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summary

Unless the international community pursues a regional strategy for rebuilding Afghanistan, the security of the Central Asian states and Pakistan will be so compromised that new terrorist groups with global reach soon will be using Eurasia as their launching pad again.

Arms, drugs, and seditious ideas from Afghanistan have severely undermined the region. To achieve stability, the antiterrorist coalition must disarm Afghan factions, impose an arms embargo, and destroy the country's poppy crop and its opium and heroin factories. Otherwise, militant Islamic groups across the region will use Afghanistan's drugs to finance their operations and its weapons to fight their wars.

Economic recovery is the essential antidote to radicalism. Macroeconomic reform in Uzbekistan is the key. Its instability would rock its neighbors, while success could spark the creation of free markets across the entire region. ■

Preventing New Afghanistans: A Regional Strategy for Reconstruction

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Now is the time to learn the lessons of the past decade in Afghanistan: how it declined from a failing state into a cesspool drawing in Islamic malcontents from all over the world as well as those, like Osama bin Laden, who could bankroll them. If we fail to do so, our freedom may regularly be challenged by threats emerging from the heart of Eurasia, from Afghanistan itself, or from the neighboring states whose fates are being reshaped by their troublesome neighbor.

After a quarter-century of war, a new security system—or, more properly, an insecurity system—has emerged in a territory encompassing Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, and parts of Kazakhstan, China, India, Iran, and Russia (see map).

Eliminating bin Laden and his terrorist bands from Afghanistan ends an important source of financing and training for the seditious elements that operate in the region. But unless the international com-

munity pursues an aggressive strategy for regional development, new bin Ladens will emerge to take his place and Afghanistan-like states will proliferate. The seedbed of terrorism created by the proxy war fought between the Soviet Union and the United States in Afghanistan during the 1980s recognizes few national boundaries. The infection from Afghanistan has already spread to neighboring states, and will continue to eat at their societies. Unless these infected points are cauterized through comprehensive programs of economic and social development, the long-term security of four Central Asian states, as well as that of Pakistan, is likely to be severely compromised. This, in turn, will infect and undermine whatever can be built in Afghanistan, and could endanger global security.

History Points to a Regional Approach

Throughout modern history, the peoples of Afghanistan have melded with those of its



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neighboring states, in part because the country's principal ethnic groups were dispersed across national borders. Refugee flows have been common, and disorder in one country has quickly taken on a regional character.

Pakistan has been directly affected by the Afghan war since the Soviet invasion in 1979, and its leaders have long believed that its territorial integrity would be at risk if Pashtun elements are denied a leading role in Kabul. Now it is difficult to fully untangle the political threads that connect these two neighbors. The Taliban movement has marked the most intimate collaboration between them, because the movement is intellectually rooted in a number of Pakistani medresseh (Islamic academies) that hold to the teachings of a nineteenth-century Islamic fundamentalist revival. Refugees from Afghanistan were drawn to these medresseh, as were many young Pakistanis from poor or modest-income families, who had no opportunity for a secular education because of Pakistan's economic woes.

The effect of Afghanistan on many Central Asian states has been at least as profound, although not as well known. The civil war in Tajikistan in the early 1990s was facilitated by the sanctuary and training in guerrilla warfare that Afghanistan offered to Tajik fighters. In turn, Tajikistan's civil war enabled drug traffickers, arms dealers, and Islamic revolutionary thinkers to thrive. Such groups continue to flourish there, putting neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan at particular risk. Although a government of national reconciliation was eventually created in Dushanbe in 1997, the Tajik government still does not firmly control all the country's territory.

All the states of the region have been affected by the traffic in opium and heroin manufactured from Afghanistan's poppy harvest. If eyewitness reports are at all credible, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan already fit some definitions of "narco-states" because both their governments sift profits directly from

the drug trade. Turkmen have benefited from drugs transiting formerly Taliban-held territories, whereas Tajiks have worked through the Northern Alliance, with their main drug routes crossing Kyrgyzstan and thence into Kazakhstan and Russia. Kyrgyzstan also risks becoming a narco-state, because the low salaries paid local government and security officials in the southern part of the country make them ripe for subornation.

