Security in Central Asia

Russian policy and military posture

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Cover: A Tajik military is watching over the Panj river, in the Wakhan valley, from the Tajik side, Afghanistan is at the other side of the river (Pascal Mannaerts/Alamy Stock Photo)

Sammanfattning

Rysslands politiska ledarskap strävar efter en exklusiv intressesfär i det före detta Sovjetunionen. Denna rapport analyserar Rysslands politik gentemot samt militära styrkedisposition och inställning till väpnade konflikter i Centralasien efter 2014. Den jämför också Rysslands operationalisering av det man uppfattar som sina intressesfärer i Centralasien och i Kaukasien, som är ett ämne för en tidigare rapport av samma författare.

Författarna finner att Rysslands militära styrkepositionering i Centralasien främst handlar om krishantering, medan den i Kaukasien är anpassad till ett regionalt krig. En annan skillnad är att Ryssland har flera stödinstallationer relaterade till kärnvapen i Centralasien. På den politiska nivån tenderar de centralasiatiska länderna dessutom att se Ryssland mer som en partner än de sydkaukasiska länderna gör, även om de också känner vissa farhågor efter Rysslands olagliga annektering av Krim.

I Centralasien har Ryssland färre möjligheter att utnyttja ”frusna konflikter” än i Kaukasien. Geografin är ett dubbel-eggat svärd för Ryssland i regionen. Å ena sidan skyddar de enorma avstånden Rysslands kärnland från en större konventionell markstridoperation, men å andra sidan ger den färre möjligheter till att intervenera i en potentiell väpnad konflikt i Centralasien jämfört med Kaukasien.

En sista jämförelsepunkt är att Ryssland inte längre är den mest engagerade externa globala aktören i Centralasien eftersom Kinas inflytande växer på Rysslands bekostnad.

Nyckelord: Centralasien, Ryssland, Kazakstan, Kirgizistan, Tadzjikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kina, Kaukasien, säkerhet, väpnad konflikt, militär konflikt, intressesfär

Summary

Russia's political leadership strives to create an exclusive sphere of interest throughout the former Soviet Union. This report provides analysis of Russia's approach – that is, of the interplay between policy and military posture – to potential conflicts in Central Asia since 2014. It also compares Russia's operationalizing of its perceived spheres of interest in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which was the subject of a previous report by the same authors.

The authors find that Russia's military posture in Central Asia is primarily about crisis management, while in the Caucasus it clearly pertains to a much larger regional war. Another difference is that Russia has nuclear weapons-related support installations in Central Asia. On the political level, the Central Asian states tend to perceive Russia more as a partner than the South Caucasus states do, even though they also feel some apprehension, since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea.

In Central Asia, Russia has fewer opportunities to engage in "frozen conflicts" than in the Caucasus. Geography is a double-edged sword for Russia. On the one hand, the huge distances from the Russian mainland protect Russia against major conventional ground-forces-centric operations, but on the other hand allow less capacity to intervene in potential military conflict in Central Asia than in the Caucasus.

A final point of comparison is that Russia is no longer the most engaged global actor in Central Asia, where China's influence is increasing at Russia's expense.

Keywords: Central Asia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, China, the Caucasus, security, armed conflict, military conflict, sphere of interest

Preface

This study is produced within the framework of the Russia and Eurasia Studies Programme (Russian Foreign, Defence and Security Policy) at the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), which provides analyses for the Swedish Ministry of Defence. The programme focuses on Russian security studies, including Russia's neighbourhood, and its military, economic and domestic affairs.

A number of people deserve our gratitude in realising this report. First of all, we would like thank all our interlocutors in Bishkek, Almaty, Astana (now Nur-Sultan), Moscow, Tashkent and Dushanbe. We are most grateful to H.E. Ingrid Tersman, Sweden's ambassador to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (based in Stockholm), H.E. Ambassador Christian Kamill, Sweden's ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic and H.E. Ambassador Mats Foyer, Sweden's ambassador to Kazakhstan, for generously sharing their time and views with us during our trips to Central Asia. Our gratitude also goes to Mr Nourlan Mamyrov, Honorary Consul to Sweden in the Kyrgyz Republic and Mr Nurlan Izmailov, Honorary Consul to Sweden in Almaty.

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Jakob Hedenskog

Project manager for the FOI Russia and Eurasia Studies Programme and co-author of this report

Stockholm, May 2019

Contents

Acronyms and abbreviations

AA	Air Force and Air Defence Army
AB	Air Base
AD	Air Defence
ADD	(Theatre) Air Defence Division
Arty	Artillery
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASWTR	Anti-Submarine Warfare Testing Range
Bde	Brigade
Bn	Battalion
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
C3	Command, Control and Communications (support unit)
C4ISR	Command, Control, Computers, Communications Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
CAA	Combined Arms Army (just “Army” on maps)
CBR	Chemical, biological and radiological (protection)
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CNR	Commission of National Reconciliation
CPF	Collective Peacekeeping Force
CRDF-CAR	Collective Rapid Deployment Forces for the Central Asia Region
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
CSS	Communications Station for Submarines
Div	Division
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
FSB	Federalnaia Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (Federal Security Service)
GBAO	Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast
GDP	gross domestic product

HQ	Headquarters
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IS	Islamic State
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JISCO	Joint Inter-Service Combat Operation
JSC	Joint Strategic Command
LACM	Land-attack cruise missile
MB	Military Base
MD	Military District
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoD	Russia's Ministry of Defence (if not stated otherwise)
MRL	Multiple rocket launcher
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSMS	Optical Space Monitoring Station
Reg	Regiment
Rwy	Railway troops
SAM	surface-to-air missile
SCO	Shanghai Security Organization
SMS	Seismic Monitoring Station
sqn	Squadron (here = 10 aircraft or helicopters)
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
TR	Test Range (Space)
TS	Test station
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

US	United States
USD	United States dollar
UTO	United Tajik Opposition

1. Introduction

Central Asia is a region of great strategic importance. It is located in the heart of the Eurasian continent between several regional powers and emerging economies like China, India and Russia. For Russia, particularly, Central Asia is important for three reasons. The first reason is that it is part of the former Soviet Union, which Russia considers its unique sphere of interest (Hedenskog et al. 2018: 75). The second reason is the region's closeness to the unstable Afghanistan and the potential spill-over of militant Islamism, drug smuggling and inter-ethnic violence from that country (Norberg and Holmquist 2014: 13). A third reason is that the region hosts military installations, some of which relate to Russia's nuclear weapons system.

This makes Central Asia a vital region for the Russian military. Russia's repeated use of military force in recent years in different regions of its neighbourhood – in the Caucasus (Georgia), in Ukraine (Crimea and Donbas) and the Middle East (Syria) – makes it important to study Russia's military posture in its perceived sphere of interest. This has understandably sparked fears in Central Asia about Russia's intentions and capabilities. In fact, Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea sent shock waves across the entire post-Soviet area. One Kazakh expert said in 2015 that Crimea was "like our 9/11", referring to the 2001 terrorist attack in the USA (Kuchins et al. 2015). This "Crimea Syndrome" permeated our interviews in the region even four years after Russia's illegal annexation. Although improbable, the idea now exists in Central Asia that under certain circumstances something similar could happen there as well (interviews, Bishkek, Astana and Almaty 2018).

Russia is an important player in world politics. Analysing its perceptions, capabilities and challenges in different regions helps in understanding Russia's behaviour, also on a wider scale. Countries neighbouring Russia may understandably focus their views on Russia's actions solely through the lens of "their" regions. Spanning two continents, and being the biggest country in the world when it comes to territory, Russia must however handle multiple regions simultaneously. Understanding Russian policy and posture in Central Asia is thus also useful in Europe, the Caucasus and East Asia.

1.1 Aim and research question

The aim of this study is to describe Russia's military posture and its approach to military conflicts in Central Asia since 2014. With *approach* we mean the interplay between *policy* and *military posture*. This means covering Russia's policy as expressed in political and strategic documents and official statements and its military posture in terms of the forces nominally available for deployment

in the region. It also includes factors affecting their deployment to potential military conflicts as defined in the 2014 Russian Military Doctrine. We also outline the political response from the Central Asian states to the actual Russian policy. However, we briefly outline, but do not estimate, the military capability of the armed forces of the Central Asian states, which are significantly smaller than Russia's Armed Forces.

The overall research question is: What are Russia's possibilities for using armed intervention to address potential crises in Central Asia (Chapter 6)? Answering this question means exploring both how Russia generally views Central Asia and different types of military conflicts (Chapter 2). It also means taking into account forces that may cause armed fighting in Central Asia (Chapter 3) as well as how external actors and the five Central Asian states may respond (Chapter 4). Finally, there is a need to outline what military assets Russia may use to intervene (Chapter 5).

There are consequently four subsidiary research questions. Firstly: What is Russia's overall approach to Central Asia and to military conflicts? Secondly: How does Russia approach potential conflict drivers in Central Asia? Thirdly: How is the interaction between external actors (particularly Russia and China) and the region's five states developing? Finally, what are Russia's military assets for dealing with military conflicts in Central Asia?

1.2 Delimitations, sources and outline

Throughout history, there have been different geographical perceptions of Central Asia. The traditional Russian and Soviet name for the region was Middle Asia (*Sredniaia Aziia*), which included only those traditionally non-Slavic Central Asian lands incorporated within the borders of historical Russia. These were the territories of the former khanates of Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand, all latecomers to the Russian Empire, in the 1860s and 1870s. These lands roughly corresponded to the territories of the Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR). Thus, this definition excluded the Kazakh SSR, as most of its territory had been incorporated into the Russian Empire a century before (Jonson 2004: 17). For Russia, Kazakhstan was always a different entity (interviews, Bishkek and Moscow 2018).

However, a wider definition, Central Asia (*Tsentralnaia Aziia*), which developed from the mid-twentieth century, also included Kazakhstan. In early January 1993, shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the leaders from the five former Soviet Central Asian Republics met in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, and declared a set of policies that would establish a five-state Commonwealth of Central Asia, also including Kazakhstan (Malik 1994: 4) From then on, this

definition of Central Asia has been officially recognised not only by the states themselves, but also by the international community. Therefore, it is the definition used in this report (see Map 1.1).

Nevertheless, the term Middle Asia still sometimes appears among scholars of the region (interviews, Bishkek 2018). Also, in its six-volume *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), based on a decision from 1978, defines the region much more widely, as containing "Afghanistan, north-eastern Iran, Pakistan, northern India, western China, Mongolia and the former Soviet Central Asian republics" (Mayor 1992: 8). In the military assessment in Chapter 5 of this report, the corresponding area is defined as Russia's potential Central Asian War Theatre, covering primarily the Central Military District and the five post-Soviet Central Asian states and parts of surrounding regions.

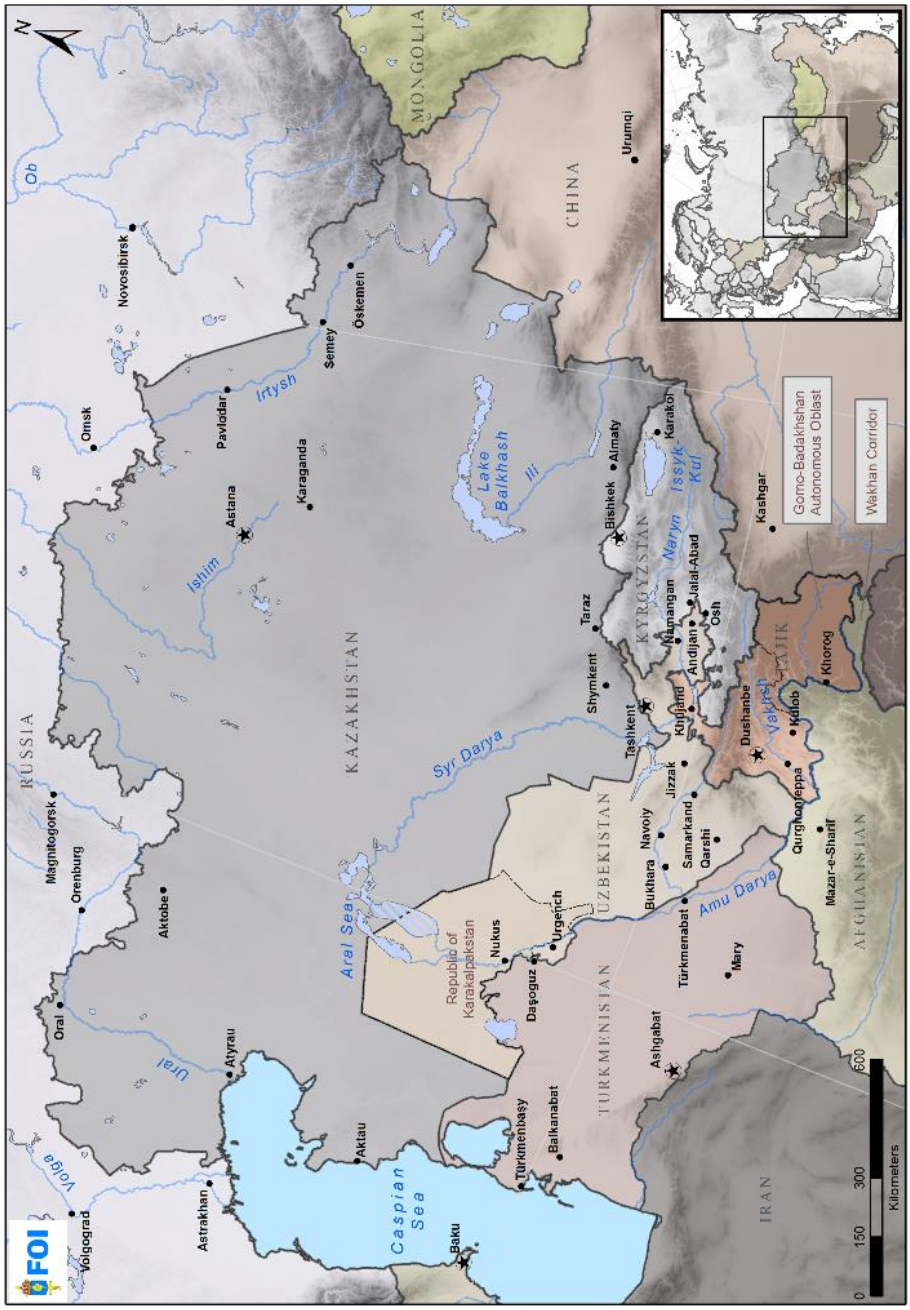
As in our previous report on Russia and the Caucasus (Hedenskog et al. 2018), the period studied in this report begins with Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, except when a historical background to the conflicts is needed. Russia's bilateral relations with each of the five Central Asian states are not in focus here. Additional delimitations appear throughout the report.

The key source used in the report is comprised of 59 interviews from four separate field trips: three to Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan/Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) and one to Moscow, between May and October 2018. Interlocutors included government officials, regional experts, analysts, journalists and diplomats from institutions listed in Appendix 3, at the end of the report. The written sources are primarily Russian primary sources, such as strategic documents (the National Security Strategy, the Military Doctrine and Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation) and speeches of the Russian political leadership. This is complemented by secondary sources, such as Russian, Central Asian and Western newspaper articles, Internet sources and research reports. Written sources are listed at the end of each chapter. The collection of material and updating was completed in April 2019. The military analysis contains an update of the assessment of Russia's Armed Forces and the Central Asian War Theatre that was presented in the FOI report *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2016* (Westerlund and Norberg 2016).

The outline of the report is as follows. Chapter 2 contains a description of Russia's perspective on Central Asia as reflected in strategic documents as well as Russia's distinctions of different types of military conflicts. Chapter 3 thematically discusses both the distinction of interstate and intrastate conflicts of the region and Russia's political approach to these conflicts. Chapter 4 describes the perspectives of the five Central Asian states on the influence of the main external actors. Chapter 5 describes Russia's military posture in Central Asia. Chapter 6

discusses possible Russian considerations about the use of military force in some potential cases of escalating conflicts in Central Asia. Finally, Chapter 7 contains some concluding observations, which are contrasted with Russian policy and posture in the Caucasus.

More detailed background information on the intrastate conflicts and ethnic composition of the Central Asian states are found in Appendix 1 and 2.



Map 1.1 Central Asia – an overview

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2. Russia's overall policy towards Central Asia and military conflicts

This chapter briefly describes Russia's perspectives on the threat from Afghanistan and on Central Asia as reflected in strategic documents such as the 2015 National Security Strategy and the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept. It also contains a description of different types of military conflicts as defined in Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine. This chapter deals with these two issues together, since they are based on Russian policy documents.

2.1 Central Asia, Russia and the threat from Afghanistan

One reason why Central Asia is important for Russia's security is because it is close to Afghanistan, a fact stressed in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept (Foreign Policy Concept, para 97). Afghanistan remains a source of instability for Central Asia, too, which mainly affects Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, each with borders to Afghanistan. One key issue is the effect of the drug trade (interviews, Moscow, Bishkek and Astana 2018). Afghanistan continues to dominate the worldwide opium market, as the country accounts for almost two-thirds of the global area under illicit opium poppy cultivation. The "Northern Route" from Afghanistan to neighbouring states of Central Asia, further to Russia and other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and on to the European Union (EU), has undergone a resurgence, after a decline during the period 2008-2012 (UNODC World Drug Report 2016: xiii).

Other concerns connected to Afghanistan are the spread of terrorism and religious extremism (interview, Bishkek 2018). Although in the territorial sense the Taliban is not a military threat to Central Asia (or Russia), but rather concentrates on Afghanistan itself, their radical Islamic ideas could spread from Afghanistan and quickly undermine the secular authoritarian, but weak, regimes in Central Asia (interview, Moscow, 2018).

Furthermore, the problem of the spread of extremism has increased with the establishment of the Islamic State (IS) in northern Afghanistan. In contrast to the Taliban, IS wants to establish Sharia law in the whole of Central Asia. This problem has become more urgent with fighters coming with their families to Afghanistan from Syria. The long border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan – the weakest point – is reportedly becoming more and more unstable (interview, Bishkek 2018). Russia also wants to stop the region from becoming a rest and recreation area for the terrorists operating in Russia, as northern Afghanistan was

for Chechens in the 1990s. Russia's aims in the region also include stemming potential refugee movements from the region northwards to Russia (interview, Moscow 2018).

