

A Stabilizing Neighbor? The Impact of China's Engagement in Central Asia on Regional Security

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DGAPanalyse

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The Impact of China's Engagement in
Central Asia on Regional Security

by Luba v. Hauff

Summary/Zusammenfassung

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The relationship between Central Asia's states and their societies is an increasingly vital determinant of regional insecurity. During the past decade, the traditionally secular populations' frustration with their secular governments has increased considerably—and with it, their responsiveness to alternative, Islamic, forms of social and political organization. If it goes unheeded, this state of affairs may eventually undermine the international community's security- and state-building efforts in Afghanistan. Set against this background and in consideration of the region's growing linkages with its eastern neighbor, this analysis intends to shed light upon the role of China in Central Asia's state-society relations, to discuss its impact on this post-Soviet region's growing insecurity, and finally, to forge a link between China's neighborhood policy and the security of the greater Central Asian region after 2014.

Ein stabilisierender Nachbar?

Auswirkungen des chinesischen Engagements in Zentralasien auf die regionale Sicherheit

Die Beziehung zwischen Staat und Gesellschaft hat sich zu einem akuten Unsicherheitsfaktor in Zentralasien entwickelt. Im letzten Jahrzehnt hat die Enttäuschung der traditionell säkularen Bevölkerung über ihre ebenfalls säkularen Regierungen deutlich zugenommen – und somit auch die gesellschaftliche Aufgeschlossenheit gegenüber alternativen, islamischen Formen sozialer und politischer Organisation. Diese Entwicklung hat das Potenzial, die Bemühungen der internationalen Gemeinschaft um die Schaffung von Sicherheit und den Aufbau eines funktionierenden Staates in Afghanistan zu beeinträchtigen. Vor diesem Hintergrund und angesichts der wachsenden Verflechtungen zwischen der postsowjetischen Region Zentralasien und der Volksrepublik China verfolgt die vorliegende Analyse das Ziel, die Rolle Pekings im zentralasiatischen Staat-Gesellschaft-Geflecht zu beleuchten und die sich daraus ergebenden sicherheitspolitischen Schlüsse zu ziehen. Darauf aufbauend wird dann die Bedeutung chinesischer Nachbarschaftspolitik für die Sicherheitslage der Großregion Zentralasien auch nach 2014 reflektiert.

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A Stabilizing Neighbor?

The Impact of China's Engagement in Central Asia on Regional Security

by Luba v. Hauff

Introduction

As the presence of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) draws to an end in Afghanistan, the spotlight increasingly shifts to the regional powers and their role in building and ensuring the future stability of the greater Central Asian region. In this regard, Afghanistan's northern neighbors—the five formerly Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—as well as China to the northeast, are regarded as increasingly vital players. The Central Asian states, together with Russia and the Baltic states, are part of the essential Northern Distribution Network (NDN) through which non-lethal equipment such as food, clothing, construction materials, and fuel are transported to the coalition forces in Afghanistan.¹ What is more, the secularized and traditionally moderate Muslim republics share century-long ties with Afghanistan, with significant numbers of ethnic Turkmens, Uzbeks and Tajiks living across their southern borders. These ethnic groups have been among the most resolute supporters of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, and, according to Oksana Antonenko, “helped to drive the [Taliban] regime out of Afghanistan” in the immediate aftermath of the US-led invasion of the country in 2001.² China, on the other hand, commands significant economic resources that are vital for the Afghan postwar reconstruction and development. Indeed, Beijing's extensive potential for investing in the country's raw materials as well as in its transport and communications infrastructure is considered a real opportunity to “divert Afghans away from illicit commercial activities such as opium production,” among other things.³ Thus, as the deadline for ISAF-withdrawal approaches and the international community's relationship with Afghanistan's southern neighbors, Iran and Pakistan, continuously deteriorates, hopes are rising for the stabilizing force of the northeastern neighbors—

and especially China—within the greater Central Asian region.

The aim of this analysis is to examine the foundation of these hopes. More concretely, the analysis intends to shed light on the impact of China's engagement in post-Soviet Central Asia, to discuss the extent to which its functioning in the past two decades was effectively conducive to regional security, and finally to draw the relevant conclusions about its potential role in Afghanistan.⁴ This paper's main focus shall be the relationship between Central Asia's post-Soviet governments and their respective societies. As will be argued below, the nature of this relationship is an essential determinant in building security—or fostering insecurity—in this region. To this end, Part I will address state-society relations in Central Asia and discuss their relevance with regard to the growing responsiveness of the traditionally secular societies to alternative—Islamic—forms of social and political organization. Subsequently, Part II will turn to China's role in this relationship, discussing Beijing's interests and ambitions in Central Asia as well as its methods of promoting them. Finally, the implications of China's functioning will be compiled in Part III, which will reflect on the People's Republic's stabilizing potential in and beyond the newly independent region.

Part I: Central Asia: The State and Society

The Roots of Insecurity ...

The sudden departure of the Soviet Union and the ensuing “prize” of political independence came as a surprise to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—the five new republics of post-Soviet Central Asia. It left the

region's well-indoctrinated population devoid of a unifying ideology that during Soviet times had reliably provided guidance on social, political, and even spiritual questions.⁵ What is more, independence also put the region's leaders into an organizational state of insecurity, depriving them of long-established and well-known (supra-regional) institutional structures.⁶ Thus, independence brought a kind of ideological as well as organizational "vacuum" to Central Asia's new states, precipitating a diametrical opposition between the needs of those governed and those governing. The former—"a populace that suffered from 'post-Soviet ideological disorder'"—yearned for the resurrection of their previously suppressed Islamic heritage as well as for socio-economic development, which required the fundamental transformation of the region's political and economic structures.⁷ Yet, the region's new leaders, all former members of the Soviet nomenclature, set their focus on "political stability"—the maintenance of control over state resources and society, and consequently the absence of effective transformation of any kind.⁸ Eventually, this discrepancy of demands created one significant cause of today's insecurity: a state of alienation and distrust between Central Asia's citizens and their governments.⁹

That such a development would take place, however, was not necessarily foreseeable in the early 1990s. Indeed, the breakdown of the communist and only officially atheist Soviet Union was absorbed by a much-anticipated Islamic revival in Central Asia which took place across all strata of the region's population.¹⁰ Initially endorsed and even promoted by the governments, the region's Islamic heritage became an important building block in the process of post-Soviet self-discovery, historiography, and nation building. Often conceptualized as societal "archaization" or "indigenization," Central Asia's peoples were allowed to return to their Islamic traditions, to harness the newly acquired freedom of religious practice and life, as well as to re-integrate with the greater Muslim community.¹¹

However, as the proliferation (and attractiveness) of Islam advanced in the newly independent states, the governments' stance toward religion changed; it was increasingly perceived as a threat to state authority, and with it, to the consolida-

tion of genuine secularity.¹² In this regard, the Tajik civil war (1992–1997) as well as the Taliban's siege of Afghanistan in 1996 proved a watershed for the governments' relationship with Islam—to the extent that their initial endorsement turned into anxiety, suspicion, and soon the suppression of all independent (i.e. not state-controlled) religious activity.¹³ Thenceforth, and in a very Soviet fashion, religion became the subject of Central Asia's post-Soviet states. National Islamic offices were again assigned in close cooperation with the governments; recommendations (or even instructions) on the part of the authorities for themes to be discussed during weekly sermons were brought back into use; state control was re-introduced in matters of religious education and information.¹⁴ Invasive state interference—notably in Uzbekistan but also, increasingly, in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan—has discredited the reputation of most government-approved religious officials and, indeed, of "official Islam" as a whole, forcing even ordinary observant believers underground—again.¹⁵

