
18. Radical Islam as a threat to the security of the Central Asian states: a view from Uzbekistan

Farkhad Khamraev

I. Introduction

The changes in the former Soviet Union that took place at the beginning of the 1990s radically transformed the global geopolitical structure. Fifteen former Soviet republics, now independent states, set out on a course of independent development and transformation of their societies. Among them were the republics of Central Asia, whose subsequent development became dependent on the identification and effective use of factors that would preserve national stability and on the timely identification of threats to this stability, their sources and interrelationships.

The post-cold war world remains highly complex and contradictory. It has become highly interdependent, and autarky is therefore not a viable option. International relations in the 21st century will be increasingly affected by the emerging influences of globalization. The active participation and integration of the sovereign states of Central Asia in international institutions will be an important factor for the stable development of the entire region.

A 'Great Game' has resumed in Central Asia between the world's great powers. In contrast to the experience here during the 19th and the greater part of the 20th centuries, the major factors influencing this are now geo-economic rather than geopolitical—the struggle is now over energy resources. In this regard, the availability of and existing plans for the exploitation of the large deposits of oil and gas in the Central Asian region create serious preconditions for the region to become one of the most important centres of world politics in the years to come.

It might be expected that in the process of exploring the raw material potential of the region there will be close cooperation between US, European and Japanese corporations. That cooperation already exists and there is consequently increasing coordination of interests and actions between the USA, the European Union (EU) and Japan in the region. If China offers necessary guarantees and opens up its territory for pipelines to be laid and energy to be delivered to Japan, political consolidation in the China–Japan–USA triangle can also be expected.

These two processes are helping to intensify the integration of the Central Asian states into the global economy and therefore into global politics. They

will not, however, develop as quickly or as smoothly as many hope they will, and may therefore provoke serious conflicts.

Such conflicts and crises may be serious in the event of the interests of Russian and Western corporations clashing. The USA has already taken action to establish its influence in the Caspian Sea region and is interested in enhancing its role there. The Kazakh political scientist Nikolay Masanov has written:

US and Western trans-national corporations are active in the exploration of Central Asian resources and they are particularly interested in reducing Russia's influence in the region. When new transport routes, such as the trans-Caucasus corridor, become operational, Russia is expected to experience serious negative consequences. The point is that the flow of export goods from Central Asia across Russia unites the Urals, the Volga region, western Siberia and the Far East into a single complex. If this flow takes alternative routes *it is quite possible that the territorial integrity of Russia will be endangered.*¹

Under these conditions, the Central Asian states should show their consistent interest in strengthening the geo-economic presence of the West in the region while also taking Russia's interests and ambitions into account. The transformation of the region into an integral part of the global economy and politics will not, of course, reduce genuine and objective contradictions, but it will help to promote economic development and transparent government. The emergence of zones of competing economic interests in Central Asia also increases the need for national and regional stability.

Analysis of the main factors influencing Central Asia's strategic development reveals that there are serious problems and contradictions blocking the creation of regional stability and security systems. In spite of efforts by the regional states there continue to be deep disparities in their domestic development which must be overcome in order to consolidate their national sovereignty. The economies of most of the regional countries remain unstable. These countries will also continue to be vulnerable to negative tendencies which are initiated from outside the region and which remain outside their control.

Different countries in the region experience different tensions and challenges. In spite of all they have in common, particularly in culture and history, their geopolitical conditions are quite diverse. Tensions exist between regional countries which will most likely remain in the near future. The potential for conflict in Central Asia is influenced by many different factors, such as ethnicity, territorial disputes, disputes over access to water and natural resources, ideology and religion, as well as by Russia. The security of the new sovereign Caspian states is also highly dependent on external factors, both regional and global.

¹ Masanov, N., 'Podbryushye Rossii yzhe ne myagkoye' [Russia's underbelly is no longer soft], *Novaya Gazeta* (Moscow), 6–12 Apr. 1998. Emphasis in original.

II. Threats to security

As a result, the situation in Central Asia is characterized above all by: (a) the creation of democratic institutions in the regional countries at a time of intense domestic political struggle; (b) the existence of inter-ethnic conflicts; (c) the growth of political and religious extremism in different forms against the backdrop of the collapse of former ideological dogmas; (d) poorly developed economies and widespread suffering among the common people in most of these countries; and (e) the growth of economic and social disparities between the regional states and between different social groups within each state.

