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## Afghanistan and Central Asia: Nervous Neighbors and Mutual Liabilities?

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## **Afghanistan and Central Asia: Nervous Neighbors and Mutual Liabilities?**

*By Lucas Hori*

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*“We in Uzbekistan are acutely aware that the decisive factor for security is the attainment of peace and stability in Afghanistan.”*

Islam Karimov, President of Uzbekistan, at a NATO summit in Bucharest (April 8, 2008)

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### ***Abstract***

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, Afghanistan has received a great deal of international attention, while its Central Asian neighbors have been generally ignored. However, the former-Soviet republics are plagued by security threats of their own, which leaders are quick to blame on the volatile circumstances in Afghanistan. This paper examines the relationship between the two regions, focusing especially on cross-border drug trade, and radical Islamist groups, and claims that Central Asian leaders have over-exaggerated Afghanistan's negative impact on their states. The piece also evaluates Central Asia's effects on Afghanistan. It concludes by offering suggestions for improving the turbulent region.

### ***Introduction***

Immediately following September 11, 2001, Afghanistan became a magnet of international attention for allegedly harboring the terrorists that perpetrated the attack on New York's World Trade Center. The Middle Eastern nation has since garnered extensive media focus, diplomatic efforts, and as of October 2009, 67,700 international troops striving to ensure national stability (BBC 2009). Directly to its north, however, the surrounding Central Asian states have received scant notice. Ruled by strict dictators and enclosed by perilous borders, the

five former Soviet republics have done little to encourage foreign enquirers, largely escaping Western scrutiny. Still, despite skewed statistics and watchful governments, bleak reports of pervasive crime, government oppression, and economic downturn have emerged from the region (Nichol 2009:ii).

Central Asian rulers are quick to suggest their unstable and war-torn southern neighbor is to blame for such problems. Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov called Afghanistan the "main source of fanaticism and extremism in the region," at a 2000 panregional conference (Zhokov 2000); and in the same year, Tajik Defense Minister Col. Gen. Sherali Khairullayev asked the international community "to realize the dangers emanating from Afghanistan" (United Press 2000). Doubtless, Afghanistan—dominated by an opium economy and governed only by a nascent constitution—has had a negative influence in the area. However, Luzianin suggests, "It is crucial for the Central Asian region to identify the correlation between the external (the Afghan-Pakistani) threats and its own domestic threats, and to determine which is dominant" (2009).

As this paper will explore, this determination is not easily made. Core threats to Central Asia's security include extensive drug trafficking and emerging Islamic terrorist organizations (Lal 2006:19), and Afghanistan certainly has contributed to the rise of such menaces. However, the Central Asian republics are also responsible for creating a regional structure that has allowed illicit activity to flourish. By studying these two areas of concern, it is possible to gain insight into the degree to which Afghanistan has affected the Central Asian states, and thereby, predict how a resolution to the Afghan conflict will improve the region.

### ***Drug Trade***

No one questions that Afghanistan is among the world's largest producers of illicit drugs, and Central Asian governments have been ready to shift the blame for national drug problems to their neighbor. The republics do indeed have serious drug issues; it has been suggested that the Silk Road, historically famous for facilitating the exchange of Western and Eastern goods, acts today as a conduit for narcotics (Dash 2003). A 2008 United Nation's Office of Drug and Crime (UNODC) report summarizes the trends in illicit drugs in the region, prefaced by the warning that it is difficult to extract trustworthy statistics from a region marked by government deception and inconsistent law-enforcement efforts. However, even given the obscurity of regional statistics, a disheartening picture of the drug trade arises. It is estimated that in 2006, 118 metric tons of heroin were smuggled through the region, not including the perhaps more vigorous trade in raw opium. From 2002 to 2006, 25,670 kilograms of heroin were seized in the five Central Asian states, and 18,443 kilograms of opium (UNODC 2008: 9). (By comparison, from 1995-1999, 7,154 kilograms of heroin were seized in the more tightly patrolled United States (U.S. DEA 2006).) In nine months in 2001, the Kyrgyz government claimed to have seized nearly twelve-and-a-half tons of drugs of all varieties, including sixty-five kilograms of heroin (Mohapatra 2007: 161).

