

CENTRAL ASIA FACING ISAF WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN

ISLAMIST THREATS AND REGIONAL SOLUTIONS

Thomas Kunze / Michail Logvinov

In 2014, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) combat mission in Afghanistan is due to be concluded. Though a security agreement between the U.S. and Afghanistan allows for the Karzai regime to be able to continue to count on their support, the ISAF is a thing of the past. The withdrawal of troops and a large portion of material provisions has presented participating ISAF countries with logistical challenges. Particular emphasis is placed on the Central Asian countries that together make up the Northern Distribution Network (NDN): Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Part of the withdrawal is to be carried out using the NDN. On the one hand, this provides new economic and political opportunities for Central Asian countries. On the other hand, Islamist forces could take advantage of an emerging security vacuum due to the troop withdrawal to spread terror and fear throughout Afghanistan and its neighbouring Central Asian countries. Even comparatively secure Northern Afghanistan, which is primarily populated by Uzbeks and Tajiks, could become a new base for terrorist activity, threatening the secular regimes in the former Soviet Central Asian republics. Islamist ideas are already entrenched in their societies, and regional Islamist networks do exist.

TROOP WITHDRAWAL: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT IN AFGHANISTAN?

The situation in Afghanistan is proving doubly difficult for those ISAF countries involved: transferring responsibility for security to local forces on the one hand, and the logistical complexity of the withdrawal on the other. According



Dr. Thomas Kunze is Resident Representative of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Central Asia, based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.



Dr. Michail Logvinov is a research associate for the Hannah-Arendt-Institut for Totalitarian Studies at the Dresden University of Technology.

to NATO, there are a total of 87,207 soldiers (as of August 2013) from 49 nations in Afghanistan as part of the ISAF mission, the largest numbers of troops being from the U.S. (60,000 troops), the United Kingdom (7,700 troops) and Germany (4,400 troops).¹

However, the security situation in Afghanistan remains precarious and is in no way secured. Though the Taliban have been weakened by the international mission, they have not been driven away. According to NATO, approximately 8,000 to 12,000 troops will remain in Afghanistan in 2014 as part of the post-ISAF mission, "Resolute

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Support", to provide assistance with training, instruction and support for local security forces.² In June 2013, NATO Defence Ministers made a commitment that the remaining troops should no longer play a combat role.³

This is to ensure that the responsibility for security in Afghanistan is completely transferred to local forces. However, it remains questionable as to whether or not they are ready for this. The Afghan soldiers are considered inadequately trained and the number of deserters is high. The political balance of power does not yet appear to be stable enough to guarantee that the government will not collapse or at least have their authority undermined following the withdrawal of troops. Afghanistan's political system is fragile and corruption is pervasive. The situation in eastern Afghan province of Nuristan provides a preview, as troops have already withdrawn from there in 2012. A large portion of the province, including major access roads used to provide the local population with supplies, is now controlled by the Taliban.⁴

- 1 | Cf. NATO, "International Security Assistance Force: Key Facts and Figures", 1-2, <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.pdf> (accessed 23 Nov 2013).
- 2 | Cf. Adrian Croft and Phil Stewart, "NATO considers post-2014 Afghan force of 8,000-12,000", Reuters, 22 Feb 2013, <http://reuters.com/article/2013/02/22/us-afghanistan-usa-nato-idUSBRE91L0IC20130222> (accessed 23 Nov 2013).
- 3 | Cf. Karen Parrish, "NATO Defense Ministers Set Post-2014 Afghanistan Mission", American Forces Press Service, 5 Jun 2013, <http://defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=120218> (accessed 14 Oct 2013).
- 4 | Cf. „Taliban übernehmen nach ISAF Abzug die Kontrolle“, *Stern*, 25 Sep 2013, <http://stern.de/politik/ausland/afghanische-provinz-nuristan-taliban-uebernehmen-nach-isaf-abzug-die-kontrolle-2060563.html> (accessed 1 Oct 2013).



Soldiers of the logistics support battalion: The Bundeswehr will leave behind equipment with a replacement value amounting to several million euros because the return transport is often too costly. | Source: © Sebastian Wilke, Bundeswehr.

LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES OF WITHDRAWAL

After international security forces were sent to Afghanistan based on UN Resolution 1386 passed on 20 December 2001, an enormous amount of equipment was imported into the country. At this juncture, it was not only a matter of weapons, munitions and military vehicles, but also aid materials and everyday commodities for the troops. With the withdrawal of the troops, this equipment must be sent back to its home country. For the Bundeswehr alone this means transferring approximately 1,200 vehicles and at least 4,000 containers worth of equipment, according to German federal government estimates.⁵ In addition, the Bundeswehr will leave behind equipment with a replacement value of some 150 million euros because, for example, the cost of return transport of vehicles that are more than two years old is now more costly than the equipment's value.⁶ This equipment will either be handed over to the Afghans, sold or scrapped. According to the Federal

5 | Cf. Federal Government of Germany, "Erster Seetransport eingelaufen", 10 Aug 2013, <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Artikel/2013/08/2013-08-08-rueckverlegung.html> (accessed 23 Nov 2013).

6 | Cf. "Abzug aus Afghanistan: Bundeswehr lässt Kriegsgerät im Wert von 150 Millionen Euro zurück", *Spiegel Online*, 4 Aug 2013, <http://spiegel.de/politik/ausland/a-914747.html> (accessed 1 Oct 2013).

Ministry of Defence, this will be the case for approximately 42 per cent of all equipment in use.⁷ This figure does not include weapons, as these should in no way be permitted to subsequently fall into the hands of the Taliban.

Fig. 1

**Logistics for military equipment and weapons:
Withdrawal routes from Afghanistan**



Source: Own depiction.