The disparity between the popular demand for religious freedom and its restriction by governments has gone hand in hand with the disparity between the societies' hope for socio-economic development and the political and economic trajectories chosen by Central Asia's post-Soviet regimes. To be sure, some governments initially welcomed Western engagement in the region and opted to adjust some aspects of their polities to then prevailing Zeitgeist of privatization, deregulation, liberalization, and, not last, democratization.¹⁶ However, the governments' enthusiasm for Western-promoted structural change was weaker than their Soviet-inherited goal of "political stability"—the control over state resources and society as well as the avoidance of risks in all aspects of political life, or in short, the maintenance of the political status quo. As a result, by the turn of the century, Central Asia's transition process—where present—petered out, bringing to the fore a mixture of Soviet authoritarian and traditional local political practices, in some cases with Western-informed nuances.¹⁷

Today, these governance structures represent an integral part of the region's polities. Best characterized as "patrimonial-authoritarian," Central Asia's

regimes combine the formal, bureaucratic sphere of modern presidential-authoritarian systems with the informal, traditionalist functioning of non-institutionalized networks, so-called clans. Officially, the region's presidents thus control their republics' parliaments, parties, economic resources, and key industries. In reality, however, their power is limited by special interest groups, which revolve around traditional local kinship ties, former Soviet comrades cliques, and new, post-Soviet business circles.¹⁸ The presidents' core, if informal, duty is to manage the often rivaling factions—to create a certain “balance of power” between them—as well as to ensure their loyalty and support vis-à-vis the regime. This is implemented through the allocation of privileged positions within government agencies and the state's key industries. Thus, Central Asia's tax and custom agencies, border guards, security apparatuses, banking systems, as well as industries related to raw materials and other strategic industries are all deeply penetrated by so-called “vested interests”: members of elitist circles that operate hand in hand with the region's rulers.¹⁹

These patrimonial-authoritarian structures depend for their survival on the constant inflow of rents as well as on the absence of civil and political liberties. Indeed, the highly lucrative alliance between presidents and “vested interests” can only be sustained, firstly, if there are enough economic resources to be redistributed among the key actors to maintain their political loyalty; and secondly, if the effective political participation and representation of those excluded from the state's distributional channels is suppressed. In other words and to a significant extent, Central Asian governance may be regarded as an “alternative system of profit, power, and protection” that serves the interests of various local groups at the expense of the majority population.²⁰

A prominent feature of such governance is “growth without development”—the government's failure to provide public services, to meet the fundamental material needs of its population.²¹ Indeed, during the past decades, the region has encountered a considerable inflow of foreign capital (through investments, credits, and aid), which made itself felt in solid growth rates as well as in a slight elevation of the consumption-related

standard of living.²² In spite of this, however, the post-Soviet governments have been systematically underperforming in their provision of such basic services as education, (affordable) health care, social protection, and adequate housing—to name a few. The same is true in the realm of basic infrastructure, from schools and hospitals to roads.²³ This is because twenty years after independence, the Soviet-era resources in existential sectors like healthcare, education, energy, and transport have been almost exhausted while little new has been put in their place. As the International Crisis Group puts it, the “post-independence regimes made little effort to maintain or replace either [of the Soviet human and infrastructure resources], and funds allocated for this purpose have largely been eaten up by corruption.”²⁴

In short, repression and socio-economic exclusion have been maintained as features of the post-Soviet era and continue to serve the region's “political stability”—the survival of Central Asia's patrimonial-authoritarian regimes. These circumstances have long been nurturing feelings of alienation among the region's citizens toward their governments, bringing about the crumbling of Central Asia's post-Soviet stability on the ground—or, rather, of its surface appearance.²⁵

... and Their Consequences

The failure of Central Asia's post-Soviet governments to build genuinely inclusive nations and functioning states, to provide effective institutional mechanisms to voice discontent and opposition, and to deliver genuine socio-economic progress across all parts of society has been fueling popular disappointment and anger. These, during the past decade, have pushed some parts of the populace into the extra-legal sphere that advocates violence, while heightening the receptiveness of others to alternative, religiously informed models of social and political organization.

As for the former, since 2005, the region has encountered constant and ever more frequent eruptions of violence.²⁶ Kyrgyzstan was the setting of two “revolutions” (in 2005 and 2010), more appropriately described, however, as violent reshuf-

fling of interest groups under the guise of political change.²⁷ Also in 2010, the country's south was the setting for highly violent inter-ethnic clashes that left more than four hundred people dead and entailed a massive destruction of property as well as extensive displacement of ethnic minorities.²⁸ Uzbekistan, in 2005, witnessed highly violent clashes between government-affiliated security services and the (unarmed) civilian population in Andijan, which, according to international sources, led to the death of at least four hundred people.²⁹ In Tajikistan, since the most recent military operations in the country's eastern Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province (GBAO), protestors, especially young people with little experience of the country's civil war, have started to look actively for confrontation with the authorities and police forces.³⁰ Even previously utterly stable Kazakhstan has been shaken by unrest. In late 2011, police fired on unarmed demonstrators at an industrial strike killing at least 16 and injuring more than one hundred people, marking a negative watershed in the relations between the Kazakh government and its people.³¹ Moreover, Central Asia's most prosperous country has encountered a "rising terror threat," counting ten incidents of violence (from suicide bombings to random explosions) and a total death toll of more than fifty people since May 2011.³²

At the same time, the population's growing alienation from their governments has brought to the fore a more subtle yet also further-reaching dimension of insecurity. The region's traditionally secular populations are showing heightened receptiveness toward alternative models of social and political organization. This has manifested itself in a second, more community-oriented wave of post-Soviet Islamic revival (as distinguished from the first wave in the immediate aftermath of Soviet disintegration, which had a more cultural-spiritual focus). Thus, for the past decade, a variety of social and political Islamic movements have been sprouting up in Central Asia, becoming an integral (if, due to repression, unofficial and often illegal) part of many Central Asians' lives. By and large, their presence represents a response to government failure, to the inherent inadequacy of socio-economic development, and to the societies' disenchantment with the prevailing political-ideological impasse.³³

The more prominent movements of a social, welfare-oriented character in Central Asia include, among others, the Jama'at al Tabligh as well as local- and foreign-sponsored Islamic charities such as Adap Bashaty and the Turkish Diyanet.³⁴ In addition to (moderate) spiritual guidance, these organizations provide vital social, educational, and at times even economic assistance to those parts of society that have been (or feel) neglected by the local political structures. In a region beset by the absence of the rule of law, these groups offer authentic (Islamic) norms, guidelines, and rules, thus helping to establish intra-communal networks that endeavor to effectively meet the social and economic needs neglected by the governments.³⁵ This kind of Islamic dissemination is a phenomenon that can be widely observed in Central Asia, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. While, by and large, a product of Central Asia's political failure, this kind of activism is solely focused on welfare and community, and does not pursue political aims.³⁶

This is different for radical Islamic (Islamist) movements at the other, political, end of the process of Islamic revival. These movements are characterized by the conjunction of religion and politics, and often, they denounce the welfare-oriented aspects of the moderate, non-political groups. Indeed, these movements regard themselves as exclusively political organizations, endeavoring to break-up Central Asia's secular governments and to establish a region-wide political-religious entity that unites all Muslims based on Islamic law.³⁷ The most noted groups in this regard are the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) as well as Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), the Islamic Party of Liberation.