For Russia, however, the war in Afghanistan is no longer merely about drugs and terrorism. Rather, the war in Afghanistan has morphed from being primarily the theatre of the US global war on terrorism, or a US-Taliban war, into being a proxy war that not only involves the US and the Taliban but also key powers and neighbours such as India, Pakistan, Iran, China and Russia, as much as it is a counter-terrorism operation. Whatever happens in Afghanistan has repercussions in both South and Central Asia as well as in international relations and security as a whole. Russia's rapprochement with Pakistan, since 2013, as well as its actual support to the Taliban through intelligence-sharing and arms deliveries, on the claim that the Taliban are the ones fighting IS, show that Moscow is using the Taliban and Afghanistan as a theatre for an anti-American proxy war (Blank and Kim: 11-12). The US/NATO Commander in Afghanistan, General John Nicholson, has accused Russia of arming the Taliban through its base in Tajikistan, and even pointed to the coincidence with Moscow's operations in Syria (Rowlatt 2018).

2.2 Central Asia in Russia's strategic documents

The relations with the former Soviet republics in general play a prominent role in Russia's strategic documents. Central Asia mostly appears in that context, although there are not many specific mentions of it. Russia's efforts have been given greater emphasis after Vladimir Putin returned to the presidency in 2012 and particularly after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. According to the National Security Strategy from 2015, the development of relations of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) are key areas of Russia's foreign policy (Russia's Security Council 2015, para. 89-92).

This is also emphasised in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, from 2016 (Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016, para. 49, 51). A bit further down in the Concept's priorities comes the strengthening of the role of the Shanghai Security Organization (SCO) in regional and global affairs, including to consolidate mutual trust and partnership in Central Asia (para. 79). In Central Asia, all states except Turkmenistan are members of the SCO.

Neither the National Security Strategy nor the Foreign Policy Concept say anything special about potential military conflicts in Central Asia. Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine (Russia's Security Council 2014), however, offers a clue.

2.3 Russian military thinking about armed conflicts

Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine stipulates four types of military conflict (*voenny konflikt*), where states use military force either to solve disagreements between them or to deal with domestic conflicts:

- armed conflict (*vooruzhenny konflikt*); takes place between or within states on a limited scale (the Russian perception of 'colour revolutions' would fall into this category);
- local war (*lokalnaia voina*) with limited political aims; takes place in border areas between states, about issues concerning only the states involved;
- regional war (*regionalnaia voina*); involves several states fighting with national or coalition forces in one region of the world about important military-political aims;
- large-scale war (*krupnomashtabnaia voina*); between either coalitions of states or the greatest states in the international community; involves radical military-political aims. It can result from the escalation of the other types of military conflict and involve many states from different regions of the world, as well as require the mobilisation of all available material and moral resources of the participating states.

Handling the doctrine's envisaged categories of military conflict requires different types of forces. Table 2.1 presents an overview of possible operations and corresponding forces required for various conflicts. It is a rough guide to levels of operations and exercises as well as designations of military forces, all reflecting Russian terminology and hierarchies of operations, formations and units. The different levels are neither exact nor distinct measures, but merely indicate an order of magnitude, to facilitate analysis.

The Military Doctrine is a system of officially adopted state views on preparing for the armed defence and armed protection of the Russian Federation. It takes into account the main provisions of the National Security Strategy, the Foreign Policy Concept and other strategic documents (Russia's Security Council 2014: para. 8). For this analysis, armed conflict, i.e. conflict on a more limited scale, pertains to a conflict such as the civil war in Tajikistan 1992-1997. The Doctrine's notion of larger-scale wars justifies discussing the possibility of wider military conflicts in Central Asia that involve external regional powers or coalitions. The Doctrine warns that local wars may draw in major powers and escalate to great-power confrontation.

Table 2.1 Overview of military conflicts and assessed corresponding operations, formations and units

Military conflict (a)	**Level of operations**	**Forces/Formations/Units**
Large-scale War	Strategic (2+ operations)	- All of Russia's Armed Forces plus mobilized reserves
Regional War	Strategic	
	Operational/strategic	- Military districts/Joint Strategic Commands - Several Combined-arms Armies - Several Air Armies - Navy fleets
Local War	Operational	- One Combined-arms Army - One Army Corps - Navy Flotilla
	Tactical	- Division or Brigade - Navy vessels
Armed Conflict	Tactical	- Regiment - Larger Navy vessel
	Lower tactical	- Battalion and below - Smaller Navy vessel

Source: Norberg (2018: 17). Comment: a) according to Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine.

2.4 Conclusions

Central Asia appears in Russia's strategic documents both in the aspect of closeness to the troublesome Afghanistan and in the aspect of Russian reintegration efforts within the post-Soviet area, which have been given more priority after the illegal annexation of Crimea. Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine notes the theoretical possibility that smaller military conflicts may escalate to involve great powers. What type of conflict drivers would Russia have to address to avoid conflict and escalation in Central Asia?

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3. Russia's policy towards conflict drivers in Central Asia

This chapter discusses Russia's approach to potential military conflicts in Central Asia. The chapter deals with both the dynamics of interstate conflicts, such as border conflicts, territorial conflicts, and ethnic conflicts including two or more states, as well as with intrastate conflicts between a state government and an armed group or groups originating from the same state.

3.1 Potential interstate conflict drivers

The potential in Central Asia for interstate conflicts between Uzbekistan, the only country with borders to all other Central Asian states plus Afghanistan, and its neighbours receded to a large extent after the change of power in Uzbekistan in late 2016. Then Shavkat Mirziyoyev replaced the first president, Islam Karimov, who had died after 27 years in power. This change has initially had spectacular results, including signs of both political liberalisation of Uzbekistan's extremely authoritarian previous system of rule and of economic reforms, as well as an activation of Uzbekistan on the international stage and normalisation of relations with its neighbours (Marszewski 2018: 1; interview, Tashkent 2018).

With regard of Russia, Mirziyoyev has tried to assure a favourable neutrality. Moscow interpreted the change of power in Tashkent as an opportunity to increase its influence in Uzbekistan. Mirziyoyev's liberalisation of the economy opened up for Russian economic activity and allowed Russian capital in the hands of Uzbeks living in Russia return to Uzbekistan. Uzbek-born oligarch Alisher Usmanov, with links to the Kremlin, positioned himself as the key negotiator between the new Uzbekistan ruling elite and foreign investors. Russia and Uzbekistan signed binding agreements regarding construction by Russian investors of nuclear power plants in Uzbekistan (Marszewski 2018: 7; interview, Tashkent, 2018).

Also, Uzbekistan's relations with its neighbours, particularly Tajikistan, have improved significantly since the change of power in Tashkent. Before 2016, the relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were often tense over issues such as irrigation, borders and ethnic grievances. Each country has large ethnic minorities comprised of the other's nationality (see Appendix 2), while important historical centres of Uzbekistan – such as Samarkand and Bukhara – are traditionally inhabited by Tajiks. In March 2018, Mirziyoyev visited Tajikistan and, together with President Rahmon of Tajikistan, signed a "Joint Statement on Strengthening Friendship and Good Neighbourliness, Border Treaty and the Agreement on

Bilateral Visa Free Travels". This was the first ever official visit of an Uzbek president to this neighbouring country (The Tashkent Times 2018).

Despite these positive achievements, there remain causes of conflict in Central Asia that might erupt into serious conflict over borders, territories, ethnic grievances and natural resources. Some of these existing conflicts have the potential to become exploited by a third party and used as an excuse for intervention.

Border and territorial conflicts

In Soviet times – particularly during the 1920s under Josef Stalin – borders were freely adjusted by Moscow as part of a divide and rule policy. At the same time, local powers lobbied Moscow to incorporate desirable areas into their jurisdictions, thus complicating borders further. Some borders in Central Asia have been redrawn many times, making it difficult even to establish a baseline for negotiations (Doorov et al. 2014). The fact that existing state borders do not correspond to the ethnic makeup of the region is the root of the region's interethnic problems, particularly in the Fergana Valley (see Map 2.1). There is a danger that an internal problem of one state could erupt into an international conflict with another (RFE/RL 2013).

Of the five Central Asian republics, only Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have solved their border issues with all their neighbours, while problems of delimitation of the borders between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan remain (Tashtemkhanova et al. 2015: 521). For instance, by 2018, up to 85 per cent of the 1 400 kilometre-long Kyrgyz-Uzbek border had been delineated (interview, Bishkek 2018). The remaining border sections with undefined status include the areas around Uzbekistan's exclaves in Kyrgyzstan (see below, RFE/RL 2018).

When the Central Asian Soviet Republics became sovereign states, the process generated several exclaves, i.e. territories that belong to one republic but are located in another. In and around the Fergana Valley there are several exclaves: two Tajik exclaves in Kyrgyzstan (Kayragach and Vorukh), four Uzbek exclaves in Kyrgyzstan (Sokh, Shohimardon, Chon-Qora and Jani-Ayil) and one Tajik exclave in Uzbekistan (Sarvan; see Map 2.1). Tensions in those areas have at times led to clashes between local residents and border guards.

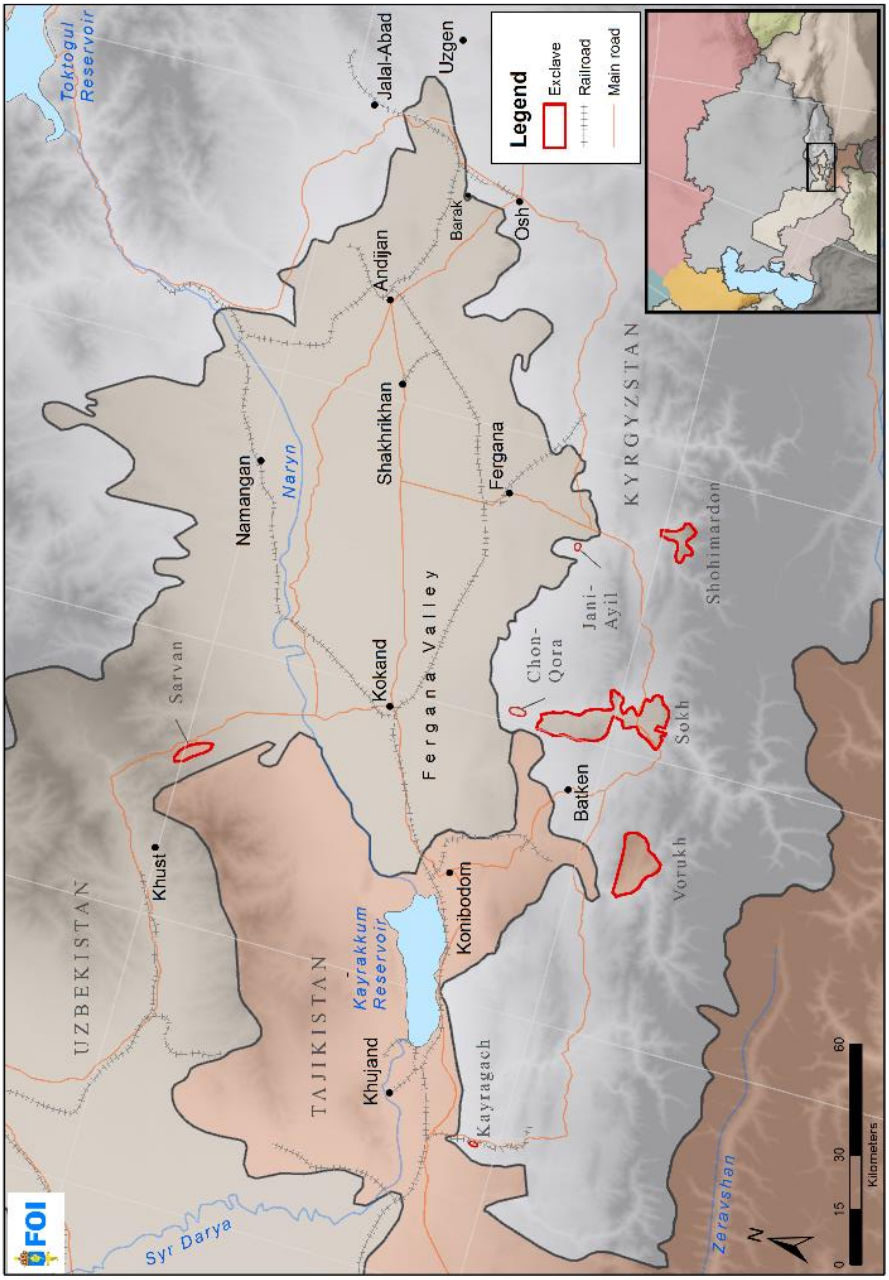
Most of these exclaves are small, with tiny populations, sometimes consisting of just one village, or lacking any population at all. The two exceptions are Vorukh and Sokh. Vorukh has an estimated population of 10,000-30,000, of which 95 per cent are Tajiks. Sokh has an estimated population of 25,000-70,000 and, despite

being part of Uzbekistan and surrounded by Kyrgyzstan, this population is nearly 99 per cent Tajik (Tashtemkhanova et al. 2015: 521).

Vorukh has been a source of constant tensions and occasional clashes between Tajik and Kyrgyz border guards, who have built checkpoints on the road in and out of the area (Doorov et al. 2014). As for Sokh, in 1999, Tashkent determined that militants from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) were using the exclave as a base for operations against both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan, therefore, significantly increased its military presence in the exclave and began mining its borders, which led to the deaths of several Kyrgyz by mines or gunfire while trying to cross into Sokh. In 2001, the countries signed a memorandum of understanding delimiting Sokh's border and agreeing on the "expediency" of connecting the exclave with the rest of Uzbekistan, but Bishkek rejected the territory that Tashkent offered in exchange for concluding the deal (RFE/RL 2013).

These exclaves are tinderboxes that can ignite other disputes. Furthermore, they can draw in not only local populations but also the governments of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which divide the Fergana valley between them. The inability of the three countries to solve their exclave problems not only keeps local tensions high. It also levies an economic cost by requiring them to build new transportation routes as alternatives to existing Soviet-era ones that bypass one another's borders.

However, one case where a land swap actually seems to be working is the former Barak exclave (see Map 2.1), with its 100 per cent Kyrgyz population, estimated at 600 people. The village of Barak has been located in Uzbekistan, but according to an agreement from 2018, the village is supposed to be exchanged for land around another village in Uzbekistan. The exchange process is estimated to take up to two years (RFE/RL 2018). This could be seen as a sign of the new climate in Central Asia post-2016 following the regime change in Uzbekistan. It also has the potential to stand as a positive example for future similar agreements pertaining to other territorial disputes in the region.



Map 3.1 Fergana Valley

Ethnic conflicts

A common prophecy about Central Asia has been that after independence the region would rapidly fall into ethnic-based violence that could potentially tear it apart. More than 25 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, this has yet to materialize. Instead, Central Asia shows a proneness to small-scale tensions over resources; these tensions take an ethnic form, but seem incapable of causing full-scale security threats and state collapse (Belafatti 2014).

Nevertheless, there have been tensions and conflicts, and some parts of the region are more prone to conflict of seemingly ethnic nature than others. The Fergana Valley (see Map 2.1) is often seen as a source of ethnic conflict. This once-prosperous, diverse region at the heart of Central Asia suffered considerably from the fall of the Soviet Union, and its now-struggling economy pits different groups against each other to compete for the control of resources and political power. This issue is particularly serious in ethnically mixed regions of southern Kyrgyzstan, which saw at least two major episodes of ethnic-based violence, in 1990 and 2010, between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks (see more on 2010 below). The Uzbek minority constitutes 14.6 per cent of Kyrgyzstan's population, according to the 2017 census, and is mostly concentrated in the south. Minor clashes between different groups take place regularly (ibid.).

Besides the Fergana Valley, there are parts of Central Asia where ethnicity may come to play a disruptive role for state security and social order. All over central-southern Uzbekistan, as well as north and western Tajikistan, Uzbek and Tajik communities live mixed with titular nationalities (see Appendix 2). Especially Tajikistan's large Uzbek minority comprise a substantial presence in the country's north, where Uzbeks may be 30-40 per cent of the population (ibid.).

A special case in the Central Asian ethnic mix is the Russians. During the time of the Soviet Union, ethnic Russians made up 9.5 million of the total population in the Central Asian SSRs (Peyrose 2008: 4). Most of them, more than 6.2 million, lived in the Kazakh SSR, where they constituted 37 per cent of the population, but large groups also lived in the Kyrgyz and Turkmen SSRs (see Appendix 2). Since then, however, more than 80 per cent of the Russians in Tajikistan, two-thirds of those in Turkmenistan, and half of those in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have left for another country (mostly Russia) (ibid.: 21). The motivations for their departure are multiple, and at the same time pose economic, social and political concerns. The collapse of the standard of living that followed the disappearance of the Soviet Union was common to all Central Asian republics (ibid.: 6). In Tajikistan, most Russians left during the civil war, 1992-97 (ibid.: 5). The Russian Federation has generally shown little interest towards its minorities. In the new Central Asian republics, it has probably not wished to sacrifice, in the name of

defending its "diaspora", its good relations with the new Central Asian regimes (ibid.: 21).

Apart from the ethnic minorities that represent the titular nations of Central Asia and the Russians, there are two autonomous regions (from the Soviet time) in Central Asia where distinct ethnic groups live: Karakalpakstan, in Uzbekistan, and Gorno-Badakhshan, in Tajikistan (see Map 1.1). Both regions have experienced ethnic tensions and calls for greater autonomy in recent years.

Firstly, the Republic of Karakalpakstan is an autonomous republic located in the northwest of Uzbekistan. It is inhabited by more than 400,000 ethnic Karakalpaks, who, by culture and language consider themselves closer to the Kazakhs than to the Uzbeks. The region has seen sporadic calls for independence from Uzbekistan (Rotar 2014). The destroying of the Aral Sea has caused a catastrophe, particularly in Karakalpakstan, with billions of tonnes of salt in dry areas, which in storms sometimes even reaches the Tajik mountainous areas (interview, Dushanbe 2018).