The withdrawal provides a significant logistical challenge for the largest contributors of troops, the U.S., the UK and Germany. Due to Afghanistan's geographical position, there are only limited routes of withdrawal through which to effect this transfer. The country has no direct access to the sea. In addition, Afghanistan is bordered by mountain ranges to the north and in the east. The west and south-east are bordered by Afghanistan's politically unstable neighbours, Pakistan and Iran, which have so far not been considered cooperative by the West. In addition, the infrastructural situation in Afghanistan itself is quite substandard due to poorly developed road networks.

Due to periodic riots and attacks, a direct route to the seaport of Karachi (Pakistan) through Afghani Kandahar or Pakistani Peshawar is considered too unsafe and unstable

for the transport of such a large amount of military equipment. Additionally, agreements made with the government in Islamabad are often not honoured by these regions. Pakistan closes the Afghan border time and again. Following the NATO air strike in 2011, during which Pakistani security forces were killed, the borders remained closed for nearly eight months.

One alternative for transporting the equipment is to do so by air. The Bundeswehr already transports military equipment back to Germany via Trabzon airport on the Black Sea in northern Turkey. Military aircraft first landed there in the spring of 2013 and equipment was then further transported to Germany by ship.⁸ A total of 85 per cent of German equipment will be returned along this route.⁹ Sensitive military equipment, such as encryption technology, is always flown directly to Germany.¹⁰ However, this route is very expensive. Surface transport combined with sea transport via the countries situated to the north of Afghanistan, the NDN, offers a more economical alternative. One route passes through Tajikistan to the Manas (Bishkek) military airbase in Kyrgyzstan, which may be used by the U.S. Army until 2014, and then is either flown or transported to ports in the Baltic Sea through Kazakhstan. For the Bundeswehr, which primarily operates in northern Afghanistan, Uzbekistan is emerging as an important route for withdrawal. The only railway line linking Afghanistan with Central Asia (the NDN) follows a route from Mazar-i-Sharif in northern Afghanistan to Termez in southern Uzbekistan. As part of the Anti-Terrorism Alliance, Uzbekistan granted the Bundeswehr usage rights for the airport in Termez in 2001. There are two main routes available from Termez. One leads via Kazakhstan and Russia to the seaport of Riga. The other goes via

85 per cent of German equipment will be returned along the Turkey route. Sensitive military equipment, such as encryption technology, is always flown directly to Germany.

8 | Cf. Bundeswehr, "Chronologie des Einsatzes in Afghanistan ISAF", 21 Sep 2013, http://einsatz.bundeswehr.de/portal/a/einsatzbw/!ut/p/c4/LcgxDoAgDEbhs3gBurt5C3Uxv1qhgRQjV RJO4N50_dopi_FIx4mWZFopGmTfq1urTsvLFpg7SOi3ZzSv9g aOxw-QKUY1G3hypoXKTjjoEP3AjH-VW0! (accessed 1 Oct 2013).

9 | Cf. interview with the head of the logistical transition point in Trabzon for the German Bundeswehr, Colonel Michael Sinn: Jan Henne and Michael Sinn, "Zwischenstopp in Trabzon", *GEO*, Aug 2013, 78.

10 | Cf. *ibid.*

Kazakhstan to the Caspian Sea or through Azerbaijan to the seaport of Poti in Georgia. However, the Bundeswehr only wants to transport approximately five per cent of its equipment using these routes.¹¹

The U.S. is the largest contributor of troops and their forces and equipment are positioned in southern and eastern Afghanistan. For them, considering using NDN routes poses the difficulty of materials having to traverse a tunnel along the Salang Pass en route to the Hindu Kush in northern Afghanistan. This bottleneck leaves them potentially vulnerable to Taliban attacks, which the U.S. has thus far avoided by withdrawing the bulk of their equipment through the north.¹²

THE ISAF WITHDRAWAL AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CENTRAL ASIA

The opportunities unfolding for Central Asian (and Caucasian) countries through the provision of withdrawal routes and their resulting strategic importance appear to be relatively insignificant due to the low frequency

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of use. Nevertheless, these countries may gain financial, economic and political benefits. First of all, they are paid for the transit routes. Secondly, Central Asian countries have a means of applying pressure to gain greater influence on the international stage. The ISAF countries rely on the Central Asian countries and their willingness to cooperate. Uzbekistan, which was sanctioned by the U.S. and the European Union after the bloody suppression of an uprising in Andijan in 2005, has already been able to acquit themselves of these sanctions.¹³ The U.S. is now permitted to sell military equipment to Uzbekistan, the justification being that this will provide the country with the opportunity to better protect itself against terrorism. The British are also making an effort with the Central Asian countries. In September 2013, the UK negotiated a

11 | Cf. *ibid.*

12 | Cf. Jan Henne, "Operation Abzug", *GEO*, Aug 2013, 66-78, here: 78.

13 | Cf. an analysis for the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute: Erkin Akhmadov, "U.S. lifts military embargo on Uzbekistan", 10 May 2011, <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5641> (accessed 14 Oct 2013).

bilateral agreement with Dushanbe to strengthen economic relations and expand tourism.¹⁴ The plans also include deliberations on a transit agreement that would allow the British military to withdraw troops from Afghanistan via Tajikistan.

Although the Central Asian states will reap short-term financial benefits from the withdrawal of ISAF troops, this remains economically irrelevant in the medium-term. Of crucial political importance will be whether these countries will decide to work together more closely as a result of a possible new security situation. The Russian-dominated transnational organisation, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), or the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), dominated by Russia and China, could play a significant role in this, assuming their member states undertake a similar security assessment. They have at least begun to discuss the issues of security and stability in Central Asia following the withdrawal of ISAF troops. This was demonstrated in a summit meeting of heads of state in Bishkek in October 2013.¹⁵ For NATO, increased cooperation with the CSTO should not be ruled out in the future. Though Uzbekistan has turned its back on the 2012 military alliance, Tashkent participating in a new security policy assessment at a later date should not be ruled out. Because the U.S., Russia, the EU and not least the Central Asian states themselves are all striving towards the same objective: regional security and stability following the withdrawal of international troops.