The pervasive drug trade has had deleterious societal effects. As any observer would expect, drug use has risen concurrently with an increase in trafficking, especially along important trade routes. In 2006, the Central Asia states (excluding Turkmenistan) had over 90,000 registered drug users (UNODC 2008: 27), and many more were left uncounted (perhaps as many as 500,000, the World Bank suggested in 2005). The number of drug-related crimes is closely linked to the amount of substance being traded; the cities with the highest incidence of such crime were those that served as important waypoints along drug routes. The majority of the

crimes surrounding drugs have involved storage or distribution, rather than smuggling; and surprisingly, the number of drug-related crimes registered has been decreasing since 2005. However, most of these transgressions also resulted in the arrest of a drug user for possession of a small amount of substance, rather than the infiltration of large-scale trading operations, calling into question the competency of drug enforcement agencies (UNODC 2008: 40).

Finally, the drug trade, and the concurrent intravenous drug use, has brought a marked increase in the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in the region. The World Bank claims a 1,600 percent increase in HIV incidences from 2000 to 2004, with cases concentrated among young people who inject drugs or engage in commercial sex (2005), and researchers, relying on models from Southeast Asia, have suggested that HIV follows heroin trafficking routes in the region (Stachowiak & Beyrer 2000). Given the consequences of the drug trade, it is understandable that Central Asian leaders seek to determine the source of the problem.

Further, it is not unreasonable to put some responsibility on Afghanistan. The war-torn nation is, by all accounts, guilty for the vast majority of the drugs that are trafficked in Central Asia; 99 percent of opiates traded in Central Asia originate there (UNODC 2008: 6), amounting to about 15 percent of Afghanistan's overall production (Nichol 2009:20). A 2009 UNODC report maintained that 90 percent of the world's opium is produced in Afghanistan (about 3,500 tons), and the drug is exported worldwide through a variety of trade routes (2). Most opium is grown in the south and west of the country, and therefore, even more is trafficked through Iran and Pakistan than Central Asia. This broad trade undoubtedly has a negative influence on the region as a whole.

Drug production in Afghanistan (a relatively new industry that arose only after the expulsion of the Soviets in 1979) "thrives against a background of economic hardship in

Afghanistan and the broader region” (UNODC 2009: 20). Even after several years of Western intervention, unemployment remains high in Afghanistan, and the access the basic amenities remains low. Consistently ranked among the most corrupt nations (Andelman 2007), Afghanistan’s fraudulent system also “buys protection against eradication, facilitates illicit shipments, and guarantees immunity for drug traffickers” (UNODC 2009: 20). The combination of extreme poverty and widely perceived government corruption emboldens many average Afghans to involve themselves in the production, processing, trade, and consumption of illicit drugs. Thus, from 2002 to 2008, Afghan farmers made approximately \$6.4 billion from poppy cultivation, and traffickers profited about \$18 billion (UNODC 2009: 20).

The UNODC further suggests that all parties involved in destabilizing Afghanistan are somehow involved in the drug trade, and therefore, Western powers should look to a reduction in drug traffic to calm the volatile nation (2009). Although the Taliban was permissive of opium production in the years following the collapse of the Soviet initiative in Afghanistan, the radical organization itself banned poppy cultivation briefly in July 2000 (Jelsma 2005). Though this proscription sent the prices of heroin soaring in the region, it was rescinded in the face of mass public protest and today, the organization supports, and even forces, opium cultivation (IRIN 2008).<sup>i</sup> From 2008 to 2009, only 10,000 hectares of opium were eliminated in the country, less than two percent of drugs were confiscated, and few major traffickers were apprehended (UNODC 2009: 13).

The vast majority of opium product trafficked through the “northern” Central Asian route is destined for Russia, and passes through major Central Asian hubs, including Dushanbe, Bishkek, and Tashkent (UNODC 2008: 33). (Although more heroin and opium is seized in Tajikistan than any other of the Central Asia republics, thanks to its close proximity to

Afghanistan and porous borders, all states in the region still recorded significant seizures in 2005 (UNODC 2009: 33, 36.) Without the large contribution of illegal product from Afghanistan, this trade would be impossible. Therefore, significant blame for the unfortunate drug situation in the former Soviet republics does lie in Kabul.

Conversely, however, Central Asian governments have also facilitated this trade, and a brief review of these governments is in order. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 left a Central Asian power vacuum that was filled (with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, which today stands as a failed state) with dictatorial leaders of the previous era. Presidents Sa Niyazov of Turkmenistan (recently deceased), Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan, and Emomalii Rahmon of Tajikistan have all been charged with rampant violation of human rights ranging from the rigging of elections to the killing of dissidents by boiling; no enduring Central Asian leader has proved exemplary (Bukharbayeva 2005; Walsh 2003). Thus, by allowing, from the top down, the rampant poverty, corruption, and disorganization in which the drug trade thrives, the region's rulers have contributed to its prevalence.