Secondly, Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) is one of the most strategically sensitive areas in Central Asia. Situated in the Pamir Mountains, GBAO borders Afghanistan, to the south and west, and China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, to the east. Approximately 135,000 of the 200,000 inhabitants of the GBAO are ethnic Pamiri, whose culture, language and religion are distinct from those of the Tajik majority. Nevertheless, the authorities in Dushanbe consider Pamiris to be 'Tajik'. Pamiri languages belong to a branch of Iranian languages different from the Tajik spoken across most of Tajikistan. While most Tajiks are Hanafi Sunnis, Pamiris are Ismaili Shiites who recognise the Aga Khan as their spiritual leader. The GBAO border is a concern for Russia, China, the US and other foreign partners. Afghan opiates flow freely into Tajikistan and onwards to Russia, China and the West. The Taliban and Islamist fighters affiliated with them operate on the other side of the frontier. Periodical unrest in GBAO has for years claimed numerous lives. All clashes appear to have been sparked by the central government's efforts to break the local authorities' power (International Crisis Group 2018: 1-7).

Conflicts over natural resources

For many years, water management caused disputes in Central Asia, due to the conflicting needs and priorities between upstream and downstream countries, thus endangering regional stability and security. In terms of distribution of natural resources, the countries in the region are divided into two groups: 'energy-poor but water-rich' upstream countries (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and 'energy-rich but water-poor' downstream countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan). While the first group is in dire need of water for energy, downstream countries need water for agriculture (Kocak 2015). As a result, for a

long time, natural resources emerged not as tools for facilitating regional cooperation but as sources of conflict.

Particularly, Tajikistan's plans to construct a hydropower plant in Rogun, near Dushanbe, infected the relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for two decades. Tashkent opposed the project, saying that it could endanger its cotton fields. In 2012, then Uzbek President Islam Karimov even threatened that "efforts by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to build electric power stations on rivers that flowed into Uzbekistan could spark a war" (Collade 2015). After the regime change in Uzbekistan, current president Mirziyoyev has opened up for dropping his country's objection to the project and even suggested Uzbek involvement in it. In 2018, the still unfinished dam went into operation (Putz 2018). Another breakthrough was when Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan agreed, in 2017, to develop hydroelectric power plants on the Naryn River, which feeds Syr Darya, traversing Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan towards the Aral Sea (Dalbaeva 2018).

Even if all water-related conflicts have not yet been solved, these and other agreements on hydropower and the reopening of border crossings show that the disputes are not intractable. Thus, the future conflict potential of these issues is lower than it was prior to 2016.

3.2 Russia's role in intrastate conflicts

The two most obvious intrastate conflicts in Central Asia since independence have been the Tajik civil war, 1992-97, and the violent events of 2010, in southern Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, we have included them in this report, although they occurred well before 2014. The description below focuses on Russia's behaviour in these conflicts. For a background to the conflicts as such, see Appendix 1.

The Tajik civil war 1992-97

By far the most violent intrastate conflict in Central Asia in the post-Soviet period was the Tajik Civil War of 1992-1997 (see Appendix 1 for background). Russia's role in the early phase of the conflict was initially passive on the side of the government, although the local Russian military gradually engaged in the conflict, against the opposition. When civil strife turned into civil war in May 1992, the Russian 201st Motorized Rifle Division, deployed in Tajikistan since Soviet times, was ordered to remain neutral. Informally, however, both the Russian military and Uzbekistan started to transfer weapons to the Popular Front, based in Leninabad (Khujand) and Kulob, which forced the coalition government to resign. The Supreme Soviet, where the Leninabad-Kulob faction had the majority, convened and elected a new government under the leadership of Emomali Rahmon (until 2007, his surname was Rahmonov). According to most

commentators, Rahmon might never have come to power without the help of the Russians (Jonson 2009: 43-44).

Once in power, Rahmon received Moscow's official recognition and blessing, and the Russian military presence increased. Russia's prime concern was to support a regime that would bring stability and guarantee a continued role and influence for Russia in Tajikistan, irrespective of the fact that the democratic opposition in Russia had previously supported the Tajik democrats. After opposition fighters killed 25 Russian border troops in July 1993, during an attack at the Tajik-Afghan border, Russia assumed primary responsibility for Tajikistan's security and increased its military presence. In September 1993, Russian troops took on the role of 'peacekeepers', in line with a decision by the member states of the CIS. In April 1994, Russia, as a 'third party mediator', succeeded in getting the warring parties to the negotiating table. Under the pretence of being neutral, Russia continued to back Rahmon's regime and its efforts to defeat the opposition (Jonson 2009: 44).

Russia had a dominant position in the Collective Peacekeeping Forces (CPF), which the CIS created and which also included contingents from the armed forces of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Gradually, the CPF became deadlocked and Russia continued its interference on the side of the Rahmon regime, which continued its efforts to defeat the opposition (ibid.: 44).

Russia was also, together with Iran, highly engaged in settling the conflict's final peace negotiations, which took place in Moscow in June 1997. The peace deal, a negotiated or even imposed solution based on immediate discussions among the main factions and including a power-sharing agreement, was the one often imposed by Russia in other internal conflicts in the post-Soviet space, as well as more recently, in Syria. One expert has labelled it the "Tajik model" (Rodkiewicz 2017: 22). Also central for Russia in this model is the presence of Russian troops, often covered as 'peacekeepers'.

The violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010

The immediate consequence of the ouster of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, in Kyrgyzstan, was the heightening of inter-ethnic tensions, especially in the southern regions of the country (see Appendix 1 for background). The Russian leadership had long been highly disappointed in the corrupt regime under Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who came to power after the Tulip Revolution of 2005. Especially, Moscow was vexed by Bakiyev's reversal on his pledge to close the United States air base in Manas, Kyrgyzstan, and annoyed by his willingness to host a US-funded anti-terrorist training centre in the southern Batken region (Troitskiy 2012: 14).

Thus, Russia's reaction to the protests in Bishkek in early April 2010 was remarkably swift. On 8 April 2010, the day after Bakiyev left Bishkek, Putin had a telephone conversation with Roza Otunbayeva, the head of the interim government established by the leaders of several opposition parties, and declared that Moscow saw her as the "de facto head of the executive power in Kyrgyzstan". Bakiyev fled to the south of the country and tried to mobilize his supporters in resistance to the interim government (Troitskiy 2012: 14-17). Russia was the first state in the world to de facto recognise the Kyrgyzstan regime change that took place on 7 April 2010. This recognition, along with a previous campaign against Bakiyev by Russian media, as well as price hikes of Russian gas, has given rise to the suspicion that the events of April were provoked by Russia. However, it seems no more than reasonable to say that Russia provided some inspiration and lobbying in that direction (Górecki 2010).

Although the interim government managed to quickly restore order in and around the capital of Bishkek, it faced a more complicated challenge in the south of the country. The local Kyrgyz elites of Osh and Jalal-Abad were closely linked with Bakiyev's elite and unwilling to subordinate themselves to the interim government, where "northerners" were in a clear majority. On 10 June, tensions between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities in Osh burst into wide-scale clashes. It seemed imminent that violence would engulf the whole of the country and spill-over into the Uzbek part of the Fergana Valley, provoking the implosion of Kyrgyzstan and a regional meltdown. On 12 June, as violence spread to Jalal-Abad, the interim government acknowledged that "military forces from the outside" were needed and asked Russia to send peacekeepers to Kyrgyzstan, which Russia refused to accommodate (Troitskiy 2012: 23-25).

The Russian leadership faced a dilemma when the interim government asked it to interfere. Sending Russian troops to southern Kyrgyzstan would mean a costly and protracted involvement in a civil conflict that would be highly unpopular in the eyes of the Russian public. It would be detrimental to Russia's relations with Uzbekistan and would almost inevitably expose Russia to wide international criticism. Moscow decided in favour of non-interference (Troitskiy 2012: 23-24). The matter was referred to the CSTO, but active CSTO engagement was never likely. Firstly, there was a question of the legality of such an intervention: the mandate of the CSTO only permitted collective defence against an external threat, but the Kyrgyz conflict was an internal affair. Secondly, the status of the Kyrgyz interim government was unclear – it had seized power in a coup d'état and though it was widely recognized as legitimate, it lacked a solid legal foundation. Thirdly, the CSTO operates on a consensus basis and two members, Uzbekistan and Belarus, objected to such action (Belarus was hosting Bakiyev and refused to accede to Kyrgyz requests for his extradition). Finally, there were strong doubts as to whether it was in the best interests of the CSTO to become embroiled in a

confused internal mêlée. The feasibility of a joint peacekeeping response was discussed at a CSTO meeting in Moscow on 14 June 2010, but rejected (Akiner 2016: 58).

After the CSTO's refusal to interfere, the Kyrgyz interim government cancelled its appeal for peacekeepers, but asked Russia to provide troops for the defence of "strategic objects", such as dams and factories. Russia refused to accommodate this request as well. After a while, the tide of violence in southern Kyrgyzstan was reversed and a fragile and superficial stability was restored (Troitskiy 2012: 23-25).

3.3 Conclusions

Despite the potential for intrastate conflicts, particularly with regard to the ethnic and territorial issues in the Fergana Valley, which could act as drivers of serious conflicts in Central Asia, Russia has fewer possibilities to interfere in Central Asia than in the Caucasus. To some extent, this depends on geography. Central Asia is farther away from Moscow than the Caucasus, while Russia neither borders any of the turbulent parts of the Fergana Valley, nor the autonomous regions of Uzbekistan (Karakalpakstan) or Tajikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan). Russia's interference in the Tajik Civil War was possible since Russia had already a military base in the country. The lack of will to interfere in the situation in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010 clearly points to the limits that Russia's ability to act in its backyard had at that time.

Another comparison with the Caucasus is the importance of avoiding "frozen" conflicts. In contrast to the Caucasus – where the unresolved conflict in Georgia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh have given Russia numerous chances to control the peace-negotiation format as well as stir up unrest in its perceived sphere of interest – the Central Asian countries have managed to avoid escalation of the conflicts they have with each other. Regarding the events in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, then Uzbek president Islam Karimov allegedly said that "we have had our Karabakh" (interview, Tashkent 2018), thereby providing clear evidence that this lesson had been learned.

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4. External actors in Central Asia and regional responses

The aim of this chapter is to describe the main security-focused external actors in Central Asia; how they relate to each other; and how the Central Asian states view them. Since independence from the Soviet Union, the chief foreign policy strategy in Central Asia has been multi-vectorism (Cooley 2012: 68). This essentially means that the states strive to extract a maximum of benefits from as many foreign partners (or 'vectors') as possible. This is done either by leveraging partners against each other, or by striking similar deals of cooperation with numerous partners to avoid becoming too dependent on any one of them. The multi-vector policy appears to have served the region well, generally speaking, but there are differences between the individual states, in terms of both approach and degrees of success. Among the Central Asian states, Kazakhstan is perhaps the most prone to broad cooperation, bilaterally as well as multilaterally, while Turkmenistan, is at the other end of the spectrum.

However, over the past few years, the regional dynamics in Central Asia have changed. Since the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the NATO-led security mission in Afghanistan, ended in 2014, the Central Asian states have not been able to use the Western presence as a counterweight to Russian influence to the same extent as before (Engvall and Cornell 2015: 8-9). Despite this, Russia is not as influential as it would like to be. According to Central Asian interlocutors, this is because Russia "has not modernised its offer" to the region (interviews, Dushanbe 2018). While Russia is the region's chief provider of security, it does not have the capacity to give the Central Asian countries what they want most, which is economic development. Therefore, they have turned to China. China's economic muscles are much larger than Russia's, and the dependence of several of the Central Asian states on China has increased drastically (interviews, Bishkek, Almaty and Dushanbe 2018).

4.1 United States and Europe: declining interest?

While the US has had a considerable presence in the region, due to the war in Afghanistan, there is now a perception in Central Asia that the US is losing interest. American observers appear to agree that because of the drawdown, Central Asia does not hold the same importance as it did ten years ago (Rumer et al. 2016). One expert even called Central Asia a "third tier interest" (Sanderson 2016). The Central Asian view of the EU is similar, disregarding the fact that the EU is a very important economic partner for many of the Central Asian countries. However, the situation is not simply a matter of interest, or a lack thereof. At

times, Western partners attach normative democracy or human rights conditions to the deals they offer to the Central Asian regimes. This is not always welcome and makes Russia or China more convenient partners (interview, Bishkek, 2018). Kyrgyzstan is the most democratic state in Central Asia, but also the most unstable, having gone through revolutions in 2005 and 2010. Other Central Asian regimes, as well as Russia and China, take this as proof that authoritarianism is a prerequisite for stability (Odgaard 2017: 151).

According to interlocutors in Central Asia, American and European policies towards Central Asia are perceived as inconsistent. While the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 carried an implicit message from Russia to Central Asia to limit relations with the West, it also provided a valuable lesson for the Central Asian states: they would have to fend for themselves against Russia (interviews, Astana 2018). Russia's war against Ukraine in 2014 surely strengthened these impressions. This does not mean that the Central Asian states do not pursue relations with the US or the EU. It is nonetheless likely that the Central Asian countries consider Russia's reaction when they make certain foreign policy decisions. How much, and in which cases, the Central Asian countries accommodate Russia's wishes varies a great deal.

For example, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have pursued highly diverging approaches to the US in recent years, but the policies of both have been influenced by Russia. For the US, its military relationship with Kazakhstan is its most significant in Central Asia (Kucera 2018). In 2018, Kazakhstan amended a 2010 transit agreement with the US that allowed military transports to Afghanistan through Kazakh ports in the Caspian Sea. Russia, fearing a US military presence in the Caspian, voiced its discontent. Kazakhstan responded officially that it would not allow the establishment of US military bases in the Caspian, and that the agreement concerns non-lethal cargo (Aliyev 2018). However, it appears that Russia has won this dispute. The Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which was signed by all the Caspian states in August 2018, determines that the presence of foreign military forces in the Caspian is prohibited (The Kremlin 2018).

Security cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and the US has diminished significantly over the past few years, with the US' involuntary withdrawal from the Manas base in Bishkek as the clearest example (interviews, Bishkek 2018). Russia had a hand in the closure of Manas, promising Kyrgyzstan financial benefits in exchange. Kyrgyzstan tried to use Russia's offer to leverage larger payments from the US, but when the US declined to pay more, Russia's offer won out (Cooley 2012: 124). In 2018, the US Central Command's (CENTCOM) General Joseph Votel testified before the US Senate that, in his opinion, the US had lost Kyrgyzstan to Russia and China (Kucera 2018).

Despite this somewhat bleak description of Central Asian-Western relations, it should be noted that some positive developments are taking place, too. The recent reshaping of Uzbek foreign policy under the new president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, is paving the way for unprecedented levels of intraregional cooperation, and this may reenergize Western engagement in the region as well. Mirziyoyev, in accordance with the new multidirectional foreign policy, has made it a priority to reach out to as many potential partners as possible, starting with the Central Asian neighbours (MFA Uzbekistan n.d.). It is too early to assess what the implications of this will be, but it is worth mentioning that many Western interlocutors in Central Asia truly appear to be optimistic (interviews, Astana, Bishkek, Dushanbe, and Tashkent 2018).

4.2 Russian influence: multidimensional and partly successful

Russia wields considerable influence in Central Asia. This is in part due to geographic proximity, but also to the shared history and ties forged during the Soviet Union era (interviews, Astana, Almaty, Bishkek, Dushanbe and Tashkent 2018). Russia channels this influence via its bilateral relationships with the Central Asian states, as well as through several multilateral organisations.

The Central Asian states have taken rather diverging approaches towards Russia's reintegration efforts within the former Soviet space (see Table 4.1). Kazakhstan, under the long rule of its first president, Nursultan Nazarbayev (1991-2019), used multilateral fora as a strategy to embed the country's delicate relation with Russia in a broad area of international organisations (Engvall and Cornell 2015: 12). Kyrgyzstan has followed Kazakhstan's example and joined all Russian-led organisations in the region.

Tajikistan's economic weakness and geographically vulnerable position, sharing a long border with Afghanistan, has made it lean more towards Russian support in the security sphere. Tajikistan is a member of the CSTO (interview, Dushanbe 2018).

Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have traditionally chosen a more isolationist approach to re-integration in the post-Soviet area. Uzbekistan is a member of only the CIS and the SCO. Turkmenistan has held the most extreme approach in its isolationism and has shunned membership in any regional organisation. Its status of "permanent neutrality" is even recognised by a United Nations General Assembly resolution (12 December 1995), a unique case in the world (The Diplomat 2015).

Table 4.1 The Central Asian states in Russia-sponsored regional organisations

Country/org.	CIS	CSTO	SCO	EAEU
Kazakhstan	X	X	X	X
Kyrgyzstan	X	X	X	X
Tajikistan	X	X	X	
Turkmenistan	*			
Uzbekistan	X	**	X	

Notes: *Turkmenistan ratified the CIS creation agreement, making it a "founding state" of the CIS, but never ratified the subsequent Charter, preventing it from being a real member of the organisation. Since 2005, Turkmenistan has seen itself as an "associate member of the CIS".

**Uzbekistan signed the Tashkent Treaty in 1992 and was a member of the Tashkent Pact from 1994 to 1999. It joined the CSTO in 2002, but withdrew from the organisation for the second time in 2012.

Central Asia plays an important part in the Russian vision of a Eurasian union. This entails fostering both political and economic integration of Russia and the former Soviet republics under the banner of a shared Eurasian identity (Popescu 2014: 34). Some fear that this implies that Russia wants to re-establish something similar to the Soviet Union. Another explanation is perhaps that Russia's pursuit of Eurasian integration is not about recreating a former empire, but rather a means to secure Russia's place in the emerging multipolar world order. Because global politics are becoming more regionalised, Russia seeks to increase its regional clout (Dragneva 2018: 4). Regardless of Russia's motive, many of the former Soviet republics perceive political integration with Russia to pose a threat to their sovereignty. It is likely for that reason that the envisioned political dimension of the Eurasian union has yet to materialize.

