well as its governing capacity. These factors are extremely important in any discussion on the impact of international narcotics trade, as it could potentially affect the lives of its citizens and the states governing capacity through corruption and failed economic performance.

Internal Weakness and Security in Greater Central Asia

Greater Central Asia consists of states that suffer from internal weaknesses in their political and economic functions at different but always significant degrees. The impact of this on the development of the security situation and the state’s ability to act are devastating in some cases and serious in most. Internal weakness has been a growing problem for many of the states in this region but potentially more important is the regional weakness that enables organized crime, extremism to grow and prevents effective multilateral cooperation to combat the problems. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation have taken a number of far reaching measures to combat different forms of soft and hard security threats. Even so, the results are not that promising. This is mainly due to the inability of the Central Asian members in the SCO that lack the willingness and ability to act.

This is not necessarily a problem only for Greater Central Asia. It has been a negative development since independence that is disturbing for regional and international security. Increasingly the internal weakness of a state’s economic and political function impacts the security perception and the impact of such threats on other states. Corruption and political co-optation by non-political actors are especially apparent in states that suffer from internal weakness. Criminal and shady economic structures can, with little effort, further destabilize and corrupt a weak country or a region. This promotes the production and transit of narcotics and increases terrorist/extremist behavior. This is without mentioning the environmental problems the Greater Central Asian region faces.

²⁰ Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, *op. cit.* pp. 21-22.

Therefore the very weaknesses of states are a crucial component in the security discussion on Greater Central Asia.

Furthermore, the need to look at the state's weaknesses is important as the impact of insecurity does not only affect the state in itself, but also the surrounding states. Holsti had argued that:

“the security between states in the Third world, among some of the former republics of the Soviet Union, and elsewhere has become increasingly dependent upon security within those states.”²¹

It is safe to point out that the cooperation regarding regional security between the Greater Central Asian states are lacking to a disturbing degree, not so much because it lacks common interest but because the national interest is primarily directed inwards rather than outwards and that there is a substantial distrust between the Greater Central Asian States.²² This failure is particularly apparent when the potential soft security threats are to a high degree transnational in character and the problems in particularly weak states spill over to other states. Afghanistan and Tajikistan are the worst affected states in this regard and the overlap of security threats and geography between these two states is disturbing. Alongside this, the Ferghana valley is a region where the trans-national aspect is apparent and increasingly problematic. Buzan has argued that states are considered to be strong when the:

“national security can be viewed primarily in terms of protecting the components of the state from outside threat and interference, and where the idea of state, its institutions and its territory will be clearly defined and stable in their own right”.²³

This would imply that strong states do not view internal issues as primary security threats because the political institutions can supposedly deal sufficiently with any internal problem to an acceptable degree. The capacity of strong states to withstand internal security issues has not included threats that are “soft” and driven by non-traditional purposes such as economic profit or environmental degeneration. Neither has it taken into account what happens when a large part of the population in

²¹ Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, the War and the State of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 15. For a more elaborate discussion of the linkage between narcotics and weak states see: Maral Madi, “Narcotics Trafficking in Weak States,” The Program for Silk Road Studies, Uppsala University, 2003, pp. 7-21.

²² Niklas Swanström, “Political Development and Organized Crime: The Yin and Yang of Greater Central Asia,” *op. cit.*

²³ Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear* (New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 2nd ed. 1991), p. 100.

another state is forced to move due to drought (such as the Aral Sea issue). It also fails to take into account economic deprivation, the abuse of narcotics, the corruption of the state apparatus, and that the level of criminality and health costs rise whilst productivity decreases. This is a situation that is present in many of the Greater Central Asian states albeit to varying degrees, and the situation will undoubtedly be worse in states that exhibit a greater frequency of such problems.

