Central Asia Wars and Ethnic Conflicts – Rebuilding Failed States

Barnett R. Rubin

2004/11

Regional Paper: Central Asia
Wars and Ethnic Conflicts – Rebuilding Failed States[*]

Barnett R. Rubin
February 19, 2004

The early 1990s saw the development of a new regional state system in Central Asia.
The breakup of the Soviet Union created five newly independent states out of the Soviet
Republics between the steppe and the Amu Darya. It also led to the collapse of both the
Soviet-supported government in Afghanistan and of the Soviet-supported military
structures that had formed the core of state power in Afghanistan.[2]

The processes at work resembled the breakup of colonial empires on other continents,
notably Africa. In both places, the process of changing colonial administrations into
nation-states was beset with conflicts and challenges to the legitimacy and capacity of the
new states and their ruling elites from both within and without. Soviet policies, in
particular its nationalities policy and the tight economic integration of the Soviet space,
determined a particular range of outcomes that differed from other post-colonial regions.
The outcome also differed significantly in Afghanistan, which was not politically
incorporated into the Soviet metropole.

Violent conflicts affected parts of post-Soviet Central Asia, especially those areas linked
in one way or another to the ongoing violence and socio-political fragmentation in
Afghanistan. These linkages included the mobilization of transnational cultural
identities, both ethnic and religious.   The linkage of contiguous conflicts into a regional
conflict formation resembled processes in other parts of the world, in particular a number
of regions of Africa. Conflicts in the Great Lakes region, where the worst political
violence of the 1990s occurred, were also linked by a variety of networks of
communication and exchange.

While the spread and escalation of conflict through the construction and mobilization of
transnational identities was common to Central Africa and Central Asia, the specific
patterns of identity conflict differed both between and within the regions. Rwanda and
Burundi both differed from most post-colonial countries, whether in Central Asia or
Africa, in emerging from colonialism with a harshly hierarchical division between only
two major groups, a dominant Tutsi minority and a Hutu majority. This bipolar social
structure appears to be the type that is prone to the most violent conflict among identity
groups.[3] In Burundi, the Tutsis have remained dominant through military regimes, while

in Rwanda, a Hutu-power "revolution" placed a populist regime in power from 1959 to 1994. While these identities built on elements of pre-colonial social structure, the Belgian colonial regime made only these identities rather than others politically relevant, made them far more rigid and unequal, and identified them with categories of European racialist theory. The Tutsis, supposedly of "Hamitic" stock were considered practically white, while the Hutus were considered to be of inferior "Bantu" race. This racialist ideology eventually legitimated genocide both in Europe, where it was developed, and in Africa, where it was implanted, though the ideology alone does not explain the genocides.[4]

Compared to the Caucasus or the Balkans, Central Asia (excepting Afghanistan) has not experienced the highest level of violence in post-communist or post-Soviet transitions, and the Great Lakes clearly exceeds even Afghanistan in the pervasiveness of political violence, much of it justified in the name of one identity or another. But the persistence and threat of conflict has determined much of the political evolution of both regions. The episodes of violence derive from inter-related processes at the local, national, regional, and global levels connected by a variety of networks, leading some to call this type of war "network war."[5] Mobilized cultural identities have played important roles in some of these networks, but the identities most relevant to conflict have not always corresponded to theories of ethnic or cultural determinism.

In Central Asia, the main lines of conflict have often not involved clashes of named ethnic groups against each other. Such identities, often fractured, competed for loyalty with more tightly-knit local identities or solidarity groups. Nor did civilizationalist ideologies form the main lines of antagonism: political Islam became effective only when organized around local identities, and few if any clashes opposed the indigenous peoples to the Russian-speaking settler peoples of Christian heritage in Central Asia.[6]

The major conflict that now determines the fate of the region, that between the United States and al-Qaida, owes its origins less to the politics of the region itself than to the increasing globalization of conflicts. Yet even a global organization like al-Qaida finds that it can root itself in an area only through alliances with groups motivated by intensely particularistic concerns, such as those of the tribes of the Afghan-Pakistan border region.

In Central Africa, the distinction between Hutus and Tutsis is largely political rather than cultural (ethnic). Within each country, both peoples speak the same Bantu languages (Kinyarawanda and Kirundi, which are mutually intelligible), and formed part of the same pre-colonial states. Mamdani argues that these identities were originally categories

---

[4] Mamdani, Mahmood. *Contemporary Africa And The Legacy of Late Colonialism*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996) 39-34; Prunier, Gérard. *The Rwanda Crisis : History of a Genocide.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1995; Des Forges, Alison Liebhafsky, Human Rights Watch, and Fédération internationale des droits de l'homme. *"Leave None to Tell the Story": Genocide in Rwanda.* New York; Paris: Human Rights Watch; International Federation of Human Rights, 1999; Lemarchand, René. *Rwanda and Burundi.* New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970.

[5], Mark R. Duffield, *Global governance and the New Wars : the Merging of Development and Security.* London ; New York; New York: Zed Books; Distributed in the USA exclusively by Palgrave, 2001.

[6] Olivier Roy, *La Nouvelle Asie Centrale, ou, La Fabrication des Nations.* Paris: Seuil, 1997; Roy, *The New Central Asia : the creation of nations.* New York: New York University Press, 2000.

of political status in relation to chieftancies rather than ethno-cultural groups, though they have now taken on some of the qualities of the latter.[7] The ethnicization or even racialization of these identities has been largely the consequence rather than the cause of state policies and political conflict. These processes illustrate the extent to which culture is constructed through politics, rather than the reverse.

<u>Identity and Power</u>

All six states in Central Asia have titular nationalities, that is, they are named after ethnic groups and were established as "homelands" of those ethnic groups. These groups attained the status of "nationalities" within the Soviet Union because of their supposed level of development and territorial characteristics. While the Soviet doctrine of nationality formation linked each republic to a particular eponymous nationality, the relation of the titular nationality to the republics and their successor states is much more complex than simple ethnic domination.

Sub-Saharan African states, mostly established as colonial administrative units over non-contiguous overseas empires with no doctrine of self-determination, generally do not have titular nationalities. The closest equivalent, strangely enough, the "Bantustans" of apartheid South Africa, show in their name that they were imposed by non-Africans who adopted Soviet terminology to refer to a colonialist practice they tried to legitimate by nationalist doctrine.[8] Rwanda and Burundi, unlike most African states, descended from similarly located and named pre-colonial kingdoms, and were dominated by one or another ethnicized status group.

Afghanistan may be the land of the Afghans, and "Afghans" may have originally denoted "Pashtuns," but all of these terms are contested. While a few diehard opponents of Pashtun hegemony occasionally call for the country's name to be changed (to "Ariana" or "Khurasan"), most focus on changing the meaning of "Afghan." The rise of Afghan national identity in the post-Taliban period has coincided with an insistence by members of all ethnic groups that "Afghan" is a non-ethnic term, denoting citizens of Afghanistan, as Afghanistan's new constitution will state. Though Pashtuns are in a sense the people of the state (Staatsvolk), they are no longer the people of the government and feel correspondingly even more excluded. This exclusion manifests itself in growing support for the neo-Taliban and in a low level of participation in the political processes sponsored by the Kabul government under the Bonn Agreement.

The Pashtun character of the Afghan state never attained the pervasiveness of a Soviet-style nationalities policy. Power was always exercised by a small group -- royal family, Muhammadzai clan, and a few allies under the monarchy, a party faction or a tightly –

---

[7] Mamdani, *Contemporary Africa*, 39-34.

[8] Rwanda and Burundi have aspects of nationally named states. Some even claim that Rwandan and Burundian are ethno-nationalities, while Hutus and Tutsis are political statuses, not ethnicities. The debate mainly illustrates that European political categories sometimes apply only problematically to other societies, which have different cognitive and symbolic structures. The problem is as much a political as an intellectual one. Colonial and imperial powers imposed these categories through their policies. They were not simply analytical mistakes committed by academics.

knit group of ulama under the Khalqis and the Taliban, two other Pashtun dominated, indeed almost mono-ethnic, regimes. The state did not implement a comprehensive set of nationality policies designed to identify the ethnic group with the state in the style of Soviet or post-Habsburg Europe. None of the Afghan regimes made ethno-nationalism into a full-blown state ideology. Unlike in the Balkans, religion linked groups across ethnic divides, rather than reinforcing and sacralizing such differences. The penetration of the state into the society was too weak for any such policy to affect more than a portion of the urban population and some client groups. Some forms of ethnic politics did develop, but these were based on conspiratorial factionalism rather than mass populism, for which there was no outlet. Ethnic politics remains a practice, rather than an ideology, and it lacks legitimacy, to say nothing of hegemony.