Nevertheless, the economic dimension exists, embodied by the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which was founded in 2015, based on the Russia – Kazakhstan – Belarus Customs Union established in 2010. The EAEU gives the members access to the Russian market, and facilitates work migration. Kazakhstan has made it very clear to Russia that it will only be part of an economic union, not a political one (Holmquist 2015). But, for Kazakhstan the benefits of EAEU membership still seem to be more political than economic (interviews, Astana 2018). With the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia again showed Kazakhstan and all other former Soviet republics that the cost of leaving Russia's orbit is steep. Kazakhstan, therefore, mainly sees the EAEU as "a way to contain Russia within a rules-based organization" (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2017: 10).

For Russia, the EAEU mainly seems to be a strategic tool used to obtain geopolitical goals. Interlocutors in the region noted that the EAEU is not very

economically beneficial and, according to some, even useless (interviews, Astana, Bishkek and Dushanbe 2018). Russia is an important trade partner for all EAEU states, but trade between the other members is highly limited (CIA World Factbook Trade Statistics n.d.). One important problem is that none of the member states seems to want deep economic integration (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2017: 17). A possible reason is that it could impede trade with partners outside of the EAEU, such as China. Several interviewees saw this as Uzbekistan's and Tajikistan's chief reason for not joining the EAEU, despite considerable pressure from Russia (interviews, Tashkent and Dushanbe 2018).

Russia's Eurasian vision also has a military dimension, represented by the Russia-led CSTO. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are not members and only engage in bilateral security cooperation with Russia. Besides being a member of the CSTO, Tajikistan, which has very limited military capacity on its own, is dependent on bilateral Russian support to maintain its security (interviews, Dushanbe, 2018 and The Military Balance 2018: 208). Russia is thus the most important security provider in Central Asia and, should a conflict arise there, the CSTO is the main available tool. The CSTO enables Russia to have a presence in the region and facilitates Russian military planning and other preparations (see Section 5.3). Common security concerns for all the Central Asian states, as well as for Russia and China, are those related to Afghanistan, such as terrorism, organised crime and migration flows. The CSTO has conducted exercises with Afghanistan-related scenarios, such as a Taliban-induced conflict in Central Asia, but has yet to be tested in reality.

The security services of the Central Asian states also cooperate with Russian equivalents to handle threats emanating from Afghanistan. However, some experts in Central Asia seem to think that Russia, in order to subdue the Central Asian states and push them closer to it, exaggerates the Jihadi threat from Afghanistan (interviews, Moscow and Tashkent 2018).

What all the Central Asian regimes also fear are internal power struggles and ethnic conflicts that, considering the multi-ethnic compositions of the Central Asian states, have the potential to escalate. The Central Asian states are reluctant to allow the CSTO, i.e. Russia, to intervene in ethnic conflicts. The chief reason is a risk that such conflicts may become "frozen" under Russian auspices. The wars in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine have made it clear for the Central Asian states that Russia uses such conflicts as a means to assert its will over the conflicting parties (interviews, Astana, Bishkek, Dushanbe and Tashkent 2018). This is probably a conflict-reducing factor in the region.

While the CSTO member states have a veto over where interventions take place, the Russian influence over them and the other Central Asian states is extensive. Faced with handling an escalating internal conflict by themselves, or allowing a

Russian military presence that could become permanent, the CSTO states would probably have to accept the latter alternative, no matter how reluctant they might be. Thus, the only solution is to avoid such conflicts arising at all.

Generally, Russians and Central Asians seem to agree that their shared history has created a bond between their peoples. This allows Moscow other means of leverage over the Central Asian states besides the Russia-sponsored organisations, such as through the media and information sphere, and through Russian popular culture, which reaches a wide audience (Skalamera 2017: 135). Central Asian elites also remain culturally Russified, which gives Russia some sway over leadership successions and business networks.

Central Asian migrant workers in Russia make Moscow's influence significant in some segments of the population (interview, Tashkent 2018). Millions of Central Asian migrants work in Russia and their remittances make an essential contribution to the gross domestic products (GDP) of their countries of origin, which helps calm potential sources of social strife. Though the value of remittances may fluctuate, they are a lifeline for Central Asia's poorer economies, particularly Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Skalamera 2017: 134). In 2017, for instance, remittances from Kyrgyz migrants amounted to 2.48 billion United States dollars (USD) and accounted for 32.9 per cent of GDP. Remittances from Tajik migrants amounted to 2.25 billion USD, or 31.6 per cent of GDP (The World Bank n.d.). That Russia can send these migrant workers home, and thereby cause serious socio-economic problems, creates a strong incentive for the regimes in Central Asia to stay on good terms with Moscow (interviews, Bishkek, Astana and Tashkent 2018).

At the same time, all the Central Asian states are in a process of state-building, where creating their own identities separate from the Russian world is imperative. The role of Russian as lingua franca in Central Asia is decreasing; some countries are Latinising their alphabets and exchanging Russian place and given names for Central Asian ones. At Central Asian universities, studies of Russian compete with Chinese and English. While there is nostalgia among the older generations for the Soviet Union, all the Central Asian countries now have very young populations, which means that a significant number of Central Asians have no memories of the time before independence. These developments may cause Russian influence in Central Asia to diminish in the future.

4.3 China: increasingly active in economics and security

China bases its engagement in Central Asia on two intertwined interests: economics and security. Whereas Russia generally sees its cultural and historic

ties with Central Asia as assets, China has a more negative outlook. Beijing perceives the transnational ethnic and religious ties between Xinjiang's minorities and the Central Asian states as potential threats to its national security (Zhao and Xu 2017: 75). This view is mainly founded in the belief that these transnational links can facilitate an infiltration of Xinjiang by the "three evil forces": religious extremism, separatism and terrorism (ibid: 80). China believes that economic development will contribute to stability in Central Asia and, by extension, to Xinjiang (Odgaard 2017: 50). Central Asia is an important part of China's strategy for fulfilling its energy needs. China has surpassed Russia as the main buyer of Central Asian gas (ITC Trademap n.d.).

Where Central Asia is concerned, China does not have an all-encompassing concept comparable to Russia's Eurasian vision (Zhao 2018: 79). Instead, there is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is actually greater in scope than the EAEU, but more loosely defined. The BRI has no real geographic boundaries (Maçães 2018: 24). The aim of the BRI is to improve connectivity and economic integration between China and the rest of the world, and is an important means to aid China's ascension to global power status (Bohman 2018: 2-5). The goal of the BRI is to build six "economic corridors". Several of these pass through Central Asia (ibid.). To realize BRI, China thus needs access to the Central Asian territories. For the Central Asian states, China represents an opportunity to gain much-needed investments and to balance Russia's influence. The downside is that the Chinese investments have entailed a high degree of economic risk, which has led some of the Central Asian states to become very dependent on China. In some instances, it has even led them to hand over strategic assets as payment for loans (interviews, Dushanbe 2018).

The gross external debts of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are estimated at 77.5 percent and 67.9 percent of GDP (2017) respectively (Bhutia 2018). They owe approximately half of these debts to China (interviews, Bishkek and Dushanbe 2018). China's image has been tarnished during the past few years, at least in Central Asian public opinion. In 2018, for example, the Chinese-led modernization of Bishkek's main heating plant caused a huge scandal as the plant broke down in the middle of winter, leaving many people in Bishkek freezing. A Xinjiang-based contractor carried out the refurbishment of the plant in 2017, and the cost amounted to 386 million USD, money that Kyrgyzstan borrowed from China and that is due for repayment in 2033 (Djanibekova 2018). After inspections, it became apparent that only part of that sum had actually been spent on refurbishment. It also turned out that the Chinese contractor had inflated costs and been awarded the project without tender, which caused an anti-corruption probe in Kyrgyzstan and led to the arrest of numerous responsible individuals, including Kyrgyz government ministers (Putz 2018).

Tajikistan has made several investment deals where Tajikistan repays China through economic concessions. For example, China is building a power plant in exchange for a license to operate a Tajik goldmine (Eurasianet 2018). In 2011, Tajikistan ceded territory close to the Wakhan corridor to China (see Map 1.1). Officially, this was part of the ratification of a border settlement agreement made in the 1990s, but some believe it was in exchange for debt relief (Reynolds 2018). China has also been leasing arable land for Chinese farmers (Kozhevnikov 2011). All of these examples of economic influence stoke fear in Central Asia and Russia that China will inevitably have sway over political developments in the region as well.

In Kazakhstan, scepticism towards China seems particularly pronounced. For instance, land issues have proved incendiary in connection to China. In 2016, when the Kazakh government proposed a new land privatization law that would allow foreigners to lease land, the country experienced its biggest protests to date. The protests were fuelled by anti-Chinese sentiment and resulted in a moratorium on land reform until the year 2021 (RFERL 2016). China has a big stake in the Kazakh oil sector, and the state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation is one of Kazakhstan's main partners in oil and gas extraction (Astana Times 2018). China is also Uzbekistan's most important economic partner.

In Turkmenistan's case, the dependency on China is so great that it appears to be jeopardizing the entire economy. Gas is Turkmenistan's main export commodity. Due to some disputes, Turkmenistan no longer sells gas to Iran or Russia, leaving China as the main customer. China currently buys 94 per cent of Turkmenistan's gas. Unfortunately for Turkmenistan, the gas price almost halved between 2014 and 2017 (Jakóbowski and Marszewski 2018). Turkmenistan is also deeply indebted to Chinese creditors for various gas infrastructure projects, and is believed by observers to be paying off some of these debts in gas. Consequently, there has been a substantial reduction of revenue to Turkmenistan, which in turn has unleashed a serious economic crisis (ibid.). The Turkmen government keeps reiterating publicly that the economy is doing well, while there is clear evidence to the contrary. Prices on everyday goods such as bread, flour and cooking oil have soared and the goods themselves have become scarce, making the lives of ordinary people very difficult.

On top of this, the government has announced the removal of subsidies on energy and water (Bugayev and Najibullah 2018). This has led to unusual outbursts of societal discontent, with people blaming the government for their misfortunes (Pannier 2018). If left unchecked, the crisis could destabilize the country and possibly even lead to state collapse (Jakóbowski and Marszewski 2018). During late 2018, Gazprom announced that in 2019 it will resume purchasing gas from Turkmenistan, but it remains to be seen whether this can ameliorate Turkmenistan's problems (RFE/RL 2018a).

In 2014, Russia was clearly the main, if not only, external actor involved in regional security in Central Asia. The idea that Central Asian security is entirely Russia's domain is not true anymore, as China has become more active within this sphere (Eder 2018; interviews, Dushanbe 2018). The rationale for this is supposedly to protect investments and to stop extremism from spreading. In its defence white paper from 2015, China no longer mentions the principle of non-intervention, thus making it possible for the Chinese military to protect Chinese interests abroad (Xinhua 2013; Xinhua 2015). At the end of 2015, China adopted an anti-terrorism law that enables the deployment of Chinese troops outside of China's borders (Dorsey 2019: 39).

Many of China's visible security-related activities take place within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), but China also regularly conducts exercises with the Central Asian states in bilateral and multilateral formats. In 2018, numerous media reports were published that alleged that China is building a base on Afghan territory, in Badakhshan. China denied it, but Afghan authorities later said that it concerns a training base for Afghan soldiers (Chan 2018). China's security cooperation with Tajikistan is increasing. Chinese soldiers are patrolling part of the Afghan-Tajik border (Goble 2018), according to regional interlocutors, possibly on both the Afghan and Tajik sides (interviews, Dushanbe 2018). China has a military installation of some kind in the Tajik autonomous region of Gorno-Badakhshan, close to Xinjiang and Afghanistan (International Crisis Group 2018). In 2016, China agreed to finance and build border guard posts and a training centre along the Tajik border with Afghanistan (Reuters 2016). Allegedly, China and Tajikistan have also conducted joint counter-narcotics operations (Pannier 2017a). Stemming the potential inflow of extremist actors to Xinjiang from the outside is an important driver behind China's actions (Dorsey 2019: 36).

China's internal strategy to pacify Xinjiang also affects Central Asia. During 2018, numerous people testified on the use of draconian measures by the Chinese authorities in Xinjiang against Chinese Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and other ethnic minorities (Human Rights Watch 2018). Some of these witnesses have taken refuge in Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where many of them have kin, complicating these countries' relations with China (RFERL 2018bc). In addition, some of the people incarcerated in Xinjiang's so-called re-education camps are actually Kazakh and Kyrgyz citizens. Kazakhstan has limited its dialogue with China regarding Xinjiang to negotiating the release of Kazakh citizens, and deemed the other cases to be a domestic Chinese concern (Pannier and Tahir 2018).

While the Central Asian governments understandably need to exercise caution regarding this issue, the Central Asian populations may not. Anti-Chinese sentiments are already present in the Central Asian states (interviews, Astana,

Almaty, Bishkek, Dushanbe and Tashkent 2018), and the situation in Xinjiang risks worsening public perceptions of China even more. Hence, there are also other potential consequences. For example, the issue could spark nationalism in some of the Central Asian countries, and increase public pressure on their governments to act in some way, perhaps even limiting their dealings with China. Thus, considering the already widespread dependence on China in the region, the Central Asian governments could find themselves in a very awkward position, between their main creditor and their populations.

4.4 China and Russia in Central Asia: competition or cooperation?

China's engagement in Central Asia is doubtlessly increasing. One possible reason may be that the larger Chinese footprint is the result of Russian-Chinese rapprochement, and some kind of informal division of labour, where Russia mainly takes care of security and China does economic development. This appears to be a recurring view amongst Russian scholars (interview, Moscow 2018). More likely, the division of labour is a result of the fact that China, by virtue of its economic strength, is encroaching on Russian interests in Central Asia without Russia being able to do much about it.

Russia is no longer in a position to exercise hegemonic power or demand exclusive rights of engagement. Russia is nevertheless still the preponderant security actor in Central Asia, and will likely remain so for the near future. However, since 2015, noteworthy developments have taken place. China's military reforms and new stance on deploying troops abroad, coupled with strategic investments all over the world and the establishment of several military installations outside China set a new precedent for Chinese behaviour. It creates the impression that China is no longer satisfied with letting other powers dictate the rules. How Russia chooses to handle this will be an important issue to monitor. For now, these Chinese advances seem to have made Russia conclude that cooperating instead of competing with China is the best strategy.

Russia has been the main proponent of coordination between the EAEU and BRI, and some formal attempts have been made. For example, Russia and China launched a joint vision in 2015, called "One Belt One Union". Initial differences in expectation soon became apparent. Russia thought this meant that negotiations between EAEU members and China would henceforth go through the EAEU, but China had no such intention. Due to the structure of the EAEU, such an arrangement would have given Russia a say in any negotiations between the other EAEU members and China. As it turned out, Russia had not consulted the other EAEU countries on the idea of linking up with the BRI. After being treated so

highhandedly, all of the other member states embarked on direct bilateral negotiations with China (Gabuev 2016: 74). Sometime after this initial episode of misunderstanding each other's intentions, China and Russia began discussing the Russian idea of a "Great Eurasian partnership" that would entail linking not only the EAEU and the BRI but also the SCO and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) into one big bloc (Li 2018: 96). Some doubt the viability of this idea, and instead believe that in the absence of the US, their common enemy, from the region, Russia and China will succumb to competition rather than cooperation in Central Asia (Skalamera 2017: 137). In 2018, China and the EAEU signed a non-preferential free trade agreement (Maçães 2018: 58).

4.5 Regional responses

The most important challenges for the Central Asian regimes are safeguarding regime survival, upholding sovereignty, avoiding excessive dependence on any of the powerful foreign partners and staving off the threat of extremism. While the Central Asian states appear to perceive these challenges similarly, their individual foreign policies have had differing results.

Kazakhstan, currently the region's largest economy, has as previously mentioned elected to keep Russia close, and therefore joined many Russian-initiated cooperation mechanisms, while at the same time pursuing cooperation with China, the US, the EU and other partners in as many fields as possible. Russia is Kazakhstan's neighbour, so having a functioning relationship is necessary. This is of course broadly true for the other Central Asian states as well. The Kazakhstani-Russian relationship is however not free from friction. As mentioned, following the illegal annexation of Crimea, Kazakhstan's perception of Russia was fundamentally altered. Making matters even worse, in 2014 Putin stated that "the Kazakhs never had any statehood" and that it was to the Kazakh's advantage "to remain in the greater Russian world" that has developed industry and advanced technology (Najibullah 2014). This launched a wave of Kazakh nationalism, push back against the Russian language and concerted ideological plans to cement Kazakh identity, including a change from Cyrillic to Latin script (interview, Astana 2018).

Several exchanges have taken place that can be interpreted as Kazakhstan's asserting its independence from Russia. For example, Kazakhstan did not support Russia in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution vote on Ukraine in 2014, nor on Syria in 2018. Neither did Kazakhstan join Russia in countersanctions against the EU when Russia requested it (interviews, Almaty and Astana 2018). In regards to China, it seems that Kazakhstan exercises caution. For example, Kazakhstan tries to limit the Chinese influence by putting restrictions on the number of work permits awarded to Chinese citizens each year.

The legislation that would allow foreigners to buy land in Kazakhstan was shelved after popular pressure. Supposedly, in response to China's Xinjiang policy, Kazakhstan also restricted the number of visas awarded to Chinese travellers (interviews, Almaty and Astana 2018).

Turkmenistan has had the most isolationist foreign policy approach of all the Central Asian states. The merits of this policy appear questionable since Turkmenistan is experiencing a severe economic crisis after falling out with its traditional trade partners, Iran and Russia, leaving only China. Russian interlocutors say that Russia currently has very little influence over, or insight into, Turkmenistan's political affairs (interviews, Moscow 2018). How much insight China has, in its capacity as Turkmenistan's main trade partner, is anyone's guess, and whether China will do anything to help Turkmenistan out of the crisis is equally unclear.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are the region's poorest countries and the stability of their economies relies on Russia and China. Millions of migrant workers from both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan live and work in Russia, which gives Russia considerable leverage. China, as previously mentioned, owns great parts of the foreign debts of both countries. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have not been able to avoid becoming deeply dependent on Russia and China. That said, both countries have been quite adept in getting what they need – help in maintaining security and procuring economic investment – from their two big neighbours.