In the weaker states in Greater Central Asia, loose socio-political cohesion and internal challenges to the legitimacy of the government have led to endemic political instability, and in some cases, to internal military defiance of the state structure. Thus, these weak states are more vulnerable to the internally generated threats than strong states, and their primary objective is to consolidate their internal stability (and political control), rather than focusing on threats originating from other states. Ayooob has argued at a general level that the “major concern – indeed – obsession” of elites of developing states “is with security at the level of both states structures and governing regimes”.²⁴

Weak states are therefore (to a higher degree than strong states) preoccupied with the possibility to stay in power, in an often undemocratic system, and are willing to go to great lengths to accomplish this. The often forceful action against domestic opposition or even perceived opposition is common in Greater Central Asia. Financial support (corruption) is one of these means to stay in power and weak political leaders seek resources to hold on to their power. In 2005, the people behind the Kyrgyz revolution were financed by means of drug money.²⁵ This would, if the allegations are true to any extent, put the current regime in an inter-dependant relationship with narcotics dealers that threaten their internal, as well as international, legitimacy. Such security threats come in a wide variety of shapes but the common denominator is that it could threaten the stability (power) of the regime in power. Afghanistan is, of course, a clear-cut case where the narcotics industry has become the primary industry in the country, and has seeped into the core of the institutions and power relationships present there.²⁶ This is a situation the international community is all too aware of.

This said, the existence of weak states cannot explain all aspects of the lack of security in the region. As one example, the international narcotics trade as a phenomenon is prevalent in all states of the world

²⁴ Mohammed Ayooob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²⁵ Svante Cornell and Niklas Swanström, “Kyrgyzstan’s “Revolution”: Poppies or Tulips?” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, May 18, 2005.

²⁶ Samuel Chan, “Breaking the Impasse in Afghanistan: Problems with Neighbours, Brothers and Guests,” *op. cit.*; Niklas Swanström, “The Narcotics Trade: A Threat to Security? National and Transnational Implications,” *op. cit.*

today and states are affected by the consequences of narcotics regardless of the degree of political cohesion. It could however be argued that the production and transit of narcotics are more prevalent in weak states or regions as there are fewer control mechanisms, and the political elite is relatively easy to co-opt (for example the war lords in Afghanistan, the North Korean government, the Tajik and Turkmen elites and the militants in Burma). Another hypothesis, which connects back to weak states, is that the transit routes would primarily be drawn through relatively weak states as corruption and political co-optation would decrease the transaction costs for the criminal networks. Similarly, many of the new security threats, and old, thrive in weak states and economies.²⁷ This is because weak states tend to have much less resources and abilities to act on soft security threats, such as the environmental challenges that are often not even seen as a serious threat or at least not the governments. This is despite the fact that water and agricultural areas are in high demand and dwindling due to poor environmental track records. The result of this is a substantial threat to the physical survival of the state or at least regions, such as the Aral Sea area. Overall, this makes weak states a growing ground for soft security threats and the spread tends to be much faster in comparison to a state with a more stable political and economic environment.

When Traditional and Non-Traditional Security Meet in Greater Central Asia

Afghanistan has emerged as the single largest producer of heroin in the world.²⁸ This basic reality has had a tremendous negative impact on the Greater Central Asian region. In fact, much of the traditional and non-traditional security threats can be directly derived from this unfortunate situation or has reinforced other security threats. Criminal co-optation of the state and military instability can in simple terms be calculated from the epicenter that Afghanistan has become. The greater the distance from this hub, the less instability and criminal cooption. The situation can, of course, not be only calculated by geographical proximity as the underlying factors are more complicated than this but the heroin trade has had an undeniably negative impact on the stability of the region. China and Iran are two examples of states that border Afghanistan that hold a relatively high degree of internal state control and can effectively combat organized crime and other non-traditional security threats. Following the transit routes through Iran, Russia, Central Asia, Pakistan, Middle East, etc., there is a visible negative impact where the heroin is

²⁷ Maral Madi, "Narcotics Trafficking in Weak States," *op. cit.*

²⁸ *World Drug Report 2009* (New York: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2009).

transited with rapid expanding criminality, epidemics (HIV/Aids and Hepatitis C) that follow intravenous usage and military tension.

The arch of instability is primarily derived from a few states in the vicinity of Afghanistan, but there is serious spillover to other neighboring states. The weakness of the Afghan, Tajik and Kyrgyz economies and political systems make them easy targets for the criminal networks, and have emerged as three of the most corrupt states according to Transparency International. In fact, all states within the Greater Central Asian region receive a dismal score. For example, Kazakhstan (on the high end) receives the score 2.2 (of 10) which indicates rampant corruption and Afghanistan receives 1.5, which is the fifth lowest score in the world.²⁹ Moreover, there are very few effective institutions in the worst affected states where the law enforcement institutions are weak. Social, educational, and health institutions are also in the worst perceivable condition and government institutions (at large) are in a very poor condition. The lack of effective institution building and rampant corruption in these states make any effective management of security threats very difficult. Threats that are not considered central to the survival of the government, such as environmental protection or widespread health programs are excluded from the list of security threats that need to be handled.