The titular ethnic group did not constitute a clear majority, and, indeed, may have included only a plurality of the population. In the absence of a legal definition of individual membership in ethnic groups, any ethnic (or general) census, or any population registration outside of those living in urban areas or employed by state institutions, no clear data existed on the ethnic composition of the population. The emigration of as much of a third of the population for over a generation has further clouded the issue by making the definition of the "population" unclear. Since neither the denominator nor the numerator is well defined or based on reliable data, ethnic percentages in Afghanistan are – deservedly -- contested.[9]

In the Soviet system non-ethnic Soviet citizenship coexisted with legally recognized ethno-national identity, which included a kind of quasi-citizenship for those who were members of the titular groups of any of the republics or of the lesser autonomous republics, regions, or districts. Soviet censuses counted the members of each recognized nationality, the number of which decreased with each succeeding census. The Soviet government constructed the officially recognized nationalities out of more fragmented and fluid groups. In many cases it created new ethno-linguistic identities by transforming Persian into "Tajik," Chaghatai Turki into "Uzbek," and so on.[10] The entire population was registered with the state, and each individual was identified as a member of a single "nationality" based on parentage on his internal passport. Hence the state systematically suppressed multiple identities. Membership in the titular nationality of a republic or territory provided certain advantages in education and employment within the institutions controlled by that administrative unit. At the same time, the republics were not states but territorial divisions of the USSR, on whose territories the all-Union ministries and entities based in Moscow had the most power and offered superior opportunities for career advancement in many fields. A Russian-speaking all-Union elite based in the Communist party and state apparatus based on non-ethnic Soviet citizenship dominated the republics but also competed in each one with the local "national" elite. Russian-speaking minorities settled primarily in the capital cities of the Central Asian republics,

---

[9] The CIA Factbook claims that Pashtuns are 44 percent of the population of Afghanistan, but I have so far been unable to determine how the CIA defines Pashtuns, how it defines the population of Afghanistan, or what data this assertion is based on.

[10] Alisher Ilkhamov, "Sarts and 'Uzbek' Nomads: Their Role in Formation of the Modern Uzbek Identity." Paper presented at SSRC/CERMOC workshop, Beirut, February 2001.

as employees of these all-Union entities, including both the security organs and the industrial apparatus, which was closely connected to the defense system.[11]

The relations between the Russian speakers and the indigenous nationalities constitute the only potential "racial" issue in the region. The proportionately large Russian-speaking populations of Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic, however, also included sizable numbers of descendants of internal Soviet exiles and of agricultural settlers on pasture land that became available for cultivation as a result of the forcible settlement of nomads during Stalin's collectivization drive. This policy resulted in as many deaths as any other brutal colonial policy (possibly over a million in Kazakhstan), but unlike other colonial powers, the Soviet Union was at least equally brutal to its own core nation of ethnic Russians. This classic pattern of settler colonialism, along with the establishment of Union-controlled heavy industry, accounts for the predominantly Russian-speaking population of northern Kazakhstan, a population that is contiguous with Siberia.

This Russian-speaking population now has a feeling of exclusion from state power, as the political elites of the newly independent states are almost exclusively derived from the titular nationalities, as are the symbols of these states and their national languages. Yet this population has not participated in or been the object of mass violent conflict in any independent Central Asian state. Migration, which peaked in 1995, has reduced its relative numbers, as every Soviet nationality has tended to remigrate to its titular state in the post-Soviet period. The cultural and educational Russification of the political and cultural elites in every Central Asian state has also perpetuated an environment in which Russian-speakers could continue to work professionally. Even in Kazakhstan, where all the ingredients existed for a Russian Milosevic to create a civil war, no such conflict occurred. If Central Asian Islam has "bloody borders," in Huntington's term, the blood is mainly that of fellow Muslims.[12]

The groups involved in "ethnic conflict" in this region are predominantly Muslim in heritage. Some speak Turkic and others Iranian languages. Some have predominantly nomadic heritage, as do the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen, while others have predominantly settled (urban and agricultural) societies for millennia, as do Uzbeks and Tajiks. Virtually all are Hanafi Sunni Muslims. Bi- and multi-lingualism is common in the region, as is ethnic intermarriage, at least compared with the Balkans or the Caucasus. There are relatively few cultural differences among many of these groups, despite their different linguistic heritage. Uzbeks and Tajiks, for instance, claim many of the same figures as key to their cultural heritage. Though they speak structurally and genetically unrelated languages, they share much vocabulary, most of Persian and Arabic origin. One would be hard-pressed to identify differences of culture or values that underlie conflicts among political groups based on ethnic identity. Throughout the region, the main sources of conflict are over who gains access to the relatively scarce resources of power and wealth. Identity politics plays both instrumental and affective roles in this

Comment: Check. --- Dr. Rubin. I found the following at allRefer Reference: In 1936 the territory was made a full Soviet republic. From 1929 to 1934, during the period when Soviet leader Joseph V. Stalin was trying to collectivize agriculture, Kazakstan endured repeated famines because peasants had slaughtered their livestock in protest against Soviet agricultural policy. In that period, at least 1.5 million Kazaks and 80 percent of the republic's livestock died. Thousands more Kazaks tried to escape to China, although most starved in the attempt. – Is this what you were referring to in your article?

---

[11] Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, and George Washington University, Washington, D.C. Institute for Sino-Soviet Studies. *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia; The Case of Tadzhikistan.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970.

[12] Samuel P Huntington,. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

struggle, and it should not be dismissed solely as a crude invention of manipulative elites, but it is very far from constituting a satisfactory explanation for the patterns of conflict or for presenting a coherent road map of how to overcome them.

Within the region, states exhibit different degrees of ethnic dominance in population statistics. Both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have populations over 70 percent of which is registered as belonging to the titular nationality. The percentage in Tajikistan is just over 60 percent.[13] In parts of both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan the boundaries between Uzbek and Tajik identities are quite porous, and those with a choice tend to opt for the titular nationality. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan, the titular nationality (to the extent that Pashtuns are one in Afghanistan) constitutes a bare majority or only a plurality and may be a minority in urban areas.

Ethnic identity, however, is not always the strongest political identity. As in Afghanistan, smaller solidarity groups based on locality, kinship, or a combination of the two remain at the core of political action.[14] Despite Soviet penetration of the northern portion, the indigenous ethnic groups of this entire area have maintained strongly patriarchal and patrilineal family structures, and the post-Soviet period has seen a strengthening of such structures among the indigenous nationalities. This is reflected in the deterioration in Central Asia of women's rates of education and a lowering of the age of marriage.[15] In societies with such kinship structures, often reinforced by cross-cousin marriage, kinship-based relations such as clan or tribe are often very powerful. Even relations that are organized around formal institutions, such as government institutions or political parties, tend to be reinforced through arranged marriages among families of political allies, creating kinship bonds that often supercede the formal relations. In the elites of communist and post-communist societies of Central Asia, such "clan" structures have been organized around the territorial units of administration and production.[16] In Afghanistan they have grown up around militia leadership and other forms of power. This form of solidarity accounts for the influence of groups such as Panjsheris, Kulabis, Qandaharis, Samarqandis, Narin Kyrgyz, and others. Such units of solidarity are usually more important and effective than whole ethnic groups. The solidarity of such units against their competitors is not rooted in cultural difference of conflict, since their closest competitors share exactly the same culture. That is why they are competing for the same things. Such units are also largely devoid of ideological meaning or sanctity, unlike in societies that practice ancestor worship. They are effective units of solidarity and control of resources, however. Even if they do not include most members of an ethnic group, they can effectively exclude all members of other ethnic groups, giving rise to an ethnic reaction to sub-ethnic behavior.

---

[13] Nunn et al. *Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central Asia*; (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 1999), 35-37, Table 3.1 and 3.2.

[14] Roy, *La Nouvelle Asie Centrale;* Rubin, "Russian hegemony and sate breakdown in the periphery: causes and consequences of the civil war," in *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State Building.* London; New York: Routledge, 1998.

[15] Farangiz Najibullah, *Central Asia: Women's Rights Activists Push for Higher Marriage Age*, Washington, D.C.: Radio Free Europe, 2003.

[16] Rubin, Jack Snyder, "Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown," in *Post-Soviet Political Order*, 143-148.

The use of kinship-based patronage networks as structures to control power or resources is common to many societies. Such smaller groups often use broader ethnic appeals to legitimate their narrow grip on power. A similar pattern exists in Rwanda and Burundi. The Hutu elite of the Habyarimana regime (the Akazu, or household) came almost entirely from the northwest province of Gisenyi. It was kept together in part by a kinship-patronage network organized around Habyarimana's wife. The Tutsi military elite of Burundi comes largely from the province of Bururi, south of Bujumbura. Most of the Hutus in the military also come from Bururi, from clans with links of patronage with the Bururi Tutsis. Major political decisions in the country often must be vetted with the Tutsi elders of Bururi. Struggle among different clans or regional groupings within the Hutu and Tutsi groups provide part of the back story of the conflicts in those two countries.