IMU is a militant organization that since 1998 has been pursuing the overthrow of the Uzbek regime and the creation of an Islamic state.³⁸ In 2001, it is said to have transformed itself into the Islamic Party of Turkestan, highlighting its goal of "integrating" the greater Central Asian region (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and China's Xinjiang province) into a state called Turkestan.³⁹ American post-09/11 military operations in Afghanistan have dealt a severe, albeit probably only temporary, blow to its operational and organizational capabilities, killing its leader

Juma Namangani and driving the remaining members into the tribal areas of the Pakistani-Afghan border. Since 2009, however, regional observers have been worrying about the return of IMU or IMU-affiliated guerrillas—mostly disenfranchised young men responding to government repression and the lack of economic prospects—fighting alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan and their potential re-orientation toward Central Asia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in particular.⁴⁰

In contrast to the IMU, which advocates violence, the Hizb ut-Tahrir movement (HT) is—according to own statements—pacifist. It regards itself as a political party whose ideology is exclusively based upon Islam. This organization seeks to “Islamize society from the bottom up” so as to re-instate the *Khilafat-e-Rashida* (the Rightly-Guided Caliphate) that existed in the seventh century under Prophet Mohammed.⁴¹ HT is banned from official life throughout Central Asia, where it operates through clandestine networks and cells. According to Emmanuel Karagiannis, the organization counts about 25,000 “hard-core members and many more sympathizers” in the region, with traditionally devout Uzbeks (either from Uzbekistan or Uzbek-populated areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) accounting for the majority of followers.⁴² The movement’s popularity is rooted in its promise of peaceful yet radical political and social change—the establishment of a just society governed by sharia, not man-made laws. Accordingly, HT adjusts its strategy to each country’s socio-economic and political context, constructing something like a “local Islamist ideology” that takes up the individual grievances of the target population and demonstrates how religion may be applied in order to resolve them.⁴³

The attractiveness of radical Islamic groupings is directly linked to the quality of the relationship between the state and society.⁴⁴ In other words, it is the extent of political and religious repression on the ground—and with it, the extent of alienation between the state and society—that is decisive for Islamism to take hold. Indeed, evidence on the ground shows that whenever a political framework allows for the possibility of voicing opposition and dissent—however limited—people tend to abstain from the (violent or non-violent) politicization of

Islam.⁴⁵ For this reason, radical groups are somewhat less popular in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (at least among ethnic Kyrgyz and Kazakh), where welfare-oriented groups still have the upper hand. Conversely, where the possibility of participation is non-existent, radical Islam is regarded as “the only real opposition to autocratic and repressive regimes,” triggering, in turn, ever harsher responses on the part of the governments—to the point of a fully-grown vicious cycle of repression and radicalization.⁴⁶ This appears to be increasingly the case in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

This “second wave” of Islamic revival in Central Asia coincides with the final security- and state-building processes being implemented across the border in Afghanistan by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). It has the potential to obliterate the ideological-organizational boundaries between traditionally secular Central Asia and Islamist-shattered Afghanistan and thus become a security risk for the greater region. Indeed, in conjunction with further socio-economic hardship, government repression, and growing radical propaganda, this wave may, to quote Sébastien Peyrouse, facilitate “the transformation of Islam into an ideology of resistance” against a secularist world order “considered unjust because it is impious.”⁴⁷ In any case, the present revival could create a mind-set among the broad population that sympathizes, or at least is indifferent, to political or even militant Islam’s infiltration of the post-Soviet space. This in turn would render Central Asia a hub for radical ideology and activism—and hence a source of pronounced regional and international insecurity.⁴⁸

To conclude this section, a large proportion of Central Asia’s issues of insecurity—from sudden eruptions of violence to the embedding of radical Islamist ideas in the region—is the result of a relationship of alienation and distrust between Central Asia’s peoples and their governments, and stems from the region’s authoritarian and patrimonial structures. Above all, the current developments reflect the citizens’ renunciation of the incumbent regimes, which, functioning within their fenced-off structures, have failed to provide socio-economic development and a post-Soviet political-ideological vision that, as Karagiannis writes, “could inspire

hope for a better future.”⁴⁹ In consequence, Central Asia’s effective potential for insecurity—the local permeability for, and eventual establishment of, militant Islam in the region—may be regarded as a function of the extent of political-religious repression, that is, of the extent of state-society alienation, on the ground. It is against this background that the functioning of a silent, yet highly significant external actor in Central Asia’s domestic politics, the People’s Republic of China, shall be reviewed in the next part.

Part II: Chinese Policy in Central Asia: Stability above All?

Beijing’s involvement in Central Asia dates back to 1989, when it entered into negotiations on the delineation and demilitarization of the then heavily fortified Sino-Soviet frontier, which encompassed the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik Republics. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, talks continued bilaterally between Beijing and the respective governments of the newly independent states.⁵⁰ The formation of a sound bilateral basis, however, was tainted by the outbreak of unrest in Xinjiang, a province on China’s northwestern frontier and home to a large Uighur minority that shares ethnic, religious, and cultural ties with the Central Asian peoples.⁵¹ The collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing independence of the former titular republics substantially encouraged existent separatist tendencies in the Chinese province, leading to the outbreak of a series of riots during the early 1990s. This circumstance dramatically raised the significance of Central Asia to the government in Beijing, which suspected that the newly independent republics sympathized with the Uighurs’ drive for independence and played an important part in their mobilization.⁵²

It is against this background that China developed an approach toward Central Asia that not only sought to promote the peaceful accommodation on border issues but also, crucially, focused on introducing and asserting its own position on the “Xinjiang problem.”⁵³ To this end, Beijing embarked on a neighborhood policy that combined the newly

independent states’ core interests of economic development and political stability with its own security needs, aiming for the establishment of mutually beneficial, and hence reliable, Sino-Central Asian relations.

Economic Development

China’s first official act in the economic realm was to establish a straightforward link between the newly independent republics’ desire for development and their discontinuation of Central Asia’s support for the Uighur separatist cause. Beijing presented Central Asia’s new leaders with a fundamental quid pro quo “in which strict control ... over the activities of their citizens with respect to Xinjiang [were] rewarded with concrete benefits in the areas of trade and investment.”⁵⁴ This method effectively tied the hands of the economically weak and cooperation-seeking post-Soviet governments, compelling them to suppress Uighur activism in their own countries. In exchange, Chinese engagement in the realms of trade, finance, and investment has progressed at a previously unimagined pace, carrying significant benefits for both sides.

Trade between Central Asia and China has been growing exponentially, developing from a practically non-existent trade volume in 1991 to 23 billion dollars in 2010.⁵⁵ To Beijing, a large manufacturer of inexpensive goods, gaining access to Central Asia’s new and unsaturated (if small) markets proved a profitable undertaking, as its price structure endowed it with a comparative advantage vis-à-vis Western, Turkish, and even Russian goods. Its products, sold through official channels or the semi-official “shuttle trade,” have fully met the impoverished majority’s demand for affordable everyday products on the one hand, and “the growing technology-related consumption [needs] of the middle classes” on the other, rendering China one of the main trade partners of the region today.⁵⁶ Beijing also became an important creditor to all of the republics, granting extensive buyers’ credits to the region’s poorest states and, whenever deemed opportune, individual loans on short notice.⁵⁷

What is more, as a net importer of hydropower and hydrocarbons, China has used its relationship

with energy-abundant Central Asia firstly, to channel electricity to Xinjiang (which is underserved with hydropower) and secondly, to moderate its dependence on the traditional Middle Eastern hydrocarbon suppliers and the respective, US-controlled, supply routes.⁵⁸ Thus, the People's Republic has been highly engaged in creating new hydroelectric plants as well as eastern- and southern-directed electricity grids operating partly in Kazakhstan and especially in water-abundant Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.⁵⁹ Beijing has also invested heavily into the energy industries of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, the region's respective oil and gas champions, turning their export focus toward the east.⁶⁰ Finally, it initiated the building of eastward-oriented transport infrastructure, with the aim of restoring the region's historic significance as a transport hub for greater Eurasian trade.⁶¹

In general, Sino-Central Asian economic cooperation has been an important motor for the region's post-Soviet economic development. The considerable growth rates, the expansion of regional transport infrastructure and extraction industry, as well as the slight elevation of the post-Soviet standard of living through the provision of affordable consumer goods may all, to various degrees, be attributed to China's engagement. Beijing's presence in Central Asia also offered new employment opportunities to the post-Soviet populace, notably in the realm of intra-regional re-exportation of Chinese goods ("shuttle trade") as well as through the provision of work opportunities in China for Central Asian academics, thanks to student and professional exchange programs.⁶² Moreover, China's economic presence in the post-Soviet region had significant spillover effects in the political realm, promoting within the Central Asian governments a previously unfamiliar sense of political self-determination. Indeed, Sino-Central Asian cooperation has helped to alleviate the new republics' dependence upon the old (partly decaying and almost exclusively Moscow-oriented) Soviet infrastructure and also strengthened their negotiation position vis-à-vis Russia's post-imperial economic ambitions in the region.⁶³

