

UN Global Initiative Central Asian Conflict Prevention Regional Action Agenda

Background

Central Asia¹, in whose territory Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are located stretches from the Caspian Sea in the west to Mongolia and China in the east, and from south Siberian Ural in the north to the borders of Iran and Afghanistan in the south. Four million square kilometers of its territory is mainly covered by plains, deserts and mountains.

The population of Central Asia is about 60 million people. It is populated by various ethnic and confessional groups. The largest of these include Turkic-speaking (Uzbek, Kazakh, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, Karakalpak, Tatar, Uigur) and Farsi-speaking (Tajik) ethnicities; in addition, many other nationalities populate the area including Russians, Koreans, and tens of other peoples. 90% of the faithful are Sunni Muslims with most of other ethnicities being Orthodox Christian.

The region's peculiarities include a high natural population growth with a lot of people being under 15 years old and a relatively high level of literacy and education.

The total gross national income (GNI) of the Central Asian states exceeded 42 billion USD in 2002, and with regards to its purchasing power parity, was about 162 billion USD. With regards to general economic potential and industry diversity, the leaders are Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In terms of per capita figures, according to classification of the World Bank, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are countries with lower than world average level of development, while Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are deemed to be countries with a low level of economic development, and Tajikistan is among the 10 poorest countries in the world.

In the structure of manufacturing, Central Asia is dominated by mining, agriculture, raw materials production and processing industries. Kazakhstan boasts the region's largest and most diversified mining and extracting industry (oil, coal, base (non-ferrous) metals) while Uzbekistan leads in mechanical engineering, chemical industry and light industry. In the other countries, only certain industries achieved significant development, namely, gas and cotton processing in Turkmenistan, energy and gold extraction in Kyrgyzstan, and aluminum smelting, light industry and energy in Tajikistan. The regions' agriculture is dominated by production of grain (Kazakhstan), cotton and silk (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), fruits and vegetables (all the region's countries).

The peoples of Central Asia have historically maintained close cultural, social, and trade and economic relations. In ancient times, the Great Silk Way connected the East with the West and played a role of cultural, trade and transport artery.

Today the regions' states have mostly formed their own forms of state sovereignty and are full members of the international community, members of various international organizations and unions. The Organization for Central Asian Cooperation is active in the region.

Given many unresolved regional issues and the fact that the region has recently experienced conflicts that entailed human casualties, the issue of conflict prevention is particularly acute for the region today.

¹ The very name of "Central Asia" is a relatively new term describing realities of the post-Soviet geopolitical regionalization, since in Soviet historiography starting the moment of the formation of the five countries in the area of Soviet East (Turkistan) the term "Middle Asia and Kazakhstan" was used. In 1993 at the meeting of heads of the five former Soviet Asian republics, the decision was made to rename the region into Central Asia that currently encompasses Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Predominant factors of conflict development

These factors are a reflection of complex socio-cultural, socio-political and socioeconomic processes underway in the region.

These processes are triggered on the one hand by world trends of globalization and regionalization, and on the other hand by the processes of socioeconomic transformation and formation of won sovereignty.

The external factors include:

- Interests of the “big” geopolitics, especially those of USA, Russia, and China;
- Economic interests of transnational “raw materials” corporations;
- Interests of transnational “criminal” syndicates (drug trafficking, arms, heroin); and
- Interests of transnational terrorist syndicates.

Clashes among the interests above create the first layer of factors that give rise to, and develop, conflicts.

Regional factors of conflict development include:

- *Firstly*, almost all new states of post-Soviet Middle Asia decided on an independent model of movement and development, their own tempo of transformations and reforms, and own type of state governance. This includes “democratic” way of development, “neo-totalitarian or neo-Soviet” way, versions of an authoritarian way and even a state of civil war;
- *Secondly*, among the new states, the myth of their rich natural resources prevails; they believe are in demand in the world, thanks to which they will make a socioeconomic leap;
- *Thirdly*, there exists historical competition between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan; and
- *Fourthly*, there is a dominating pattern of expecting assistance from outside.

Presence of such diversity of vectors of development among the region’s countries gives rise to the second layer of factors that trigger and develop conflicts.

Certain state-related factors of conflict development include the following:

- The need for institutional changes, the strengthening and legitimization thereof. The key here is the issue of mechanisms of harmonization of interests of elite circles, and ways to develop strategic decisions. Before such a task always rested with the Center (Moscow), but today, it became a prerogative of the local elite. One of the more important processes that were supposed to provide “opportunities” and influence was the process of emergence and formation of “private property;”
- The need for structural reforms, the inequality of development of various industries and internal territories;
- Structural socio-political changes, the formation of new societal groups and new socio-political institutions, and civic society in the first place. Expansion of the composition of socially active “players”. Conservatism of the system of state governance. Social inequality, poverty and corruption.

Antagonisms and oppositions in these aspects bring about the third layer of factors that create and develop conflicts.

Predominant factors of conflict risk

Security issues:

- The region's states have failed to create an effective regional system of collective security, and this has led to a dangerous vacuum of authority provoking various extremist organizations to strengthen their influence in the region;
- The region's countries have turned into one of the most important transit channels for transportation of drugs from Afghanistan; and
- There is incompleteness in the process of delimitation and demarcation of state borders.