The Afghan source of instability in the 'Islamic arc' formed during the global confrontation between the superpowers is spreading to the north. It is as if the arc is now extending into the Central Asian states. The escalation of the Afghan conflict is creating the conditions for a progressive escalation of instability in the region. This is the most dangerous threat to national and regional security, as was seen in the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan in the summer and autumn of 1999 and the summer of 2000; in Tashkent in February 1999; in the Tashkent region in the autumn of 1999; and in the Surkandarya region of Uzbekistan in the summer of 2000.

The five Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—occupy 4 million square kilometres (km²) of territory, and of their combined population of over 53 million people approximately 75 per cent are Islamic peoples which are culturally close.² Naturally, when the communist ideology collapsed the processes of national revivalism began in the regional countries. Equally naturally, a significant proportion of the local populations reverted to Islamic values and stronger religious identities. These were logical processes, influenced by the natural and understandable desire of Islamic nations to re-establish their historical, cultural and political identities: Islam presents a system of values that was formed and existed over several centuries, emphasizing justice, empathy with one's neighbours and the desire to help others (with the expectation of rewards in the afterlife). For many generations, and for Islamic peoples in different countries, the Koran was and will remain the sacred code of the basic laws of life.

At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the religious revival in the Central Asian republics intensified significantly. It was characterized by: a substantial increase in the number of mosques in all the Central Asian republics (recently the uncontrolled construction of both large and small mosques has been stopped, for instance, in Uzbekistan³); zealous observance of ancient traditions and ceremonies, especially of a ritual nature; a many-fold increase in

² On the populations of the Central Asian states see Khamraev, F. M., 'Tsentral'naya Aziya: problema razdelyonnykh natsii' [Central Asia: problem of divided nations] in *Gosudarstvo i Obshchestvo v Stranakh Postsovetskogo Vostoka: Istoriya, Sovremennost', Perspektivy* [State and society in post-Soviet Oriental countries: history, modern times, prospects], proceedings of a conference (Daik Press: Almaty, 1999), pp. 146–47.

³ In Kyrgyzstan the government decided that all the country's estimated 1300 mosques must be re-registered with the Ministry of Justice and the qualifications of all imams re-evaluated during 2001. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), *RFE/RL Newslines*, vol. 4, no. 213, Part 1 (2 Nov. 2000).

the number of students in religious schools and institutions, even in those republics where Islam has never played a significant role in public life, such as Kazakhstan; the opening of institutions of higher learning where the rich historical and cultural heritage of the regional peoples is studied, with priority being given to Islam, and the creation of specialized universities for the study of Islam, such as the Islamic University in Tashkent; the declaration of Islamic holidays as state holidays and the official celebration of important dates connected with outstanding religious leaders; the (now lawful) publication of material and the launching of television and radio programmes propagating Islamic norms and values; the expansion of contacts with other Islamic countries, including membership in different international Islamic organizations; and the development of official and unofficial activities on the part of political movements using Islamic slogans.

Each Central Asian republic has moved along the road of Islamic revival in its own way. This as a necessary and indispensable process, and the peoples of Central Asia cannot and should not disregard their past. They remember and esteem their ancestors and are proud to be the descendants of Imam al-Bukhari, Naqshbandi and Akhmet Yassavi, for example. Without historical memory there can be no future for a civilized people. Islam Karimov, President of Uzbekistan, has pointed out that during its independence his country has succeeded in 'reviving in our life the historical national and spiritual values and traditions and re-establishing our sacred religion in the spiritual development of the society'.⁴

However, to revive classical Islam and establish its proper role and place in the modern world is not a simple matter. The road from accepting the need for it to implementing it is difficult because Islam is not being and should not be forced onto the citizens of these countries. The acceptance of a religion and its basic values is individual. The Central Asian peoples have passed through a period of atheism and the loss of their history—mistakes that must not be repeated. There are destructive forces that interpret the Islamic revival in their own militant way. Although many peoples living in this region follow the same religion, their social perceptions, values, frame of mind and attitudes towards the modern world are far from uniform. Moreover, in accordance with their social and political views, different Islamic groups interpret the sacred religious texts differently. Sometimes these variations in interpretation cause irreparable damage to human relationships and even loss of life.