The international community will need to use targeted assistance programs to undo the damage caused by proximity. Afghanistan's neighbors don't have the decade or more to wait while international assistance helps repair the damage done by over a quarter-century of civil war in Afghanistan.

Improving the current situation in Pakistan will be a slow and difficult process. Its political system is well rooted, as is its dispute with India. By contrast, the fates of the Central Asian states could be much easier to influence for the better. The international community now can finally seize the opportunity it missed a decade ago when these states first were granted independence. The crucial step is to jump-start economic reform, which the United States could do at relatively low cost, with rapid and long-enduring benefits.

Unless the international community moves quickly to help the Central Asian states protect themselves from the dangers emanating from Afghanistan, these countries will breed future terrorist networks. Moreover, their problems will fester just when Western democracies hope to use Caspian oil and gas reserves—whose delivery would be compromised by instability in landlocked Central Asia.

Disarm the Afghans and End the Drug Trade

For these reasons, the recovery process in Afghanistan must be a regional one, in which the sensibilities and preferences of the Afghan people do not overwhelm the legiti-

mate security needs of neighboring states. This means that a carrot-and-stick approach needs to be used.

The international community is making plans to provide the carrot of massively expanded assistance, but it has shown little inclination to apply the stick. Groups working under the auspices of the European Union, United Nations, and World Bank, to name but a few, are all drawing up ambitious programs for reconstruction. These social and economic projects could generate impressive transformations, but all would entail a considerable transition period. During these years, the security of neighboring states would be at risk.

Nothing short of a full international military occupation of Afghanistan would diminish the security threats it poses. Barring this unlikely occurrence, U.S. policy makers must become far more sensitive than they now are

to the risks of spillover from Afghanistan, most particularly those posed by the proliferation of conventional arms.

Afghanistan has been an arms bazaar in recent decades, and even months of U.S. bombing are unlikely to eliminate all of these Soviet-era stores. Meanwhile, U.S. and Russian cooperation with the Northern Alliance is bringing an entirely new generation of more sophisticated weapons into the region.

In a part of the world where one day's friends become the next day's foes, only disarming all paramilitary groups and a complete arms embargo of Afghanistan will offer long-term protection to its neighbors. To date, few have embraced or even seriously discussed this goal, though it has long been strongly advocated by Uzbekistan president Islam Karimov and Kyrgyzstan president Askar Akayev. Most U.S. and Western leaders

Central Asian Region



have dismissed the possibility of an arms embargo, to say nothing of disarming anti-Taliban paramilitary groups. They prefer to ignore the fact that many of these groups, including some from the Northern Alliance, provided paramilitary training for Central Asia's militants well before the Taliban came to power. Given the chance, these Afghan groups would do so again.

The presence of large stores and markets for arms in Afghanistan make the region's burgeoning drug trade even deadlier. In recent years, more than 90 percent of all the heroin sold in Europe has come from Afghanistan. During the past eighteen months, while a Taliban ban on poppy cultivation has substan-

throughout Afghanistan to quickly recover, as traders along its well-established routes seek to maintain their profits. The drug trade, which feeds on the region's poverty, enables radical Islamic groups to become self-financing. The region's drug dealers and arms traders are longtime symbiotic companions.

This is bad news for the Central Asian states. The point of contagion remains Afghanistan. As a senior government official in Kyrgyzstan recently described the situation, the flourishing drug trade ensures that anyone can buy entry into Central Asia. The focus of the discussion was the now-deceased Juma Namangani, head of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, one of the

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tially reduced stockpiles in most of the country, poppy cultivation has doubled in the territory controlled by the Northern Alliance. Now farmers throughout the country are setting seed for next year's poppy crop.

Crop substitution programs alone will not eliminate drugs from Afghanistan. Economic incentives for farmers will be effective only if the country's elite is forced to stop collecting payoffs from this highly lucrative trade. As happens in all civilized countries, a serious effort should be made to find Afghanistan's drug dealers, and they should be subject to arrest and lengthy incarceration. But these efforts would be much more likely to succeed if current drug stores and processing facilities were destroyed throughout the country, regardless of whose territory they are in. The United States has the intelligence and military capacity to accomplish this.