As a result, security threats of different kinds have emerged in the region to an unprecedented level in the worst affected states, but the impact is felt to some degree in all regional states. Due to the fact that the states are weak and have very little impact on the security situation, there are huge domestic security problems. This is especially evident in the areas outside of the major cities that the central government has lost control of, or lost interest in, especially if minorities or opposition controls the area.³⁰ The government institutions and influence therefore often fails to impact the regions outside of the capital, at least in a positive manner. This is particularly true in minority regions and regions that are considered to be less important to the ruling elite for other reasons. This has cemented a center-periphery cleavage that furthers the division of the countries in question and alienates the governments from its people. This is something that is noted in all Greater Central Asian states, albeit it is more pronounced in the weaker states. There is not a single country that has not felt the impact of regional tension and preferential treatment of certain region, cities and groups over others. Politically and socially, this is a major issue but the problem does not end

²⁹ Transparency International, Corruption Perception Index: <<http://www.transparency.org/>>.

³⁰ Niklas Swanström and Nicklas Norling, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Trade, and the roles of India, Pakistan and Iran," *Central Asian Survey* 26, 3 (2007): 429-444.

with these factors. The economic consequences are arguably even more important as it threatens the economic sustainability of the countries in question and pits the less affluent regions against the more affluent.

In fact, trade and investments are largely done between capitals and major cities while many of the regional cities are left outside of the economic and social development, if there is any legal economic development to speak about.³¹ This has not only created a division between capitals and other areas, but has also reinforced a growing radicalization of the political life. Much of the radicalization we see today has its roots in the failure of the regional governments to act and provide security for an individual's economic and social development. Islamic radicals and drug dealers have in many ways become the security provider, or at least prospective, that the state should be and in exposed areas the only economic development worth talking about is derived from organized crime.³² The failure of the regional government to act is not only derived from lack of interest and greed, but also in the government's ability to act, or lack thereof. Due to weak government structures, institutional corruption and historical luggage inherited from the Soviet occupation, many regional governments cannot act effectively, and are less dependent on the ruling party and more on the inherent weakness of its institutions.

Weak infrastructural investments have emerged as a major problem in Greater Central Asia. This does not only fail to integrate the different states and the region as a political entity, it decreases the chance of stable long-term economic development. External, as well as internal, investment and trade fails to reach all areas of the region and excludes large groups from the advantages of economic development. It also takes out large consumer markets and prevents growth. This will have damning effects for the development of security for all areas of Greater Central Asia. This is also true when it comes to health and educational institutions that are, as a rule of thumb, worse off in the peripheral areas, something that often is true also in developed states, but the differences are devastating in this region and causes real security challenges for the population at large.

³¹ Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Niklas Swanström, Svante Cornell and Anara Tabyshalieva, *A Strategic Conflict Analysis of Central Asia with a Focus on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*, Report to Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, June 2005; "Tajikistan: On the Road to Failure," Asia Report No. 162, *International Crisis Group*, February 12, 2009; "Kyrgyzstan: A Faltering State," Asia Report No. 109, *International Crisis Group*, December 16, 2005; "Kyrgyzstan: A Deceptive Calm," Asia Briefing No. 79, *International Crisis Group*, August 14, 2008.

³² Niklas Swanström, "Political Development and Organized Crime: The Yin and Yang of Greater Central Asia," *op. cit.*

Lack of economic growth in the Greater Central Asian region, with partial exceptions of some major cities and specific areas such as the energy sector, have emerged as one of the largest threats against stability. Social and economic deprivation has increased the dissatisfaction with the state and its institutions with major upheavals as a result. Moreover, they turn to organizations and structures that offer alternatives, regardless of the radical and utopian goals or even accepting protection and support from criminal interests. As mentioned earlier, organized crime is the provider of socio-economic stability and development in many regions and states and in Kyrgyzstan organized crime played a critical role in the political changed in 2005. The failure of state structures to provide economic development has raised internal levels of dissatisfaction and promoted the emergence of militant organizations/or criminal organizations. People seek alternatives to sustain themselves and their families, or they simply leave the region to seek a better life.