THREATS TO CENTRAL ASIA: THE SPREAD OF RADICAL ISLAMIC TERRORISM AND JIHAD

Just as the withdrawal of troops is providing Central Asia with opportunities, there are also risks. There is a great danger of radical Islamist groups taking advantage of the

14 | Cf. National Information Agency of Tajikistan, "Meeting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs with the UK Ambassador", 1 Jul 2013, <http://khovar.tj/eng/foreign-policy/4142-meeting-of-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-with-the-uk-ambassador.html> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

15 | Cf. AKIPress, "Bishkek to host conference on situation development in Central Asia after ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014", 3 Oct 2013, http://akipress.com/_en_news.php?id=137722 (accessed 8 Oct 2013).

power vacuum in Afghanistan and Islamic terrorism spreading to Central Asian countries. These countries fear that Afghanistan could once again become a shelter for radical Islamic terrorism after 2014, which could destabilise their own authoritarian-secular systems. Islamist groups in Central Asia have already attempted to overthrow the new regimes once before, following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. During the Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), they fought hand in hand with the Mujahideen – from which the Taliban later emerged – against the “godless Soviets”. Tajik and Uzbek jihadists always found refuge in northern Afghanistan.¹⁶

The highly populated Fergana Valley, geographically framed by Kyrgyzstan to the south, Uzbekistan to the east and Tajikistan to the north, is a focal point for Central Asian security policy. This region, densely populated by different ethnicities, has been shaped by past resource conflicts and violence among ethnic groups. Islamist underground organisations, already present during the Soviet era, formed the roots of a terrorist organisation that would later become the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IMU was founded in the early 1990s by Tahir Yuldashev and Juma Khojayev (Namangani). The Uzbekistani government’s secular stance has meant it has become a declared enemy of the IMU. Yuldashev, the former Mullah of Namangan, was a gifted organiser and charismatic personality who was committed to the Sharia system. Namangani had gained combat experience in the Soviet war in Afghanistan.¹⁷

The Uzbekistani government’s secular stance has meant it has become a declared enemy of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, founded in the early 1990s.

In 1991, they both challenged the Uzbek government. An angry crowd stormed offices and public buildings in Namangan. Uzbek President Islam Karimov was able to put an end to the uprising, first through negotiation and then

16 | Cf. Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad. The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, Yale, 2002, 248.

17 | A high-ranking PIW official is reported as saying, “[h]e is essentially a guerrilla leader, not an Islamic scholar, and he is easily influenced by those around him, such as today he is influenced by the Taliban and Osama bin Laden. [...] He is a good person but not a deep person or intellectual in any way, and he has been shaped by his own military and political experiences rather than Islamic ideology, but he hates the Uzbek government [...]”. Rashid, *Jihad*, 143.

by taking drastic action. Yuldashev and Namangani fled to Tajikistan, then to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Pakistani intelligence agency ISI is said to have come to Yuldashev's aid financially and to have provided him with refuge: "From 1995 to 1998 Yuldashev was based in Peshawar, the centre not only of Pakistani and Afghan Islamic activism but also of pan-Islamic jihadi groups. Here he met with the 'Arab-Afghans' [...], who were later to introduce him to [Osama] bin Laden and other Afghan groups."¹⁸

The Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) later split from the IMU. Both groups operate in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Some of their militant members sympathise with waging the "holy war" in other countries. The research literature indicates that the IMU is supported by Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other organisations (Harakatul-Ansar and Al-Jihad). Perhaps it was even an initiative of Osama bin Laden's to launch an Uzbek jihadist group to combat the Karimov regime.¹⁹

After the German police had arrested three members of the Islamic Jihad Union in Sauerland in 2007, security experts stated that terrorist activity originating in Central Asia also constituted a direct threat to Germany. In contrast, Juma Namangani and Tahir Yuldashev, the former leaders of the IMU, today pose no further threat. Namangani was killed during a U.S. campaign in northern Afghanistan in 2001. According to the Pakistani intelligence agency, Yuldashev died in August 2009 in an American drone attack in South Waziristan, a mountain region in north-western Pakistan on the Pakistani-Afghan border. Before his death, Osama bin Laden's confidant had threatened attacks on the Presidents of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on a DVD: "Karimov, Bakiyev and Rahmonov had better remember that they will be punished for persecuting Muslims – in this life as well as before the judgement of heaven."²⁰

On several occasions different places in Uzbekistan have been attacked by Islamist terrorists. In February 1999, six bombs exploded in Tashkent. Sixteen people were killed and more than 100 were injured in the attacks. The Islamic

18 | Ibid.

19 | Cf. *ibid.*, 148.

20 | Peter Böhm, "Comeback der Islamisten", *Südwind*, Dec 2006, <http://suedwind-magazin.at/start.asp?ID=236723> (accessed 27 Jun 2011).

Movement of Uzbekistan is said to have been responsible for the attacks. The IMU campaigned for the establishment of an Islamic state in Uzbekistan and the release of imprisoned Muslims: "On 13 Dzuma-d-ul-Avval 1420 (25 August 1999) the Emir of the 'Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan' and the chief commander of the Mujahideen, Muhammad Tahrir, declared a 'jihad' on the Tashkent regime," according to a declaration.²¹ In March and April 2004, new attacks were launched in Tashkent and Bukhara. Women with explosive belts and armed men attacked several police stations. This resulted in the deaths of 33 terrorists, ten policemen and four bystanders. In July 2004, two explosive devices were set off in front of the entrances to the U.S. and Israeli embassies in Tashkent, killing two Uzbek security guards. All these attacks were claimed by the Islamic Jihad Union.