Identity and Conflict

Since the independence of Central Asia, there have been roughly speaking three sets of violent conflicts in the region, though all of them are closely linked, involve some of the same actors, and are part of a common regional conflict formation. They need to be considered both separately and in relation to each other. They are: the constantly changing war in and around Afghanistan; the civil war in Tajikistan; and the Islamist rebellion mainly recruiting from the Ferghana Valley and directed against the government of Uzbekistan, but with activities on the territories of several states. The conflict between the U.S. and al-Qaida is of a different type and magnitude. On the one hand it is derived primarily from grievances based in the Muslim world outside this region, and its main theaters of operations are elsewhere. On the other hand, it originated among the foreign mujahidin recruited for Afghanistan as part of the US-Pakistan-Saudi joint operation against the Soviets, and , after the May 1996 return of Usama bin Laden to Afghanistan, it became entangled as a global dimension of the conflict in Afghanistan, and that is mainly how it will be treated here. Of course there are many other forms of political conflict in Central Asia, some ethnic and some not, but these are the major cases of political violence.

The Great Lakes region refers here inductively to Rwanda, Burundi, and the areas around them that have become involved in the conflicts there, largely through their linkage to the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire). The conflicts in the region that have triggered and escalated others have been the polarized violent conflicts between Hutu and Tutsi-led movements in Rwanda and Burundi, which in turn exacerbated the more amorphous conflict that developed in Zaire. The conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi revolved around control of political power by Hutu or Tutsi political elites. The elites and populations of both countries learned lessons from the experience of the other, usually aggravating the conflicts. After the Rwandan genocide (1994), and the establishment of Rwandan Hutu-power and genocidaire military bases in Eastern Zaire, the conflict spread and eventually engulfed the whole DRC and the surrounding area. As in Central Asia (and a number of other regions), conflicts seemingly originating in national or sub-national dynamics, spread across borders to link up in a regional conflict formation. Just as in Central Asia, militias became involved in conflicts of regional

dimension, seeking to control valuable resources, and participating in the fights of allied groups in neighboring countries.

The most remarkable characteristic of the conflict in Afghanistan was the rapidity with which it changed in structure. Within the span of a few months at the beginning of 1992 it changed from an apparently bipolar conflict between a communist regime supported by the USSR and Islamic mujahidin supported by the US, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia to a multipolar ethnic conflict. This shift constituted almost a controlled experiment, showing which elements of the structure of conflict were constant and which varied with external factors. The structures that did not change were the units of solidarity based on clan, kinship, and region. These militias stayed together in more or less the same form. Each also had a mono-ethnic composition, but was in fact more narrowly based and could not claim to represent an entire ethnic group. What changed abruptly were the alliances among them and the cause for which they were allegedly fighting. Former communists allied with (former) Islamists along primarily ethnic lines. In the course of the years 1992-1996, every one of the four major contending militias was at various times both an ally and an opponent of each other militia. The rise of the Taliban finally drove them all back together, temporarily, just before all were defeated by the new movement.

That movement in turn, while presenting itself as a purely Islamic movement, was dominated by a small group of Deobandi mullahs from Qandahar trained in the same madrasas.[17] The opposition was led by a clan from Panjsher, loosely allied with militias based in other parts of the northern and central regions. The war with the Taliban thus turned into a kind of ethnic conflict between a Pashtun-led and non-Pashtun led force, and both sides made use of ethnic appeals from time to time. Violence by monoethnic militias against "enemy" populations fomented a new level of ethnic resentment. Nonetheless, local and familial loyalties tended to trump ethnic ones. In 1997, for instance, Uzbek militia leader Abdul Malik Pahlawan allied with the Taliban to oust his rival Uzbek militia leader Abdul Rashid Dostum from Mazar-i Sharif, since he suspected Dostum of having assassinated his brother.

Within former Soviet Central Asia the poor fit between a model of "ethnic" conflict and the actual types of conflict is even more evident. During the late Soviet period there were two exceedingly bloody incidents of apparently ethnic conflict in different parts of the Ferghana Valley, a geographical unit divided by the Soviet authorities among the republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kirgizia (as it was then called). The Ferghana riots of 1989 started with and were publicized as attacks (virtual pogroms) by Uzbeks against a small group known as Meskhetian Turks. These Turks, natives of Georgia, were deported to Central Asia en masse by Stalin as one of the nationalities he suspected of sympathizing with the Nazis. Uzbeks in Ferghana, however, mainly remember these events as consisting of demonstrations for the sovereignty of Uzbekistan which were

[17] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia.* New Haven, Conn. ; London: Yale Nota Bene, Yale University Press, 2001.

suppressed violently by Soviet troops. There has been little, if any, violence against those Meskhetian Turks who remained in Uzbekistan.[18]

The ethnic character of the "Osh events" in southern Kyrgyzstan in 1990 was even clearer. A demonstration about land by nationalist Kyrgyz led to violent clashes and hundreds of brutal killings between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz.[19] These killings were stopped only by the intervention of Soviet troops. Less violent, but following a similar pattern, were riots in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe, set off by a rumor that Armenians fleeing attacks on them in Sumgait, Azerbaijan, were receiving scarce housing. In all these cases, mobs of the titular nationality attacked ethnic scapegoats as the tension over sovereignty of the republics rose.

These incidents had no real sequel after independence, and many in the region today attribute them in part to manipulation by murky Soviet forces trying to discredit the movements for sovereignty. The Meskhetian Turks by and large fled Central Asia and are attempting to resettle in their original homeland in the Caucasus as well as in other areas, where they remain stateless. Tensions persist between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the south of the Kyrgyz Republic, but efforts by the government and civic organizations, as well as by ordinary people who do not want to repeat the events, have prevented any repetition of such bloody conflicts. Few people expect them to be repeated under current conditions, where regional tensions between north and south Kyrgyzstan and the mobilization of Islamist movements are much more imminent sources of political conflict. Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the south have at times made common cause against northern domination of the republic.[20]

There are several ethnic issues in post-Soviet Central Asia today. Some Tajik nationalists claim parts of Uzbekistan (Samarqand and Bukhara in particular) as a lost homeland, and the Tajiks living in these cities have grievances regarding language and education. The Russian-speaking population of Kazakhstan contains a significant portion of people seething with bitterness at the indigenization of the state apparatus and their difficulties of employment, which combine to create a feeling of exclusion among this formerly dominant stratum. Many might feel more comfortable if northern Kazakhstan merged with its Siberian neighbors, and they have sympathizers across the border. Uzbeks constitute the largest Central Asian ethnic minority in each of the other four states, and in each they have a set of conflicts with at least parts of the titular ethnic group.

None of these ethnic issues, however, has sparked mass violence since independence. The civil war in Tajikistan pitted a purely Tajik group (the so-called Islamo-democratic

---

[18] Andrea Armstrong, "Being Recognized as Citizens: a Human Security Dilemma in Central Asia." Paper prepared for Commission on Human Security, December, 2002.
[19] John Schoeberlein, "Bones of Contention," in *Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia*; Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002; Valeriĭ Tishkov, Aleksandrovich, International Peace Research Institute, and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and After The Soviet Union : The Mind Aflame.* London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1997; Nunn et al. *Calming the Ferghana Valley,* 106.
[20]Antonina Zaharova and Nick Megoran, "Osh Ten Years on: Positive Developments in Ethnic Relations," Eurasianet, September 18, 2000, http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav091800.shtml.

alliance) against a Tajik-led coalition including Uzbeks and Russians. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan consisted of a movement led by Uzbeks from the Ferghana Valley, with followers from some other groups as well, fighting against several states mainly in order to attack the regime in Tashkent from bases in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Ethnic and sub-ethnic (or regional) identities played a role in mobilization for these conflicts, but ethnic issues per se (and certainly not cultural diversity or a clash of civilizations) played little role.

The civil war in Tajikistan exhibited a dual character: it was a clash of both ideologies and regional clans. One side consisted of those groups formerly allied with Soviet power (including competing adherents of Moscow and Tashkent), from Leninabad, Kulab, and Hissar, and the other side of those groups, Gharmis and Pamiris, who wished to reconfigure state power in Tajikistan in a more nationalist direction. The nationalist group included both "democrats" and "Islamists," but what united them was a form of Tajik ethno-nationalism.

In Tajikistan itself, the competing forces are more usually identified as regional "clans." Since the late1940s, Tajikistan was ruled by an elite drawn from the northern part of the country (Leninabad, now Soghd, or, after its main city, Khujand). This area is part of the Ferghana Valley and close to Tashkent. It includes a large Uzbek population, and the boundaries between Uzbeks and Tajiks there are quite porous. The Leninabadi elite was thus allied with Tashkent and the Uzbek minority in Tajikistan as well as elements of the ex-Soviet (now Russian) military on its territory. The Islamo-democratic nationalist opposition recruited from "Gharmis," a group from the mountainous areas east of Dushanbe, and Pamiris, groups from the mountainous autonomous province of Gorno-Badakhshan, who are not even Tajik in a purely linguistic sense (they speak a group of Eastern Iranian languages closer to Kurdish and Pashto and are Ismaili rather than Sunni Muslims), but whose culture had been singled out by the Soviet nationalities policy as exemplifying the true ancient ways of the "Tajik."