The result has been that the remittances from migrant laborers (primarily men) from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan account for between 8 and 50 percent of the legal national income.³³ This exodus of these laborers will not decrease during the economic crisis, unless Russia (where most emigrants go) imposes severe restrictions on immigration. If this would happen, it would not only have devastating effects on the economy, it would also increase unemployment catastrophically and potentially increase radicalization of the society. It is unlikely that migrant laborers would return home voluntarily, as the feeling is that their own state offers none or very small opportunities for their social and economic development. However, in tough economic times the labor force has been partially forced back, primarily from Russia, with possible social tension as a result.³⁴

Fundamentalism has increasingly become a serious threat to all states in the region, Afghanistan naturally suffers primarily from this due to the long-term instability and the dominant position of organized crime but the problem is more widespread. Much of the problem lies in the growing unemployment; weak government sponsored health care, social welfare at large, as well as a lack of belief in the future. Radicalization of all working and failing institutions in the weak states are underway in the region and the development will over time (if this level of development continues) will be the alienation of Greater Central Asia not only from the West but also from India, China and Russia. This would be due to rampant corruption, instability and radicalization. However, alienation is not the only problem. The potential development of alternative economic and political structures may be less promising

³³ Erica Marat, "Labor Migration in Central Asia: Implications of the Global Economic Crisis," *Silk Road Paper*, *Institute for Security and Development Policy*, 2009.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 41.

than the current institutions if the following governments are radically oriented. There also seems to be only a remote, if even that, reason to wish for better economic development and political participation under more radicalized governance.

Traditional security issues, that is, military threats to the government, follows the so-called soft security threats. Today, we can see a network of militants in the southern part of Greater Central Asia, especially in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan posing soft security threats even if the phenomena is spread all over the region and beyond. Much of the problem is that the militants derive their appeal, strength and freedom of operation from the soft security threats that the governments have failed to act on. The social and economic deprivation gives extremist organizations a reason to act militarily against a government which they perceive as corrupt. This corruption is present, and would also most likely remain even if there was a change of government. This is because it is imbedded in the system. The current socio-economic situation in the region has legitimized many radical organizations actions against the government. These organizations can be openly militant like the Taliban and the IMU or less open, like Hizb-Ut-Tahrir.

Militant movements have tapped into the tremendous economic resources of organized crime (more specifically the heroin market, but also weapons, human trafficking etc). In fact, to a great extent, organized crime and militant organizations are highly compatible.³⁵ This is especially true after 9/11 when state sponsored terrorism dwindled and they had to seek other revenues. Organized crime reaps great benefits from unstable governments and conflicts and it has become a real policy problem for many states in and outside of the region.³⁶ IMU is one of the examples on where an organization has thrived on organized crime, even to the extent that IMU cannot today be called a political organization only, but are heavily involved in organized crime and in particular heroin smuggling.³⁷ Very few political changes, militant or non-militant, can be accomplished in Greater Central Asia without a strong connection to organized crime. We did see that the political change in Kyrgyzstan was directly supported by the criminal networks. That is, narco-traffickers from the south of Kyrgyzstan and in particular

³⁵ Ron Chepesiuk, "Dangerous Alliance: Terrorism and Organized Crime," *The Global Politician*, September 11, 2008, <<http://www.globalpolitician.com/23435-crime>> (April 20, 2010); LaVerle Berry, et al., *Nations Hospitable To Organized Crime And Terrorism*, Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress, October 2003, <www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/Nats_Hospitable.pdf> (April 20, 2010).

³⁶ Interviews in 2007-2009 with drug enforcement and military agencies in Greater Central Asia and states neighboring.

³⁷ Svante Cornell, "Narcotics, Radicalism and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, 4 (2005): 577-597.

the Osh region.³⁸ Increasingly there is a problem differentiating between the pure fundamentalist and criminal organizations, because they overlap and benefit from each other's strong points (social legitimacy and financial strength respectively). Overall, there is an increasing problem in differentiating between the different security threats in the region. This is because they tend to overlap and reinforce each other, not only via a merger of criminal and militant organizations, but also through regional instability and lack of security. In the footsteps of organized crime and militants are devastating effects on human health, the environment, as well as the legal economy.