Before President Karimov's death, in 2016, Uzbekistan pursued a guarded foreign policy that kept the Central Asian neighbours and both Russia and China at a comfortable distance. An important focus for that policy was to avoid becoming embroiled in military conflicts in the region and to avoid conflicts that could be "frozen" under Russian auspices on Uzbek territory (interviews, Tashkent 2018). Despite this, relations with several of the Central Asian neighbours were chilly during Karimov's reign. The new foreign policy in place since 2016 shares the main feature of avoiding conflict, but the proposed methods appear to be different. The Uzbek government still prefers bilateral relations and is not keen to join either the CSTO or the EAEU. Neither organisation is deemed able to contribute to Uzbekistan's security or economy. Staying out also reduces the number of arenas in which Uzbekistan has to deal with Russia.

What is new, however, is the policy of "neighbours first". The idea is that solving regional issues and strengthening regional cooperation will, as one regional expert put it, "make Central Asia less subject to external decision-making". This surprising development clearly benefits all Central Asian states (interviews, Astana, Almaty, Bishkek, Dushanbe and Tashkent 2018). In 2018, it was agreed that regular yearly meetings would be held at the heads-of-state level. In connection to the first meeting, which was held in Astana in March 2018, Russia

asked to be included, but the Central Asian states said no. Then Kazakh president Nazarbayev supposedly had to call his Russian counterpart and reassure him that this new dawn of regional cooperation was not against Russia's interests (interviews, Dushanbe 2018).

Because of the precarious balance that all the Central Asian states struggle to keep vis-à-vis their more powerful foreign partners, there is a fear in the region that too much progress and too much dynamic change could incite interference by external actors and endanger the whole process. The idea is thus to tread carefully and to keep the emphasis on bilateral cooperation, instead of creating any sort of formal multilateral institution into which others also may demand entry (interviews, Astana and Tashkent 2018).

4.6 Conclusions

Russia and China are the most important external actors in Central Asia right now, and their respective relationships with each of the Central Asian states are complex and characterized by both opportunity and challenge. From the Central Asian states' perspective, too much Russo-Chinese competition could ultimately cause conflict, and too much cooperation could make the favoured multi-vector foreign policies difficult to conduct. At the present time, it appears more probable that China and Russia will try to cooperate more, rather than less. The Central Asian states may thus have to find creative approaches to balance their powerful neighbours. One option, while not exactly new, could be to build more partnerships with other actors, alongside those with Russia and China. The US and the EU, though broadly perceived as uninterested, could still contribute through cooperation and development in fields such as education, rule of law and green technology, where Russia and China are not as strong. With its huge market, India could potentially be an influential partner of the Central Asian states. There are signs that India is increasingly interested in gaining a foothold in the region, in order to balance China and Pakistan.

Although one should never presume to know the future, as of 2019 some factors make the eruption of conflict between any of the Central Asian states (or their external partners) seem less likely. Firstly, both China and Russia agree that Central Asian stability is in everyone's best interest. Though from Russia's perspective it is plausible that some manageably low level of instability could be permissible, considering that Russia's main contribution to the region is hard security. However, as long as the Afghanistan conflict remains unresolved, the Russian military presence in the region is likely to be sufficiently justified.

Secondly, at the regional level it is interesting to note that even though there are several potential sources of conflict in Central Asia, there have been no interstate wars, nor any need of foreign intervention, since the 1990s. This is probably

because the Central Asian states see that besides the horrible costs of war, foreign intervention would incur a loss of independence. Thus, avoiding the need for foreign intervention is an important driver for peace. Uzbekistan's new "neighbours first" policy could be a driver for peace, as well, and strengthen the Central Asian countries against external influence. If successful, it could be the beginning of a new era in Central Asia.

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5. Russia's Central Asia war theatre: assets and obstacles

Against the background of the description of Russian perceptions and policies in Chapter 2, what military assets does Russia possess to deal with the security challenges in Central Asia as outlined in Chapters 3 and 4? The aim of this chapter is to describe the peacetime establishment of Russian forces that are available for operations in Central Asia and how the region's geography may affect how these forces deploy. This forms a basis for the discussion in Chapter 6 of possible Russian uses of armed force in potential military conflicts in Central Asia.

A key assumption is that Russia initiates military operations to facilitate taking and retaining the initiative. Russia thus controls the time for planning, preparing and launching an operation and gives itself adequate time. Therefore, the time aspects of operations are not subject to further discussion.

Section 5.1 provides an overview of Russia's military power and fighting power. Next, Section 5.2 outlines the posture of Russian forces that can deploy in Central Asia, both forces already in the region and those based in Russia. The next section briefly describes the possible reinforcements at Russia's disposal. Section 5.4 outlines how Russian forces actually prepare for operations in Central Asia within the framework of various military exercises. The subsequent section is devoted to Russian military installations in Central Asia, primarily those relevant for Russia's nuclear weapons. Section 5.6 is an overview of the armed forces of the Central Asian states. The next section discusses how geography may affect Russian military operations in Central Asia. Finally, Section 5.8 concludes that Russia appears to have a posture to deal with different types of military conflict in the region.

5.1 Russia's military power and fighting power

Russian military terminology stipulates that military power is a state's physical and moral resources for building and using armed forces. A key intrinsic part of military power is fighting power, which relates to the armed forces in terms of the quantity and quality of personnel and equipment and the quality of command and control (Norberg 2018: 26-30). Generating fighting power means training, developing and sustaining forces in peacetime. To use fighting power is to deploy these forces, ultimately on war-fighting operations.

Russia has four military districts (MD): Eastern, Central, Southern and Western. Russia's Northern Fleet, based on the Kola Peninsula, also has an assigned territory on the Russian MoD's map of MDs and probably functions like an MD.

An MD develops and sustains forces on Russian territory in peacetime. In wartime, Russian forces deploy on operations in a war theatre, a territory that, irrespective of national borders, can include much of a continent, with the surrounding seas and the air and space above (Russian MoD 2019b). On potential war-fighting operations, Russian forces can deploy in force groups tailored to task under the command of the Joint Strategic Command (JSC) of the MD closest to the area of operations. Here, the war theatre would be the Central Asian states and bordering regions. The term *Russia's Central Asia war theatre* used here is a hypothetical, analytical construct, and not based on any documents known to the authors. Russian forces on an operation in the Central Asia war theatre would primarily come from the Central MD and operate under its JSC.

The Russian view on the state's resources for war is holistic. The state's military organisation (*voennaia organizatsia gosudarstva*) includes assets of all ministries and agencies and some state and private companies, which in wartime will be under the Ministry of Defence. The main military component is the Armed Forces, under the MoD (Russian MoD 2019 a and c). There are also some ten other ministries with armed units and formations with nominally altogether more than 500,000 servicemen (IISS 2018: 205). They are mainly for use in Russia and not included in this analysis.

Russia's Armed Forces can probably deploy a Joint Inter-Service Combat Operation (JISCO) with large conventional forces, primarily ground forces (Norberg and Westerlund 2016: 23–27). That probably corresponds to what may be required in what Russia's 2014 military doctrine calls a regional war (See above 2.3). We assume that this provides capabilities that can be adapted to handle contingencies of a lesser scale, what the doctrine calls local wars and armed conflicts. Russia's sizeable paramilitary forces; capabilities with standoff or nuclear weapons; military units; and formation under central control receive brief or no mention here.

Assessments of available Russian forces should ideally include combat readiness, as well as combat capability, in terms of manning levels and equipment serviceability. The combat readiness of the Russian Armed Forces is probably sufficient to launch operations, since they have systematically carried out surprise inspections of combat readiness since 2013 (Norberg 2015 and 2018). We assume that the nominal force organisation is fully manned and combat ready, although that may not be the case in reality. Systematic, detailed and reliable open source information about the combat capability of Russian units is scarce. Officially, the Russian MoD claimed 90 per cent manning across the Armed Forces in 2016 (Norberg and Westerlund 2016: 48-50). Russia has plenty of equipment, especially for ground forces. Russian units therefore probably have sufficient manning and equipment levels to deploy on operations.

5.2 The Armed Forces posture for Central Asia

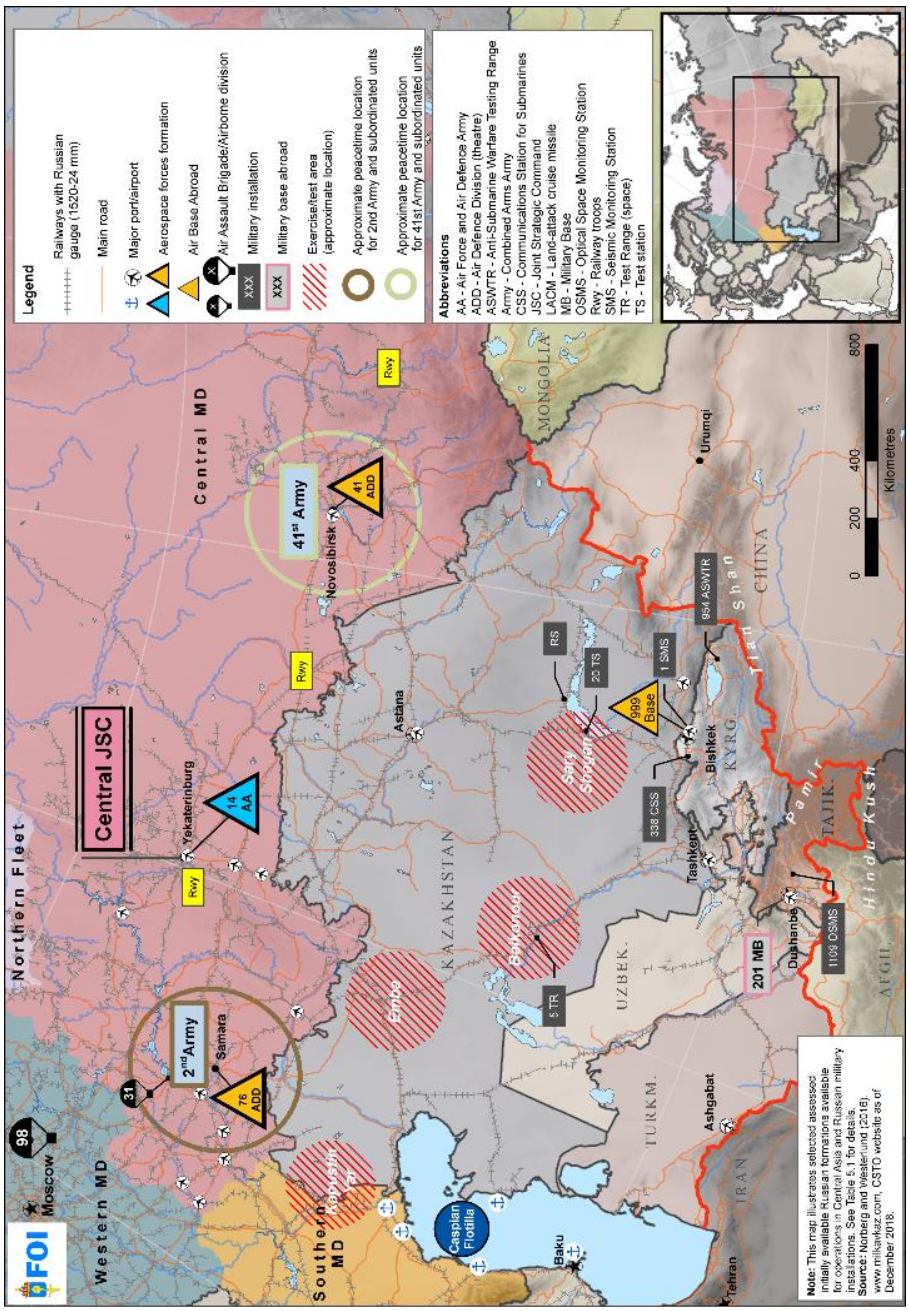
Russia's Armed Forces have a nominal peacetime establishment of about 1 million men. As the heritage force of the Soviet Armed Forces, its assets range from nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missiles to large conventional forces. There are three services (*vid vooruzhennykh sil*): the Ground Forces, the Navy and the Aerospace Forces, as well as two independent arms of service (*rod voisk*), the Airborne Forces and the Strategic Missile Forces. Each Russian MD has formations and units from each service and independent service arm as a basis for launching a JISCO with ground, sea and air forces. Russia's Armed Forces also regularly exercise how to send reinforcements across Eurasia, often by train, sometimes by air. Russia's forces available for operations in a war theatre consist of those permanently based there (i.e. initially available), plus reinforcements from other parts of Russia.

Based on Nersisyan (2015), one can divide Russia's military posture in Central Asia into bases and installations. A military base (*voennaia baza*) is equipped to host the forces, equipment, ammunition, fuel and supplies that enable a force to fight. A base hosts Russian units and can project military power. Russia used its military bases in Georgia and Ukraine to launch wars against the host countries in 2008 and 2014, respectively. A military installation (*voenny obiekt*) pertains to non-combat infrastructure such as exercise areas, command posts, test and evaluation ranges, radar and monitoring stations, stores, and communication stations.

Russia's bases in Central Asia are in peacetime subordinated to the Central MD, which is geographically closest to Central Asia. The Central MD's forces are outlined on Map 5.1 and detailed in Table 5.1; both reflect the situation in 2018.

Russian forces based in Central Asia

Map 5.1 shows Russia's two key military bases in Central Asia. The first, in Tajikistan, is Russia's largest military base abroad, the 201st Military Base (201 MB). It has a motor rifle division structure with three manoeuvre regiments, plus battalion-size support units. Estimates of its size vary from 5,000 to 7,000 men (IISS 2018: 206; interview, Dushanbe 2018). The 201 MB is Russia's key asset for handling any type of military conflict in southern Central Asia. Tajikistan's Armed Forces would probably have difficulties handling most of the country's potential security challenges: border or resource disputes, inter-ethnic tensions, terrorism, or spill-over from tensions in neighbouring Afghanistan.



Map 5.1 Initially available Russian forces for operations in Central Asia

The second base is the 999th Air Base (999 AB) in Kant, Kyrgyzstan; it is Russia's initial ability to use Central Asian air space and a possible base for reinforcements. It has some ten Su-25SM ground attack aircraft and some transport helicopters. The ambition seems to be to provide some fire support to ground forces. Increased fire support from the air or significant air defence operations require reinforcements from Russia. Russia has asked Tajikistan's permission to use a military airfield west of Dushanbe (Sidorkova 2016; Shorshin 2016), probably to increase the potential for air support for ground forces from the 201 MB. In late 2018, there were no signs that Russian military fixed-wing aircraft were to deploy there permanently anytime soon.

Russian forces based in Russia

Map 5.1 and Table 5.1 show the Central MD's peacetime force disposition, with two Ground Forces formations as cores for potential JISCOs. Each such Combined Arms Army (CAA) is probably able to reinforce operations, primarily eastwards in the case of the 41st CAA and west or south for the 2nd CAA. Each CAA has manoeuvre brigades as well as support brigades for command and control and fire support.

In recent years, a former tank brigade became the core of the 90th Tank Division, probably subordinated to the Central MD, possibly planned as a key offensive unit. Both the CAAs have support brigades for command and control, fire support and sustainability. The circles around the armies on Map 5.1 indicate where they would start deploying from on operations. Table 5.1 lists initially available formations and units of the Central MD's JSC.

Each CAA has a logistics brigade, but as of 2018 only the 2nd CAA appears to have its own engineer regiment. An engineer regiment is under formation for the 41st CAA. Its operational status was unclear in late 2018. It is therefore not included in this assessment (Surkov et al. 2018). With that possible exception, both CAAs have all five JISCO functions and are here counted as available on Russian territory. The Central MD has equipment stores in its east for three motor rifle brigades. These units presumably have a skeleton staff and need manning before deploying on operations and are here not counted as available. We also assess that the 31st Air Assault Brigade and the 98th Airborne Division, which in peacetime are under the Airborne Forces command in Moscow, are available for operations in Central Asia.

Table 5.1 Initially available Russian forces for operations in Central Asia

Formation		In Russia					In Central Asia	
		Central JSC	**2 CAA**	**41 CAA**	**90 Tank div**	**14 Air Army**	**201 Military Base**	**999 Air Base**
JISCO function	**C4ISR**	Headquarters [a]	Headquarters	Headquarters	Headquarters	Headquarters	Headquarters	
		2 x C3 bde	91 C3 bde	35 C3 bde		1 x reconnaissance sqn	C3 Support bn	
		2 x Special Forces bde 1 x Electronic Warfare bde					Reconnaissance bn	
	Manoeuvre	98 Airborne div [b] 31 Airborne bde [b]	30 Motor rifle bde	35 Motor rifle bde	239 Tank reg		149 Motor rifle reg	
		3 x Motor rifle bde stores	15 Motor rifle bde	55 Motor rifle bde	6 Tank reg		92 Motor rifle reg	
			21 Motor rifle bde	74 Motor rifle bde	80 Tank reg		191 Motor rifle reg	
					228 Motor rifle reg			
	Fire support [f]	232 MRL bde	92 Missile bde	119 Missile bde	400 Artillery reg	4 x fighter sqn	MRL bn	1 x sqn attack
			385 Artillery bde	120 Artillery bde	NN AD reg	3 x fighter-bomber sqn	Air defence bn	
			950 MRL reg			2 x attack helicopter sqn		
		28 Theatre AD bde	297 AD bde	61 AD bde		76 Theatre AD div		
		29 CBR bde	2 CBR reg	10 CBR reg		41 Theatre AD div		
	Mobility	12 Engineering bde	39 Engineering reg			3 x medium transport aircraft sqn	Engineering bn	
		5 Railway Troops bde				1 x heavy transport aircraft sqn	4 x helicopters	<4 helicopters
		43 Railway Troops bde				4 x transport helicopter sqn		
		48 Railway Troops bde						
	Sustain-ability	3794 Logistics Base	105 Logistics bde	106 Logistics bde			Logistics bn	

Comment. The function C4ISR (including units for situational awareness e.g. reconnaissance and electronic warfare) supports the commander and coordinates sea, air and ground forces. The manoeuvre is about taking and holding or denying terrain to an adversary. Fire support is about protecting and supporting the manoeuvre. Mobility is about getting forces into and move them within a war theatre. Sustainability supports and replenishes forces after they use up intrinsic equipment and supplies. **Abbreviations**: AD – Air Defence; bn – battalion: C3 – command control and communications support; CBR – Chemical, biological and radiological [protection]; div – division; MRL – multiple rocket launch: reg – regiment; sqn – squadron (some 10 aircraft or helicopters). **Notes:** Ordinal numbers before units, unless "x" = times; NN = ordinal unknown; (a) denotes HQ staff; (b) these two airborne units, in peacetime subordinated to the Airborne Forces command in Moscow, are earmarked for CSTO operations, including in Central Asia. **Sources**: Norberg and Westerlund (2016: 23–27); Westerlund and Norberg (2016: 76–77); IISS (2018: 202–203; 206); milkavkaz.com (December 2018).

