

Third, the regional cooperation and negotiation mechanisms are in disarray. During the past three years the Central Asian Forum (formerly, the Central Asian Economic Union) has been on the brink of collapse due to the inability of the members to resolve their differences. The CIS Collective Security Treaty excludes Uzbekistan, one of the most important regional players, and Turkmenistan. The Shanghai Forum lost its integrity as three of its members accepted the presence of US military bases, which may potentially be utilized against other members, namely China and Russia.

Fourth, for many local politicians the establishment of US military bases may become an additional stabilizing factor in the region in the absence of regional security cooperation and negotiation institutions. In the meantime the opponents of US military bases believe that the US presence is a clear signal of full support for the existing regimes, who are increasingly impatient in dealing with each other. In addition, uncertainty

about the future of the US presence in the region "brings an element of instability into the relatively stable environment" (in the words of the head of one of the think-tanks in Almaty [pers. comm., April 2002]), as the Chinese and Russian place in the new security architecture has not yet been spelled out.

Overall, my research indicates that the security environment in the Central Asian region is becoming much more complex for a number of reasons, and I believe that the voices of local experts and local policy makers about nuances of regional politics are absolutely critical for understanding the complexity of these developments.

Reference

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Afghan Communities in Uzbekistan

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Surprisingly, Uzbekistan never had sizable Afghan communities on its territory before the early 1990s. However, since the demise of the USSR, Uzbekistan has found itself a home to Afghan refugees. Their number was estimated by UNHCR at 8,000 in 1993. No significant increases in these figures have been reported over the last several years.

In October and November of 2001, as part of my broader research on the dynamics of Afghan refugees in the region, I conducted a survey among Afghans in Tashkent. Due to the uncertain legal status of the overwhelming majority of Afghans in Tashkent and their aversion to public exposure, snowball sampling was the best available technique to conduct the survey. It was carried out among 91 heads of Afghan households in Tashkent, including 53 Pashtuns, 25 Tajiks, 8 Uzbeks, and 5 Hazaras.

The survey and accompanying research revealed two interesting results. First, it was established that at least two major waves of

migration from Afghanistan to Uzbekistan have taken place. The first wave comprised a group of people who came to the former Soviet Union to study, and became refugees after 1991. They are relatively well-off and have a higher level of education than the second wave, which came during the first years of independence when government policy was still relatively flexible. The second wave Afghan communities are compactly located in specific districts of the capital and struggle to earn their livelihood under highly unfavorable economic circumstances aggravated by the restrictive attitude of the Uzbek government.

Secondly, I conclude from my research that the Afghan communities in Uzbekistan are multi-ethnic, containing representatives of all four main Afghan ethnicities (Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras), and yet they seem not to be affected by the inter-ethnic divisions that are prevalent in their home country. In Uzbekistan they consider themselves a

single nation, maintain strong intra-communal ties, and pursue their traditional way of life. However, their future is uncertain, mainly due to the restrictive attitude of the government towards refugees and asylum seekers. Since local integration is currently not an option for Afghans, they are entirely dependent on the situation in Afghanistan for voluntary repatriation.

The survey is part of my doctoral dissertation (for the degree of “doctor of sciences” [*doktor nauk*]), which focuses on the Afghan crisis and its impact on Central Asia. The analyses of the survey were presented at the International Berkeley Conference on the Caucasus and Central Asia held March 16-17, 2002.