During the Tajikistan civil war between 1991 and 1997 a post-Soviet secular camp faced off with an Islamic camp. With external support the secular forces were able to gain the upper hand. In Tajikistan a civil war raged from 1991 to 1997, claiming the lives of approximately 50,000 people according to United Nations estimates. Here, too, a post-Soviet secular camp faced off with an Islamic camp. With external support, the majority of which came from Russia and Uzbekistan, the secular forces, with President Emomali Rahmon as their leader, were able to gain the upper hand.

Social discontent, poor living conditions and indignation with the authoritarian regime have continued to play into the hands of militant Islamists in the Fergana Valley border triangle. As a result of the civil war in Tajikistan and other wars that ravaged the neighbouring Central Asia Caucasus region in the 1990s, militant Islamists declared a jihad against post-Soviet governments in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The line separating the jihadists from the Afghan Mujahideen was blurred.

21 | Quoted in: Uwe Halbach, *Sicherheit in Zentralasien, Teil II: Kleinkriege im Ferganatal und das Problem der "neuen Sicherheitsrisiken"* (Report by BIOst, No. 25), Cologne, 2000, 17, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-41650> (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

DRUG TRAFFICKING AS PART OF THE NETWORK OF TERRORIST ACTIVITIES

In addition, militant Islamists were developing a symbiotic relationship with organised crime (drug and arms trafficking). The link between Islamism and drug-related crime strengthened with the instability in Afghanistan and the civil war in Tajikistan. Important routes for Afghan drug transport were the result of this.²² Several drug routes from Afghanistan pass through Central Asia. Opium is transported via Turkmenistan to Russia and Turkey. The drugs also enter Russia and Europe via Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. One of the routes passes through the Fergana Valley.²³ In 2006, more than 20 per cent of processed heroin left Afghanistan using these northern routes. The high mountain region of Badakhshan (Tajikistan), as well as the Osh region (Kyrgyzstan), are of particular significance for Central Asian drug smuggling.²⁴

In the 1990s, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan was considered a terrorist organisation that was highly involved in the drug trade. Their activities were largely financed by the heroin trade.²⁵ "Islamic movements such as these," writes Uwe Halbach (SWP), "intend [...] to destabilise Central Asia through terrorism, thereby securing regional drug routes without state intervention."²⁶ Against this backdrop, several of the IMU's terrorist attacks in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan can be considered

measures to ensure a courier system for Afghan opiates through Central Asia to Russia and the West.

22 | Cf. Rainer Freitag-Wirminghaus, "Russland, islamische Republiken des Kaukasus und Zentralasiens", in: Werner Ende and Udo Steinbach (eds.), *Der Islam in der Gegenwart*, Munich, 2005, 277-305, here: 296.

23 | Cf. International Crisis Group (ICG), "Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hisbut-Tahrir", *ICG Asia Report* 58, 2003, 16, <http://crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/058-radical-islam-in-central-asia-responding-to-hizb-ut-tahrir.aspx> (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

24 | Cf. ICG, "Central Asia: Drugs and Conflict", *ICG Asia Report* 25, 26 Nov 2001, <http://crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/025-central-asia-drugs-and-conflict.aspx> (accessed 27 Nov 2013); Bernd Kuzmits, "Grenzüberschreitende Kooperation. Afghanistan und seine nördlichen Nachbarn", *Osteuropa*, Aug-Sep 2007, 417-432.

25 | Cf. Freitag-Wirminghaus, n. 22, 296.

26 | Halbach, n. 21, 17.

State Department considers the IJU and the IMU terrorist organisations.²⁷ In 2005, the Al-Qaeda/Taliban United Nations Sanctions Committee placed the organisations on the list of terrorist organisations based on Security Council Resolution 1267.²⁸

INTERACTION BETWEEN LOCAL AND EXTERNAL ISLAMIST ORGANISATIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA

After the fall of the Soviet Union, active states and organisations engaged in missions in the Islamic world on behalf of Central Asia's "forgotten Muslims". Among them were Pakistani organisations.

While the first stirrings of jihad by militant Islamists in Central Asia were already being felt during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, after the fall of the Soviet Union, active states and organisations engaged in missions in the Islamic world on behalf of Central Asia's "forgotten Muslims". Among them were Saudi Arabia, Turkey's Nurcular Brotherhood, and Pakistani organisations.²⁹ They provided financial and "ideational" assistance. Persian-speaking Tajikistan could count on Iranian support. Although the populations of the former Soviet Central Asian republics predominantly stood in opposition to militant Islamism,³⁰ Islamist groups, such as the IMU, were able to recruit enough followers to successfully carry out controlled acts of terrorism in Central Asia from Afghanistan. The militant Islamists owed their power of penetration not least to the support of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

27 | "[T]he Islamic Jihad Group (IJG) also known as Jamaat al-Jihad, also known as the Libyan Society, also known as the Kazakh Jamaat, also known as the Jamaat Mujahidin, also known as the Jamiyat, also known as Jamiat al-Jihad al-Islami, also known as Dzhamaat Modzhakhedov, also known as Islamic Jihad Group of Uzbekistan, also known as al-Djihad al-Islami." See: U.S. Department of the Treasury, Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), "Alphabetical Listing of Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons ('SDN List')", <http://treasury.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/sdn/sdnlist.txt> (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

28 | Cf. Deutscher Bundestag, "Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Ulla Jelpke, Petra Pau und der Fraktion DIE LINKE" (Drucksache 16/7916), Berlin, 2008, 3.

29 | Cf. Brian Glyn Williams, "Jihad and Ethnicity in Post-Communist Eurasia. On the Trail of Transnational Islamic Holy Warriors in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Chechnya and Kosovo", in: *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 2, No. 3-4, Mar-Jun 2003, 3-24, here: 6.

30 | Halbach n. 21, 27.