Despite opportunity for economic growth through natural resources, the region remains very poor; Tajikistan has a per capita GDP of approximately \$1,800, while Uzbekistan's is about \$2,600 (CIA 2009a, CIA2009b). Unemployment rates in the region are also some of the highest in the world. Kyrgyzstan's stands at 18 percent, while Turkmenistan's is an astounding 60 percent (CIA 2009c), and the region's leaders, who amass wealth for themselves while failing to provide basic infrastructure, are responsible for the economic stagnation which leads citizens to turn to illicit trade in order to procure basic necessities. In Tajikistan, where 80 percent live below the poverty line, widows have turned to drug trafficking to support their children (Esfandiari 2004), and large-scale traffickers, thanks to the region's epidemic poverty, are able to

persuade citizens to run drugs at a high risk for a small price (Lubin 2003:47). In 2007, Askarbek Mameev, chairman of Kyrgyzstan's State Commission on Drug Control, concluded, "In some regions, the only way to survive is to take part in the drug trade" (Matlack 1997). Thus, by failing to provide basic economic reform, Central Asian governments have allowed the readily available Afghan drugs to become a source of lifesaving revenue for their impoverished populations.

Pervasive corruption in Central Asia, especially at borders, has further encouraged the growth of a drug trade. Lubin points to "widespread corruption among police, border guards, customs, and other government officials as one of the most important factors sustaining the large drug flow in Central Asia," and suggests that underpaid border patrols implicitly understand that their salary will be augmented by trafficker's bribes (2003: 47). Indeed, the largest drug dealers have the most cash and are able to pay off guards to look the other way as shipments pass. Injury or death is the penalty for failure to comply with their demands (Lubin 2003:47). The situation would be somewhat improved if the government made overtures to stop the trade. However, the May 2000 seizure near Almaty, Kazakhstan, of 62 grams of heroin, \$54,000 in cash, and orders for 1.2 million pounds sterling from the car of Tajik ambassador Sadullojon Nematov, allegedly headed toward a delivery to a Tajik trade head, suggests that the drug trade has even infiltrated into the upper echelons of the government itself (Mamadshoyev 2000; Lubin 2003:47).

This complicity certainly cannot be blamed on Afghanistan, and can be contrasted with Iran's deliberate effort to disrupt the narcotics trade. With help from the United Nations Drug Control Program and Western governments, Iran was able to significantly reduce drug trade; and in 1999, Iranian seizures accounted for 85 percent of global opium confiscations (Maranenko 2007: 5), while the Central Asian leaders remained relatively passive. Therefore, though



Afghanistan is the obvious source of Central Asia's drugs, the ease with which drugs flow through the former Soviet states is also an essential factor in the regional trade, for which the Central Asian states are culpable; indeed, lacking this trade route, Afghanistan might be forced to limit its output. Further, in the absence of Afghan drugs, weakly patrolled Central Asian states could begin producing substances internally; the UNODC concludes, "any success in reducing the opium supply in Afghanistan may be met with an increase in supply from Central Asia" (2008: 8). Therefore, it is not appropriate to conclude that a collapse of Afghanistan's illicit production would necessarily bring the drug trade to a halt in the republics.

### ***Terrorist Organizations***

Given the decades of turmoil and unrest in Afghanistan, it is not surprising that its neighbors have also sought to blame the country for fomenting terrorism. Radical Islamic factions are the chief concern, and regarding such organizations, Rashid proposes that, "the crisis in Afghanistan is the single most important external factor in the growing instability of Central Asia" (2002:209). An analysis of the current situation reveals that, as with the drug trade, Afghanistan is intimately involved with Islamic terrorism in the region.

Yet, significant culpability for the increasing risk of an Islamic upheaval also lies with the Central Asian states. Until 1996, leaders of Central Asia did not consider political Islam a legitimate concern of the region except in Tajikistan, where civil war had pitted the remnant communists against a heavily Islamic uprising (Malashenko 2001:53, Cornell 2005:583). In that year, however, the Taliban, who relied on an extreme, conservative interpretation of Islam, occupied the capital of Afghanistan, effectively completing its two-year campaign for control of the unstable nation (U.S. Dept of State 2009). The regime was infamous for its repressive

measures, establishing the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice to cleanse the state of “un-Islamic” activities, including the viewing of television and the maintenance of too short a beard. Though Central Asian officials may still have believed an invasion from the Taliban unlikely, the success of the Muslim group in the southern state caused leaders to fear a catalyzing “euphoria” among other similarly-minded organizations in their embryonic stages (Malashenko 2001:54). As time progressed, it became evident that the Taliban in fact provided more than ideological encouragement. Controlling 90 percent of Afghanistan by 2001, the group began to support Central Asian terrorist groups as well, offering sanctuary, weapons, and finances (Bruno 2009; Rashid 1999:30).