Anything less than such strong measures will allow the opium and heroin trade

groups targeted by the United States for being part of the al Qaeda network. Namangani has been killed, but his death will not mean the end of his movement. During the past few months, many of the movement's leading fighters have returned to their long-term base in Tajikistan, bribing their way across the Tajik-Afghan border to recruit new supporters for future forays into Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan Lies at the Center

Instability in one Central Asian country causes disorder in its neighbors. Militant Islamic groups, like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, use camps in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as launching pads for attacks into Uzbekistan. Many of these have been broken up, and though Kyrgyz border security has increased in the past two years, the salaries of its southern forces are too low and not always paid. The return to power of prominent Tajik

and Uzbek warlords from the Northern Alliance will bring the bulk of Afghanistan's drug trade back across their territory, and then out via Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, before the trade splits into a number of routes across Kazakhstan to Russia and onward to Europe. This will put a lot more money in the hands of those who control this narrow corridor into Central Asia, and ethnic Uzbeks have always played a key role in all forms of illicit trade.

The drug trade ensures the perpetuation of the militant Islamic groups that have been proliferating in Uzbekistan and throughout Central Asia. The largest of these, the Hizb ut-Tahrir, calls for believers to unite and

This is why the Uzbek strategy of keeping close tabs on the country's Islamic establishment is unlikely to succeed in the long run. The government is making the same mistake as its Soviet predecessors in believing that it can dampen the fires of religious ferment with state regulation of religious practice. This only serves to push extremist groups underground, and to make heroes of their adherents.

The current religious unrest in Uzbekistan is nothing new. It has endured in much the same form for more than a hundred years. The only thing that has changed is the relative balance among those accepting mainstream Islamic teachings, those calling for a return to the "true" roots of the faith, and those calling

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return Islam to the purity of its founding by creating a new caliphate; therefore, they reject the four mainstream schools of Islamic law. This movement is outlawed everywhere but Turkmenistan, where it seems to lack a significant presence. Since its adherents have faced massive arrests, they have gone underground in Uzbekistan, but they are growing in the border regions of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, particularly among the unemployed youth who are paid to distribute its religious tracts.

Even the current campaign against such fundamentalist groups, for all its reach, does not protect the Uzbek regime against those Islamic critics who speak from within officially registered religious groups. Groups that accept the officially allowed Hanafi school of Islamic law can operate legally, but with some supervision. These include militant Sufi orders, which are gaining in popularity and could find common cause with fundamentalists like the banned Hizb ut-Tahrir.

for accommodation with the West. Each of these currents has defined itself in varying ways over time, partly reflecting global trends. Advocates of a Western model have always faced an uphill battle. Even after more than 70 years of militant atheism, the Soviet Union failed to fully tip the balance toward secular rule in Uzbekistan. The current regime's nationalistic message also is likely to fail.

Bolstering the Central Asian States

The government of Uzbekistan must inevitably accommodate itself to the country's Islamic past, or risk turning the religious opposition into a focal point for all who oppose the country's highly repressive, narrowly representative political regime. Moreover, there will be no stability in Central Asia if the current situation in Uzbekistan does not improve.

Uzbek groups that traditionally shared power under Soviet rule have now been pushed far from the trough. The absence of economic

reform means that many elite families that amassed capital in the grey and black economies of the Soviet era have been frustrated since independence, while their friends and relatives in neighboring states have gotten rich in nascent market economies. Most continue to support the Karimov regime in the slim hope that promised reform will be forthcoming. But there is a growing risk that they will choose to cast their fortune with any group that might be able to unseat the current regime. Because formal secular opposition in Uzbekistan has been eliminated, their only alternative may be to form an alliance of convenience with the country's religious opposition.

If Islamists take power in Uzbekistan, the future of secular rule everywhere in the region

will be threatened. An internally divided Uzbek regime is also dangerous. Bolstered by U.S. military assistance, Uzbekistan could tangle with weaker neighbors like Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan that harbor potentially seditious elements. Downstream water user Turkmenistan is also not exempt from Uzbek displeasure, particularly if the Tashkent regime feels pressed to get higher yields from the largely unreformed, state-dominated cotton economy. Only oil-rich Kazakhstan could relatively easily withstand an Islamic wave or Uzbek military aggression.