At the same time, however, Beijing's engagement has done little to encourage urgently needed eco-

nomical reforms on the part of Central Asia's governments. Quite the opposite, China's significant, yet largely unconditional, financial transfers—be it through infrastructure investments or concessional loans—have largely obliterated the acute necessity to reform and diversify the region's economies, while providing resources that fostered the region's destructive regimes.⁶⁴ This, in turn, has not only heightened the danger of the "resource curse," especially in Central Asia's hydrocarbon-abundant countries.⁶⁵ It has also forestalled the development of local know-how, hampering the urgently needed advancement of the economies' secondary and tertiary sectors.⁶⁶ As a consequence, this kind of cooperation dramatically increased the newly independent republics' dependence on the continued inflow of manufactured goods, capital, and also goodwill from China. Thus, in addition to endorsing ultimately insecurity-fostering structures, Sino-Central Asian cooperation put the matter of national development to a disproportional extent out of the latter governments' hands, binding them to follow Beijing's, and not necessarily national, interests. From this perspective, and especially if taking a long-term view, China's economic engagement may be considered to have been rather obstructive to Central Asia's sustainable socio-economic development, and hence to the emergence of viable state-society relations as a whole.

Regional Stability

Beijing complemented its economic quid pro quo with a multilateral, normatively-informed strategy that focused on persuading the Central Asian regimes into compliance with China's regional security objectives. This proved enormously successful because Beijing, to paraphrase Jia Qingguo, came up with a vision of regional security that appealed not only to itself but also to the nations that were supposed to be led.⁶⁷ This vision manifested itself in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a regional intergovernmental organization that includes the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek Republics as well as Russia and China as its members.⁶⁸ The SCO has been set to promote the maintenance of regional security, understood as the suppression of the "three evils of terrorism, separatism, and extremism" as well as, somewhat less

stringently, the containment of drug and weapon trafficking in the region.⁶⁹ In this regard, the notion of the “three evils” has been taken from China’s domestic security discourse, where it is regularly applied to Uighur matters, as well as other issues of government-felt insecurity. Within the SCO, in turn, it has served as an instrument to mutualize Chinese security needs with those of the post-Soviet states—to repack (some selected) Central Asian issues of insecurity into Chinese terminology and thus establish a collective understanding of what constitutes a regional security threat.⁷⁰

With the “three evils,” Beijing introduced a discourse on regional security that not only reflected its own needs, but also took heed of the chief concern of Central Asia’s patrimonial-authoritarian regimes: survival. Indeed, the mutualization of threat perceptions was greatly facilitated by the post-Soviet governments’ understanding of “stability” as control over state resources and society as well as the absence of risks in any aspects of political life—or, as pointed out above, the maintenance of the political status quo. The decisive common denominator on both sides was thus the desire to frame any unwelcome domestic activism—be it from Uighurs, Islamists, or members of any movement of a generally oppositional nature—as an outgrowth of “terrorism, separatism, and extremism,” that is, as a threat to the stability of national governments and, in turn, to regional security as a whole.⁷¹

And indeed, this is what SCO representatives have been doing since the region’s surface stability tilted in 2005: that year’s Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the Andijan incident in Uzbekistan have effectively served as templates for subsequent categorization of the region’s “three evils,” leading to the establishment of the linkage between civil (anti-regime) activism and extremism.⁷² Zhang Deguang, the SCO’s first secretary general, provided highly informative insight into how the SCO member states understood regional “security” and intended to apply (and benefit from) the notion of the “three evils” when he took the “disturbing” Kyrgyz revolution as evidence for the urgency to further suppress extremist forces.⁷³ Even more illustrative of this attitude was the SCO’s explicit endorse-

ment of the Uzbek government’s crackdown on protestors in Andijan in May 2005. During this incident Uzbek security services are reported to have deliberately fired on protesting civilians, leading to the deaths of at least four hundred people. Western governments, organizations, and media have referred to the event as a “massacre” of unarmed civilians.⁷⁴ The official Uzbek position, however, sanctioned the security services, calling their action a legitimate law enforcement operation directed at “Islamic extremists, criminals, and bandits” who sought to destabilize and eventually overthrow the country’s government.⁷⁵ In contrast to the international community, the fellow SCO member states expressed solidarity with the Uzbek government, condemned the incident as an act of terrorism and extremism, and were prepared to offer help to restore the country’s “security.”⁷⁶ Only two weeks after the incident, President Islam Karimov was solemnly received in Beijing by Hu Jintao, who used the occasion to reiterate the Chinese government’s favorable opinion of the Uzbek government’s measures. He welcomed these “efforts in safeguarding national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity” and assured his authoritarian counterpart of the “common interest in [further] safeguarding regional peace, stability and security” by “jointly cracking down on the ‘three evils forces.’”⁷⁷

The establishment of a collective understanding of (in)security went hand in hand with the establishment of an intra-organizational code of conduct, in which the principle of “non-interference into the internal affairs of a state” figured most prominently.⁷⁸ The SCO member states, to be sure, followed the international definition of “interference” as “the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state,” ranging from military intervention to more subtle interference in political activities, support for secession, and so-called “regime change.”⁷⁹ However, they flavored this principle with the addendum of “respect for diversity of [political] cultures,” establishing the linkage between “non-interference” and the “right” to autonomously choose one’s “own path of development.”⁸⁰ This position resonated well with China’s overall foreign policy approach, which stipulates that no single model of (social and

political) development fits all; that each country should choose its individual development route; and that “outsiders should not interfere.”⁸¹

Hence, “non-interference,” as put forward by China and applied within the SCO, would be best understood as the unequivocal rejection of the “export of foreign models of social development,” as SCO member states put it.⁸² Such statements are generally directed at those (usually Western) nations interested in promoting political transformation in Central Asia—“the cause at the root to instability around the world,” according to an “authoritative” Chinese analysis.⁸³ Against this background, the SCO’s amalgamation of “non-interference” with “respect for diversity” and developmental individualism may be regarded as serving the purpose of “protective integration”: it provides a normatively charged shield against international pressure on Central Asia’s patrimonial-authoritarian governments and thus endeavors to legitimize domestic policies internally and externally so as protect the region’s political status quo.⁸⁴

To conclude: much as it has in the economic realm, Beijing has used the premise of regional security to push through a political quid pro quo in which, to paraphrase Graham Fuller, Central Asian governments’ strict control of Uighur activism within their territories has been rewarded with implicit support for the region’s regimes.⁸⁵ This has been achieved by matching Chinese security terminology to the patrimonial-authoritarian governments’ threat perceptions (linking the “three evils” of Chinese security discourse to Central Asia’s domestic anti-regime activism). Beijing’s explicit backing of the Central Asian’s core domestic interest—regime survival—further increased the authoritarian republics’ dependence on China, annihilating the merest leeway for the region’s leaders to disregard its needs. By and large, and for the governments involved, this policy has proved an outstanding success. Thus, during the past decade, all of the region’s newly independent republics have unequivocally rallied behind China’s security needs. In their territories, they have restricted all social and political activity related to Xinjiang’s independence as well as to China’s treatment of Uighurs.⁸⁶ At the same time, Central Asia’s governance structures—and with it,

the condition of state-society relations—have been further consolidated; the region has re-emerged as a secure stronghold for patrimonial, authoritarian governance.⁸⁷ It is at precisely this point that the linkage between the People’s Republic’s engagement in Central Asia and the region’s growing insecurity comes into play.

Part III: State-Society Relations in Central Asia: The Chinese Factor

China regards its engagement in Central Asia through the prism of a “harmonious world,” a notion with roots in its Taoist and Confucian heritage that advocates a conduct in international relations “that respect[s] each other’s national sovereignty, tolerate[s] diversity (in national political systems and values), and promotes national development.”⁸⁸ More concretely, Beijing likes to present its engagement in the region as a “policy of bringing harmony, security, and prosperity to neighbors, ... [dedicated to strengthening] mutual trust and cooperation ..., easing up hot-spot tensions, and striving to maintain peace and tranquility in Asia.”⁸⁹ In order to evaluate the effective impact of this high-sounding neighborhood policy and determine Beijing’s objective role in the region’s security framework, it is of use to recall the root of a significant part of Central Asia’s insecurity: the patrimonial-authoritarian form of governance and the ensuing alienation and distrust that exists between the citizens and their states.