Water and energy issues:

- The problem hindering cooperation among Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan is use of water resources of the Sarydarya River, whose flows originate at the cross of the Naryn and Karadarya rivers in the eastern part of the Ferghana Valley. Kyrgyzstan needs energy, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan need water; and
- The irrigation systems of the region's countries are based on obsolete technologies that use water uneconomically.

Ecological issues:

- Today's most serious ecological issue in the region, which requires immediate action, is maintenance and safety of tailing dumps in Kyrgyzstan. These dumps contain mostly radioactive waste of the mining industry accumulated during the Soviet time;
- The region inherited a Soviet-era ecological catastrophe of the Aral Sea that both directly and indirectly affects all Central Asian nations; and
- Each republic of the region is concerned with ecological consequences of the economic activity (especially those of mining projects) in the adjacent territories of the region's other countries. The risk of inflicting damage to environment is quite real, therefore issues of compensation are quite acute.

Migration issues:

- Huge illegal labor migration. People work mostly in shadow economy without any legal protection. This makes them vulnerable to exploitation and to crime while simultaneously leaving them without access to healthcare services and education for their children; and
- Differing outlooks on issues of migration and refugees among the region's countries.

Issues of human development:

Currently, all the region's countries have been encountering common problems of human development in the area of healthcare, education, culture, science, etc.

- In the area of healthcare, prophylaxis of tuberculosis and other infectious diseases (viral hepatitis, acute ventral infections, syphilis, AIDS, etc.) are quite significant in all the region's countries. The possibility of regional epidemics makes these countries undertake measures to protect themselves at the expense of neighboring states;
- The region's governments' ability to supply schools with textbooks in native languages is rather limited due to a lack of resources despite the states' open policy favoring educational rights of ethnic minorities. Many ethnic minorities have no opportunity to educate their children in their native language. This results in

- deterioration of the overall education and increases inequality of opportunities of obtaining quality education; and
- Differences in understanding of human development between the local elite and international programs and projects.

Political and governance-related issues:

- Weakness of state institutions. Monopolization of power in the hands of certain groups. Presence of clan rule, nepotism and traditionalistic forms of governance. Deficiencies in personnel policies, inability of (and lack of opportunity for) new socio-political groups to gain power;
- Low political culture among the majority of the population. Formality of activities of many institutions and organizations of the civic society. Ethnic and cultural diversity is used for political purposes; and
- Lack of coordination of activities among various international organizations which results in a “struggle of projects”. Formality of many international projects.

Our position and values

All people are born free and, therefore, human rights are an indispensable characteristic of the modern civilization, including one of the fundamental human rights – the right to life.

Diversity of ideas should be used for creation, not for development of conflicts.

A conflict per se is a complex phenomenon and effective prevention and transformations of conflicts are possible only as a result of partnership and participation of various participants.

Only democratic procedures and mechanisms will enable us to avoid monopoly of power and achieve truth.

Recommendations

For state bodies:

- Start forming a general conception of prevention of violent conflicts in Central Asia;
- Develop and formalize in law formats and procedures to harmonize interests of the regions' states during the resolution of issues that affect interests of the region's other countries;
- Actively use the capacities of civic society institutions in development, promotion and implementation of projects and programs aimed at prevention of conflicts; arrange communication among the region's nations and public groups;
- Support initiatives aimed at conflict prevention both within a country and in cross-border areas;
- Develop the system of enhancement of the qualifications of state officers, ensuring quality of public conflict prevention services rendered;
- Include knowledge, skills and abilities of conflict prevention and harmonization of interests in the qualifications requirements set for state officers.

For civic society:

- Initiate changes in the inter-state legislative base regulating interaction and cooperation between the state and civic society;
- Form a regional system for the enhancement of the qualifications of officers of civic society institutions working in the area of conflict prevention;
- Organize a regional civic expert examination of governance and other decisions of state bodies, if effects of such decisions transcend the borders of one of the states;

- Expand the regional informational field in which civic society institutions' projects are implemented;
- Depoliticize project activities in the area of interethnic and intercultural interaction; develop the policy of "peoples' diplomacy".

For international organizations:

- Harmonize positions of various international organizations working in the region and prevent competition among the projects;
- Recommend that the UN act as doyen of the donor community in the area of conflict prevention. It is advisable that a UN regional coordination center be established. Expand the UN bodies' connections with the civic society and, if necessary, change their organizational structures;
- Adapt the ideas, methods and technologies introduced from outside to local current situations' peculiarities;
- Review approaches to in-country implementation of programs and projects in order for the latter to be focused on real issues and not just goals of the donors;
- Support efforts of civic society aimed at having it included in the process of discussion and decision making; support the development of civic society, not just civic society institutions; and
- Facilitate promotion of partnership between the state and the civic society through joint activities. Render assistance in development and implementation of the mechanism of partnership between the state and the civic society.