The JSC has additional fire support assets (two artillery and one air defence brigade) and mobility assets (three Railway Troops brigades and one Engineering brigade). It also has a logistics base, probably tailored to its specific needs, but it lacks its own mobile sustainability support units, such as logistics brigades. Russian-gauge railways facilitate transport of ground force formations on former Soviet territory, e.g. all across Central Asia, but not beyond.

For the Aerospace Forces, the key formation is the 14th Air Force and Air Defence Army (14 AA on Map 5.1) with its HQ in Yekaterinburg. Aircraft can operate from at least some thirteen airfields in the Central MD (Westerlund and Norberg 2016:77). Table 5.1 outlines the 14 AA assets: four fighter/multi-role squadrons, three fighter-bomber squadrons, two attack and four transport helicopter squadrons and two air defence divisions. In contrast to other air armies, this formation's fighter aircraft are primarily the heavy, long-range MiG-31 fighter, chiefly designed for air defence over national territory, including the Arctic.

In contrast to other MDs, there seems to be a lack of light fighter aircraft for air cover for a JISCO, both in the region and as reinforcements from the Central MD. Why has Russia only deployed MiG-31s here, when it has more air power-capable potential adversaries in both its east and west? One possible explanation is that this reflects a lower degree of Russian concern for potential adversaries with offensive air capabilities. Another explanation may be the MiG-31's capabilities. Its comparatively long operating range enables it to cover more of Central Asia's air space from bases in Russia than other Russian fighter aircraft. Its on-board radar is more capable than those on other Russian fighters. Together, this makes it more able to operate independently outside the range of Russia's ground based radars. Kazakhstan also still operates the MiG-31 system, although its aircraft are old (Globalsecurity.org 2016). The presence of MiG-31s in both Kazakhstan and Russia's Central MD indicates another possible explanation for MiG-31s in the heart of Eurasia: the deployment is a legacy of Soviet planning and force posture.

The 41st and the 76th Air Defence Divisions (ADD), each with three surface-to-air missile (SAM) regiments and a radar regiment, mostly with various versions of S-300, with S-400 being gradually introduced (milkavkaz.com 2018), provide air defence for key installations. The Aerospace Forces also have some transport aircraft. These initially available air assets could provide air support to a JISCO in Central Asia, with both fire support and operational and tactical air mobility, but would first need to deploy forward to do so.

In short, the Central MD appears to have two roles. The first is to provide a strategic reserve for supporting force redeployment and war-fighting operations in Russia's east, west or south, commanded by other JSCs. The second role is a responsibility for operations in Central Asia, from crisis management to war fighting.

The Russian Navy probably plays a minor role in a JISCO in Central Asia. The main asset nearby is the Southern MD's Caspian Flotilla. As seen on Map 5.2, its four corvettes are capable of firing some 30 land-attack cruise missiles (LACM) in a first salvo in support of a Russian JISCO in the region. The range of these missiles covers all but the easternmost parts of Central Asia, although terrain such as mountains, and an adversary's air defences forcing a missile to take evasive action, may shorten the range. In addition, two corvettes and four submarines from the Black Sea Fleet can provide LACM fire support in the western parts of Central Asia. The Flotilla's two naval infantry battalions, with landing ships, can support a JISCO with a tactical-level seaborne manoeuvre along the Caspian coast. The Flotilla's smaller ships, up to corvettes, could in theory operate and provide fire support to a JISCO along tributaries to the Caspian Sea, although this would only be of marginal importance in a Russian JISCO deeper into Central Asia.

To conclude, Russia's military posture, in terms of peacetime deployment of forces initially available for operations, has two parts. The first are the forces in Central Asia, the 201 MB and 999 AB, which are best suited for limited ground operations at the scale of armed conflict or a smaller local war. They are clearly insufficient for either a larger local war involving more than two Central Asian states, or for a regional war; both possibilities would also involve air power or wider ground operations. They probably suffice to handle the initial stages of an armed conflict in Central Asia in or around Tajikistan. In an escalating conflict reaching the scale and scope of a local war or above, they could buy Russia time to bring in such assets from the second part: forces from Russia's Central MD. Peacetime conventional forces are larger in other MDs than those that pertain to Central Asia. The geographic isolation and limited capabilities of the Central Asian countries, as well as the lack of any sizeable military adversary permanently deployed near the region, may explain why Russia's military posture in Central Asia seems focused on armed conflict or local war. Longer or larger wars in Central Asia that the peacetime military posture cannot handle would require additional reinforcements from other parts of Russia.

5.3 Potential reinforcements

A Russian JISCO can include up to four CAAs with brigade-level units for support functions. Aerospace Forces support could consist of some 11 fighter squadrons, six fighter-bomber squadrons, five attack squadrons (with an estimated 10 aircraft per squadron) and three ADDs, as well as support from Navy units in the war theatre. Assets for such a force are available in Russia (Westerlund and Norberg 2016: 67–96). Russia can reinforce to Central Asia either from the Central MD or through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Russia could in theory also deploy paramilitary forces or proxy forces such as

Cossack militias (Klein 2019: 16-17), although their military effect is probably marginal in a larger operation.

The Central MD would need reinforcements from other MDs if an operation requires a force with more than two CAAs. A force of altogether some three to four CAAs is probably the biggest reinforcement Russia could deploy to the Central Asia war theatre. Railways are likely to provide the bulk of strategic and operational-level transport, i.e. to get primarily ground forces to the war theatre and the area of operations. Russian railway gauge thus marks a limit to the geographical reach of a Russian JISCO. Air transports and air units may deploy faster if there is enough basing capacity. For operations in Central Asia, the time needed to deploy such a force would obviously depend on how far south it has to go.

The CSTO has three collective security regions, each including a bilateral air defence arrangement and bi- or multilateral ground forces between Russia and member states. The air defence arrangements give Russia additional depth against an adversary's air power. The ground force arrangements give Russia some burden-sharing for some potential operations and an excuse to plan for and exercise such operations on partner states' territories. The CSTO also includes Russia-led cooperation, in for example armaments and officer training (Ibid: 25, 32 and 35).

The Central Asia collective security region has four components. The first is the evolving Russia–Kazakhstan air defence arrangement. The second is a multilateral ground force, the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces for the Central Asia Region, CRDF-CAR (CSTO, 2018 and CSTO, b and d; n.d.). The latter is to ensure the military security of its members and for counter-terror operations. It includes 5,000 soldiers pledged from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. Its deployment organisation will depend on its mission (CSTO, d) The third is a more sizeable force, some 18,000 pledged soldiers, relevant for Central Asia, the Collective Operational Reaction Forces (CSTO, c; n.d.), founded in 2009. The CSTO also lists 3,600-strong peacekeeping forces (CSTO, e and f; n.d.). The first provides Russia with a more than 1,000-kilometre-wide air defence buffer zone with improved situational awareness. The second provides small forces, but they are available in the region. The third provides improved war-fighting capability. The last two indicate an approach that handles escalation by increasing the forces. The fourth seems designed for handling the aftermath of military conflicts.

For Russia, it is worthwhile to develop and maintain the CSTO framework, since it provides some burden-sharing and multilateral political legitimacy as well as opportunities to prepare operations, in terms of planning and exercises. This probably facilitates operations in Central Asia, for example with Russia's

traditionally CSTO-earmarked units, the 31st Air Assault Brigade and the 98th Airborne Division (Norberg 2013: 16, 22). The sum of preparations, especially logistics, have arguably facilitated potential Russian military operations in Central Asia. Exercises and planning within CSTO have enabled Russia to prepare and exercise transporting forces on trains across former Soviet republics for operations in the Central Asia war theatre.

The collective CSTO forces probably depend on Russian capabilities to function in combined arms or inter-service operations. Other CSTO member states can contribute to a Russian operation in Central Asia, but the core, such as command and control, will be Russian. Only in 2018 did staff officers from the CSTO Joint HQ participate in planning and executing the operational-strategic-level exercise series Combat Brotherhood (CSTO 2018b). The CSTO website notes that the collective forces remain untested in real operations (CSTO 2018c). The CSTO can only facilitate Russian operations in Central Asia. CSTO's collective forces need Russian forces to carry out any operations. Any decisive capabilities for war fighting will be Russian.

In short, Russian bases in the region and the CSTO CRDF-CAR, including Russian forces, are Russian tools for managing initial escalation of armed conflict or local war. Anything that requires actual warfighting in an inter-service operation, or a local war that escalates into a regional war, would require reinforcements from primarily Russia's Central MD.

CSTO's aims and military capabilities for crisis intervention are essentially those of Russia. The assets available for war fighting in Central Asia are also Russia's. To what extent do they actually prepare for operations? CSTO forces exercise regularly (CSTO, e; n.d.), including in the Russian annual strategic *Tsentr* (centre) exercises in 2011 and 2015 (Norberg 2015 and 2018). As illustrated in the next section, exercises indicate both ambitions and capabilities.

5.4 Military exercises of the CSTO and Russia

Russia is behind the two exercise activities relevant for the ability to project military power in Central Asia: CSTO multilateral exercises geared towards crisis management, and Russia's annual strategic exercises pertaining to war fighting on a war-theatre level.

The CSTO has carried out military exercises for crisis management since at least 2007. There may be two reasons why Russian forces are the core of these exercises, while other members make smaller contributions: Russia's forces are clearly the biggest. Russian interests are the driving force behind the CSTO. The fighting power of Russia's Armed Forces improved with increasingly bigger exercises 2009–2017 (Norberg 2018), which probably affected the scale and

scope of CSTO's exercises as well. In 2015, there was a joint surprise combat readiness inspection of units earmarked as the Collective Operational Reaction Forces. The key CSTO exercise activity in recent years is the Combat Brotherhood exercise series. In 2018, it took place as an operational-strategic-level exercise series covering various stages of a conflict in Central Asia (CSTO 2018, a, b and c).

The CSTO publishes little that is specific about its plans for so-called "peace-creating operations," a direct translation of the Russian term *mirotvorcheskie operatsii*. A CSTO press release about the Unbreakable Brotherhood-2018 exercise of peace-creating forces noted that the scenario pertained to a deployment to a UN Security Council-mandated operation into a non-CSTO member in Central Asia (CSTO 2018b), i.e. into Uzbekistan or, more likely, Turkmenistan.

The CSTO is the only multilateral organisation that regularly carries out exercises pertaining to crisis management in Central Asia. In the case of an armed conflict or local war, CSTO forces are thus the most likely to be able to intervene, at least initially. If a conflict escalates into a regional war requiring a warfighting operation in terms of a JISCO, Russia's Armed Forces exercise for that, too, although not in Central Asia.

Russia's Armed Forces carry out annual strategic-level exercises that pertain to war-fighting operations in a war theatre i.e. throughout up to most areas of a continent. These exercises rotate between Russia's MDs and take place in September, as the culmination of the Armed Forces' annual training cycle (Norberg 2018:35). In 2011 and 2015, the exercises took place in Russia's Central MD and in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, CSTO's Central Asian member states. These exercises pertained to JISCOs involving the Central MD's two CAAs, its Air Army and the Caspian Flotilla, as well as CSTO collective forces.

The scale and scope of the *Tsentr* exercises increased manifold from 2011 to 2015. The stated number of servicemen rose from 12,000 in 2011 to 95,000 in 2015, the number of pieces of ground force equipment from 1,000 to 7,000 and the number of aircraft and helicopters from 50 to 170. The number of participating ships only doubled, from 10 to 20. A key novelty in 2015 was that Russia carried out a surprise combat readiness inspection for participating forces. Both in 2011 and in 2015, parallel exercises took place in Russia's west – the 7,000-men-strong Union Shield *(Shchit Soiuza*), with Belarus – as well as in its north, with an unnamed navy exercise in the Northern Fleet, which in 2015 included 50 ships and submarines (Norberg 2015:27-30; 2018:36; 60-68).

Both iterations of the *Tsentr* had a CSTO component, but Central Asia as a region appeared less pronounced in official statements in 2015. The increased scale and scope of the *Tsentr* exercises probably reflects an increased Russian capability to

handle military conflicts in Central Asia with initially available assets; that is, an increase from managing an armed conflict and the initial stages of a local war, to handling a local war and the initial stages of a regional war. The increased focus on fighting regional wars, however, probably more reflects the Central MD's role in reinforcing Russian war-fighting operations in the European and Far Eastern war theatres than in preparing for crisis management in Central Asia. Two features signal that annual strategic exercises, irrespective of where they take place, are about escalation from conventional to nuclear war. Firstly, there are parallel exercises in the Northern Fleet, a key part of Russia's nuclear weapons system, in relation to *Tsentr*, and other annual strategic exercises since 2012 (Norberg 2018:36). Secondly, since 2014, Russia's land-based Strategic Missile Forces have been carrying out a major exercise about a month after the annual strategic exercise (Ibid. 2018:39).

Both the exercise in CSTO and Russia's annual strategic exercises, especially the *Tsentr*-iterations, show that Russia carries out active preparations for the use of military force in Central Asia, both for crisis management and warfighting.

5.5 Russian military installations in Central Asia

Central Asia hosts several Russian military installations. Most have remained there since the Soviet Union era. In contrast to military bases in the region, or forces based in Russia, the installations are not for projecting military power. The installations relate to either Russia's nuclear weapons system, air defence, space forces, or the development of equipment, and benefit from the region's geography.

The communications and monitoring systems noted in Table 5.2 are often part of Russia's wider nuclear weapons deterrence system (Nersisyan 2015), i.e. Russia's ability both to launch nuclear weapons and to defend itself against them. This includes support systems, e.g. systems for communicating with nuclear submarines on the high seas, or radar stations for monitoring incoming ballistic missiles. Nuclear deterrence remains a pillar of Russian security policy. It is unclear how well Russia's military installations in Central Asia actually work, given that many of them are decades old. Since Russia still leases areas for these installations, the assumption here is that they work sufficiently well. The installations are not further analysed here.

Table 5.2 Selected Russian military installations in Central Asia

Installation	Location	Category
1109th Optical space monitoring station	Tajikistan	Space/Nuclear
338th Navy communication station	Kyrgyzstan	Nuclear
1st Seismic monitoring station & 17th Radio-seismic laboratory	Kyrgyzstan	Nuclear
954th Underwater test range	Kyrgyzstan	Development
20th Test station	Kazakhstan	Development
49th (?) Ballistic missile radar station	Kazakhstan	Nuclear
5th Space test range *	Kazakhstan	Space
Exercise/test areas	Kazakhstan	Development

Comment: * Morozov (2019) noted that the 5th Space test range was to conduct its last military-related space launch in 2019. Map 5.1 indicates approximate locations of Russian military installation in Central Asia.

The key point here is that for Russia, Central Asia's role in the nuclear weapons system adds an existential dimension to the region, in addition to Russia's preparations for crisis management or warfighting. Russian forces would however not be the only ones involved in potential military conflicts in Central Asia. What forces do the Central Asian states have and what role might they play?

5.6 The armed forces of the Central Asian states

The armed forces of the region's states are probably a part of Russian planning for crisis management in Central Asia, especially when it comes to Russia's CSTO allies. The overview in Table 5.1 illustrates that the assets of the five states are much smaller than Russia's. The assets are here just a proxy for a capability assessment. Their quality, in terms of combat capability and combat readiness, is outside this analysis, since neither they, nor the armed forces of any other country, have been subject to the same analysis as Russia's Armed Forces.

Russian planners probably consider six key points with regard to Central Asia's armed forces. Firstly, all countries have some forces that can handle at least the initial stages of an armed conflict, but prolonged or widened fighting would require outside intervention so as not to escalate. Secondly, Central Asia's CSTO members have made some crisis management preparations within the CRDF-CAR, including for Russian deployments to the region. That can buy time for interventions to handle an escalating situation, but probably not to stave it off.

Thirdly, on paper, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have bigger assets than the two smaller states and are probably more capable of handling security challenges by military means. Fourthly, Russia has a significantly stronger air capability than any of the Central Asian states and probably cannot count on any of the latter to defend their own air space. Fifthly, all of the countries, except Turkmenistan, have comparatively strong paramilitary forces aimed primarily at domestic use, indicating that a key security concern is not external, but domestic. Finally, Turkmenistan has the biggest assets, on paper, but its declared permanent neutrality makes it unlikely that Russian planners count on these resources when planning crisis management in Central Asia. If potential instability in Turkmenistan were to require a Russian military intervention, these nominal military assets will probably be a Russian concern.