The Islamization of Central Asia came in two stages, an early and a later one. The early phase, which started in the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries, involved the peoples living settled agricultural lives in what are now Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and in south-western Kyrgyzstan. The later phase, which covered the period up to the 16th century, affected the nomads on the territory of modern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. This influenced the role Islam plays in the lives of various populations of Central Asia. Generally, the level of

⁴ Karimov, I., *Uzbekistan Ustremlyonny v 21 Vek* [Uzbekistan aspiring for the 21st century] (Tashkent, 1999), p. 8.

sustainability of Islam and its norms in different spheres of life, including the political, cultural and legal, varied throughout the region. In the areas Islam influenced first its norms and laws have become an integral part of the lifestyle of local populations. In the former nomadic regions of Central Asia, however, its role is more superficial and is intertwined with the pre-Islamic traditions of the local populations.⁵ However, in spite of these differences all the regional peoples view Islam as one of the basic world religions which has played a significant role in the history of civilization and continues to influence different spheres of public and private life in Central Asia.

Much can be said about the positive role of Islam and about its past and current influence. In August 1996 at a regional conference on security problems participants from both regional and international organizations were united in the opinion that Islamization did not pose a threat to the security of the Central Asian region.⁶ However, in only a few years the situation has changed radically. The strengthening of the Islamic opposition in Tajikistan, the advance of the Taliban movement to the north of Afghanistan and the explosions in Tashkent in February 1999 have resulted in Islamic revivalism coming to be seen as a movement that aims to create a new Islamic political regime or regimes. Islamic radicalism has thus become the primary regional security threat, not just in individual countries but for the region as a whole.

In the political sense, this threat is reflected in attempts to undermine the trust of Islamic believers in their governments, which are undertaking reform, by destroying stability and disturbing national, civic and inter-ethnic harmony, all of which are indispensable conditions for the implementation and success of reforms. The activities of radical Islamists are aimed at discrediting democracy, the secular state, and multi-ethnic and multi-confessional societies. Simultaneously, radical Islamists are trying to provoke confrontation between different regions within countries and among different social groups that lead 'true' or 'false' lives from the point of view of radical Islam. They are also trying to create a negative image of the Central Asian republics, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in particular, in the wider Islamic world.

The strengthening of radical Islam in the region is in most instances connected with a serious deterioration in the socio-economic situation in the different countries. They are still experiencing deep crises which affect the lives of their populations in different ways. The crisis has become so fundamental and has so undermined development that the situation is barely controllable. One of the most complex issues, which requires immediate and constant attention, is the preservation of civil peace and harmony. The populations are becoming increasingly impoverished and the rate of unemployment is rising. Factories, plants and offices are being privatized and transformed into commercial structures, and are often used only as storage facilities. As a rule, the salaries of civil

⁵ Sultangalieva, A., *Islam v Kazakhstane: Istoriya, Etnichnost', Obshchestvo* [Islam in Kazakhstan: history, ethnicity, society] (Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies: Almaty, 1998), pp. 89–90.

⁶ Conference on Democratic Civilian Control of the Military, Defense Planning and Management, and Regional Security in Central Asia, Tashkent, 12–16 Aug. 1996, co-sponsored by the George C. Marshall Center and the Uzbekistan International Institute for Strategic Studies.

servants only marginally exceed subsistence level. People's purchasing power has fallen considerably while consumer prices, especially food prices, have increased substantially. Living conditions have deteriorated, especially in the small towns and rural areas. Systematic or chronic underpayment and late payment of salaries are contributing to a rapid decline in the quality of life and living standards. On the other hand, there is a growing disparity between the rich and poor people of the regional countries, while the middle class remains insignificant in both numbers and influence.⁷

All these factors contribute to the growing dissatisfaction among various sections of the regional populations, and as a consequence opposition is emerging, sometimes functioning officially and sometimes underground, using all the means at its disposal, including religious ones. In the opinion of some experts, an additional cause for the emergence of radical Islam is the rigid and even cruel suppression of opposition elements in the early years of independence (1992–94). The secular opposition, deprived of the right to oppose the government authorities openly, emigrated for the most part and continued its involvement in regional domestic affairs from abroad. Initially this opposition took the form of ideological confrontation, but later opposition forces turned to the use of violence. These observations are relevant above all to the case of Uzbekistan, where the government accused the opposition of maintaining ties with 'Tajik nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists' and mercilessly suppressed it.⁸ Regional leaders are also convinced that the lessons of Tajikistan and the events in neighbouring Afghanistan 'legitimize' authoritarian rule, which is allegedly required during the current transitional period in order to avoid bloodshed and to preserve ethnic and civil harmony, peace and stability.

However, the basic causes of the strengthening of radical Islam in Central Asia are external, and they have recently become even more important. Islam is increasingly considered by a number of foreign countries as a force which may help (or prevent) the realization of their own goals in the region. One group of such countries is interested in the total Islamization of the Central Asian states and striving to achieve this goal using every available weapon. There is, however, a second group of countries which share the fears and concerns of the regional states that a further strengthening of Islam in Central Asia may produce unwelcome geopolitical and geo-economic changes.

Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and (obviously) Afghanistan belong to the first group. Although their activities differ they usually take the form of financial assistance and the supply of religious literature to religious and political organizations or the training and upgrading of 'religious' cadres capable of launching a jihad in different forms. The second group of countries includes Russia, the USA, the developed European countries, China and India. Each of

⁷ These conclusions are based on a survey conducted by the Institute of Kazakhstan's Development in 1996 and published in *Ustoychivo li Razvitiye Kazakhstana? Otsenka Potentsiala Napryazhonnosti v Obshchestve* [Is Kazakhstan's development stable? Evaluation of tension potential in society] (Almaty, 1996), pp. 49–51.

⁸ Horsman, S., 'Uzbekistan's involvement in the Tajik civil war 1992–1997: domestic considerations', *Central Asian Survey* (Oxford), vol. 18, no. 1 (1999), p. 43.

these is no doubt pursuing its own political goals, but in general all are interested in a secular development of the Central Asian states, thus creating a counterbalance to the activities of the first group of countries.

Today as never before Central Asian leaders face the problem of maintaining regional stability. They have to avert the threat of fragmentation of the Ferghana Valley, which is shared by Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, in the same way as happened in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. This threat is very real. The Central Asian republics are today making maximum efforts to prevent violence and extremism, using for this purpose all available domestic means. However, the scope of the threat is such that difficult situations are emerging in one part of Central Asia after another. The regional countries are therefore striving to increase their cooperation in order to fight these local conflicts.

Uzbekistan has launched several initiatives in different international forums aimed at strengthening global and especially regional security. These include proposals to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, to establish an embargo on arms deliveries to zones of local conflict (especially in Afghanistan), to activate the 'Six Plus Two' Group in order to reach a peaceful resolution of the Afghan conflict and to support the activities of the Shanghai Forum,⁹ and the latest initiative of President Karimov for the creation of an international anti-terrorist centre.¹⁰

This last initiative is aimed at fighting transnational terrorism and fostering global and regional security. The basic task of the new anti-terrorist centre, with its headquarters in Vienna, would be to coordinate appropriate measures within the framework of the United Nations, using for these purposes the tried and tested forms of international cooperation. Special importance should be accorded to the implementation of decisions taken by the UN. The proposed centre will not duplicate the activities of the administrations and security agencies of the individual Central Asian states or of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) anti-terrorist centre in Moscow. It may include several groups that would monitor the implementation of existing conventions and other international agreements on the struggle against terrorism, monitor and evaluate national legislation in this area, prepare information and analytical materials, and so on. However, Uzbekistan's proposal encountered serious procedural and financial difficulties in the UN. The support of the major world powers, the USA in particular, who are interested in creating a reliable security system in Central Asia could be critical to the future of the proposed centre. The CIS anti-terrorist centre in Moscow plans to establish a branch office in Central Asia, either in Tashkent or in Almaty. This may become one of the positive factors in the collective effort of regional countries in the fight against radical Islamic organizations.

⁹ The 'Six Plus Two' Group consists of China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, the USA, the UN and 2 Central Asian states, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (signatories of the 1996 Tashkent Declaration on the Fundamental Principles of a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan). On the Shanghai Forum (since June 2001 called the Shanghai Cooperation Organization) see chapter 5, section V in this volume.

¹⁰ *Narodnoye Slovo* (Tashkent), 19 Nov. 2000.

Diverse as they are socially, politically, ethnically and culturally, the regional countries may collectively succeed in creating a favourable environment for fighting external threats and for the stable development of the region. It must be admitted, however, that so far there is no regional security system in Central Asia and there are only a few elements of such a system currently in place.

When terrorists invaded southern Kyrgyzstan at the end of July 1999, the regional countries failed to develop a mechanism for coordinating their activities against such incursions. As a result, and because there was a great degree of complacency, the region soon faced tragic consequences. It has become clear that the armed forces of the regional countries are incapable of repulsing such invasions individually. However, it did seem that the proper lessons were drawn from this experience, as over the next six months substantial efforts were made to prepare to fight similar threats. As a result there was a more effective response to the more powerful groups of Islamic militants which penetrated the territory of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the summer of 2000.