The merger of weak states, old and new security threats in Central Asia weakens government structures even more and is truly a vicious circle. The government's inability to effectively combat soft security threats "legitimizes" the usage of military violence against the government. Moreover, the continued and long-lasting conflicts that we have seen in southern Greater Central Asia have had devastating effects on social and human security. Increased violence and criminal co-option has decreased resources to health and education; resources that focus on keeping regimes in place and sustain the very little control they have. Financial and human resources to health, education and social security at large has dwindled in most states in comparison to military expenditure and good old fashion corruption.

Implications on Energy and Environmental Security

The overall security situation in Greater Central Asia has much to wish for and the region can only be termed unstable with a side of serious security deficits. China holds a stronger grip on the security in Xinjiang, even if we saw some disturbances there in 2009, and Kazakhstan emerges as one of the more stable states in the region despite tendencies for political and economic instability. This makes the security situation problematic in all aspects and the security threats to both energy and the environment are serious. This is especially evident in the southern part of the region.

Criminal co-option and rampant military instability in the southern part of Greater Central Asia have spilled over to other states in the region and there is a potentially growing degree of extremism and dissatisfaction with the regional governments. This is not a new trend but a long-term development that was initiated decades ago. However, with the destabilization of Afghanistan and the fact that it has become the epicenter of instability in the region, the situation has become much worse. There is no easy solution to this problem and it will take great

³⁸ Svante Cornell and Niklas Swanström, "Kyrgyzstan's "Revolution": Poppies or Tulips?" *op. cit.*

regional and international efforts to turn the situation around. Efforts that are not necessarily believed to be necessary until the situation becomes worse and directly affects the West and China much more directly than it does today. Part of the solution to the problem is in increased international assistance in establishing functional institutions such as police, legal, and customs but also in presenting economic alternatives to organized crime and political alternatives to increased radicalization. This would force the international community to commit both tremendous economic and political resources, resources that will not be there in times of international economic instability.

The environment is more affected than the energy sector as energy is seen as something more lucrative and more serious than simply a green policy. Energy transit and production generates financial resources, whereas environmental policies only decreases financial resources, or at least that is what many assume. There is very little consideration, except for the extreme cases such as the Aral Sea, for the impact other security threats have had on the environment or what security impact the environment could have. Heroin cultivation has had devastating effects on the environment in Latin America (the only region where this has been measured), which was done through the pollution of rivers and soil by the chemicals used in the refinement process of narcotics.³⁹ As Afghanistan produces 94 percent of the worlds' heroin, it can be safely assumed that a generous amount of chemicals has polluted the wildlife, as criminal networks are not exactly renowned for their environmental policies. In both cases, it is evident that social and economic instability have had huge negative impacts. Alongside this, transit routes for oil and gas in southern Greater Central Asia are limited and expensive due to this instability. Similarly, the instability in the region has made environmental programs difficult, despite the fact that the conflicts have increased the need for such endeavors.

The solution is not necessarily simply to establish democratic and free trade oriented governments today, as they would succumb under the devastating conditions they would have to rule in, but rather in strengthening the basic foundations of the region and the states. This is not an easy task because much of the economic control today in some regions is inter-twined with organized crime. However, by increasing trade with all parts of the region through improved infrastructure would potentially decrease the base for radicalization and extremism and offer alternatives to organized crime. This needs to be done in coordination with intensified work against organized crime and militant groups, with military means if necessary. SCO will have a role here with a firm

³⁹ Niklas Swanström, "The Narcotics Trade: A Threat to Security? National and Transnational Implications," *op. cit.*

guiding from China, but the organization is severely hampered when dealing with these issues. This is because Russia does not benefit from multilateral cooperation with regards to energy, and there are also strong interests in Russia that benefit from increased instability and narcotics trafficking. Moreover, the Central Asian state has a poor track record with regards to cooperation. Even so, China needs to come up with fresh ideas on ways to proceed. This should, of course, be done in cooperation with the rest of the international community.