The Central Asian region, including the Caucasus and China's Xinjiang province populated by Muslim Uyghurs, was attributed with great significance in Al-Qaeda's strategic planning. Experts underscore Central Asian terrorists' loyalty to Al-Qaeda, which has earned them a large number of Chechen, Tajik, Uzbek and Uyghur recruits for their campaign against the Northern Alliance and U.S. troops in Afghanistan.³¹ In a letter to Taliban leader Mullah Omar in 2002, Osama bin Laden is even said to have pointed out Central Asia's prominent position in the anti-U.S. jihad.³² During the 1990s, acts of terrorism in Central Asia and the North Caucasus were always brought about in cooperation with external actors. According to accusations, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Arab countries contributed to the destabilisation of the region.

According to the former head of the Kyrgyz security apparatus, Kalik Imankulov, a terrorist network was formed around 2002, operating as the Islamic Movement of Central Asia (IMCA).³³ This network included the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Movement of East Turkestan, which brought together Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Tajik, Afghan, Chechen, Uzbek and Uyghur militants. The common goal was to establish an Islamic legal system in the area stretching from the Caucasus to Xinjiang. The creation of a "Central Asian caliphate", which was to include

31 | Cf. Michael Scheuer, "Central Asia in Al-Qaeda's Vision of the Anti-American Jihad, 1979-2006", in: *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2006, 5-10, here: 7.

32 | "During the previous period, with the grace of Allah, we were successful in cooperation with our brothers in Tajikistan in various fields including training. We were able to train a good number of them, arm them and deliver them to Tajikistan. Moreover, Allah facilitated to us delivering weapons to them; we pray Allah grants us all victory. We need to cooperate all together to continue this matter, especially Jihad continuation in the Islamic Republics [of Central Asia which] will keep the enemies busy and divert them from the Afghani issue and ease the pressure. The enemies of Islam['] problem will become how to stop the spreading of Islam into the Islamic Republics and not the Afghani issue. Consequently, the efforts of the Russians and their American allies will be scattered. It is a fact that the Islamic Republics region is rich with significant scientific experience in conventional and non-conventional military industries, which will have a great role in future Jihad against the enemies of Islam." Quote as in: *ibid.*, 8.

33 | Cf. Sergei Blagov, "Moscow on alert for Muslim militancy", 19 Sep 2002, http://atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/DI19Ag01.html (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, is the first step on the path toward the unification of Muslims in Central Asia and an Ummah (a community of Muslims under one "Islamic nation"). The expansion of theocracy to the adjacent territories of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and to the northwest of China is the second step in the IMCA's plan. There is no shortage of supra-regional structures for Islamist organisations in Central Asia. The largest and most well-known movement was the Islamic Rebirth Party (IRP), founded in 1990 in Russian Astrakhan. They achieved particular significance in Tajikistan.

After the civil war ended, the Tajik Islamists chose to cooperate with the secularists and initially decided not to challenge the non-Islamic state. In doing so, they distanced themselves from other Islamist forces.

As demonstrated by the progression of the civil war, which ended in 1997, there was broad Islamist support for their objectives in the region. What is peculiar about the IRP is that the organisation is the only legal party in Central Asia with a "religious mandate".³⁴ After the civil war ended, the Tajik Islamists chose to cooperate with the secularists and initially decided not to challenge the non-Islamic state. In doing so, they distanced themselves from other Islamist forces. This, in turn, meant that the IRP was considered as having been bought by the Tajik government. Thus two Central Asian Islamist organisations had changed their profile. The IMU increasingly became part of an international militant Islamist movement with ties to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda; however, following 11 September 2001, they lost influence. The IRP shifted from an armed opposition group to a legal party involved in establishing the constitution.³⁵

These developments benefitted the Islamic Liberation Party (Hizb ut-Tahrir, HuT) in particular. Founded in East Jerusalem in 1953, the Islamist organisation initially operated as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East. It later expanded its reach to become a transnationally active organisation, albeit a primarily Palestinian dominated one.³⁶ They are banned from operating in several countries, including Germany. By the 1980s, Hizb ut-Tahrir had already succeeded in smuggling propagandist literature to the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. The organisation's first

34 | Cf. Freitag-Wirminghaus, n. 22, 294-295.

35 | Cf. *ibid.*, 298-300.

36 | Cf. Guido Steinberg, *Der nahe und ferne Feind. Die Netzwerke des islamistischen Islamismus*, Munich, 2005, 39 et sqq.

cells were particularly active in the Fergana Valley.³⁷ From there, the Hizb ut-Tahrir expanded their network to include other regions in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. As the population of Central Asia had little knowledge of Arabic language and ideals, the Hizb ut-Tahrir rapidly adapted itself to meet the regional conditions. The first translations of programmatic writings and propagandist leaflets by the organisation began to emerge. Today, Hizb ut-Tahrir is the fastest growing Islamist movement in Central Asia – most likely because they are essentially able to operate with virtually no competition.



Worldwide commitment for the Ummah: Supporters of Hizb ut-Tahrir demonstrate in Copenhagen in 2006. | Source: EPO ©©©.

The establishment of the “Central Asian Caliphate” is one of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s professed goals. Other objectives include the liberation of the Muslim world from Western influences and the introduction of Sharia law.³⁸ Hizb ut-Tahrir tends to present itself as non-violent, yet present aggressive anti-Semitism and anti-Western rhetoric as an integral part of their ideology. Moreover, the organisation legitimises jihad against Israel and the U.S., making it difficult to speak of a sincere renunciation of violence.³⁹ Experts believe the renunciation of violence is strategic in nature

37 | Cf. Zeyno Baran, *Hizb ut-Tahrir. Islam’s Political Insurgency*, Washington D.C., 2004.

38 | Cf. n. 23, 4.