On 21 April 2000 the presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, meeting in Tashkent, signed a four-party treaty on the collective struggle against the international terrorism, religious and political extremism and organized crime that are threatening stability in the region.¹¹ A meeting in Bishkek on 20 August 2000 was a logical continuation of the Tashkent talks and was particularly important, first, because it was held at a time when hostilities against Islamic militants were going on in the south of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and, second, because it was attended by Sergey Ivanov, then Secretary of the Russian Security Council. The close relationship between developments in the North Caucasus, Central Asia and Afghanistan was thus underlined. The participants at the Bishkek meeting adopted a declaration which reflected their serious concern over the developments in Central Asia. They confirmed 'their firm resolution to respond adequately to the arrogant activities of bandits'.¹²

III. The future of security relations in Central Asia

This section discusses in greater detail the state of cooperation between the Central Asian countries and Russia. Russia is now the principal guarantor of regional security and only with its help will the Central Asian republics be able to withstand incursions by major Islamic formations crossing over the Afghan border.

Until recently, some regional countries did not consider the possibility of such assistance realistic. However, the ongoing changes in the balance of external forces influencing the internal situation in Central Asia made fundamental changes in regional governments' foreign policy strategies unavoidable. Until recently the regional states based their foreign policies mainly on the principle

¹¹ *Narodnoye Slovo*, 21 Apr. 2000.

¹² *Narodnoye Slovo*, 22 Aug. 2000. See also the text of the Bishkek Declaration in *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, no. 9 (Sep. 2000), p. 23.

of equidistance from the major powers—Russia and the USA—but current realities have forced them to review their policies seriously. To a certain extent the change in their outlook has been also encouraged by the rise to power of a new generation of politicians in Russia.

Given the new geopolitical realities in Central Asia, special significance must be given to reforming the relations of the regional countries, and especially of Uzbekistan, with Russia. Otherwise the region may face irreversibly negative consequences. Russia is currently increasing its political and military presence in the region following the emergence of serious security threats coming from the southern CIS borders. It is also generally redirecting much of its foreign policy efforts in a southerly direction, to countries of the Middle East and North Africa, and to the so-called rogue states—Iran, Iraq and North Korea—which may be interpreted as a thinly disguised warning to the USA not to increase its presence and/or influence in CIS countries. In relations between the Central Asian countries and Russia, the transition is now nearly complete and the participants are actively seeking avenues for cooperation on an equal basis, critically taking their past experiences into account. A new stage in relations between the regional countries and Russia is emerging, which needs to be based on new approaches and initiatives, with the Russian leadership building partnership with all the regional countries on the basis of equality.

These new developments in the Central Asian geopolitical situation mean that a Russian presence in the region is no longer at issue. It is without question in the interest of the regional countries to have a continued Russian presence in Central Asia as one of the principal guarantors of regional security and stability, as one participant in regional economic integration, and as a partner against such global threats as international terrorism, drug trafficking and the illegal arms trade.¹³

¹³ These changes in geopolitical realities in Central Asia resulted in military and security cooperation between the regional states and Russia being stepped up. In response to the concerns of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan over the growing threat posed to their security by international terrorism and political and religious extremism, at the summit meeting of the 1992 Treaty on Collective Security (the Tashkent Treaty), held in Bishkek in Oct. 2000, Russia signed an agreement on increasing its military assistance to these countries, including arms sales and the creation of a joint rapid-deployment force that could be sent to any of those states to help them counter a threat of external aggression or terrorism. Also in 2000 Uzbekistan (no longer a party to the Tashkent Treaty) signed a number of bilateral agreements with Russia that included increased procurement of Russian arms and training of Uzbek military personnel in Russia. In June 2000 Uzbekistan also agreed to join Russia in establishing a common anti-aircraft defence in Central Asia. ITAR-TASS, 11 Oct. 2000, in 'CIS leaders sign security agreements', Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report—Central Eurasia (FBIS-SOV)*, FBIS-SOV-2000-1012, 11 Oct. 2000; and Interfax, 20 June 2000, in 'Russia, Uzbekistan begin joint anti-aircraft defense service duty', in FBIS-SOV-2000-0620, 20 June 2000.

During Karimov's visit to Russia on 3–5 May 2001 several economic and military issues were discussed. The 2 countries pledged to increase bilateral trade and enhance military–technical cooperation with the creation of working groups within the Russian and Uzbek national security systems to coordinate the military–technical cooperation called for in agreements signed in 1999 and 2000. See also chapter 5 in this volume. According to Karimov, this cooperation is essential as Russia 'is, for us, not only a guarantor of security but also a strategic partner'. Uzbek Television first channel/BBC Monitoring Service, 'Uzbekistan, Russia agree to set up military cooperation groups', 6 May 2001, URL <<http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/uzbekistan/hypermail/news/ooo7.html>>; and ITAR-TASS (Moscow), 4 May 2001, in 'Uzbekistani President says no disagreements between Russia and Uzbekistan', FBIS-SOV-2001-0504, 7 May 2001.