The Taliban’s reign in Afghanistan was marked by a degree of stabilization that many oppressive regimes engender. The drug ban of 2000 was far more effective in limiting narcotics than any efforts since, feuds between local warlords were eliminated, and government corruption was reduced (Bruno 2009). However, the regime also began to provide sanctuary to other radical Islamists and their organizations, and this ultimately proved disastrous (U.S. State Dept 2009). When Osama Bin Laden, the leader responsible for the September 11th attacks on the United States, was discovered to be hiding in Afghanistan, the Taliban was forced from power by an alliance of NATO forces that invaded during the proceeding period of international outrage. Though American leaders have touted the installation of an improved, free government (Richter 2009), other sources suggest that as late as December 2008, the Taliban had a permanent presence in 72% percent of the nation (ICOS 2008). Although it is not easy to estimate the number of Taliban still active in the conflicted area, 2007 figures concluded that the organization could muster 10,000 soldiers, with 2,000-3,000 “full-time insurgents” (Rodhe 2007).

Nearly a year ago, a Taliban sympathizer in Afghanistan told an American official, “You might have all the watches, but we have all the time” (Coughlin 2009). The phrase suggested that, despite the military superiority of American forces, the public protest in the United States would eventually force a withdrawal of troops, allowing the Taliban to reclaim its lost power. President Obama’s recent commitment to withdraw troops from the region before his 2012 re-election campaign substantiates the anonymous Afghan’s position (Brown 2009). If the current government collapsed with the withdrawal of American troops, the Taliban might become more aggressive toward Central Asia. To this point, Rashid claims, “Conjuring up new enemies is the best way to fuel the permanent state of jihad, the only thing that keeps the [Taliban] army united and motivated.” With the departure of the United States, “the first enemy to be singled out would probably be Tajikistan because of the Russian forces already there; later would come Uzbekistan” (2002:211). Such claims reinforce Central Asian fears of Afghanistan’s terrorist base, and a collapse of the current puppet-American government could be disastrous for the region.

However, even assuming an increasingly stable Afghanistan, the Central Asian states have terrorist threats emanating from within their own borders. As in Afghanistan, radical Islamists are the main terrorist risk in Central Asia, and several organizations present possible threats. The most infamous of these is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which was formed in the Fergana Valley shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Led by two young organizers, Tohir Abdouhalilovitch Yuldeshev and Jumaboi Ahmadzhanovitch Khojaev (later Juma Namangani), the group quickly turned to violence as a means of establishing its desired Islamic state. In 1991, Yuldeshev boldly confronted President Karimov, demanding that he impose shari’a in Uzbekistan and create more mosques; the angered head of state walked out.

Shortly thereafter, the IMU seized the headquarters of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan; and by 1998, its leadership, forced into exile in Kabul, had both announced the official creation of the organization and declared a jihad to remove Karimov from power (Rashid 2002:148).

Although it is generally acknowledged that the IMU has received shelter, funding, training, and manpower from Afghan groups (Nichol 2009:3), the organization was founded as a response to Karimov's undue oppression. Following a violent Muslim response to the disappearance of several important Islamist leaders, the president passed the 1998 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, requiring the registration of all mosques and Muslim clergy, and targeting the families of Muslim radicals with heavy abuse. Such restrictive laws placed increasing pressure on Namangami and Yuldeshev to react radically (Rashid 2002:146). In an October 2000 interview for *Voice of America*, Yuldeshev acknowledged its objectives: "The goals of IMU activities are firstly fighting against oppression within our country [Uzbekistan], against bribery, against the inequities and also the freeing of our Muslim brothers from prison" (quoted in Rashid 2001). In 1999 and 2000, the organization executed a series of attacks and kidnappings in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. However, its campaign was cut short by American intervention in Afghanistan, and the group suffered heavy losses at the Battle of Kunduz in November 2001, as it attempted to assist its Taliban cohorts (Cornell 2005:590). With its leadership decimated and membership scattered, the IMU appeared defeated. Yet, further bombings in 2004 suggest that remnants of the organization remain active under varying aliases (Nichol 2009:5), and it is likely that the fragmented radicals could regroup with destabilization (Rashid 2002).<sup>ii</sup>