39 | Cf. *ibid.*, 5.

and may be set aside given certain favourable conditions.⁴⁰ Hizb ut-Tahrir does not accept any political compromises or models except those of an Islamic state based on Sharia law. Every article of the Constitution, every dispensation of justice should be derived from Sharia law.⁴¹ Hizb ut-Tahrir's treatises propose a three-stage model for bringing all Muslims together in a neo-Caliphate based on an interpretation of the Prophet Mohammed's mission to establish the first Islamic state. The first stage involves the recruitment of Muslims who will spread the party's propaganda throughout the world. The second step calls for interaction with the Ummah to assist them in working for Islam and toward the integration of Islam into everyday life, the state and society. The third and final stage comprises the process of taking power and the holistic and total implementation of the Islamic order. Beginning in Central Asia, Muslims everywhere should rise up and unite to form a caliphate.⁴²

Hardly any reliable information is available regarding the number of Hizb ut-Tahrir members in Central Asia. Its decentralised cells operate in secret, taking incredibly strict security precautions. Only the heads of the cells know who the decision makers are in the higher-ranking structures. Hizb ut-Tahrir is considered tightly organised and pyramidal. Its organisational structure "ranges from local base units at the organisation's regional level to supra-regional leadership." [...] The regional representative is appointed by the Central Political Council at the international level.⁴³ However, experts believe that

Hizb ut-Tahrir is considered tightly organised and pyramidal. Its organisational structure "ranges from local base units at the organisation's regional level to supra-regional leadership."

40 | An HuT member strikes at the heart of the matter by stating the following: "Islam obliges Muslims to possess power so they can intimidate – I would not say terrorise – the enemies of Islam. In the beginning the Caliphate would strengthen itself internally and it would not initiate jihad. But after that, we would carry Islam as an intellectual call to all the world. And we will make people bordering the Caliphate believe in Islam. Only if they refuse, then we'll ask them to be ruled by Islam. And after all discussions and negotiations they still refuse, then the last resort will be a jihad to spread the spirit of Islam and the rule of Islam. This is done in the interest of all people to get them out of darkness and into the light." Quoted in: Zeyno Baran, Frederick S. Starr and Svante E. Cornell, *Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU*, Uppsala, 2006, 17.

41 | N. 23, 4.

42 | Cf. Freitag-Wirminghaus, n. 22, 299.

43 | Ibid., 298.

between 15,000 and 20,000 followers live in Central Asia.⁴⁴ Between 3,000 and 5,000 followers live in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.⁴⁵

Akram Yuldashev, an Islamist activist and ideologue from the Hizb ut-Tahrir network,⁴⁶ founded a movement with a local agenda, now known as Akromiya, in Andijan (Uzbekistan). Akromiyists act on the assumption that a regional agenda can only be carried out on a local level. Yuldashev worked out a five-stage programme designed to enable Akromiya members to Islamise society and, in doing so, gain power. The first stage includes the Islamic education of members of its secret cells and ends with a vow of fidelity to the Koran. The second phase aims to establish a financial means of existence. The Akromiyists will start small businesses in which “brothers” may work or they will be employed with the support of like-minded people in public organisations. Members must give one-fifth of their profits to Akromiya. While the third stage focuses on spiritual indoctrination, the fourth and penultimate step to a true Islamic order aims to legitimise the coalition either by recruiting officials to their cause or by exploiting them. Once the movement and its supporters have been legitimised, the fifth step is to open up a legal means of acquiring power.⁴⁷ The coalition has succeeded in gaining influence in Adijan through this socio-economic approach by creating jobs to ease the strain of economic depression – “one [of the] most successful examples of the bottom-up approach of pro-Islamic social engineering.”⁴⁸

There was an uprising in Andijan in 2005, which was violently suppressed by the Uzbek authorities. According to reports by the Uzbek authorities, a group of armed members of the Islamist organisation Akromiya attacked a prison to free their associates. They were on trial for terrorist activities. The riots spread. There were rallies of solidarity on the city streets and serious clashes between

44 | N. 23, 17

45 | Baran, Starr and Cornell, n. 40, 24.

46 | Cf. Bakhtijar Babadžanov, “Ферганская долина: источник или жертва исламского фундаментализма?” (Fergana Valley: Root or victim of Islamic fundamentalism?), May 1999, http://ca-c.org/journal/cac-05-1999/st_21_babajanov.shtml (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

47 | Cf. *ibid.*

48 | Baran, Starr and Cornell, n. 40, 25.

armed supporters of the Akromiyists who had been arrested and the Uzbek security forces. Unarmed civilians who had joined in the demonstrations came into the line of fire. According to official information from Tashkent, the riots claimed 187 lives. Unofficial estimates are much higher.⁴⁹

After an interview with the leader of the Zahir Baybars Battalion was published on internet forums, experts gained a bit more knowledge of this new player in the transnational jihad.

The jihad has also reached Kazakhstan, which is rich in resources and relatively stable when compared to the rest of the region. In 2011, terrorist attacks and threats by the Soldiers of the Caliphate (Jund al-Khilāfah, JaK), who had settled in Pakistan, against the regime increased. After an interview with the leader of the Zahir Baybars Battalion, Ravil Kusainov, was published on related internet forums on 9 November 2012, experts gained a bit more knowledge of this new player in the transnational jihad. According to the interview, the JaK Brigade is comprised of several battalions that are primarily active in Afghanistan, but also "in other parts of the world".⁵⁰ This was confirmed in September and October of 2012 when video footage was posted on jihadist forums of attacks on the U.S. base in the Afghan province of Khost that had taken place in June and July. Because of this, experts have speculated that the Brigade is working in cooperation with the Haqqani network, which is affiliated with Al-Qaeda. This group is interested in the developments in Kazakhstan and dedicates a significant portion of its resources to this country. According to Kusainov, his battalion is made up of 90 per cent Kazakhs but that the cell is an international one. "We believe," said one of the Emirs, "that the Central Asian region – in addition to the Islamic Maghreb and Yemen – is a candidate to become the core of the return of the Caliphate in the future."⁵¹

49 | Cf. Thomas Kunze and Thomas Vogel, *Von der Sowjetunion in die Unabhängigkeit*, Berlin, 2011, 245-246.