Table 5.3 Overview of military assets of Central Asian countries in 2018 a)

Country	Army				Air force		Paramilitary
	Personnel b)	MBT	AV	Arty	Personnel b)	Aircraft c)	Personnel b)
Kazakhstan *	20,000	300	1,076	611	12 000	104	31,500
Kyrgyzstan *	8,500	150	405	228	2,400	4	9,500
Russia *	280,000 d)	2,780	13,040	4,328	165,000 d)	1 176	554,000
Tajikistan *	7,300	37	46	23	1 500	4?	7,500
Turkmenistan	33,000	654	2,196	765	3 000	55	5,000
Uzbekistan	24,500	340	577	487	7,500	45	20,000

Abbreviations: Arty – artillery pieces; AV – armoured vehicles incl. reconnaissance vehicles, armoured personnel carriers and armoured infantry fighting vehicles; MBT - main battle tanks. Comments: * CSTO member; (a) excl. naval and coastal defence forces; (b) active service, not reserves; (c) assessed as combat-capable (d) including conscripts. Source: IISS (2018: 188-215)

To sum up, for crisis management, the military forces of the Central Asian states can possibly handle an armed conflict in or between them. Hindering vertical or horizontal escalation beyond the initial stages of a local war probably requires external intervention from Russia. In a scenario such as the war in Georgia 2008, Russian forces are likely to prevail in force-on-force fighting in any potential military conflict between Russia and a Central Asian state.

5.7 Geography and infrastructure affecting military operations

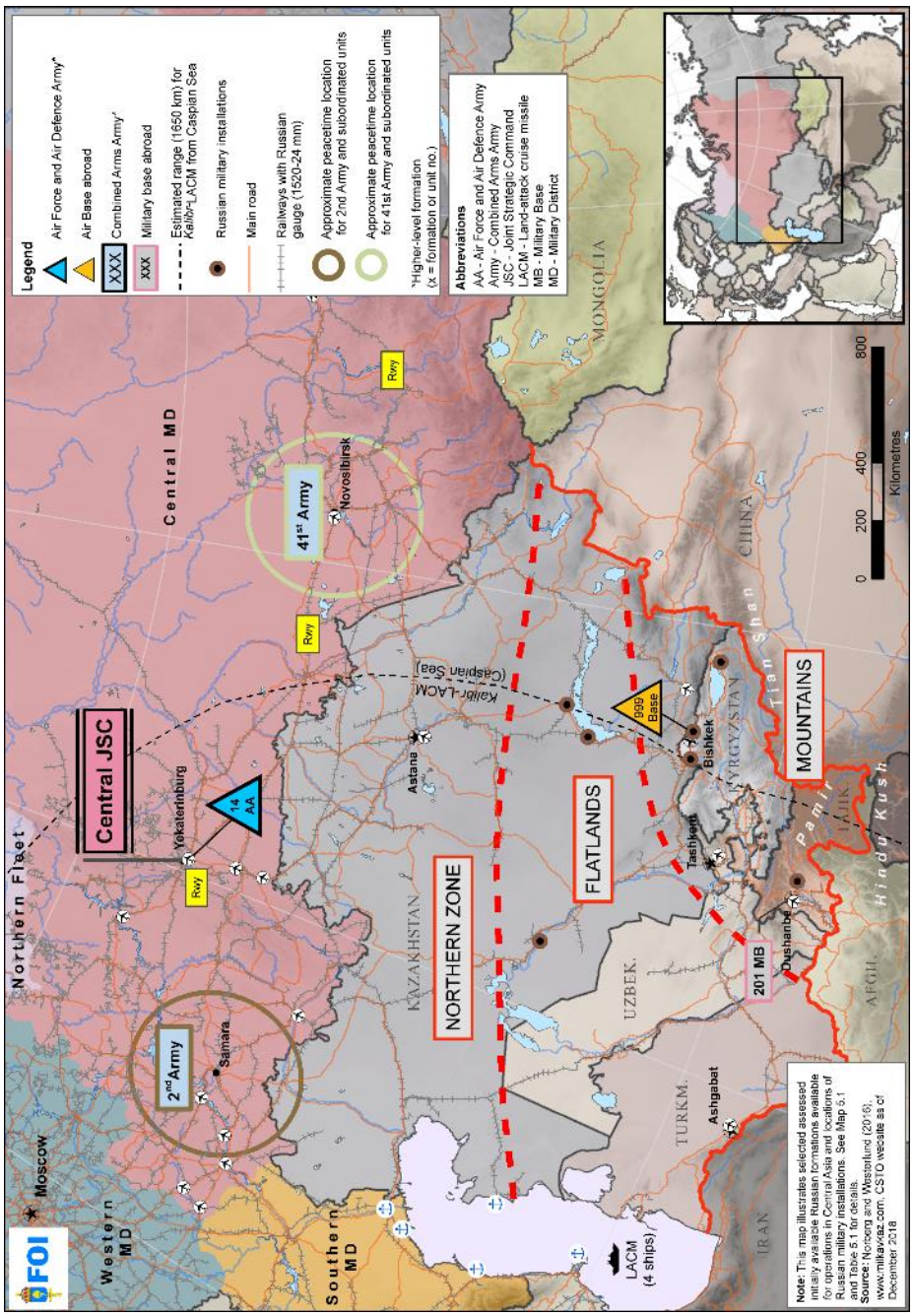
Russia's Central Asia war theatre, as outlined on Map 5.2, includes the five Central Asian states, parts of Siberia, the Urals, Mongolia and northwest China. It faces Afghanistan and Iran. The key aspect of geography is how it affects Russia's ability to move forces for a JISCO from Russia to the mountainous south of Central Asia host to many of the region's potential conflicts. The geographic features considered here are the huge steppes and deserts as well as mountain ranges, such as the Hindu Kush, the Pamir and the Tian Shan, in the region's southeast. Also of importance is infrastructure, primarily railways, main roads, and airports, which are unevenly located across Central Asia. Seaports are omitted here since naval operations are unlikely to be decisive in most of Central Asia.

Scale is the key factor for the military operations shown on Map 5.2. Russia's southern border near Yekaterinburg is some 1,900 kilometres from southern Tajikistan, roughly as far as from the southern tip of Italy to southern Denmark. Kazakhstan stretches some 3,000 kilometres from east to west, similar to the distance from New York City to Utah, or three-quarters of the USA's intercoastal distance. In short, the region is huge, similar in size to much of continental Europe.

To facilitate a discussion about how geography may affect how Russia uses armed force to address different types of military conflicts, this analysis divides Central Asia into three zones, based on how terrain and infrastructure may affect potential military operations. The reality on the ground is more complex than outlined here, for example concerning logistics and transportation. The division into three zones is not based on any Russian documents known to the authors. The discussion also omits possible political aims of Russian military operations, e.g. to stop regime change, or how Central Asian states would react to a Russian intervention.

The Northern Zone, shown on Map 5.2, is up to 700 km wide and stretches east west along the Russo-Kazakh border, from the Caspian Sea eastwards, south of Astana, to the Kazakh-Chinese border. This zone has favourable preconditions for a Russian JISCO. The road and railway networks, especially north of Astana, facilitate transport of ground forces. Russian Aerospace Forces assets for air defence and fire support for ground operations can operate from bases in Russia.

South of the Northern Zone spread the flatlands, steppes and deserts across the southern half of Kazakhstan, all of Turkmenistan and part of western Uzbekistan. The key feature is desolation. There are four north-south railroads and five north-south main roads. Russian forces would be limited to these transport arteries for any moves southward. There are few possible east-west transport combinations. The distance would make Russia-based air support far more difficult than further north. This zone holds three of Russia's military installations in Central Asia.



Map 5.2 The Central Asia war theatre

The Mountain Zone, in southern Central Asia, is probably the most challenging for Russia. It consists of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and eastern Uzbekistan, including the densely populated and volatile Fergana Valley. The Mountain Zone is wedged between the vast flatlands and the barrier of three mountain ranges in the southeast. Russia has four military installations and both its military bases here. Distance from Russia and mountainous terrain make it hard to deploy and operate a Russian JISCO, if it is needed. The region's geography is not only a challenge for Russia, but also for any peer adversary that would require such a Russian deployment.

The Flatland Zone may favour a Russian JISCO when it fights. If one considers transporting forces across it, its huge size is an obstacle that requires time and unhindered access to railways to traverse with large ground forces. The mountain ranges in the south and southeast of Central Asia (shown on Map 5.2) would also effectively hinder a potential adversary such as China from deploying any sizeable forces into the region from that direction. There are few possibilities to move forces by road or rail. High mountains make air support for ground operations harder.

Russia probably wants forces in place before a military conflict starts, or forces that can get there fast despite poor transport infrastructure. Unsurprisingly, Russia's biggest base abroad is in Tajikistan; the base's key contribution to the CSTO collective forces is from the highly mobile Airborne Forces. The further south in Central Asia, the more difficult Russian deployments become. The Mountain Zone is Central Asia's potentially most volatile. It has the most difficult terrain and weak infrastructure. It is furthest away from Russia.

5.8 Conclusions

Table 5.4 outlines the initially available military assets Russia has for intervention in Central Asia, in terms of different military conflicts of increasing scale and scope. Each actual military operation will of course be unique. The different types of military conflict discussed here are substitutes for current Russian operational plans, which are classified and not available for research. The key point is that the forces noted in the table, when taken together, show that Russia appears to have a military posture that uses its available military assets to handle potential escalation of a military conflict in the region, from crisis management in armed conflict to regional war. Few if any other countries are likely to have that.

Table 5.4 Russian available assets for different types of military conflict in Central Asia

Type of military conflict	**Russia's available assets**
Armed conflict (Mountain Zone)	201 MB + 999 AB (initially)
Armed conflict (Mountain and Flatland Zones)	Above + CSTO (including Russian forces)
Local war (all zones)	Above + Central MD
Regional war (all zones)	Above + reinforcements
Large-scale war	Above + rest of Russian Armed Forces

One probable Russian concern regards where in the region a potential military conflict would take place, if nothing else in terms of geography, as outlined by the three zones for potential military operations shown on Map 5.2. The further south in the region, the more complex a Russian operation is, in terms of transport and logistics. A second probable Russian concern is about which Central Asian states have the potential for the emergence of military conflict between them. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have bigger populations than Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. A military conflict between the bigger two is potentially more serious. Their military establishments may be smaller than Russia's, but Russia can hardly deploy all of its armed forces into Central Asia. So how might Russia's arrangements for military intervention correspond to different types of potential military conflict in Central Asia? The next chapter reflects on how Russia's military posture corresponds to different military conflicts.

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6. Russian posture and policy in potential military conflicts

Central Asia's relatively positive political dynamic since the change in power in Uzbekistan in 2016 has arguably reduced the risk of military conflicts. The Central Asian states and external powers, such as Russia, China, Iran, Turkey and the West, prioritise stability, a contrast to Syria where, as of early 2019, many of the external powers remain at loggerheads. The discussion below is therefore obviously largely about hypothetical military conflicts.

Russia has forces in Central Asia and prepares to handle different contingencies. That in itself warrants a discussion about how Russia can address military conflicts of different scale and scope by deploying military forces. This chapter illustrates possible military conflicts and how Russia's initially available military assets correspond to possible missions and to potential obstacles for operations. The aim is to discuss factors affecting potential Russian military interventions in Central Asia in terms of assets and obstacles for different missions, based on the four different types of military conflicts described in Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine, with increasing scale and scope: armed conflict, local war and regional war. The scale and scope of the different conflicts are obviously from a Russian perspective. A Central Asian state may well perceive an armed conflict or a local war as something far bigger. The Doctrine also includes large-scale war, which would encompass several continental and ocean war theatres and, possibly, exchanges of inter-continental nuclear missiles, all outside the scope of this report.

We assume that the bigger the scale and scope of a military conflict is, the longer time it takes to materialise. Russia would thus have adequate time to note an upcoming conflict, organise an operation as a response and deploy forces. Nevertheless, Russia's aim is probably to quell hostilities to avoid escalation, which is more costly to handle. This analysis neither gauges the likelihood that the different scenarios materialise, nor aspires to predict states' behaviour, nor ventures into how potential conflicts may develop.

6.1 Armed conflict

There is the potential for several armed conflicts in Central Asia. Fighting could spill over from Afghanistan and destabilise weaker states such as Tajikistan and Turkmenistan and, perhaps to a lesser degree, Uzbekistan. The region has also seen the risk of interstate military conflicts due to resource, border, or ethnic issues. Those root causes remain, but the risk that they would cause violence is probably lower, mainly because of increasing cooperation between the Central Asian states, starting with the Astana meeting in 2018. One driving factor behind

this seems to be that a military conflict between any of the five states may prompt external powers such as Russia to intervene militarily. Afterwards, Moscow may not opt to bring its forces home, thereby initiating a long-term military presence, regardless of the host country's wishes, such as in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Three cautionary observations indicate the risk of armed conflict. Firstly, as of early 2019, the cooperation between the five states had yet to face the test of serious disagreement between them. Secondly, in relatively weak states such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, collapsing economies, or power struggles, may lead to domestic armed conflict. If instigated from abroad, these would be what Russians often label as "colour revolutions", which in turn may result in civil wars, such as in Tajikistan in the 1990s and to a lesser degree in Kyrgyzstan in 2010. Thirdly, there is widespread concern in the region that radical Islamist fighters may destabilise both the countries and the region. A probable major concern for Russia is not only the possibility of an armed conflict, as such, but also that it may lead to collapsing states, or protracted regional instability, which in turn may cause collapsing economies, or flows of refugees.

Spill-over from fighting in Afghanistan may affect its three Central Asian neighbours, especially Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Tajikistan would be easier for Russia to handle, since it already has its 201 MB in the country. Turkmenistan would be more difficult for a Russian intervention that requires a force deployment. Russia lacks forces there. As Map 5.1 reveals, there is also a lack of railways and main roads, which can make it hard to get sizeable forces into the country, especially to the capital Ashgabat, and even more so to address fighting on the border with Afghanistan. Interlocutors in Moscow noted that Russia, as of 2018, also had limited access to senior decision-makers in Turkmenistan (interview, Moscow 2018).

The 201 MB is Russia's key force for handling initial stages of armed conflict and local wars in the Mountain Zone on Map 5.2. The base has assets for ground forces tactical-level combined-arms combat, but its air support is weak. The 999 AB's ten aircraft probably cannot support any sizeable operations. The base is some 700 kilometres away, with two mountain ranges between. The 201 MB is primarily available for ground operations in Tajikistan. Moscow can of course redeploy its troops elsewhere in the Mountain Zone to handle disturbances, but that potential is limited by mountainous terrain and the fact that this part of Central Asia is heavily populated. There are limitations to what a force of some 5,000–7,000 soldiers can handle, especially over time. Any intervention beyond the Mountain Zone – a prolonged contingency or an escalating conflict above armed conflict – would require reinforcements. The primary reinforcements would probably be CSTO's forces that are earmarked for Central Asia, including from Russia's airborne forces.

6.2 Local war

What the Russian 2014 Military Doctrine calls a local war, such as the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, has not happened in Central Asia since 1991. The potential local wars outlined here are thus speculative and simply designed to be bigger in scale and scope than armed conflicts. We assume that countries with bigger populations have a bigger escalation potential. Military conflicts involving the armed forces of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan may therefore more easily become local wars than those with forces from the three smaller Central Asian states.

One palpable source of risk for starting a local war is that Russian representatives have repeatedly aired concerns about the Russian minority in north Kazakhstan. In addition, Russia's president has publicly denigrated Kazakhstan's statehood. Astana has taken notice. Perhaps tellingly, Kazakhstan launched a major military exercise, Karatau-2017, when Russia's Armed Forces carried out the annual strategic exercise Zapad-2017 (Norberg 2018:73-74). Furthermore, Nazarbayev's shrewd resignation from the presidency, in March 2019, while preserving his effective control of policymaking as the head of the new Security Council, could also be interpreted, with the northern neighbour in mind, as a precaution.

A Russian response to a local war would probably require reinforcements beyond the initially available forces, the 201 MB, 999 AB and the CSTO forces, which Russia has in the region. They would probably come primarily from Russia's Central MD. Logistics are a key challenge for a Russian deployment and supply of a JISCO to address a local war in the Mountain Zone shown on Map 5.2. An intervention to address a local war in the Mountain Zone involving Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan would probably require smaller Russian resources than if Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan were involved.

A hypothetical war between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan could take place along their border, where Russia lacks forces. A Russian force deployment would probably be mainly from its highly mobile airborne forces, which can transported by air and are less dependent on ground transport to get to the operational area. Additional forces would have to be transported and supplied primarily by the region's three westernmost railways, that is, if Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan allow such transports.

Another potential local war could be one between Russia and either Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan. A Russian military operation in Uzbekistan would need Kazakhstan's consent to enable transports to deploy and supply troops. Probably only the two westernmost railways (shown on Map 5.2) would be relevant. A war with Kazakhstan would be easier for Russia the further north it is. For the Northern Zone (see Map 5.2), proximity to Russia and the availability of infrastructure make transports for a military operation much easier than further

south. Russia's Southern MD and the Caspian Flotilla could also supply forces. A protracted local war – or one that starts to escalate to involve all five Central Asian states, and especially if it starts to involve extra-regional actors, in particular any major world powers – could become a regional war.

6.3 Regional war

There is seemingly low risk of a Central Asian regional war involving external powers, none of which seems to back up its policies in the region with bigger force deployments than required for managing armed conflict. China and Russia are more involved in the region than others. Early 2019 saw few, if any, signs of a major competition between the two regarding security-related issues. Both China and Russia have their respective key security challenges elsewhere. Neither of the two has sizeable forces permanently based in Central Asia that can play any decisive role in a regional war. Among other external actors, the West, after 17 years of inconclusive military operations in Afghanistan, has lost interest in armed interventions in the region. Turkey and Iran seem preoccupied with the war in Syria. There are no significant non-Russian external forces in the region. If any major external actor decides to increase its military presence significantly, others would have time to notice and act accordingly.

It is hard to perceive a potentially adversarial power moving sizeable forces into Central Asia from south or east of the region, the only two directions possible. To the north is Russia, to the west is the Caspian Sea. From the Mongolian border in the east to the Caspian Sea in the west, an adversary from the south would have to move sizeable forces across the Tien Shan, Hindu Kush and Pamir mountain ranges, with limited supporting infrastructure such as railways or roads. Still, if such an adversary were to materialize in southern Central Asia and head north, it would have to travel 1,500 kilometres across the Flatland and Northern Zones (shown on Map 5.2) to reach Russia. In the Northern Zone (Map 5.2), Russia's Armed Forces can fight with almost the same home advantage as in Russia. Russia thus hardly needs to prepare a response in the form of a large-scale operation in Central Asia to stave off a threat to its own territory.