Major directions of conflict prevention activities in Central Asia:

- Forming a regional coordination working group to ensure processes of harmonization and synchronization of activities of civic society in the region aimed at conflict prevention;
- Developing and adopting a regional political Memorandum on Peace declaring the region a peace zone, and containing mechanisms of violent conflict prevention in the region;
- Holding a regional forum with an agenda of cross-border cooperation;
- Formulating the mechanism of taking into consideration the position of the nongovernmental sector in the process of political decision-making by the Organization for Central Asian Cooperation;
- Creating a Civic Institute for Peace in Central Asia as an independent center for research of issues of prevention of violent conflicts in the region and monitoring of the situation around prevention of violent conflicts in the region;
- Creating a mechanism for the coordination of international projects;
- Creating a regional conflict prevention service uniting efforts and resources of state organizations, nongovernmental sector and international organizations in the region;
- Creating the regional public informational network on conflict prevention; and
- Introducing disciplines and subjects on the prevention of violent conflicts in the educational programs of the region's states.

Mechanisms of monitoring the implementation of major directions of activities

- Annual regional conference on peace maintenance and conflict prevention issues;
- Regional informational newsletter on conflict prevention issues;
- Regional website dedicated to conflict prevention issues.

Plan of Actions
on prevention of conflicts in Central Asia for 2005-2008
as developed and adopted at the Central Asian conference on
“CIVIC SOCIETY FOR PARTNERSHIP IN PEACEBUILDING AND CONFLICT PREVENTION”
May 26 – 27, 2005, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Period / Action	2005	2006	2007	2008	Subsequent periods
Legal		<p>Developing and adopting a regional political Memorandum on Peace declaring the region a peace zone and containing mechanism of violent conflict prevention in the region.</p> <p>Developing a Central Asian Violent Conflict Prevention Strategy.</p>	<p>Researching the laws of the region's states concerning conflict prevention in order to harmonize them.</p>	<p>Initiating changes in laws of the region's states to reduce the risk of conflict emergence.</p> <p>Initiating inclusion in the laws of formats and procedures of cooperation between the state and the civic society aimed at prevention of violent conflicts.</p>	<p>Implementing the Public Expert Examination of the decisions made including the perspective of their conflict potential.</p>
Organizational and institutional	<p>Forming a regional coordination working group to ensure harmonization and synchronization of activities of the civic society in the region aimed at conflict prevention.</p> <p>Improving and finalizing national plans of actions aimed at peacebuilding and conflict prevention.</p>	<p>Creating a Civic Institute for Peace in Central Asia as an independent center for research of issues of prevention of violent conflicts in the region and monitoring of the situation around prevention of violent conflicts in the region.</p> <p>Integrating the peace ideas in the regional initiatives.</p> <p>Formulating the mechanism of taking into consideration the position of nongovernmental sector in the process of political decision making by the Organization for Central Asian Cooperation.</p> <p>Creating the mechanism of</p>	<p>Creating a regional conflict prevention service uniting efforts and resources of state organizations, nongovernmental sector and international organizations in the region.</p> <p>Annual regional conference on peace maintenance and conflict prevention (monitoring of implementation of the regional action agenda).</p> <p>Developing and implementing the mechanism of partnership between the state and the civic society.</p>	<p>Supporting establishment of network of organizations of the civic society and other sectors of the society working in the area of conflict prevention.</p> <p>Developing and implementing the mechanism of partnership between the state and the civic societies of Central Asia.</p> <p>Annual regional conference on peace</p>	<p>Developing the network of organizations of all sectors working in the area of conflict prevention and including in other networks.</p> <p>Annual regional conference on peace maintenance and conflict prevention (monitoring of implementation of the regional action agenda).</p>

		<p>coordination of international projects.</p> <p>Developing and implementing the mechanism of partnership between the subjects within the civic society.</p> <p>Annual regional conference on peace maintenance and conflict prevention (monitoring of implementation of the regional action agenda).</p> <p>Holding a regional forum with the agenda of cross-border cooperation.</p>		<p>maintenance and conflict prevention (monitoring of implementation of the regional action agenda, discussion of the regional action agenda for the following year).</p>	
Informational		<p>Developing the Regional Informational Strategy.</p> <p>Launching the Regional Informational Newsletter dedicated to issues of conflict prevention.</p> <p>Launching the Analytical Magazine – a publication of the Civic Institute for Peace.</p> <p>Creating the Regional Website dedicated to issues of conflict prevention.</p> <p>Commencing to work on integrating peace ideas in the implemented projects.</p>	<p>Implementing the mechanism of public expert examination of programs and projects initiated in the area of conflict prevention.</p>	<p>Creating the regional public informational network on conflict prevention.</p>	<p>Expanding the public informational network on conflict prevention.</p>
Educational		<p>Building the capacity of civic society institutes working in the area of conflict prevention, strengthening the methodological base for working with conflicts.</p> <p>Arranging mutual consultations on implementation of national programs.</p>	<p>Introducing disciplines and subjects on prevention of violent conflicts in the educational programs of the region's states.</p> <p>Creating a structure of training, retraining and qualification enhancement of personnel</p>		

			working in the area of conflict prevention (Civic Society Academy).			
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