50 | Cf. Maseh Zarif, "Jund al Khilafah Targets Kazakhstan", AEI Critical Threats Project, 15 Nov 2011, <http://criticalthreats.org/other/zarif-jund-al-khilafah-targets-kazakhstan-november-15-2011> (accessed 12 Nov 2013).

51 | Jacob Zenn, "Kazakhstan Struggles to Contain Salafist-Inspired Terrorism", *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 10, No. 17, 14 Sep 2012, 7, <http://eurodialogue.org/Kazakhstan-Struggles-to-Contain-Salafist-Inspired-Terrorism> (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS

With the Counter Terrorism Centre (CTC), the “Office for Coordinating the Campaign against Organised Crime and Other Violent Crimes in the Territories of the Commonwealth of Independent States”, the Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Russia, the post-Soviet Central Asian states and China have a range of collective institutions and means of operational and – conditionally – structural suppression of terrorism in post-Soviet territory. Institutions such as the CSTO and SCO have been committed to the fight against international terrorism and transnational organised crime since the late 1990s and early 2000s.



Suppression of terrorism in post-Soviet territory: Meeting of the SCO in Bishkek in 2013. | Source: Kremlin, Press and Information Office of the President ©.

In multilateral forums, Member States seek to promote the development of regional security plans with particular attention paid to transnational threats; they also hold joint counter-terror exercises and coordinate cooperation with other international organisations. Several terrorist attacks in Russia, the 1999/2000 armed incursions by the IMU in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the presence of Islamist training camps in Afghanistan and China’s threat perception

with regard to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region have all acted as a catalyst for regional cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

Against the backdrop of the real and perceived dangers of transnational terrorism and Islamism, CIS members were able to negotiate a cooperative agreement in the fight against terrorism in 1999, which buttressed the autocratic regimes in their own member states. One year later they founded the SCO's Counter Terrorism Centre (located in Tashkent), which took over laying the conceptual groundwork for joint counter-terrorism actions and exercises, coordinating cooperation in relevant policy areas, analysing and exchanging information and maintaining a database. As the SCO's communications and coordination centre for the fight against terrorism, the RATS contributed to the intensification of intelligence cooperation between the member states. The RATS database now includes information on 42 organisations and 1,100 individuals with (suspected) extremist backgrounds. However, no precise information is available on the analysis of this data. However, because supra-national networks are always dependent upon the cooperation of their members, there is a question of whether and to what extent the national security authorities are willing to share relevant information on the factors enabling terrorism in the

The ethnic and territorial complexity and energy and water issues in Central Asia have prevented the development of a regional security community, which is a prerequisite for collective efforts to fight terrorism.

region. Suspicion among the neighbouring Central Asian states themselves remains high, as does suspicion toward Russia and China. The ethnic and territorial complexity and energy and water issues in Central Asia have prevented the development of a regional security community, which is a prerequisite for collective efforts to fight terrorism. In the past, Central Asian states have not lived up to their potential for cooperation. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan signed an agreement on joint action in the fight against terrorism, political and religious extremism and transnational organised crime in 2000. Following the IMU previously mentioned attacks, these countries even created a coordination centre for joint operations. However, the measures agreed on have largely only manifested themselves as political declarations. Consequently, efficient cooperation between regional security institutions is not to be expected as long as the rivalries

in the region, which mainly have to do with the politics of energy and water supply, go unresolved.

This is also the case for the CSTO. The organisation is the result of the CIS' May 2002 Collective Security Treaty (CST). This was not a very promising development as the parties to the CST had not contributed

to the defence against the IMU attacks in 1999 and 2000. Although they subsequently decided in October 2000 to assemble a rapid deployment force for Central Asia, the armed assaults and terrorists attacks that took place in 2004 and 2005 faced no interven-

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tion by the CSTO. In 2009, the CSTO member states once again declared their intention to create a task force (Collective Rapid Reaction Force, CRRF). The following year, however, hundreds died during the armed clashes in Kyrgyzstan without any intervention by the organisation. The SCO too remained idle. Military experts already criticise the CSTO as a "paper tiger" without any future.⁵² Russia and Kazakhstan bear the brunt of the "rapid reaction" in post-Soviet territories, contributing nearly half of the CSTO budget. While Russia has provided 8,000 to 10,000 men and Kazakhstan approximately 3,000 men for the force, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan only want to make 300 men available each. So far Uzbekistan has not offered any forces.⁵³ If these negative threat scenarios became the reality and Islamist terrorism spread to Central Asia, the collective security system would be confronted with a number of problems. The old front and geopolitical thinking, and a decades-long tradition of political paternalism and subsidisation by Russia are severely restrictive and are still evident in Central Asia today. Despite the CSTO's reputedly successful anti-terrorism exercises,⁵⁴ the decision-makers in Russia and Central Asia cannot seriously call themselves "rapid reaction" actors with a planned rapid response task

52 | Aleksandr Chramtschichin, "Бумажные тигры' НАТО и ОДКБ" ('Paper tiger' of the NATO and the CSTO), *Independent Gazeta*, 6 Mar 2009, http://nvo.ng.ru/forces/2009-03-06/1_tigers.html (accessed 14 Nov 2013).

53 | Cf. Michail Logvinov, *Russlands Kampf gegen den Internationalen Terrorismus*, Stuttgart, 2012, 127.