In addition to Russian forces in Central Asia and forces earmarked for the CSTO and from the Central MD, a regional war in Central Asia, as probably any regional war near Russia, would require reinforcements from other Russian MDs. In a regional war against a peer military power rival such as China or NATO, Russia's posture has three echelons: firstly, Russian forces in Central Asia (201 MB and the 999 AB), possibly with regional CSTO forces; secondly, forces from the Central MD and, thirdly, forces from other MDs.

To conclude, it is hard to perceive potential military conflicts above the scale and scope of local war in Central Asia. Should such a conflict nevertheless materialize, it will probably not threaten Russia's territory.

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7. Conclusions

In 2018, FOI produced a report about Russian policy and military posture in the Caucasus (Hedenskog et al. 2018) that illustrated how Russia maintains a sphere of interest in a region that, since 1991, has seen more and larger conflicts than Central Asia. This report on Russia's approach to Central Asia offers another illustration of how Russia operationalizes such a perceived sphere of interest in the Post-Soviet area. Russia obviously has an interest in influencing security in both the Caucasus and Central Asia. Moscow has adapted the execution of that approach to each region's unique circumstances. These conclusions evolve around six comparisons between the regions.

Firstly, Russia's military posture, and initially available assets, in the South Caucasus clearly pertain to a regional war in a region that is geographically close both to Russia and the ever-unstable Middle East. In Central Asia, Russia's military posture is about crisis management in armed conflict or the initial stages of a local war. Its assets for regional war – significant assets such as theatre air defence missiles, air power and surface-to-surface missiles – are located in Russia, some 1,500 kilometres north.

Secondly, there are no known Russian nuclear weapons-related support installations in the Caucasus. Central Asia has several. Russia's nuclear weapons probably deter many adversaries from engaging its forces above a certain level. That deterrence and Central Asia's geography, which effectively prevents potential adversaries of Russia from deploying major forces there, together reduce Russia's need for a military posture in the region above an ability for crisis management. Russia's nuclear weapons are also the most substantial underpinnings of its world power aspirations. A credible nuclear weapons capability requires that related systems, such as missile defence radars and communication nodes, for example in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan respectively, work properly. This is probably a reason for a continued Russian military involvement and a motive for Russia to seek stability in Central Asia. Russia's military posture in Central Asia is thus primarily at the lowest and highest levels of potential military conflict, armed conflict and global, even nuclear, war. In the Caucasus, Russian military posture is ultimately about a regional war.

A third comparison regards Russia's establishment of military bases, often in zones of so-called frozen conflicts. In the Caucasus, Russia has done so in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, against the wishes of the government in Tbilisi. Together with the base in Armenia, these bases give Russia the potential to act outside its own territory with ground forces equal to a potential three-brigade-size army corps. In Central Asia, there have been fewer opportunities to engineer frozen conflicts, or fewer conflicts to take advantage of

in order to increase Russian influence. Russia has only one base, the 201 MB in Tajikistan, roughly equivalent in size to one of the Russian military bases in the South Caucasus. Russia thus has less capacity to intervene in potential military conflict in Central Asia than in the Caucasus. Major Russian military assets for intervention are much further away from southern Central Asia, the most volatile zone, than from restive areas in the Caucasus, especially in the South Caucasus.

The fact that Moscow has an agreement with the government in Dushanbe about its military presence in Tajikistan leads to the fourth comparison: how countries perceive Russia. The South Caucasus states' perceptions of Russia range from more or less enmity in Georgia to Armenia's reluctant partnership. Azerbaijan's rich energy resources have made it possible for Baku to develop a foreign policy more independently from Moscow. The Central Asian states are apprehensive about Russian influence, especially after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, in 2014. Our general impression is nevertheless that the five states perceive Russia as more of a partner than the South Caucasus states do. A key reflection in the region, however, is that a potential Russian military intervention in a conflict may lead to an unwanted permanent Russian military presence after the conflict has ended. Central Asian leaders have clearly observed what has happened in the Caucasus.

The fifth point is geography. The Caucasus (including Russia's North Caucasus) is small compared to the huge territories of Central Asia. In both regions, however, geography protects Russia against major conventional ground-forces-centric operations. The Greater Caucasus mountain range provides a *de facto* barrier to any sizeable ground force. Central Asia's massive flatlands provide a strategic depth, in addition to a mountain range barrier in the south.

In all, Russia has fairly successfully combined its security policy goals and military posture in two different and diverse regions of the former Soviet Union, in line with stated policy ambitions. Other external actors have not in any decisive way opposed the gradual emergence of a *Pax Russica* in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

A final point of comparison is that in the Caucasus Russia is the most engaged global actor. This is no longer the case in Central Asia, where China's influence is increasing at Russia's expense, although it is unlikely that China will overtake Russia's role in the security sphere anytime soon. In the future, however, there is little reason to believe that Central Asia will exclusively remain a part of the Russian world, which means that Russia may have to reconsider some of the ways it engages with post-Soviet space in general and Central Asia in particular.

Appendix 1 – Backgrounds

The Tajik civil war 1992-1997

The Tajik civil war began in May 1992, when regional groups from the Garm and Gorno-Badakhshan regions rose up against President Rahmon Nabiyev's newly-formed government, which was dominated by people from the Leninabad (Khujand) and Kulob regions. The rebel groups were led by a combination of liberal democratic reformers and Islamists, who would later organise under the banner of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). The government was supported by Russian border guards (Pannier 2017).

The main zone of conflict was in the country's south, although disturbances occurred nationwide. The civil war was at its peak during the first year but dragged on for five years, until June 1997, devastating the country. Estimates of casualties vary widely, from 20,000 to 100,000 people were killed and about 10 to 20 per cent of the population internally displaced (Akiner and Barnes 2001).

The UN-moderated peace process that began in 1994 stalled rather soon. By 1996, however, under the threat of the Taliban offensive in Afghanistan, Moscow, together with Tehran, seriously began to seek a political compromise that would end the civil war. On 23 December 1996, an agreement was signed between President Rahmon and the UTO leader, Said Abdullo Nuri, on the creation of a Commission of National Reconciliation (CNR). (Jonson 2009: 45). On 27 June 1997, Tajikistan president Rahmon, UTO leader Sayid Abdulloh Nuri and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General Gerd Merrem signed the *"General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan"* and the *"Moscow Protocol"*, in Moscow, ending the war (Global Security n.d.).

The Events in Kyrgyzstan 2010

The first phase of the Kyrgyz revolution of 2010 took place in early April, in the north of the country. On 5 April, a prominent opposition figure was arrested and briefly detained by the authorities in Talas, in northwest Kyrgyzstan. Soon after, during the night of 6 April, a wave of looting, arson and shooting broke out, mainly in Bishkek but with some disturbances in Talas. The following day, thousands of anti-government demonstrators gathered in the main city square in Bishkek. Marauders, some with firearms, continued to attack people and property indiscriminately. There were reports of victims being clubbed to death. Within some 24 hours, an estimated 89 people had been killed, many of them shot by snipers from the security forces, and more than 1,500 injured. President Bakiyev fled to the south of the country and on 8 April, an Interim Government, headed

by Roza Otunbayeva, was established. On 16 April, Bakiyev formally resigned and left Kyrgyzstan, going first to neighbouring Kazakhstan, then to Belarus.

Less than a month later, the second phase of the conflict began. The action moved to the south, where pro-Bakiyev forces (reportedly ethnic Kyrgyz) seized control of public buildings in Jalal-Abad and expelled the local governor. The following day, armed Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis, supporters of the Interim Government, attacked the pro-Bakiyev insurgents, regained control of the buildings and re-instated the governor. Thus, the political struggle between pro- and anti-Bakiyev activists was now cross-cut by an ethnic confrontation between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities in the south, with the Uzbeks supporting the predominantly northern Interim Government against the predominantly southern Bakiyev faction. The following days, pro-Bakiyev forces staged further protests in Jalal-Abad, Osh and Batken, during which two more people were killed and dozens injured.

The third and most devastating phase of the conflict took place in southwest Kyrgyzstan, in a narrow band of territory along the border with Uzbekistan. This was where the majority of the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani population was located and it was here that the conflict lost all semblance of a political struggle, becoming instead an outright inter-ethnic confrontation. The epicentre of the conflict was Osh, but nearby towns and villages were also badly affected, particularly in and around Jalal-Abad. In many ways, it was like a re-run of the conflict that had taken place in this same area twenty years earlier, in 1990. This new phase of the conflict was precipitated by what appeared to be a gang-related crime. Many of the victims were women, children and elderly people. There were numerous reports that the main assailants were young men wearing distinctive items such as white masks, black vests, or special armbands. It was also repeatedly noted that Kyrgyz police and military took part in the attacks on the ethnic Uzbek community.

The Interim Government was initially overwhelmed by the crisis, but then took steps to regain control of the situation. On 12 June 2010, it issued an emergency decree granting the security forces the right to use lethal force. Other measures included the partial mobilization of the military and the formation of citizens' defence groups. There were numerous Kyrgyz casualties, but most accounts confirm that the overwhelming majority of the victims were ethnic Uzbeks (Akiner 2016: 52-56). An independent international commission of inquiry into the events of June 2010 in southern Kyrgyzstan established the death toll at 470, of whom 74 per cent were Uzbeks, with thousands of people injured. Uzbek authorities indicated that they received nearly 111,000 displaced persons, the majority of whom were women and children. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimated that 300,000 people were internally displaced in other parts of Kyrgyzstan during the events. Most the refugees had returned to their homes by mid-July 2010 (Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Mission 2010: 44-46).

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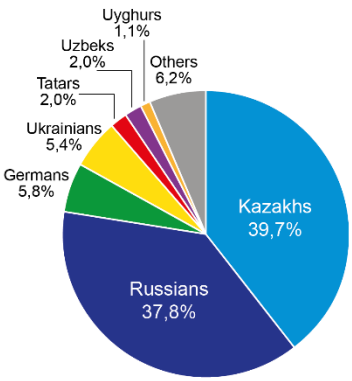
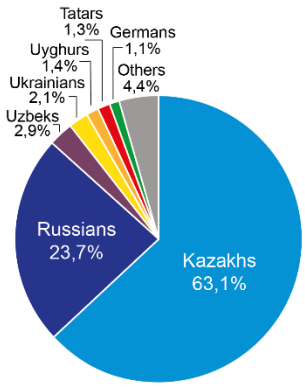
Appendix 2 – Ethnic composition of the Central Asian states

The Kazakh SSR (Total population: 16,5 mil)
Main ethnic groups in the last Soviet census, in 1989

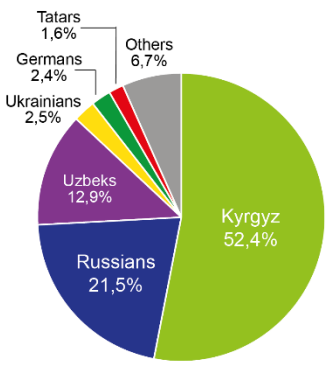


Kazakhstan (Total population 2009: 16 mil)
Main ethnic groups according to latest census

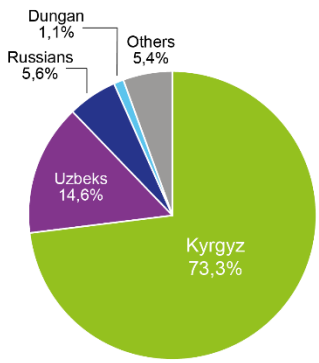


Sources: Demoscope Weekly (n.d.); the Agency of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2011)

The Kyrgyz SSR (Total population: 4,3 mil)
Main ethnic groups in the last Soviet census, in 1989

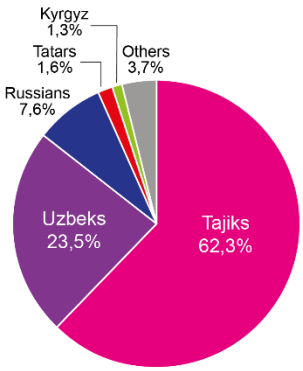


Kyrgyzstan (Total population 2018: 6,3 mil)
Main ethnic groups according to latest census

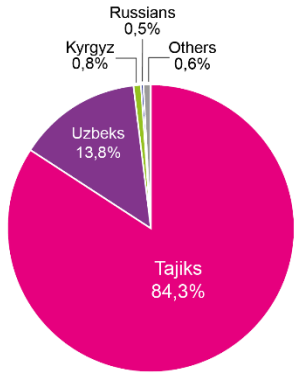


Sources: Demoscope Weekly (n.d.); National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (n.d.)

The Tajik SSR (Total population 5,1 mil)
Main ethnic groups in the last Soviet census, in 1989

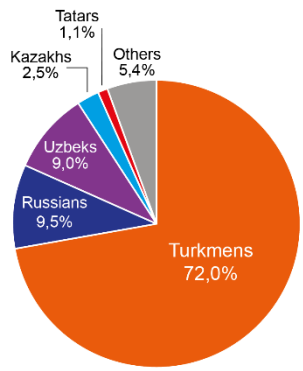


Tajikistan (Total population 2010: 7,5 mil)
Main ethnic groups according to latest census

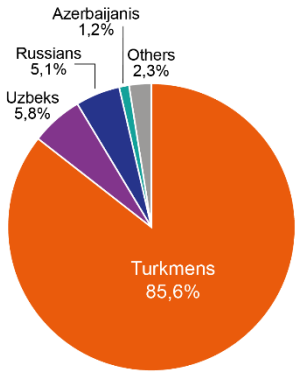


Sources: Demoscope Weekly (n.d.); the Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan (2010)

The Turkmen SSR (Total population 3,5 mil)
Main ethnic groups in the last Soviet census, in 1989

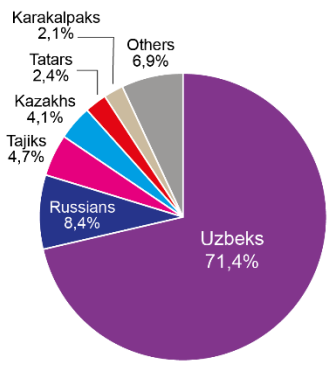


Turkmenistan (Total population 2012: 4,7 mil)
Main ethnic groups according to latest census

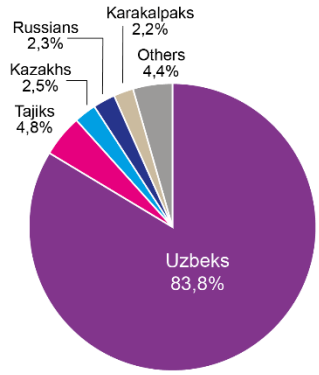


Sources: Demoscope Weekly (n.d.); Chronicles of Turkmenistan (2015)
Note: * The results of the 2012 Turkmenistan census have not been fully officially released.

The Uzbek SSR (Total population: 19,8 mil)
Main ethnic groups in the last Soviet census, in 1989



Uzbekistan (Total population 2017: 32,1 mil)
Main ethnic groups according to latest census



Sources: Demoscope Weekly (n.d.); the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics (2017)

Graphs: Jules Bergman

Sources

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Appendix 3 - List of interviews

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 23-25 May 2018

American University of Central Asia

General Staff, Ministry of Defence

Ministry of Economics

Honorary Consulate of Sweden

US Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic

Embassy of Turkey

Diplomatic Academy

Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

OSCE Academy

Embassy of Uzbekistan

Almaty, Kazakhstan 28 May 2018

Honorary Consulate of Sweden

Al-Farabi Kazakh National University

Institute of Asian Studies

Astana, Kazakhstan, 29-30 May 2018

Embassy of Sweden

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Nazarbayev University

Military Strategic Studies Centre

Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan

EU Delegation

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

US Embassy in Kazakhstan

Asia Development Bank

Moscow, Russia, 26-28 June 2018

Embassy of Sweden

Vedomosti

EJ.ru

Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST)

Moscow State Institute for International Relations (MGIMO)

Novaia gazeta

Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO)

Dialogue of Civilizations

Centre for Caucasian and Central Asian Studies, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IVRAN)

Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 27 September – 3 October 2018

Embassy of Sweden (Stockholm-based)

Honorary Consulate of Sweden (to be appointed)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Ministry of Defence

Center for International Relations Studies (under the MFA)

Inst for Strategic and Reg Studies under the President of the Rep of Uzbekistan

US Embassy in Uzbekistan

Delegation of the European Union to Uzbekistan

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

The World Bank

British Embassy

Embassy of Switzerland in Uzbekistan

United Nations (UNDP, UNODC, UNRCCA)

Avesta Investment Group

Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 14-16 October 2018

Embassy of Sweden (Stockholm-based)

Embassy of the Republic of Belarus

Embassy of France

British Embassy

US Embassy in Tajikistan

Delegation of the European Union to Tajikistan

The Aga Khan Development Network

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

European Bank for Development and Reconstruction (EBDR)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan

Russia's political leadership is explicit about its ambition to create an exclusive sphere of interest throughout the former Soviet Union. This report provides analysis of Russia's approach – that is, of the interplay between policy and military posture – to conflict drivers in Central Asia since 2014. It also compares Russia's operationalizing of its perceived spheres of interest in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which was the subject of a previous report by the same authors.

Central Asia's relatively positive political dynamic since the change in power in Uzbekistan in 2016 has arguably reduced the risk of military conflicts. The Central Asian states and external powers, such as Russia, China, Iran, Turkey and the West, prioritise stability, a contrast to Syria where some of the same the external powers remain at loggerheads. The discussion in the report is therefore largely about hypothetical military conflicts in Central Asia.

See also:

Hedenskog, Jakob; Holmquist, Erika and Norberg, Johan (2018) Security in the Caucasus: Russian policy and military posture, FOI: Stockholm, FOI-R--4567--SE, February.

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