The harshest clashes took place in southwestern Tajikistan. This formerly arid area was originally inhabited mainly by nomads from the Laqai tribe of Uzbeks, who were amalgamated with other Turki-speaking groups of various descent to form the Soviet category "Uzbek." Starting with the Stalin era, the Soviet state irrigated the area with dams on the Vakhsh river, turning it into part of the Central Asian cotton bowl, and settled Tajiks from Gharm and Kulab there. For various reasons, the Kulabis allied with the Uzbeks in support of the Leninabadis against the Islamo-democratic movement supported by the Gharmis. Tens of thousands of Gharmi refugees and fighters fled into northern Afghanistan, where they were sheltered, trained, and armed by Afghan mujahidin and even by elements of al-Qaida. The war was eventually settled when the advance of the Taliban convinced Russia and Iran, who were supporting opposite sides in Tajikistan, that they needed to settle their differences in Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan to create a more coherent front of resistance to the Taliban and their international Sunni Islamist backers.

This process provides a sketch of how local factors (conflict over access to land, houses, and water among clans in southwest Tajikistan), national factors (the breakdown of

Soviet rule and the construction for the first time of a Tajik nation-state), regional factors (Russian-Uzbek-Iranian rivalry and the ongoing war in Afghanistan), and global factors (the presence of al-Qaida and eventual US interest, worldwide demand for opiates) interacted to create and structure this conflict. Ethnic rivalries, cultural diversity, clashes of civilizations or values all played some role at various levels but are far from causing or determining the structure or outcome of the conflict.

The conflicts originating in the Ferghana Valley as a whole (overlapping with the conflict in Tajikistan) also constitute a type of controlled experiment.[21] A common society was suddenly divided among three states in 1991, with the result that the same social tensions gave rise to different political conflicts. This valley, watered by the Syr Darya and its tributaries, is one of the most densely populated areas of Central Asia. It includes several major cities with ancient histories as political and cultural centers, which also became industrial centers under Soviet rule. The Soviet government also built major irrigation works there, turning the area into one of the centers of Soviet cotton production.

Division into three states, combined with its separation from the Soviet centrally administered division of labor, which had been eroding since the start of perestroika, had more severe consequences for the Ferghana Valley than even for most other areas of Central Asia. Many industrial plants closed, and the cotton producers had to find new markets. The area was overtaken by mass unemployment and a new kind of impoverishment. Crime rose in many of the cities.

These social ills were common to the parts of Ferghana in all three states. Yet they led to different patterns of political mobilization and protest in each state, depending on the demographic and political structures of the three states, as well as the regional environment. In all three states, the elite factions or clans associated with Ferghana lost power within the republics, but this combination of economic decline and political marginalization had different consequences in each state. The one consequence they have had in common, however, has been the recent growth of the transnational Islamist group Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

In Tajikistan, as already noted, the main form of conflict consisted of "regionalism" among major Tajik "clans." The Northern Leninabadi or Khujandi clan based in Ferghana and closely linked to Uzbekistan was part of the alliance that defeated the Gharmis and Pamiris but then lost out to the Kulabis, who were more closely allied to Russia. Since the settlement of the basic power structure of independent Tajikistan (Kulabi dominance backed by Russia), this conflict has led to several incidents of violence, including an armed uprising led by militias based in Uzbekistan in 1999 and riots in several cities.

In Kyrgyzstan, regionalism, ethnic rivalry, and growing Islamism coexist, but a relatively open political system has provided an outlet that seems to have prevented lapses into violence. In recent politics, the regional rivalry between southern and northern Kyrgyzstan has posed a greater threat to the stability of the country, especially as the

---

[21] Nunn et al, *Calming the Ferghana Valley.*

presidency asserts more autocratic powers, as in other Central Asian countries. There have also been some incidents of violent suppression of demonstrations in the south, mainly directed against Uzbeks. Nonetheless, the main violent incidents in southern Kyrgyzstan resulted not from domestic conflict but from the penetration into the region of units of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, trying to fight its way from its bases in Afghanistan and Tajikistan to the Uzbekistan part of the Ferghana Valley. Many analysts believe that the growth of violence by groups originating in Uzbekistan is one of the consequences of that country's extremely rigid and closed political system, especially when contrasted with the situation in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, where social and economic conditions are in some respects worse.

In Uzbekistan, as in all Central Asian countries, the main, though often hidden political contest takes place among regional "clans," all of which are led by members of the titular ethnic group. One of the reasons that President Islam Karimov has rejected regional cooperation schemes designed to improve the situation in the Ferghana Valley may be his belief that such schemes would strengthen the ties among the elites in Ferghana across borders, creating a more coherent threat to his power base.

The social and political decline of the Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan gave rise to Islamist rather than ethnic protest movements. Unlike in Tajikistan, state power did not collapse, so that the major regional elites of Ferghana were not driven, as were Gharmi elites in Tajikistan, to ally with a popular movement like the Islamists. The wars in Tajikistan and Afghanistan provided sanctuary, training, and support for the initially small bands who were repressed and driven out of Uzbekistan. They also were able to supply themselves by developing relations with drug traffickers, a major source of revenue for most armed groups in the area. By 1997 the militants from Uzbekistan began to engage in isolated acts of terrorism in the Ferghana Valley, which led to mass arrests and other repressive policies by the regime. In 1999 and 2000, the militants, reorganized into the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, allied with al-Qaida and the Taliban and recruiting from both Uzbek youth who had fled repression and others, mounted cross-border offensives in Central Asia. These involved armed forces of Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Uzbekistan and sparked a major crisis in the region. The expected offensive in 2001 never materialized, as the IMU had become more fully integrated with the Qaida forces in Afghanistan and was focused on contributing to what was intended to be the last Taliban/al-Qaida offensive against the resistance of the Northern Alliance, led by Ahmad Shah Massoud. Instead the IMU was decimated in the US counter-attack after September 11 and has been relatively passive since that time.

The growth of an Islamist protest movement in Central Asia continues, however, under the apparent leadership or at least influence of a transnational organization known as Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Liberation Party). This group distributes leaflets throughout the region calling for a very radical program: dissolving the nation-states into an Islamic Caliphate ruled by a very strict interpretation of Shari'a and deporting all non-Muslims.[22] The distance of HT's program from practical politics indicates its function as a protest

---

[22] See its website, www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org. The website contains sections in Arabic, English, Russian, Turkish, Urdu, German, and Danish, indicating its transnational character.

movement of last resort for desperate people. The violence and extremism of its ideology does not so far seem to be matched by its actions, despite efforts by the authorities of Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz Republic to tie HT to terrorist acts or plans. HT spokesmen claim that it will act mainly through da'wa, or preaching, and resort to violence only if forced to by the repressive regimes. It does not appear to be linked to al-Qaida or other international armed militant groups. Indeed, much of its recruitment seems to take place on university campuses in Turkey and the West. While preaching an ideology that appears traditional, HT is in fact a modern globalized movement using a version of Islam cleansed of local, cultural accretions as a political ideology to counter US and Western hegemony.

The disintegration of the state in Afghanistan created conditions for the regional linkage of conflicts. It allowed militia groups to meet each other and train together, and it provided conditions for trafficking of opium and other types of contraband to finance these efforts. It also contributed to a pervasive sense of insecurity – or legitimated claims of insecurity – that governments cited to justify repressive measures that provoked yet more conflict.

The construction of a failed state in Zaire by Mobutu also created conditions for the regional linkage of conflicts. Perhaps one cannot talk about a process of state failure in Zaire/DRC, as there was never a state success there, even on the order of pre-1978 Afghanistan, but during the Cold War Mobutu at least obtained sufficient foreign aid to pay his army and keep patronage networks loyal. By the mid-1990s even these quasi-state functions collapsed. Guerrillas from neighboring states (Angola, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi) made their bases in DRC and engaged in trafficking of diamonds and other resources to pay for their wars. The 1996 and 1998 wars divided the DRC up among warlords linked to neighboring states even more definitively than Afghanistan, creating an even more tightly linked regional conflict formation. Hutu and Tutsi increasingly became transnational identities partly removed from their Rwandan or Burundian contexts, functioning instead in the context of a regionalized conflict. The conflict engendered macro-identities such as Bantu and Nilotic, that have yet to become fully functional, but that could be vehicles for even broader conflict (or cooperation) in the future. Here also, the linkage of local, national, regional, and global factors made the conflict more obdurate. For instance, the massacres between Hema and Lendu in Northern DRC derive from long-standing local conflict over land, that was aggravated by the Mobutist patronage system. After 1996 the presence of Ugandan soldiers employed Hema to guard roads leading to important gold mines (Uganda became a gold exporter after 1996, though there is no gold in Uganda). Arming the Hema upset the local balance, leading to a series of massacres. International peacekeepers (French, then Bangladeshi) are now trying to bring the situation under control as part of MONUC.

Policies of Conflict Reduction

Overall, the picture of central Asia supports the contention, emerging from other types of studies, that ethnic diversity makes conflict ethnic, but it does not cause or even increase conflict or exclusion. The most radical exclusion of a group from public life in Central Asia was the exclusion by the Taliban regime of women from public space, not any

ethnic policy. When states have ethnically diverse populations, then political conflict may be organized on ethnic lines, though conflict may also be based on sub-ethnic identities or protest ideologies. Which cleavages emerge as politically important depends on many factors, but most notably on the extent to which identity structures various forms of inequality, or, more precisely, differential access to various sorts of assets.