Given the close transnational interaction between various Islamist groups in the Middle East, it is difficult to draw a distinction between activities in one state and another. Though the

IMU doubtless received support from the Afghan Al-Qaeda and Taliban, the Central Asian group also contributed to the destabilization of the southern state. However, blame for the IMU's creation rests squarely on Uzbekistan, and the volatile combination of impoverished citizenry and repressive rule. Thus, to proclaim Afghanistan the primary source of extremism (as Karimov did in 2000) is to ignore the role of dictatorial Central Asian leadership in producing discontent of its own accord.

The IMU's violent tactics drew international reproach (the United States designated the group a terrorist organization in 2000), and gave Uzbekistan a mandate to harshly discipline its members. The Hizb ut-Tharir (HT), another Islamic faction of concern, has operated on a very different ideology. The website of the international organization, founded in 1952, declares its "objective is to resume the Islamic way of life by establishing an Islamic State that executes the systems of Islam and carries its call to the world" (Hitz ut-Tharir 2009). The HT, characterizing itself as a political party and officially proclaiming nonviolence in its quest to establish a caliphate, has attracted educated, young adherents; and like the IMU, it has prospered in the Fergana Valley, though it has also expanded to every Central Asian state except Turkmenistan (Pylenko 2006, Rashid 2002:124, 132). Using thousands of pamphlets and the prison system as means to expand its membership, the movement has attracted a significant following (Baran 2004: 85, 86); estimates of members in Uzbekistan range from 7,000 to 60,000 (Baran 2004:78), organized in secretive cells that attract a population searching for spiritual meaning to an often impoverished and unfulfilling daily life.

Despite the international HT's efforts to portray itself as peaceful to the Western world, regional leaders have questioned whether its passive doctrine is merely a front. In a 2004 broadcast following suicide bombings in Tashkent, Karimov asked, "If the religious movement

intends to set up a caliphate in Uzbekistan, overthrow the current system, give up the modern style of life, and create a state based on shari'a law, then how will they be able to do this in a peaceful way?" (Alibekov 2004). The president's fears may not be entirely unfounded. A Tajik HT pamphlet published to explain the bombings denied involvement, but contained concerning sentiments:

If we ever decide to include violence in our program, we shall not blow up now here, now there; we shall go directly to his [Karimov's] palace and liquidate him because we are not afraid of anyone but God Almighty. Karimov himself understands that we can do it. He can find from his security services that it is in our power to clamp or to liquidate him, should our chosen path allow us to act in this manner (Saeedi 2004).

Such incendiary statements have led to a government crackdown in Uzbekistan, resulting in massive human rights violations (alleged members claim to have been beaten, shocked, suffocated, poked by needles, and raped in government attempts to extort confessions of involvement), and the imprisonment of perhaps 5,150 HT members by the summer of 2001 (Rashid 2002:126). This repression, combined with the HT's cell-based structure, suggest that violent splinter factions will likely form. Indeed, it is already questioned whether the HT has formed a militant branch, as officials have found weapons in the homes of members during arrests, and violence seems imminent (Baran 2004:95). Further, many adherents seeking to escape Karimov's oppression have fled to the surrounding areas, spreading the radical doctrine throughout Central Asia. Therefore, the expanding HT seems to present a more immediate and well-organized threat than the underground, broken IMU.

Afghan factions, however, have little to do with this growing liability. In 2001, an Uzbek court convicted nine HT members of belonging to Al-Qaeda, in an obvious attempt to link the group to external terrorism. However, the defendants strongly refuted this charge, maintaining, "We do not have connections to Osama bin Laden, or any other terrorist organizations, as we pursue different methods of struggle" (Rashid 2002:135). Lacking such links, it is difficult to

understand how Uzbekistan's leadership can assign Afghanistan blame for this intrastate entity, or how a resolution in Afghanistan will mitigate the terrorist risk presented by the HT.

### *Solutions*

Given the security risks associated with a billion-dollar business in illicit drugs and a growing population of radical Muslims, seeking remedies for these threats seems a high priority. As this study has indicated, however, it would be imprudent for Central Asian leaders to rely solely on a resolution in the Afghan conflict to resolve internal liabilities. Therefore, a separate evaluation of the two domains is appropriate.