Since entering the region, Beijing has sought to accommodate the core interests of the very regimes that have been responsible for Central Asia’s political, economic, and social decay in order to ensure compliance with Chinese security interests as well as to tap into the region’s considerable raw materials and infrastructure development projects. The strategy has been to establish various institutional mechanisms that would provide wealth and security maximization for the region’s patrimonial-authoritarian structures, and to thus create a strong, self-monitoring dependency on Beijing—especially with regard to Uighur activism. And indeed, as demonstrated above, these targets

have been met. Sino-Central-Asian economic cooperation increased windfalls for the region's governments—from investments to concessional credits—bolstering their economic base. In the realm of security, Beijing established a collective discourse that allowed practically any anti-regime activism to be framed as a threat to regional stability and also helped to fend off international criticism through its particular understanding of “non-interference.” This further assisted Central Asia's patrimonial-authoritarian governments' survival. In return, the region's governments committed themselves to upholding Beijing's security needs in Xinjiang.

In other words, the promotion of Chinese interests in Central Asia has been accompanied by the provision of institutional and dialectic mechanisms that have played into the hands of post-Soviet Central Asia's authoritarian, insecurity-fostering regimes. These mechanisms have also played into the hands of the very radical Islamic elements that, alongside the region's elites, have become the main beneficiaries of Central Asia's dysfunctional political-economic and social structures. To re-emphasize: in post-Soviet, traditionally secular Central Asia, the appeal of politicized Islam is directly linked to the relative degree of repression, and thus to the extent of state-society alienation on the ground. Through its engagement in the region—and by catering to the incumbent governments' needs—China has been actively exacerbating this already highly problematic relationship between the states and their citizens. It has not only helped indirectly to foster the population's disposition toward alternative models of social and political organization, but it has also widened the window of opportunity for radical, extremist forces. Thus, Beijing has supported the consolidation of the very problem that it officially has sought to abolish.

Seen against this background, China's manner of functioning in Central Asia, instead of reflecting a policy of genuine “harmony, security and prosperity,” may be considered a rather opportunist adjustment to the preferences of the region's regimes in order to maximize its own advantage. Indeed, promoting effective security in Central Asia would

require the very opposite of China's policy—the discontinuation of the region's extant system of patrimonial-authoritarian governance and a transformation of state-society relations. In concrete terms, it would require the restoration of societal trust in the secular regimes, notably through genuine political and socio-economic inclusion of the majority population and the resultant legitimacy on the part of the incumbent governments. This state of affairs is unattainable unless China effectively withdraws its support for the region's present regimes. However, such an about-face would endanger Chinese security needs and also possibly deprive Beijing of the considerable political advantage vis-à-vis its geopolitical competitors in the region. In other words, to China, a neighborhood policy directed at the genuine—structural—stabilization of Central Asia would not be an option due to the inherent tensions with its domestic interests.

The ensuing conclusion with regard to China's stabilizing potential in and beyond post-Soviet Central Asia is accordingly disenchanting. The People's Republic has been engaged in Central Asia for more than two decades. During this time, it has actively helped to consolidate the region's political regimes that are, to a great extent, responsible for the societies' departure from their traditionally secular stance. The main point, in the end, is that Afghanistan is not the only threat to the security of the greater region. The post-Soviet regimes also carry their share of responsibility in this regard, as does China. According to Andrew Stroehlein, “embracing ... [Central Asian] dictatorships is no way to bring security to Afghanistan.”⁹⁰ Quite the opposite; it is, potentially, an effective way to forfeit the ideological boundaries within greater Central Asia—with corresponding implications for security in and around Afghanistan, especially after the withdrawal of ISAF. This fact should be borne in mind when thinking about, and hoping for, Beijing's enhanced engagement in this region.

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Notes

- 1 The NDN represents an alternative route to the logistically as well as politically exhausted Pakistani supply line and renders the involved Central Asian states, as Schmitz puts it, “indispensable partners to the West.” Cf. Andrea Schmitz, *Beyond Afghanistan. The New ISAF Strategy: Implications for Central Asia* (SWP Comments 10), Berlin 2010, p. 1. For a comprehensive line-up of the region’s logistic hubs, see e.g.: “Strategic Geography,” in: Adelphi Series 425-426/2011, *Special Issue: Afghanistan: to 2015 and beyond*, p. VII f.
- 2 Cf. Oksana Antonenko, “The Central Asian States and Russia,” in: Adelphi Series 425-426/2011, *Special Issue: Afghanistan: to 2015 and beyond*, p. 201.
- 3 Cf. Richard Weitz, “The Limits of Partnership: China, NATO and the Afghan War,” in: *China Security* 1/2006, p. 31.
- 4 However, an analysis of China’s engagement in Afghanistan proper and the ensuing impact on regional security is beyond the scope of this study. For this, see e.g. Richard Weitz, op.cit. (note 3); Christian Le Mière, Gary Li, and Nigel Inkster, “China,” in: Adelphi Series 425-426/2011, *Special Issue: Afghanistan: to 2015 and beyond*, p. 219 ff.
- 5 Cf. Emmanuel Karagiannis, “Hizb-ut Tahrir as a Social Movement Organization,” in: Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The challenge of Hizb ut-Tabrir* (Central Asian Studies), London 2012, p. 92.
- 6 Cf. S. Frederick Starr, *Clans, Authoritarian Rulers, and Parliaments in Central Asia* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Silk Road Paper), Washington, DC, June 2006, p. 6 ff.
- 7 Emmanuel Karagiannis, op. cit. (note 5), p. 92.
- 8 Cf. S. Frederick Starr, op.cit. (note 6), p. 6 ff.; Uwe Halbach, “Das Erbe der Sowjetunion, Kontinuitäten und Brüche in Zentralasien,” in: *Osteuropa* 8-9/2007, p. 77 ff. In this regard, state-building with a focus upon the titular nationality was regarded as a key instrument. See e.g.: Marlène Laruelle, “Wiedergeburt per Dekret, Nationsbildung in Zentralasien,” in: *Osteuropa* 8-9/2007, p. 139-154.
- 9 While the state-society relationship is an increasingly challenging and, indeed, fundamental issue of Central Asian insecurity, it is certainly not the only one. Since its independence, Central Asia has been plagued by intra-regional disputes over the distribution of water and hydrocarbon resources, irredentist and ethnic tensions, as well as various kinds of transnational crime. See Roy Allison and Lena Jonson (eds.), *Central Asian Security*, London/Washington, DC, 2001.
- 10 Islam has been present in the region since the sixth century, and up until the tenth century, Central Asia represented the civilizational center of the then Muslim world, attracting the most prestigious religious scholars, scientists, and artists. Today’s cities of Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khorezm still testify to the region’s cultural and religious heritage. Central Asia’s ties with the Muslim world weakened after the region’s incorporation into the Russian empire; and they were (officially) broken under the Soviet Union. However, Islam continued to thrive underground, disregarding the official coercion to atheism. Already prior to, but especially after, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the traditionally secular, predominantly Turkic Central Asia commenced to develop ties with the greater Muslim community, notably with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Cf. Evgenyi Abdulaev, “The Central Asian Nexus: Islam and Politics,” in: Boris Rumer (ed.), *Central Asia. A Gathering Storm?* London 2003, p. 248; Annette Krämer, “Islam in Zentralasien – Blüte, Unterdrückung, Instrumentalisierung,” in: *Osteuropa* 8-9/2007, p. 53 ff.; Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia*, op.cit. (note 5), p. 8 ff.; International Crisis Group (ICG), *Central Asia: Islam and the State*, Osh/Brussels 2003; Alexei Malashenko, “Islam in Central Asia,” in: Roy Allison and Lena Jonson (eds.), op.cit. (note 9), p. 49 ff.
- 11 Malashenko, op.cit.(note 10), p. 53.
- 12 Ibid., p. 53 ff.; ICG, *Central Asia: Islam and the State*, op.cit. (note 10), p. 3. Karagiannis, op.cit. (note 5), p. 8 ff.
- 13 Cf. Karagiannis, op.cit. (note 5), p. 19.
- 14 Eric McGlinchey, “Autocrats, Islamists, and the Rise of Radicalism in Central Asia,” in: *Current History*, October 2005, p. 337; ICG, op.cit. (note 10), p. 8; International Crisis Group, *Women and Radicalisation in Kyrgyzstan*, Bishkek/Brussels 2009, p. 7 ff.
- 15 Ibid., Karagiannis, op.cit. (note 5), p. 58 ff.
- 16 Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, for example, initially warmly welcomed transformation-focused Western engagement in the region. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, on the other hand, consciously chose to retain factual Soviet-era structures and accepted their (temporary) political and economic isolation within the international community. War-torn Tajikistan, again, positioned itself somewhere in the middle—being too weak to resist the pressure from international donors, but also too destitute to build any functioning structures, slowly slipping into state failure. Cf. Martha Brill Olcott, “Central Asia: Common Legacies and Conflicts,” in Allison et al, op.cit. (note 9), p. 38.; Olcott, *Central Asia’s Second Chance*, Washington, DC 2005, p. 61 ff.
- 17 Kyrgyzstan may be considered a potential exception in this regard. However, despite two government changes as well as the recent transformation into a—seemingly more inclusive—parliamentary system, its credentials in civil freedoms, political rights, and fighting corruption remain very weak. See e.g.: Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2013*, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FIW%202013%20Booklet%20-%20for%20Web_0.pdf> (accessed 2/1/2013); Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index 2012*, <<http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/>> (accessed 2/1/2013). For region-