As in Rwanda and Burundi, horizontal inequalities, where identity differences coincide with unequal social status (as in societies based on racial discrimination or exclusion), make inter-group conflict inevitable. This is less the case where identity and various forms of inequality have a more complex relationship. In the DRC, unlike its much smaller and homogeneous neighbors to the east, there are complex multi-level forms of conflict among dozens if not hundreds of groups, from local disputes over resources, to regional aspirations, and scapegoating of Tutsis at the national level. All of these have tended to be intensified by competition over control of the country's mineral wealth, in partnership with various international corporate and state interests. Central Asia does not contain any states based on apartheid or distinctions like those between Hutus and Tutsis in the Great Lakes region. The one possible exception, the subjugation of the Hazaras of Afghanistan on the basis of their religious sect, has now been greatly ameliorated by their extensive political inclusion in the post-Taliban political arrangements. Indeed, this previously suppressed group has emerged as a conciliator and power broker between opposed factions of Tajiks and Pashtuns.

Though polarized societies with horizontal inequalities between two groups are more prone to conflict, the absence of ethnic diversity does not otherwise reduce the likelihood of political conflict. It only makes it less likely that it will be organized around ethnicity. It is difficult to imagine that an ethnically homogeneous Pashtun state would be particularly harmonious or peaceful, any more than is the ethnically homogeneous state of Somalia. An imaginary Pashtunistan would be torn by conflicts along tribal, regional, factional, ideological, and clan lines, linked to competing interests in drug trafficking and other forms of the criminalized or parallel economy.

Hence reducing conflict among ethnic groups in multi-ethnic societies is a sub-problem of the more general task of reducing or managing political conflict. In Central Asia there is a clear difference between the four Turkic states of Central Asia on the one hand, all of which have more or less control of their territory and functioning administrations, and Afghanistan on the other, which is a clear case of an attempt at recovery from collapse of state institutions by building a new political order. Tajikistan fits somewhere between the two: it experienced anarchic breakdown of state institutions in the immediate post-Soviet period in at least much of the south, but Russian and UN intervention made possible the relatively quick construction of a state apparatus, even if it still has to compromise with warlord powers in some areas.

The avoidance of violent interethnic conflict has been one of the largely unrecognized success stories of the independent Central Asian states. This success should not be exaggerated, since several of them experienced political violence, even if it was not organized along ethnic lines. Post-Soviet Central Asia includes two distinct types of

ethnic problems: conflict between Russian-speakers[23] and the titular ethnic group, or that part of it that exercises state power, a potential racial conflict, and conflicts between titular ethnic groups and other Central Asian groups.

The Russian speakers constitute a post-imperial formerly dominant minority, and constituted the first open flash point for Central Asian nationalism in the region. In 1986, when Mikhail Gorbachev replaced the Kazakh first secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan with an ethnic Russian from Kazakhstan, violent riots broke out in the streets of Alma Ata (as Almaty was then called). Gorbachev's motive was not overtly ethnic – he was replacing a "corrupt" official with one more accountable to Moscow. That incident showed how the patronage and clan networks identified by Moscow with corruption formed the basis of an indigenous politics that provided the power base of the elites that took over the independent states. Similarly, the corrupt party bosses of Uzbekistan removed by Brezhnev during the cotton scandal are now retroactively defined as national heroes.

Independence led to an abrupt fall in status, security, and employment for the Russian speaking population throughout Central Asia. It fled Tajikistan en masse during the escalating political tensions leading up to the civil war, though most of the violence was directed by Tajiks against each other. In the other states, as has happened throughout the former Soviet Union, there has been a general tendency of immigration of the titular nationality and emigration of others, including Russian speakers, leading to a gradual shift in population toward the titular nationality. It appears that Kazakhstan now has a Kazakh majority, whereas at independence Kazakhs constituted only about 46 percent of the population.

> **Comment:** Check data and get source. **Dr. Rubin, the following was gleaned from a 1999 census:** Kazakh (Qazaq) 53.4%, Russian 30%, Ukrainian 3.7%, Uzbek 2.5%, German 2.4%, Uighur 1.4%, other 6.6% (1999 census)

Among the issues affecting relations between Russian speakers and the titular nationality have been citizenship, language, education, and state employment policies. Affirmative action of various sorts for the titular nationality has been an issue cutting across a number of these issue areas.

Unlike the Baltic states, the Central Asian states did not discriminate against Russians or Russian-speakers when it came to determining citizenship. The annexation of the Baltic states to the USSR was never accepted internationally, and the independent states considered themselves in legal continuity with the independent states of the interwar period, not with the USSR. Their citizenship laws reflected this, by withholding automatic grants of citizenship to those who had settled or whose ancestors had settled in those states' territories during what they considered an illegal occupation regime. The Central Asian states, however, became independent in legal continuity with the USSR as its successor states. Hence they adopted the "zero option." Every citizen of the USSR who was legally resident in these states on the date they became independent was entitled to citizenship. None of the states imposed any kind of linguistic or other culture-based test for citizenship, as did some of the Baltic states. Hence from the beginning citizenship was defined on a legal, civic, basis.

---

[23] The term "Russian speaker" in Central Asia generally denotes ethnic groups of non-Central Asian origin, including Russians, Ukrainians, other Slavs, Ashkenazi Jews, Tatars, Germans, and others.

A sizable portion of the Russian-speaking population was reluctant to rely on local citizenship for security and rights, however, and demanded the right to dual citizenship. This was reinforced by the policy of Russia, which allowed Soviet citizens living outside Russia at the time of the Soviet breakup to apply for Russian passports. Bilateral agreements between Russia and the Central Asian states have regulated the issue of treatment of each other's citizens and virtually eliminated the risk of statelessness for the Russian-speaking populations. Turkmenistan and Tajikistan signed agreements on dual citizenship, though Turkmenistan rescinded its agreement, after the November 2002 attempt on the life of President Sapurmurat Niyazov (Turkmenbashi), which he blamed on foreign intelligence services. Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic have signed agreements that simplified citizenship procedures.

Citizenship issues have triggered several of the conflicts in Central Africa. Mamdani regards them as the essential question.[24] He notes that many African countries developed the colonial practice of indirect rule into a dual citizenship regime, distinguishing political from ethnic citizens, with the latter enjoying extended rights, such as land ownership. He argues that exclusion of "non-indigenous" groups in Uganda from rights to land and participation in local councils triggered the Tutsi re-invasion of Rwanda in 1990. similarly, the revocation of citizenship from "non-indigenous" groups (some of whom migrated a century ago) triggered the Banyamulenge revolt there, leading to the war in 1996.

On the inter-related issues of language, education, and employment, Central Asian states have undertaken a balancing act. The official policies favoring use of the national language in government and education and making its mastery a condition of employment are greatly softened in practice by the fact that the political and professional elites of the titular nationalities remain, by and large, more comfortable working in Russian than in their supposed native language. When language tests are applied in a political way, it is sometimes to the detriment of members of the titular nationality who are considered more of a threat than Russian speakers. One opposition presidential candidate in the Kyrgyz Republic, an ethnic Kyrgyz, was disqualified allegedly for failing his Kyrgyz language test. Kyrgyzstan has also established a Slavonic University, with the collaboration of the Russian Federation, to provide higher education to Russian speakers, though the English-language American University of Central Asia in Bishkek enjoys greater prestige.

One of the most important and least noticed factors preventing violent conflict between the Russian-speaking populations and the states of Central Asia (and other Soviet successor states) has been the foreign policy of Russia. The Russian government has at times protested against the treatment of Russian-speaking people in the Baltic states. Russian politicians have taken even more extreme positions, such as the claim that the Baltic states are committing "genocide" against Russians. Despite such political pressures, and ample opportunities, no Russian government has followed the path of the Milosevic regime in post-Yugoslav Serbia. While Russians (and others) are may move to Russia, if they so desire, and apply for citizenship, and while Russia has negotiated, for

---

[24] Mamdani, *Contemporary Africa*, 67.

instance, to allow Russian citizens to vote in local elections in Kazakhstan, it has never
supported irredentist or militant protest movements, even where the potential was the
greatest, in Crimea, Eastern Ukraine, or Northern Kazakhstan. Among other things, this
reflects Russia's ambition to be accepted as a great power, a member of the G-8, as well
as of the permanent membership of the UN Security Council. Though largely unnoticed,
this has undoubtedly been a stabilizing factor in Central Asia and elsewhere in the former
Soviet space.[25]

The other set of ethnic issues in post-Soviet Central Asia involves relations among
Central Asian ethnic groups, mainly between the titular nationality and the diaspora of
other groups. As mentioned above, in Uzbekistan the major Central Asian ethnic
minority is the Tajiks, concentrated in Bukhara and Samarqand. Their small numbers (at
least officially – some claim that many people registered as "Uzbeks" are "really" Tajik)
and the weakness of Tajikistan has prevented this issue from developing into a major one,
despite the Uzbek government's rather harsh treatment of ethnic Tajiks. In border
regions, where citizenship remains ill-defined, governments and people alike sometimes
treat ethnicity as a proxy for citizenship. Uzbekistan has deported as many as 20,000
Tajiks it claims are illegal immigrants, but whom others claim are legal citizens of
Uzbekistan.