### *Afghanistan*

Though it has been demonstrated that peace in Afghanistan will leave challenges in Central Asia, the value of a stable neighbor cannot be underestimated either; a report by the RAND Corporation suggests such stability would have a "profound effect" on Central Asia (Lal 2006:19). The same report remarks that despite obvious problems today, "the countries of Central Asia have noted they would be even less capable of preventing the growth of illegal trade and extremist groups throughout the region in the absence of a U.S. role in Afghanistan" (22). However, the ongoing American political debate over the nation's proper role in Afghanistan indicates the complexity of finding a resolution. The American public is tiring of the unseen, deadly war, while in 2003, the British Parliament's International Development Committee concluded, "Afghanistan has no institutions that work, no legitimate economy, no security, and a serious lack of capacity within the government" (Drudge 2003).

Despite this bleak outlook, Najibullah Lafraie, Afghanistan's foreign minister from 1992 to 1996, offers an outline of measures which should be considered to ameliorate the situation (2007). First, he suggests, a new peacekeeping force under direct U.N. command must be established. Further, the United States and its allies should withdraw troops as soon as possible, to avoid antagonizing the general public and antigovernment insurgents. Simultaneously, more training should be given to the national army and police, and the Afghans should be given a greater voice designing the structure of a legitimate government. This structure, Lafraie suggests, might include the traditional warlords that occupational forces are keen to eliminate, but it must be based on a wider consensus than the current establishments. Finally, the international community must be willing to contribute more generous funds as an investment in the stability of the conflicted region (40). These recommendations, coming from a knowledgeable source, offer reasonable long-term goals. However, Western powers must foremost assume a greater patience in completing the reconstruction, and understand that any progress will be slow and tedious. Tight withdrawal deadlines for troops are ineffective and impractical. Instead, dedicated peacekeeping forces will have to be permanently installed, and hopefully, with the passing a time, the state will experience a gradual return to normalcy, and the stabilization that will accompany this shift.

### *Central Asia*

Just as an improved Afghanistan would be positive for Central Asia, less turbulence in the five former Soviet republics would discourage extremism and illicit trade in Afghanistan. However, because (generally) legitimate governments exercise



authority in Central Asia, the Western world does not have as much influence to enact changes. Therefore, officials in the region must work to address the basic economic and infrastructural failures that lead citizens to participate in illegal drug trade and seek radical overthrow of the government. Such efforts will require a reduction in the rampant government corruption that siphons international contributions from improvement projects, creation of more efficient national industries, and prudent use of the region's vast energy supplies. Further, to encourage trade and open relations with the Western world, the Central Asian nations must normalize their border procedures and open the region to media and visitors. This liberalization will necessarily bring a reduction in government oppression and human right violations, which will reduce the Islamist animosity toward the ruling parties. Unfortunately, the responsibility for such initiatives lies solely with the dictators that have been proven to be unconcerned with the welfare of their citizenry. Unless Karimov, Rahmon, and their compatriots recognize that their backward leadership will inevitably lead to unrest and economic failure, little advancement will be possible.

### ***Conclusion***

Thus far, this piece has considered how Afghanistan affects Central Asia. It can be rightfully concluded that a stabilization of the conflicted state, with an ensuing reduction of drug exports and terrorist enclaves, would be a positive trend for its northern neighbors. However, it has also been suggested that if Afghan nuisances were eliminated, the Central Asian states might still be rife with native drug production and Islamic radicals. Therefore, further evaluation might ask how *Central Asia* affects *Afghanistan's*

prospects for stability. Can a resolution be expected in the southern state while poverty and unrest rages around its borders? Western powers deeply invested in a successful resolution in the Afghan conflict might be wise to consider the transnational regional exchanges of product and ideologies, and put greater diplomatic pressure on Central Asian leaders to liberalize their lands.

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<sup>i</sup> During the ban on cultivation in Taliban territory, Northern Alliance leaders profited heavily from the high price paid for drugs grown in their region, where no ban was established. Maranenko finds it ironic that these same elites are now being charged to lead counter-narcotic programs under the American-erected system (2007: 12).

<sup>ii</sup> A 2003 Senate Subcommittee concluded “While many of the IMU camps were destroyed and an IMU leader was reportedly killed during the United States bombing in Afghanistan, recent reports indicate that the IMU is currently attempting to once again expand its activities” (Ros-Lehtinen 2003).

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