54 | Cf. Wiktor Michajlow, "Рубеж' против террора" ('Border' against terror), *Independent Gazeta*, 26 Oct 2013, http://nvo.ng.ru/forces/2010-03-26/16_rubezh.html (27 Nov 2013).

force of approximately 13,000 men. In order to quickly and efficiently respond to attacks by militant Islamists, CSTO countries need elite troops that are well-rehearsed, well-trained and, most importantly, are armed with modern military equipment and can be mobilised on very short notice and deployed to the location of incident to provide national security forces with support. Thousands of paratroopers that are to be stationed on military bases in the region instead provide an impression that it is more a matter of regional supremacy than a fight against terrorism and organised crime. Moreover, with regard to Russia's offers to cooperate with the Chinese dominated SCO and its proclamation that it wants to strengthen the exchange of information on joint counter-terrorism and the fight against drug and arms trafficking, experts have noted that these steps would "predominantly be of symbolic importance for Moscow." Above all else, for the Kremlin it is a matter of "emphasising Russia's leadership in coordinating multilateral security policy actions and Russia's role in linking together individual organisations."⁵⁵

The SCO, which emerged from the security regime of the "Shanghai Five" in June 2001, declared war on the "three evil forces": terrorism, separatism and extremism.⁵⁶ The

55 | Andrea Schmitz, "Partner aus Kalkül. Russische Politik in Zentralasien", SWP-Studie, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin, 5 Mar 2008, 16, http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2008_S05_smw_ks.pdf (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

56 | The *Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism* defines terrorism, separatism and extremism as follows: "1) 'terrorism' means: a) any act recognized as an offence in one of the treaties listed in the Annex to this Convention [...] and as defined in this Treaty; b) any other act intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a civilian, or any other person not taking an active part in the hostilities in a situation of armed conflict or to cause major damage to any material facility, as well as to organize, plan, aid and abet such act, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, violate public security or to compel public authorities or an international organisation to do or to abstain from doing any act, and prosecuted in accordance with the national laws of the Parties; 2) 'separatism' means any act intended to violate territorial integrity of a State including by annexation of any part of its territory or to disintegrate a State, committed in a violent manner, as well as planning and preparing, and abetting such act, and subject to criminal prosecuting in accordance with the national laws of the Parties; 3) 'Extremism' is an act aimed at seizing or keeping power through the use of violence or changing ▶

organisation adopted "The Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism" in 2001.⁵⁷ On 16 June 2009, the SCO countries signed a successive convention against terrorism in Yekaterinburg, which adapted international standards to the current challenges facing the SCO and upheld the plans for combatting terrorism that had already been aligned to national legal systems.⁵⁸ In 2004, both a Secretariat in Beijing and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) were established in Tashkent (Uzbekistan). The SCO also gained observer status at the United Nations. However, the SCO was unable to establish itself as a genuine multilateral security organisation after 11 September 2001. Its security plans are still in their infancy and lack clearly defined military structures. In addition, the Tajik and Kyrgyz militaries are ill-equipped and inadequately trained. Furthermore, it is unlikely that China's special forces will be deployed outside its borders. Beijing and Moscow often behave like rivals who have little interest in genuine multilateralism. The SCO is based on the structural principle of bilateral agreements under the guise of multilateralism.⁵⁹ The same holds true for the joint fight against terrorism. Along with the U.S., China has invested significant resources in bilateral agreements with Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, providing the Central Asian armies with equipment, training and surveillance technology to protect their borders. Because of the divergent interests of the actors involved, the organisation's claim to establish itself as the regional hegemonic power in Central Asia has so far gone unfulfilled.

The SCO was unable to establish itself as a genuine multilateral security organisation after 11 September 2001. Its security plans are still in their infancy and lack clearly defined military structures.

violently the constitutional regime of a State, as well as a violent encroachment upon public security, including organisation, for the above purposes, of illegal armed formations and participation in them, criminally prosecuted in conformity with the national laws of the Parties." Cf. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), 20 Apr 2006, http://english.scosummit2006.org/en_bjzl/2006-04/20/content_87.htm (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

57 | See SCO, <http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/show.asp?id=68> (accessed 16 Jun 2001).

58 | „Президент РФ внес на ратификацию в Госдуму конвенцию ШОС против терроризма“ (Russian President on the ratification of the SCO Convention against Terrorism in the State Duma), *Russian Gazette*, 29 Jun 2010, <http://rg.ru/2010/06/29/shos-anons.html> (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

59 | Schmitz, n. 55, 23-24.

CONCLUSION

Because of its strategic location, Central Asian nations will somewhat benefit economically and politically as a result of the ISAF troop withdrawal through a number of economic and political opportunities for the countries of Central Asia, even if the relocation rate through the NDN is relatively low. This is because the participating ISAF countries will pay a considerable amount for the transit routes and are willing to accommodate the region economically and politically in order to gain their favour for cooperation. Furthermore, the withdrawal of troops will mean a deterioration of the security situation in the region through the possible expansion of resurgent terrorist groups. The trepidation felt by Central Asian states in the face of threats of Islamist terror is not unfounded. Repeated attacks of varying degrees of severity have occurred, demonstrating that terrorism and jihad are possible in Central Asia.

Yet the region remains relatively stable. On the one hand, this can be explained by the fact that Central Asian regimes will combat burgeoning terrorism in their authoritarian countries with full force. On the other hand, the fight against the ISAF troops and the Pakistani military has exhausted the capacities of the jihadists. Once such capacities have been restored, destabilising developments in the territory between the Caucasus and the Hindu Kush cannot be excluded. Islamist networks already exist in Central Asia. The Central Asian states are only moderately prepared for transnational developments. Closer cooperation in terms of regional security within the existing structures of the SCO, the CSTO and furthermore with NATO would serve the common security policy interests. Though a possible increase in Islamism in Central Asia is not the automatic result of the withdrawal of ISAF troops from Afghanistan, such a scenario cannot be ruled out.