In all other Central Asian states, the main issue is that of the Uzbek minority, which is the
largest Central Asian non-titular group in every other state. In Afghanistan, where
Uzbeks are relatively less important, this has nonetheless become an issue in the north,
where Uzbek and Tajik-led militias continue to battle for control of vital markets and
resources, and where Uzbekistan has close relations with the Uzbek-led militia of Abdul
Rashid Dostum.

Except for northern Kazakhstan, Russian speakers in Central Asia tended to be
concentrated in cities and industrial centers. Uzbeks, however, are concentrated in areas
bordering on Uzbekistan in all of its neighbors. Uzbeks are proportionately largest in
Tajikistan, especially in the north, where they may even predominate in the rural areas,
and many of those who are registered as Tajik also speak Uzbek. Uzbekistan, like
Russia, has generally not pursued a policy of pan-ethnic irredentism.   Ethnic Uzbek
politicians in southern Kyrgyzstan say that Tashkent has told them to take their
grievances to Bishkek, since they are citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Nonetheless, Tashkent has made use of cross-border ties to militias with ethnic Uzbek
affiliations in both Tajikistan and Afghanistan when it has felt its interests threatened. In
fact it supported joint operations by these militias: the one led by Dostum in Afghanistan
and another one, led by Mahmud Khudaiberdiyev in Tajikistan. Uzbekistan's use of such
ethnic militias, however, was pragmatic rather than ideological or nationalist. It used
Khudaiberdiyev to exert pressure on Dushanbe – and Moscow -- over the presence in
Tajikistan of units of the IMU. The Uzbek authorities believed that Russia was aiding
this group in order to pressure Uzbekistan and responded in kind. It has used Dostum,
and supported his demands for a kind of autonomous region in the north (misleadingly

---

[25] Rubin and Snyder, "Conclusion: Managing Normal Instability," in *Post-Soviet Political Order*, 173-176.

called "federalism") mainly in order to secure Uzbekistan's border with Afghanistan, as well as neighboring parts of the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border used by the IMU and drug traffickers for infiltration into Uzbekistan.[26]

Ethnic relations in southern Kyrgyzstan offer an interesting illustration of the general point that political openness can defuse many issues, even if they are not "solved" in a definitive way. The Uzbeks of that region face a daunting number of challenges. They remember the brutal inter-ethnic riots of 1990, to which they feel even more vulnerable now that there is no Soviet army to intervene. They are cut off from their former institutions of higher education in Uzbekistan. Their schools can no longer use texts published in the neighboring republic, since Uzbekistan, like Turkmenistan, is gradually introducing Latin characters, while Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, with their larger Russian-speaking populations, are maintaining the Cyrillic orthography of Uzbek. In addition, the textbooks now reflect the divergent national ideologies and orientations. They have lost access to relatives, families, and economic partners across the border, even as their government is largely controlled not just by Kyrgyz, but by Kyrgyz from the north. They are suspected by their own government, by Tashkent, and by some of their Kyrgyz neighbors of harboring sympathies for the IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir, and, indeed, Islamic revival in southern Kyrgyzstan is, to a large extent, an Uzbek affair.[27]

The Uzbeks of the districts of Osh and Jalalabad, however, have representatives in parliament who speak out about their grievances, relatively autonomous cultural centers, non-governmental organizations, religious centers, and a variety of other outlets for their views and activities. Government officials, unlike in neighboring Uzbekistan, openly speak about inter-ethnic and social problems, rather than trying to hide them, and describe to visitors all the measures they are taking to deal with them. They welcome the assistance of the UN, OSCE, and other international organizations in trying to reduce these tensions and deal with their causes. The result is that this region, which saw the bloodiest ethnic clashes in Central Asia at the end of the Soviet period, and which has been twice invaded by guerrillas based in Afghanistan and Tajikistan trying to fight their way to Uzbekistan, and has witnessed several militant anti-government demonstrations in 2002-2003, has remained free of mass violence. The main threat to this success appears to be the growing autocracy of the government in Bishkek, which had been the least dictatorial and the most open in the region.

> **Comment:** Check dates of demonstration in Djalalabad, also called Jalalabad.

In Afghanistan and Tajikistan inter-group relations largely reflect the breakdown of political power and the quest for security. I shall focus on the situation in post-Taliban Afghanistan, where the ethnic question is most evident. In Tajikistan the somewhat less acute problems reflect conflicts among Tajik regional clans rather than ethnic groups, but the basic problem is similar, as there are few deep cultural differences among the ethnic groups of Afghanistan.

Since the fall of the Najibullah regime (and less evidently for some time before) in early 1992, the main ethnic issue in Afghanistan has been, simply, the ethnic (and tribal)

---

[26] Nunn et al, *Calming the Ferghana Valley*, 121.
[27] Ibid., 101.

identity of the solidarity group that controls the state. Those groups with less or no access to state power feel correspondingly more or less excluded, as the systems based on dynastic succession contained no mechanism for the ethnic circulation of elites. Since 1747 Afghanistan was structured to some extent as a Pashtun empire, with a particular Pashtun tribal group (since the early 19th century the Muhammadzai clan of the Barakzai tribe of the Durrani confederation of Pashtuns) in control of the highest level of the state apparatus. Except for nine months in 1928-29, this was shaken for the first time by the communist coup in 1978. When Najibullah fell in 1992, the capital came under the control of a set of mostly non-Pashtun militias, the strongest of them being the Panjsheri Tajik forces commanded by Ahmad Shah Massoud. After being ousted by the Qandahari Pashtun Taliban (aided by Pashtuns from other regions, Pakistanis, and Arabs) this same group, minus their assassinated leader, captured the capital again after the Taliban were routed by US bombing in November 2001.

The main ethnic issue in Afghanistan is thus the loss of power by Pashtuns in general and Qandahari Durranis in particular, and the control of power solely by militias until the recent effort at state building by some members of Hamid Karzai's government with international support. With the collapse of the army and of institutionalized political power, virtually the only source of political power has been organized military force. Currently, the US and the coalition around it constitutes the military force that keeps the government of Hamid Karzai in power in together, but otherwise all military forces since 1992 have been based on personal patronage within regional clan or tribal structures, sometimes reinforced with other forms of political organization. All have consequently been monoethnic, though that does not mean that they "represent" ethnic groups. There are several Tajik, Pashtun, Uzbek, and Hazara militias, each from different regions, and none of them represents an entire ethnic group. Nonetheless, even a militia that does not represent an entire ethnic group can exclude entire ethnic groups, and that is what the Panjsheris have done in the eyes of many Afghans, and in particular Pashtuns.

Very roughly speaking, Tajiks contest the Pashtun claim to monopoly of central power, while Uzbeks and Hazaras, who have no chance of controlling central power, seek greater autonomy for the areas where they predominate. The Hazara political groups have moderated their demand for federalism recently, as they benefit more from the share of power they have gained in Kabul and the north than they would from autonomy for their impoverished enclave in the central highlands.

Since there is no ethnically or politically neutral security force, or only very weak and nascent ones, whichever force is in control of the capital city is seen as being in effective control of the government, whatever may be the origins of the ministers. This force can effectively intimidate others on matters of vital concern and thus maintain a veto power over decisions, unless the only other military force, the US-led coalition, weighs in on the other side. This was the reason that the Bonn Agreement provided that all signatories were to withdraw military forces from Kabul, which was instead to be patrolled by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Though ISAF was deployed to Kabul, the Panjsheri forces (formally known as the Afghan Military Forces, or AMF) did not withdraw. Instead the Panjsheris have leveraged their physical presence into economic benefit through taking control of land and other assets. They have also used the resulting

positions in the power structure (in particular Marshall Qasim Fahim's Vice Presidency) to control many appointments and patronage assignments around the country. Hence their military presence in the capital translates into a perception and partially a reality of exclusion of most groups from power, most especially Pashtuns, who believe they should have it.

The control of the central military forces by a clan from three districts (soon to be elevated to a province with five districts) has translated into a host of political problems on every front. The UN and the Karzai government have confronted this problem through a series of initiatives. The Bonn Agreement itself recognized the problem. SRSG Lakhdar Brahimi said at Bonn that the meeting was not representative and would therefore result in an interim administration that was also not fully representative or legitimate. The Emergency Loya Jirga, held within six months after the inauguration of the interim administration, was supposed to choose a transitional administration that would be more representative and legitimate than its predecessor. While this was marginally the case, it did little if anything to address the reality of a power imbalance, and particularly the resentments of Pashtuns, who felt they had been displaced from power in their own state. As long as the Panjsheris controlled the military, intelligence, and police through their patronage networks and control over the capital and other resources, including support from the US, which saw them as an ally in the "war on terrorism," there was a limit to how much the distribution of power could shift as a result of holding a meeting. In other words, political exclusion did not result from the political distribution of positions, but from the nature of the state.