The situation in Uzbekistan is precarious. The government faces the challenge of educating, integrating, and employing a new generation—more than half the country is

14 Steps for U.S. and International Engagement to Prevent Future Terrorist Sanctuaries

In Afghanistan

- 1) Replace U.S. and coalition forces with an international peace-keeping force mostly from Muslim countries, augmented by a new police force partly based on pre-Taliban government forces.
- 2) Disarm all other national forces, and enforce an international arms embargo.
- 3) Destroy heroin factories and ban opium cultivation.
- 4) Create a new east–west cross-country transit corridor to link Central Asia with Pakistan and India.

In Pakistan

- 5) Tie debt forgiveness and economic assistance to comprehensive anticorruption efforts, including a revamped tax system and gradual land reform.
- 6) Counter the spread of fundamentalist Islam by expanding state-sponsored secular secondary education, including vocational training for both boys and girls.

In Central Asia

- 7) After hostilities in Afghanistan end, the U.S. should withdraw militarily from Central Asia but retain close bilateral relations.

- 8) Balance security assistance to Uzbekistan with economic and social reform, because a stronger Uzbek military without reform could lead it into aggression against its neighbors.
- 9) Give Uzbekistan strong incentives to make its currency fully convertible, create legal guarantees for private property, and gradually move toward private land ownership.
- 10) Press Uzbekistan to restore basic civil liberties, including freedom of religion, association, and assembly.
- 11) Urge Turkmenistan to restore basic civil liberties, and do not participate in its economy, even in the oil and gas sector, unless economic reform begins in earnest.
- 12) If Turkmenistan reforms, subsidize a natural gas pipeline across Turkmenistan and Afghanistan.
- 13) Expand economic and social assistance in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.
- 14) Promote a Central Asian open market that encourages free trade across the region, between the region and Russia, and with China, India, Iran, and Pakistan.

under 21 years old. With only a tiny private sector to draw on, this huge task lies solely with the government. Uzbek youth today are generally poorer and less healthy than their parents were at the same age. And although they also are less well educated, they are far more knowledgeable about Islam and much better integrated into global Islamic networks.

Uzbekistan need not be lost, nor go down Afghanistan's or even Pakistan's road, if Washington is careful in its relations with Tashkent. The United States must not inadvertently shift the strategic balance in Central Asia by modernizing Uzbekistan's armed forces while leaving its economy unre-

A Final Word

The United States and its international allies can never undo what has happened in Afghanistan during the past decade. Yet by giving the Central Asian states a second chance to meet the challenges of market reform and political institution building, the international community will go a long way toward ensuring that new safe havens for terrorists are not created.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, give the United States and the international community an opportunity to rethink their strategies not only in Afghanistan, but also in neighboring states (see box at left). In so doing, U.S. policy makers should not con-

U.S. policy makers should not confuse ameliorating security challenges with rooting out their underpinnings.

formed. Tashkent must be a willing partner in this process and accept economic direction from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which it has kept at arm's length since 1996.

If Uzbekistan takes the first steps, introducing a fully convertible currency and providing new guarantees for private property, the United States and the international financial institutions should provide major loan guarantees for foreign investors and new sources of financing for small and medium-sized entrepreneurs. All of Central Asia would benefit from Uzbekistan's economic recovery and from the development of a regional market. A prosperous Uzbekistan might contemplate opening up politically, would certainly ease democratic reform in neighboring states, and could even put renewed pressure on Turkmenistan to reform.

fuse temporarily ameliorating security challenges with rooting out their deep underpinnings. If the United States fails to undertake a regional strategy to eliminate the sources of terrorism in Afghanistan, it will create problems as serious as those that have brought it back to the region. Bin Laden's death and the breakup of his network will not end Afghanistan's problems or how they infect its neighbors' lives. They mark either a new round of danger, or the chance for a new beginning. ■

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