- wide political indicators, see e.g. Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2012*, <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2012%20%20NIT%20Tables.pdf>> (accessed 16/1/2013).
- 18 See e.g.: Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, *Neopatrimonialism Revisited – Beyond a Catch-All Concept* (GIGA working paper 16), Hamburg 2006; Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, New York, NY 2006; Frederick Starr, op. cit. (note 6), p. 7 ff.; Boris Rumer, Introduction, op. cit. (note 10), p. 8 ff.
 - 19 Kathleen Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories,” in: *World Politics*, January 2004, p. 224 ff.
 - 20 Cf. Mats Berdal and David Keen, “Violence and Economic Agendas in Civil Wars: Some Policy Implications,” in: *Millennium* 3/1997, p. 797.
 - 21 Cf. Boris Rumer, “Central Asia: At the End of Transition?” in: *Central Asia: At the End of Transition*, New York, NY 2005, p. 8; Starr, op. cit. (note 6), p. 8; International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Decay and Decline*, Bishkek/Brussels 2011; Eric McGlinchey, “The Making of Militants: The State and Islam in Central Asia,” in: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 2/2005, p. 554 ff.
 - 22 On average, the region’s economies have grown by almost seven per cent in since 2001, with Kazakhstan at the top with an annual rate of 8,25 per cent and Kyrgyzstan at the bottom with an annual rate of 4.29 per cent. Cf. Asian Development Bank, *Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific 2012*, Manila 2012, p. 175. For data on IDA Credits and Grants to the region, cf. World Bank, *Mapping for Results – Europe and Central Asia*, <<http://maps.worldbank.org/eca>>.
 - 23 Cf. Branka Andjelkovic et al., *Beyond Transition Towards Inclusive Societies*, Bratislava 2011; ICG, *Decay and Decline*, op. cit. (note 21).
 - 24 Kazakhstan does represent a partial exception to this. However, it still remains substantially below its (hydrocarbon-powered) capabilities. Cf. ICG, *Decay and Decline*, op. cit. (note 21).
 - 25 The notion of “surface calm” has been used by the ICG, *Central Asia: What Role for the European Union?*, Brussels 2006, p. i.
 - 26 No civil violence has been reported from Turkmenistan during the past years. This state of affairs, however, does not necessarily mirror the country’s peaceful reality, but rather reflects the extremely tight control of information and the conscious dissemination of disinformation on the part of government. Cf. *Turkmen violence “drug related,”* BBC News, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7614983.stm>> (accessed 9/12/2012).
 - 27 Cf. Paul Quinn-Judge, cited by Joshua Keating, “It’s Not a Revolution,” in: *Foreign Policy* 4/7/2010, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/07/it_s_not_a_revolution?hidecomments=yes> (accessed 2/18/2011).
 - 28 ICG, *The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan*, Osh/Brussels 2010.
 - 29 Human Rights Watch, “Bullets Were Falling Like Rain.” *The Andijan Massacre, May 13, 2005*, 6/7/2005, <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/06/06/bullets-were-falling-rain>>.
 - 30 Alexander Sodiqov, *Explaining the Conflict in Eastern Tajikistan* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, CACI Analyst), Washington, DC, 09/05/2012, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5831>> (accessed 9/13/2012); Roman Kozhevnikov, *Car bomber kills 2, wounds 25 police in Tajikistan*, Reuters, 9/3/2010, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/09/03/oukwd-uk-tajikistan-blast-idAF1RE6821CD20100903>> (accessed 9/13/2012).
 - 31 *Deadlock in Kazakhstan as Oil Workers Strike*, BBC News Asia-Pacific, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-15426533>> (accessed 9/14/2012); Joanna Lillis, *Kazakhstan: Violence in Zhanaozen Threatens Nazarbayev Legacy*, Eurasianet.org, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64745>> (accessed 9/14/2012); Daisy Sindelar & Sania Toiken, *A Year after Deadly Riots, Zhanaozen is Quiet but Angry*, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, <<http://www.rferl.org/content/zhanaozen-a-year-after-the-riots/24798726.html>> (accessed 9/14/2012).
 - 32 Joanna Lillis, *Kazakhstan: Five Suspected Terrorists Killed in Western Shootout*, Eurasianet.org, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65898>> (accessed 9/14/2012); Joanna Lillis, *Kazakhstan: Astana Jolted by Terror Incidents*, Eurasianet.org, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64529>> (accessed 9/14/2012).
 - 33 Eric McGlinchey, “Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan,” in: *Problems of Post-Communism*, May/June 2009, p. 16 ff.; Karagiannis, op. cit. (note 5), p. 36 f.
 - 34 Bayram Balci, “The rise of the Jama’at al Tabligh in Kyrgyzstan: the revival of Islamic ties between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia,” in: *Central Asian Survey* 1/2012, p. 61 ff.
 - 35 Eric McGlinchey, op. cit. (note 33), p. 16 ff.
 - 36 Bayram Balci, op. cit. (note 34).
 - 37 Karagiannis, op. cit. (note 5), p. 52, 40.
 - 38 Since 2000, it has been listed as a terrorist organization by the US Department of State. See: <<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2011/195553.htm#imu>>.
 - 39 Karagiannis, op. cit. (note 5), p. 26.
 - 40 Cf. ICG, *Tajikistan: The Changing Insurgent Threats*, Bishkek/Brussels 2011, p. 3.
 - 41 Karagiannis, op. cit. (note 5), p. 52.
 - 42 Ibid., p. 59.
 - 43 Kathleen Collins, “Ideas, Networks, and Islamist Movements: Evidence from Central Asia and the Caucasus,” in: *World Politics* 1/2007, p. 65; Karagiannis, op. cit. (note 5), p. 99.
 - 44 Cf. e.g.: Ken Menkhaus, “Governance without Government in Somalia,” in: *International Security* 3/2006, p. 74 ff.