Hence during the period of the transitional administration, the focus of efforts toward moving Afghanistan away from a monopoly of power by one sub-ethnic group focused on what is known in bureaucratic jargon as "security sector reform." This set of reforms aimed to demobilize or transform the existing security services dominated by Panjsheris and replace them with new or transformed institutions. The centerpiece of SSR consisted of the three policies of building the Afghan National Army (ANA); reforming the Ministry of Defense by making its leadership more professional and representative; and the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) into civilian life of the militias that formed the AMF. Other aspects of these programs aimed to transform the police and intelligence institutions.

As of this writing (November 2003) these efforts have all taken place in the context of Panjsheri occupation of Kabul. Despite the Bonn Agreement, Marshall Fahim refused to withdraw his forces from Kabul, and the international forces present in Afghanistan acquiesced. With the takeover of ISAF command by NATO in August 2003, there were signs that this might change. In October 2003, General Gliemeroth, the ISAF commander, publicly called for the demilitarization of Kabul city and hence the full implementation of the 2001 Bonn Agreement. By November, after a visit to Afghanistan by the Security Council, reports claimed that Fahim had agreed.

Many other government policies represented ethnic balancing or rebalancing. The government undertook plans to create a number of new provinces, mostly to accommodate greater representation for various non-Pashtun groups. A new province of

Panjsher is to be created out of three districts in Parwan. Badakhshan will be divided into predominantly Tajik and predominantly Uzbek areas. Mainly Hazara areas of some provinces in the south may be hived off to form new Hazara-majority provinces.

At the same time, the slow drive toward recentralization of the government under the presidency of Hamid Karzai is led by the ministers of finance and interior, both of them Pashtuns and highly trained professionals who had lived in the US for over twenty years. Their drive to curb warlords, while also aimed at Pashtun commanders such as former Qandahar governor Gul Agha Sherzai, is mainly aimed at curbing the power of the non-Pashtun warlords of the northern alliance and creating a national government which is either non-ethnic or predominantly elite (and English-speaking) Pashtuns, depending on one's point of view.

The struggle over the new constitution was also heavily affected by ethnic considerations. A few provisions explicitly dealt with ethnic issues, in terms of language or religious sect. For the first time the constitution did not accord special status to Pashto as the sole "national" language, but simply made it one of two official languages along with Dari (Afghan Persian). It also promised education and broadcasting in the other languages of Afghanistan. Pashtun members of the constitutional commission insisted that the national anthem should be in Pashto, as under the royal regime, in return for which Persian-speakers obtained removal of a provision requiring the government to take measures to promote knowledge of both official languages (i.e. teach Pashto to Persian-speakers) among government employees. Shi'a groups also obtained recognition of their schools of jurisprudence.

The fundamental ethnic issue, however, was a less evident but more important one: the form of government. Uzbek and Hazara political groups had long demanded "federalism," so that they could control their own areas, even if they had no hope of gaining power in the central government. The Hazara groups retreated from this view, anathema to Pashtuns, since they obtained a substantial share of positions in Kabul, much preferable to autonomy for their own impoverished area. General Dostum's demand for federalism, which enjoyed relatively little support from his own people, who hoped that the central government would protect them from warlord depradations, was finally isolated and rejected in favor of a unitary, centralized government with some devolution of power to elected local councils. Hazaras and Uzbeks, however, are actively working to subdivide provinces to create provinces where they would dominate, to provide them with more access to state resources

The structure of the central government was the most contentious issue. Qandaharis overwhelmingly supported the reestablishment of the monarchy (which would have assured that the head of state would always be a Qandahari Pashtun), but this option had less appeal elsewhere. In any case, Panjsheris on the constitutional commission prevented the group from circulating a questionnaire asking the population their views on monarchy, especially after preliminary results from Herat (a Persian-speaking area) were surprisingly positive. Under the influence of Panjsheri and other Northern Alliance leaders, the commission instead drafted a semi-presidential system with a prime minister whose powers encroached considerably on that of the president. They explained this by

citing the need for ethnic power sharing. The president would certainly be Pashtun for the foreseeable future. The prime minister could be a Tajik, most likely a Panjsheri, and more specifically Yunus Qanooni, who had tried but failed to establish this position in the interim administration set up by the Bonn Agreement. Much of the struggle of the commission with the government (and international experts) concerned the attempt to subordinate the prime minister to the president, which members of the commission interpreted as part of the American-Pashtun recentralizing strategy aimed at marginalizing the "mujahidin," that is the Northern Alliance. Finally, in late October 2003, the National Security Council and a majority of the commission voted for a pure presidential system, in the hopes that an undivided executive would provide clear leadership and avoid a Lebanese scenario. Neither the commission nor the president and NSC seriously considered the option of a genuine semi-presidential system recommended by a number of international experts. In the system they adopted, the balance for the Pashtun presidency would come largely from the parliament, which was to be elected at least initially by proportional representation within provinces, a system which was likely to create a non-Pashtun majority in parliament, at least according to the demographic beliefs of the Northern Alliance political leaders. The effects of this system on ethnic relations will have to be evaluated in practice.

Meanwhile, Pashtun disaffection and feeling of exclusion continues to feed the growing Taliban insurgency, which also depends on the sanctuaries it enjoys in Pakistan. This border area, like the border areas of the Ferghana Valley, has proven to be a source of disruption and revolt, sometimes ethnic, sometimes Islamist, and sometimes tribal. Both of these peripheral areas suffer from neglect and economic marginalization. Cross-border development programs might help to incorporate these groups better into the region's political systems, but these are unlikely as long as states perceive such a high decree of security threat from their neighbors and, in some cases, from international involvement.

In the Great Lakes, Rwanda on the one hand and the DRC on the other present radically different but almost equally difficult tasks of building sustainable peace. The DRC, even more than Afghanistan, is a territory without a political order, dominated by warlords linked to neighboring states and supporting themselves through trafficking. Rwanda is a hierarchically organized authoritarian state where the heritage of genocidal conflict makes consensual political inclusion almost impossible. No other region in the world combines these two extremes in so explosive a manner. The problem, however, has little if anything to do with cultural diversity. Hutus and Tutsis belong to the same culture, which has unfortunately become dominated by violent conflict. The wars and genocide have stimulated a tremendous amount of cultural and religious turmoil in the region, especially given the complicity or silence of many of the established churches in the genocide. Conversions to both Islam and charismatic sects of Christianity appear to be increasing, in syncretism with autochthonous beliefs about spirit possession. It is often neglected how much conflict can transform culture, perhaps more than culture causes conflicts. Central Africa is becoming religiously even more diverse and fractured, as people search for meaning and support in a situation of nearly unimaginable fear, insecurity, guilt, and fury. The extreme interpretation and implementation of Islam by the Taliban similarly resulted from a reaction to extremes of disorder and violence. It is a response to violent conflict, not re-emergence of traditional values.

<u>Regional and Global Conflict Factors</u>

As the above discussion has pointed out, most of the ethnic and other identities mobilized in conflicts in both regions are transnational. Some that did not start as transnational (Hema and Lendu, for instance) have developed transnational links as a result of the spread of conflict. This has resulted from the non-contiguous distribution of some ethnic populations (notably Tajiks), the drawing of borders through ethnic territories (notably Pashtuns), and migration flows, of refugees, warriors, laborers, and traders. The Afghan and Rwandan refugees transformed the political and ethnic landscape of their regions. Hence the issue of identity politics encompasses much more than incorporating diversity within states. Identities can link groups within a state to transborder networks. These networks through which various resources flow and are exchanged are the characteristic underpinnings of both the contemporary global economy and contemporary warfare. The latter involves both non-state actors and states engaged in asymmetrical or covert warfare. Hence the linkages of identities to networks can potentially create or strengthen collective actors whose linkages create capacities for social action (social capital) that can pose challenges to territorial states by undermining borders and sovereignty. They can also link societies to the global economy and society in potentially beneficial ways, depending on the institutional context and the capacities and incentives of the groups themselves.[28]

Since these transborder identities can be mobilized against states, they can be useful tools for states intent on destabilizing or pressuring others. Mobilization of networks based on such identities, intentionally or otherwise, has characterized the foreign policy of both global and regional powers in Central Asia and Central Africa. The US, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia used them to arm the mujahidin against the USSR, and the Soviets increasingly used them to create pro-government militias against the mujahidin. Pakistan used cross-border Pashtun links to support the Taliban, and Uzbekistan used such links among Uzbeks to support Dostum and Khudaiberdiyev, though this support was less consistent or systematic. As noted above, the consistent policy of Russia in refraining from military and political mobilization of Russian-speaking groups in Central Asia, notably Kazakhstan has helped prevent the outbreak of ethnic or racial conflict there. Rwanda used the Banyamulenge, Kinyarwandan speakers of Tutsi origin from the Mulenge region of South Kivu, as the cover for its invasion of Zaire in 1996. President Kabila later tried to create a political base of Congolese nationalism for himself using anti-Tutsi rhetoric and calls to action, depiction Tutsis as a threatening force allied with Uganda and Rwanda, thus cutting himself off from the very coalition that had brought him to power.