However, the development of cooperation with Russia on issues of regional security does not necessarily preclude Central Asian states' diversifying their security ties with other countries and international organizations. Uzbekistan therefore intends to develop cooperation with the NATO member states, including the USA, in order to strengthen its national security and enhance its capability to combat terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime. This was stated by President Karimov during his meeting with the then US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, at the UN Millennium Summit in New York in September 2000.¹⁴ Uzbekistan also welcomed an offer of political and military assistance from Turkey made by President Ahmet Sezer during his visit to Tashkent in October 2000¹⁵ and joined the Shanghai Forum in June 2001 as a full member. This regional organization, now renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, is gaining in strength and authority in the security affairs of Central Asia.

Uzbekistan is adapting its policy to the concrete security realities developing in Central Asia. Following the military gains achieved by the Taliban in Afghanistan in late 2000, which turned the course of the civil war there irreversibly in the Taliban's favour, Uzbekistan decided to establish limited contacts with the leaders of the Taliban in order to ensure the security of its southern borders. This decision was partly taken because military assistance from Russia and its allies to the opposition Northern Alliance in Afghanistan was being either discontinued or sharply reduced. There were also reasons to believe that the extremist Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was receiving large-scale assistance not from the Taliban but from the Northern Alliance via the territory of Tajikistan. (This, incidentally, explains the chilling of relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.)

The creation of a new system of international relations in the 21st century, especially on the territory of the former Soviet Union, will depend to a significant extent on how the new sovereign states of Central Asia develop. It is against the interests of the regional countries to create a system of international relations that is of a confrontational nature. Their stability and security must create a basis for the dynamic and sustainable development of the region and for the prevention of conflicts. It may also be one of the preconditions of ensuring global security. In this regard, the interests of the Central Asian countries in international relations can be said to involve: (a) the preservation of global stability and avoidance of regional conflicts; (b) the resolution of tensions and armed conflicts on regional borders, above all in connection with the threat of radical Islam; (c) the development of normal, constructive relations with all countries, giving priority to developing such relations at the regional level; (d) the strengthening and development of the peacekeeping activities of the UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and other international organizations in order to achieve early political resolutions of

¹⁴ Interfax, 11 Sep. 2000, in 'Karimov says US ready to help Uzbekistan to fight against Islamic militants', FBIS-SOV-2000-0911, 11 Sep. 2000.

¹⁵ *Narodnoye Slovo*, 18 Oct. 2000.

regional armed conflicts. In this connection, regional countries should strive to preserve their domestic stability and normalize and stabilize the situation on the regional level; *(e)* the end of the civil war and achievement of peace in Afghanistan; *(f)* the stabilization of the national reconciliation process and the establishment of a durable peace in Tajikistan; *(g)* the strengthening and deepening of processes of cooperation and integration in Central Asia; *(h)* the active involvement of the Central Asian states in international security structures and the development of close cooperation with international organizations by all regional countries; *(i)* the development of mutually beneficial and equal relations with Russia and other post-Soviet states; *(j)* the maintenance of constructive and beneficial relations with China; and *(k)* the development of normal pragmatic relations with the Central Asian states' southern neighbours, in particular in connection with ensuring the security of the transport systems of individual regional countries and of the region as a whole.

In the near future the destabilizing role of radical Islam is likely to remain. A serious security threat to all regional countries therefore persists. This being the case, two scenarios of regional cooperation aimed at combating this threat are worth considering.

The first is for the regional states to agree to terminate Russia's role as a guarantor of regional security on the assumption that they are themselves now capable of independently ensuring their own domestic and external security. In the foreseeable future this scenario is highly unlikely. On the contrary, it is only with Russia that a realistic regional security system can now be created.

The second scenario involves the creation of new forms of cooperation and trust among the regional countries in addition to those already established between them on a bilateral basis (including in the sphere of security) with the ultimate goal of creating a new community of nations. Such a supranational community would be able to contribute to the effective resolution of the domestic problems of its members as well as protecting the common interests of the region in international relations. Such a community, in this author's opinion, will eventually be capable of forming the basis for an effective regional security system in Central Asia.

BLANK PAGE 322