- 45 McGlinchey, op. cit. (note 33), p. 342; Karagiannis, op. cit. (note 5), p. 69.
- 46 Ibid., p. 124.
- 47 Cf. Sébastien Peyrouse, *Security and Islam in Asia: lessons from China's Uyghur minority* (FRIDE Policy Brief 87), Madrid, July 2011, p. 4 f.
- 48 Philip Shishkin, "Central Asia's Crisis of Governance," in: *Asia Society/Central Asia Report*, Washington, DC 2012, <http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/AS_CentralAsiasCrisisofGovernance.pdf> (accessed 9/30/2012); ICG, *Tajikistan*, op. cit. (note 40), p. 10 ff.; Murod Ismailov, *Post-2014 Afghanistan: a security dilemma for northern neighbors*, Central Asia Newswire, <<http://www.universalsnewswires.com/centralasia/international/viewstory.aspx?id=12778>> (accessed 9/30/2012).
- 49 Cf. Karagiannis, op. cit. (note 5), p. 36; ICG, *Women and Radicalisation*, op. cit. (note 14), p. 7 ff.
- 50 Cf. Maurice Lanteigne, "In Medias Res: The Development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," in: *Pacific Affairs* 4/2006, p. 206 ff.; Henry Plater-Zyberk, *Who's Afraid of the SCO?* (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom), 2007, p. 1.
- 51 Only the Tajik people have no Turkic, but rather Indo-Iranian, roots.
- 52 Apart "from the theoretical border given on the maps," the border between Xinjiang and Central Asia has never been clear, and after gaining independence, the populations of Central Asia appeared to feel solidarity with their ethnic kin, supporting the "re-establishment of East Turkistan" in Xinjiang. Cf. Niklas Swanström, "China and Central Asia: a new Great Game or Traditional Vassal Relations?" in: *Journal of Contemporary China*, 14/45/ 2005, p. 571. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, for example, hosted independence-minded organizations such as the Uyghur Political Union Committee and the Ittipak Uyghur society among others, on their territory. See e.g.: Guangcheng Xing, "China and Central Asia," in: Roy Allison and Lena Jonson (eds.), op. cit. (note 9), p. 163; Olcott, *Central Asia's Second Chance*, op. cit. (note 16), p. 61 f; Michael Clarke, "Making the Crooked Straight: China's Grand Strategy of 'Peaceful Rise' and its Central Asian Dimension," in: *Asian Security* 2/2008.
- 53 The notion "Xinjiang Problem" has been taken from Graham E. Fuller & S. Frederick Starr, *The Xinjiang Problem*, Washington, DC, 2004.
- 54 Ibid., p. 31.
- 55 Cf. European Commission DG Trade, *Bilateral Statistics*, Brussels 2012. Accessed on 1/15/2013 from <<http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/statistics/>>; Vladimir Paramonov and Aleksey Stokov, *Economic Involvement of Russia and China in Central Asia* (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, Conflict Studies Research Centre – Central Asian Series 07/12), May 2007, <<http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/rag/document-listings/ca/07%2812%29VPEnglish.pdf/view?searchterm=Economic%20Involvement%20Russia>>, p. 3. Francois Godement, *Seeking an Alliance by any other Name?* (European Council on Foreign Relations, China Analysis), <http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/China%20Analysis_The%20new%20Great%20Game%20in%20Central%20Asia_September2011.pdf> (accessed 10/1/2012); Sébastien Peyrouse, Jos Boonstra & Marlène Laruelle, *Security and Development in Central Asia, The EU compared to China and Russia* (CEPS – The Centre for European Policy Studies, EUCAM Working Paper 11), Brussels 2012, p. 13; Sébastien Peyrouse, *Economic Aspects of the Chinese-Central Asia Rapprochement* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute), Washington, DC 2007.
- 56 Cf. Sébastien Peyrouse, *Central Asia's Growing Partnership with China* (CEPS – The Centre for European Policy Studies, EUCAM Working Paper 04), Brussels, 10/9/2009, p. 10. China is the main trade partner of bordering Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and second in place in the other three countries of the region. See e.g. European Commission DG Trade, *Bilateral Statistics*, op. cit. (note 55). Chinese exports to the region are highly diversified, reaching from machinery and other high tech equipment over foodstuffs to manufactured products such as textile, footwear, and apparel among others. See e.g. Paramonov et. al., op. cit. (note 55), p. 8 f.; Swanström, op. cit. (note 52).
- 57 On China's buyers' credits, see e.g.: Alyson J. K. Bailes, Pál Dunay, Pan Guang, and Mikhail Troitskiy, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), Stockholm 2007, p. 49. Peyrouse, *Economic Aspects*, op. cit. (note 55), p. 31 ff. In 2009, China loaned 10 billion dollars on a short-term basis to "cash-strapped" Kazakhstan, cushioning the exposure of its acutely weakened economy to the global financial crisis. The credit was directly tied to enhanced access to Kazakh energy resources. See e.g. <http://www.energy-daily.com/reports/China_loans_10_bln_dlr_to_Kazakhstan_state_media_999.html>.
- 58 On water, see e.g.: Ramakant Dwivedi, "China's Central Asia Policy in Recent Times," in: *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4/2006, p. 158; Sébastien Peyrouse, "The Hydroelectric Sector in Central Asia and the Growing Role of China," in: *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 2/2007, p. 131–148. On China's energy interests in the region, see e.g.: Evan S. Medeiros, *China's International Behavior. Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification*, Santa Monica, CA 2009; Robert Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Relations. Power and Policy Since the Cold War*, Lanham 2007, p. 18 ff.; International Energy Agency, OECD, *Perspectives on Caspian Oil and Gas Development*, Vienna 2008; Luba Azarch, "Central Asia and the European Union – Prospects of an Energy Partnership," in: *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4/2009, p. 55–72.
- 59 Cf. Peyrouse, "The Hydroelectric Sector," op. cit. (note 58); Dwivedi, op. cit. (note 58).
- 60 *Central Asian Gas Exporters Should Look Eastward, Study Says*, Central Asia Newswire, 10/12/2012, <<http://www.uni>