In some cases, cross-border identities serve efforts to create armed groups that also operate across borders, like the Taliban, the IMU, or the Rwandan Hutu militias. Other networks involve economic activity, sometimes criminal (the drug trade) or criminalized (smuggling of consumer goods) that can either generate black money for illicit activities or generate capital and institutional frameworks, eventually, for regional economic

---

[28] For this section, find references from our website: For work of the project on Regional Conflict Formations, see: http://www.cic.nyu.edu/conflict/conflict_project1.html .

cooperation and development. Interestingly, at least in Central Asia, whereas militias recruiting from different identity groups often clash over control of resources, ethnic criminal mafias appear to cooperate quite easily. Observers claim that the opium/heroin trade, for instance, constitutes a model of inter-ethnic cooperation. The cocaine trade originating in the Andean region, in contrast, while not ethnically divided, has been characterized by bloody wars over control of markets and territories, in particular during the period when competing cartels were fighting to vertically integrate the industry, a development that has not yet occurred in the more competitive opium-based drug trade. Members of warring groups in Central Africa also apparently cooperated in smuggling to profit from breaking the sanctions imposed upon Burundi after the July 1996 coup d'etat.

While members of a variety of ethnic groups are involved in the drug trade, some cross-border activities have been more or less captured by single groups. The region-wide smuggling of consumer goods from Dubai through Iran and Afghanistan to Pakistan and beyond involves a largely Pashtun network of traders and truckers. Building on their background as nomad traders, Pashtuns have largely monopolized the long-distance trucking industry in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as symbolized by the Ahmadzai Trucking Company, Ltd., headed by leading figures of the nomad section of the Ahmadzai Pashtun tribe. The trade has two main routes: across the Persian Gulf and through Afghanistan via Iran, or by sea to Karachi under cover of the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA). Reflecting the importance of this trade route, the three largest urban concentrations of Pashtuns (Afghan and Pakistani) are now found, respectively, in Peshawar, Karachi, and Dubai.

These cross-border Pashtun trucking interests played an important role in the rise of the Taliban. According to Ahmed Rashid, the traders based in Quetta financed the Taliban's capture of Herat in 1995 in order to ease access to the Iranian border and remove "Amir" Ismail Khan, as he styled himself, whose tax policies were becoming more burdensome. The "security" provided by the Taliban was primarily road security, of which the traders were the greatest beneficiary. The control of security provision by a Qandahar-based group also let to the redirection of transit trade toward southwest Afghanistan, which benefited the Taliban's original constituents. Such regional trading networks, of course, could prove very beneficial to the entire region, given adequate security provided by legitimate governments and regional regimes that harmonize customs and visa regulations to facilitate legal trade.

Solidarity groups based on clan and elaborated with more modern forms of organization can be effective for controlling otherwise legal resources that can be sold internationally as a basis for autonomous political or military power. In post-Soviet Central Asia, clans do this primarily through their control or dominance of parts of the state apparatus, while in Afghanistan they can control the resources directly. Much of the parallel economy in Afghanistan has this structure. One of the sources of the power of Panjsheris is the emeralds found in the valley. Massoud taxed the trade in these gems for years but ultimately evolved a more sophisticated institutional way to profit from them through a joint venture with a Polish company. His brother-in-law, Afghanistan's charge d'affaires in the UAE, is in charge of much of the marketing. The income always went to Massoud's own budget, and it now appears to be similarly enriching Fahim, as well as a

group of related families in the valley who control the marketing. Similar structures of control and de facto ownership structure the trade in illegal timber in eastern Afghanistan, in archeological artifacts unearthed from various sites, and the seizure of land, especially valuable urban land. All of these are controlled by commanders who head sub-ethnic patronage groups, but the military and political power that they use to obtain these resources effectively excludes others. The exclusion, more than the pattern of control itself, creates ethnic resentment and, potentially, ethnic conflict.

The pattern of looting from the DRC also reflects different in state organization. Rwanda seems to have funneled large amounts of profit from coltan, diamonds, and other minerals through a state trading company, while in most of the other states involved (Uganda, Zimbabwe), cronies of the president gained access to looted resources as a form of political payoff.

Like other diaspora trading networks (Chinese, Armenians, Jews), some of these networks constitute mechanisms for the accumulation of capital that could eventually be invested productively. Diaspora Chinese in Southeast Asia appear to be one of the most dynamic sources of capital for China. A group of Afghan merchants from Dubai has identified at least $500 mn that they would be willing to invest in Afghanistan, providing that the legal regime and security conditions were positive, and more would certainly be available in the future. Emeralds and other sub-soil resources could finance some of the reconstruction of Afghanistan, just as diamonds, coltan, and other minerals could in the DRC.

The presence of international corporations, foreign governments, and international organizations (intergovernmental and non-government) creates other opportunities for capturing resources by patronage networks. These include direct corruption (bribery over contracts), nepotism, and various forms of favoritism. This was a well known aspect of the Mobutu regime, as in other autocratic, resource-rich states. Members of the families of the presidents of Central Asian states often have prominent and extremely lucrative positions in joint ventures with foreign companies. Relatives of officials of Afghanistan's Ministry of Defense appear to have profited handsomely from contracts from the coalition forces. These forms of corruption, involving individuals and families rather than whole identity groups, nonetheless have ethnic consequences. Groups that feel excluded (Russian-speakers in Kazakhstan, Pashtuns in Afghanistan, both groups that no longer benefit from a privileged relation to state power), see such corruption as more evidence that they are effectively excluded from the benefits of power.

Since identities constitute transnational networks, as well as sub-state collectivities, the set of policies to reduce conflict among identity groups and promote peaceful cultural diversity has to include regional and global as well as national policies. Education is one area where such cooperation can be important. When members of a common language community live in several states, those states can increase the educational opportunity for that community by sharing the cost of higher education and the production of textbooks for elementary and secondary education in at least some fields. The same could be true of other cultural activities, such as publishing, broadcasting, and the arts more generally.

Communities deprived of legitimate economic opportunity because of marginal positions on the borders, such as Pashtuns in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the various communities of the Ferghana Valley, especially Uzbeks, as well as the Banyamulenge and other communities in the Kivus, could benefit from development schemes for cross-border cooperation. Of course, these regions are often caught in a vicious circle. The states on either side of the border or borders (the most difficult areas are often where several states come together) are often in conflict, partly owing to the issues arising from the cross-border identity communities. As long as the states feel threatened by their neighbors and the potential for cross-border mobilization they do not control, they do not agree to programs that might strengthen the linkages of the communities across the border. Each side may, however, be trying to do so with respect to the communities across the border. It is hence difficult to imagine Pakistan and Afghanistan cooperating to improve the lot of Pashtuns across the Durand line given current conflict. Afghanistan does not accept the legitimacy of the border and accuses Pakistan of both encroaching on the unrecognized border and supporting Taliban insurgents, at the same time that al-Qaida is reported to have established bases in the Pakistani tribal territories. Pakistan charges that the newly established Indian consulates in Jalalabad and Qandahar threaten its security. Uzbekistan also blocked proposals for a common Ferghana Valley Development Program out of concern that its smaller neighbors and international organizations were using it to encroach unacceptably on its sovereignty. Uzbekistan's government also approached the security threat from militants in a much more repressive way than its neighbors, particularly the Kyrgyz Republic, and has imposed a harsh border control regime, including minefields along the undemarcated border. Such conditions are not propitious for cross-border cooperation.

Just as proposals for state structure that seem to have abstract merit, like federalism or cultural autonomy, may founder on the politics of particular states, so the nostrum of regional cooperation has foundered again and again on the politics of particular regions. Even more than state, "region" is a fluid concept, and states have strong views about which region they wish to belong to, views that are not always consistent with those of outsiders. A 1997 Security Council resolution endorsed a French proposal for a regional conference on the interlinked problems of the Great Lakes, but most of the states of the region, and Rwanda in particular, have opposed such a meeting, fearing that it would be a vehicle for attempts to impose an outside agenda. Rwanda under the control of mainly Anglophone exiles who returned from Uganda, prefers to join with the economically more viable states Anglophone states of the East African Union.

Indeed one reason that the example of a large federal state such as India might be inapplicable to most other countries is precisely because nearly all of India's ethno-linguistic identities are purely sub-state. If most of those identities connected India's peoples to neighboring states that might pose a security threat, India might be as reluctant to adopt a federal system as its small neighbor, Sri Lanka. In many areas of the world, and in particular in this one, identity and cultural issues are inherently regional and must have at least partly regional solutions.

Regional approaches of course do not guarantee success. The Lusaka process for addressing the conflict in the DRC constituted an extended set of regional, indeed,

continent-wide consultations, which resulted in an agreement that was intended to address both the internal and external causes of war in the DRC. Nonetheless, in the absence of adequate global commitment to monitoring, implementing, and enforcing the agreement, in particular the disarming of so-called "negative" forces, the agreement may never achieve its stated objectives. Nonetheless, if this process succeeds in establishing a degree of political order in the DRC, or if the Bonn process does likewise in Afghanistan, the cross-border linkages of identity groups that developed during the wars will persist. New regional and global institutions will be needed to assure that these networks become forces holding regions together and integrating them into global society rather than the protagonists of new rounds of violence.