- versalnewswires.com/centralasia/international/viewstory.aspx?id=12980> (accessed 1/21/2013); See also Azarch, op. cit. (note 58), p. 63.
- 61 As a land-bridge between China and the hydrocarbon-rich Middle East, Central Asia has a strategically advantageous geographic position and is eyed not only by Beijing. See e.g. Guangcheng Xing, “China and Central Asia,” in: Roy Allison and Lena Jonson (eds.), *Central Asian Security*, op. cit. (note 9), p. 158 f.; Gael Raballand & Agnès Andrésy, “Why Should Trade Between Central Asia and China continue to expand?” in: *Asia Europe Journal* 5/2007.
- 62 Cf. Igor Rotar, *Chinese “expansion” in Kyrgyzstan: Myth or reality?*, Central Asia Newswire, <<http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=13154>> (accessed 11/29/2012); Chris Rickleton, *Kyrgyzstan: China Expanding Influence, One Student at a Time*, Eurasianet.org, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64788>> (accessed 10/20/2012).
- 63 On Russia’s interests in Central Asia, see e.g.: Lena Jonson, “Russia and Central Asia,” in: Allison and Jonson (eds.), *Central Asian Security*, op. cit. (note 9), p. 95–126; Konstantin Syroezhkin, “Russia: On the Path to Empire?” in: Boris Rumer (ed.), *Central Asia: At the End of Transition*, London 2005; Pavel Baev, “Assessing Russia’s Cards: Three Petty Games in Central Asia,” in: *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 2/2004, p. 269–283; Marlène Laruelle, *Russia in Central Asia: Old History, New Challenges?* (CEPS – The Centre for European Policy Studies, EUCAM Working Paper 03), Brussels, 2009.
- 64 On China’s general avoidance of structural conditionality, see e.g.: Joshua Cooper Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus*, London 2004; C. Fred Bergsten, Charles Freeman, Nicholas R. Lardy, Derek J. Mitchell (eds.), *China’s Rise. Challenges and Opportunities*, Washington, DC 2007; Evan S. Medeiros, op. cit. (note 58); Edward Carr, “A Special Report on China’s Place in the World,” in: *The Economist*, 12/4/2010.
- 65 For a discussion of Kazakhstan’s and Turkmenistan’s vulnerability to the “Dutch disease,” see e.g.: Ali M. Kutan & Michael L. Wyzan, “Explaining the real exchange rate in Kazakhstan, 1996–2003: Is Kazakhstan vulnerable to the Dutch disease?” in: *Economic Systems* 3/2005, p. 242–255; United Nations Development Programm, *Assessment of the Impact of Trade on Human Development – Turkmenistan*, Bratislava 2010, p. 40 f.
- 66 Peyrouse et. al., *Security and Development*, op. cit. (note 55), p. 14.
- 67 Cf. Jia Qingguo, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: China’s Experiment in Multilateral Leadership,” in: Iwashita Akihiro (ed.), *Russia and its Eastern Edge*, Sapporo 2007, <http://kms1.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/34983/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/D3D7A5F7-960A-4D69-8FF6-3F6BDB7B81E7/en/Full+text.pdf>, p. 111.
- 68 Established upon the successful resolution of almost all border issues in 2001, the SCO is the successor of the “Shanghai Five” group, a multilateral forum established in 1995 that aimed to facilitate the early Sino-post Soviet rapprochement on border and security issues. Cf. Henry Plater-Zyberk, *Who’s Afraid of the SCO?* (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom), 2007, p. 1; Olcott, *Central Asia’s Second Chance*, op. cit. (note 16), p. 20 ff.
- 69 Cf. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, “The Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism,” <<http://www.sectsc.org/EN/show.asp?id=68>>; Matthew Oresman, “SCO Update: The Official Launch of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” in: *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, January/2004, p. 4; Oksana Antonenko, *The EU Should Not Ignore the Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (Centre for European Reform, Policy Brief), London, 5/11/2007, <<http://www.cer.org.uk/publications/archive/policy-brief/2007/eu-should-not-ignore-shanghai-co-operation-organisation>>; Farkhod Tolipov, “Central Asia in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” in: *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, January 2004, p. 6.
- 70 Cf. Peyrouse et. al., *Security and Development*, op. cit. (note 55), p. 12.
- 71 Cf. Thomas Ambrosio, “Catching the Shanghai Spirit: How the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Promotes Authoritarian Norms in Central Asia,” in: *Europe-Asia Studies* 8/2008, p. 1334; Roy Allison, “Virtual regionalism, regional structures and regime security in Central Asia,” in: *Central Asian Survey* 2/2008, p. 185 ff.; Stephen Aris, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: ‘Tackling the Three Evils’, A Regional Response to Non-traditional Security Challenges or an Anti-Western Bloc?” in: *Europe-Asia Studies* 3/2009, p. 487 ff.; Stephen Aris, “The Response of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to the Crisis in Kyrgyzstan,” in: *Civil Wars* 3/2012, p. 451ff.
- 72 Cf. Ambrosio, op. cit. (note 71), p. 1332.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Human Rights Watch, op. cit. (note 29).
- 75 See e.g. Igor Torbakov, *Uzbek Violence Deepens Russia’s Central Asia Dilemma* (Eurasianet.org, Eurasia Insight), <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav051705.shtml>> (accessed 8/2/2008); Stephen Blank, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Cracks Behind the Façade* (Eurasianet.org, Eurasia Insight), <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav062106.shtml>> (accessed 8/2/2008); Nick Megoran, “Framing Andijon, Narrating the Nation: Islam Karimov’s account of the events of 13 May 2005,” in: *Central Asian Survey* 1/2008, p. 15.
- 76 See e.g. Декларация глав государств-членов Шанхайской организации сотрудничества (Declaration of the Head of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization), Astana 2005, <<http://www.sectsc.org/RU/show.asp?id=98>> (accessed 8/3/2008); Maurice Lantaigne, “In Medias Res,” op. cit. (note 50), p. 217.
- 77 The governments also signed a “Friendship Treaty” so as to “uplift ... friendly and cooperative partnership to a

- higher level.” Cf. *Hu Jintao Holds Talks with Uzbek President Islam Karimov*, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Estonia, <<http://ee.china-embassy.org/eng/dtxw/t197953.htm>> (accessed 10/10/2012); Uzbekistan, “China Ink Partnership Treaty,” in: *Turkish Weekly*, <<http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/11186/uzbekistan-china-ink-partnership-treaty.html>> (accessed 10/11/2012).
- 78 The principle of non-interference is the most frequently cited position in the organization’s declarations, communications, and statements, and counts as the fundamental norm in regard of mutual interaction. Cf. Jia, op. cit. (note 67), p. 120.
- 79 Cf. Article 2.4 of the UN Charter and Article 2 of the Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. For a discussion on the international application of the principle, see e.g.: Chatham House, *The Principle of Non-Intervention in Contemporary International Law: Non-Interference in a State’s Internal Affairs Used to be a Rule of International Law: Is it Still?* <<http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/International%20Law/il280207.pdf>>, London 2007, p. 3 (accessed 9/15/2012).
- 80 Cf. Shanghai Cooperation Organization, “Declaration by the Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” Article II, <http://www.eurasianhome.org/doc_files/declaration_sco.doc> (accessed 9/12/2012).
- 81 See e.g. Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus*, op. cit. (note 64); C. Fred Bergsten et. al., *China’s Rise. Challenges and Opportunities*, op. cit. (note 64), p. 70.
- 82 Cf. Shanghai Cooperation Organization, “The Declaration of Heads of States of the SCO,” Shanghai 2006.
- 83 Pang Xingchen, 2004, p. 845, cited by Evan S. Medeiros, *China’s International Behavior*, op. cit., (note 58), p. 103.
- 84 Cf. Allison, “Virtual regionalism, regional structures and regime security in Central Asia,” op. cit. (note 71), p. 186; Ambrosio, “Catching the Shanghai Spirit: How the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Promotes Authoritarian Norms in Central Asia,” op. cit. (note 71), p. 1330 ff.
- 85 Cf. Graham E. Fuller et al., *The Xinjiang Problem*, op. cit. (note 53), p. 31.
- 86 Indeed, Central Asian governments have officially warned Uyghur activists to not undermine their relations with Beijing through their actions. Cf. Erica Marat, “Uyghur Diaspora Faces Government Pressure in Kyrgyzstan,” in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 156/2009, <[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35406](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35406)> (accessed 10/15/2012); Rustam Mukhamedov, *Uyghurs in Kyrgyzstan under Careful Government Supervision* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, CACI Analyst) 1/28/2004, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/1850>> (accessed 11/1/2012); *Interview with Prominent Uyghur Human Rights Activist* (Tursun Islam), IRIN (Kyrgyzstan), 1/29/2004, <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/22814/KYRGYZSTAN-Interview-with-prominent-Uyghur-human-rights-activist>> (accessed 11/2/2012); Henryk Szadziewski, *The Uyghurs, China and Central Asia*, Open Democracy, 7/26/2011, <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/henryk-szadziewski/uyghurs-china-and-central-asia>> (accessed 11/2/2012).
- 87 As pointed out in note 17, Kyrgyzstan may be considered a partial exception in this regard, yet nevertheless, its liberal credentials still remain very weak.
- 88 Cf. Hu Jintao, cited by Medeiros, *China’s International Behavior. Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification*, op. cit. (note 58), p. 49.
- 89 In this regard, Beijing likes to highlight the SCO’s “Shanghai Spirit,” an intra-organizational set of values that, according to former Secretary-General Zhang Deguang, stands for “non-alignment and openness to the rest of the world, mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, mutual consultations, respect for diversity of cultures and aspiration for joint development.” Cf. Zhang Deguang, cited in: “Shanghai Spirit Takes Place,” in: *China Daily*, 1/15/2004, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2004-01/15/content_299260.htm> (accessed 2/20/2011).
- 90 Cf. Andrew Stroehlein, *Why Uzbekistan Matters*, in: International Crisis Group Commentary, <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/uzbekistan/stroehlein-why-uzbekistan-matters.aspx>> (accessed 11/23/2011)

