

**Summary of
INTERESTS & INFLUENCES OF
MAJOR EXTERNAL ACTORS IN CENTRAL ASIA**

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1. History

Due to Central Asia's geographic and strategic location, it has always enjoyed certain advantages, but also suffered many disadvantages. Some advantages are access to trade routes, emerging global powers and emerging global markets, Russia and China. Geographically, the region is rich in fossil fuels and minerals. Central Asia's geographic location puts it at a disadvantage as being used as a battleground for external powers from the East and from the West. To clearly understand the geo-strategic significance of landlocked Central Asia one must know about its rich and complicated history.

1.1. Central Asia: In Development

The history of Central Asia was largely shaped by climate and geography particularly the temperatures, terrain, and the availability of natural resources. The dryness and the non-arable land led to the development of few bustling cities and few densely populated areas. This was also reinforced by the nomadic culture. These factors heavily influence the current history and the dynamics within the region and Central Asia's relations with its neighbors and social, economic, and political partners. Historically, the region of Central Asia did not particularly exist until after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was either known as the Soviet Union or the more general, Eurasia. However, Central Asia has emerged as one of the most important geostrategic areas in modern-day politics and economics.

Not much is known about the people of Central Asia until the 8th century B.C. with the appearance of the Scythians. They exhibited some of the same traits as Central Asian people do today: nomadic, traveled the same areas, and used horses—an important part of their lifestyle (used for warfare as well). The Scythians, as a nomadic empire, declined around 5th century B.C. Afterwards, a new Central Asia Empire, the Xiongnu Empire, emerged and challenged the Chinese and adopted many Han Dynasty customs. Moreover, during the 8th century, the Tajiks (who are Persians) emerged as an ethnic group. The establishment of the Tajik nation-state also began around this time. The Scythians were conquered by the Uyghurs, the first and most significant Turkic Group. The Uyghurs traded across Eurasia; they brought different objects into China, such as Persian silvers and textiles and acted as cultural ambassadors as they introduced Islam in China and carried Chinese culture to the West. Around the year of 840 B.C., the Uyghur Empire collapsed and in the late 9th and 10th century, the Chinese Empire collapsed and the Iranian Empire went through a decline. Also during 9th and 10th century, the Persian Samanid dynasty (819 – 999 A.D.), a Sunni Muslim Empire, gained control of Central Asia and, in alliance with the caliph of Baghdad, established Bukhara (now in Uzbekistan) as the main Muslim center in the region.

The Mongols came into power in the 13th century and here is where we see the influence of the Central Asian people's culture in a powerful group. The Mongols were interested in trade which was typical for the region and focused on science. The end of the Mongol Empire marked a turning point for Central Asia.

Recorded history began in Central Asia in 6th century B.C. with the advent of the large Achaemenid Empire. Also the 6th century saw the expansion of the Turkish Göktürk Empire (552 A.D., the Ruruan Empire fell), Turkic tribes spread throughout the region including the pastoral nomad group like the Uyghurs, brought together by the trade of the Silk Route at Turfan, which was then ruled by China's Tang Dynasty. The Göktürk Empire built a significant empire along the steppes and encompassed all of greater Mongolia, lands westward to the Caspian Sea, and the lands eastward to Korea. After the collapse of the

Göktürk Empire (or Khanate) in 744 A.D., the Uyghur Empire (Khanate) followed and fell, there were smaller power structures/kingdoms until the Mongols established their dominance in the 13th century. The Göktürk Empire lends itself to the ethnic designator, “Turk” which was passed onto groups settling in this area. This empire was followed by the Uyghur Empire (see above). Once the Uyghur Empire (Khanate) fell,

The expansion of the Achaemenid Persian Empire and later, Alexander the Great’s Empire, saw a mix of sedentary and nomadic lifestyles and cultures—one can argue this historical fact is a driving force in identity conflicts in the region. This also started a trend—which can still be seen today and not only in Central Asia—of civilized kingdoms stamping out and suppressing nomads. Still, nomads had access to Eastern empires.

The early 5th and 4th centuries were “marked by a growth in the population of the foothill belt at Kopet Dag.”ⁱ Transoxiana (references modern Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Kyrgyzstan and southwest Kazakhstan) was “created” in 4th century B.C. From the Samanid Dynasty, Ahmad’s (son of the founder Saman-Khoda) son Nasr became governor of Transoxiana in 875 CE. Transoxiana’s major cities were Bukhara and Samarkand which are now part of modern-day Uzbekistan. The region was also referred to as Sogdiana (or Sogdia) which emerged during the 4th century.

3,000 B.C. marked the arrival of the Indo-Iranians, as the Indo-Iranians split from the Indians, Dards, and Kafirs. The Iranians migrated to Iran and the Indian subcontinent from the north and the north-west and their “ancient home [is suspected to be] in the territories lying to the north of the Iranian plateau and India.”ⁱⁱ Pertaining to the Indo-Iranians their migrations indicated that Central Asia was an intermediary stop, but this is left up to speculation.ⁱⁱⁱ

The lifestyle of the nomadic people caused a lot of distress as they were known for their violence and devastation. Interestingly, the horse in modern Kyrgyz society represents strength but does strike fear and jars memories of the past. It was used as a tool of dominance, fear, and development. As early as 4500 B.C., the horse was domesticated and bred for horse meat (which is still a typical meat in the region) and around 4,000 B.C. the horses were used for transport.

Around the same time, more sedentary and agrarian societies (city-states) began to form. One of the more notable city-states was the Bactria–Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) or Oxus Civilization that formed around 2300 B.C. to 1700 B.C. The area is now covered by modern-day parts of northern Afghanistan, eastern Turkmenistan, southern Uzbekistan and western Tajikistan and was centered on the upper Amu Darya River. Many of the artifacts from BMAC were spread throughout the Middle East showing a high degree of interaction and trading with other cultures and areas throughout the region. The other sedentary cities located near the tri-border region of the Ferghana Valley became part of the ancient and influential Great Silk Road. These areas became critical for the nomadic peoples as they could not produce these goods on their own. Nomadic tribal dominance began to fade around 1500 B.C.

The 2nd and 1st millennia B.C. saw the development of many Empires including the Median Empire and Achaemenid Empire (both had ruled parts of Central Asia). The Persian and Macedonian Empires also influenced and played a significant role in Central Asia during this time. The Han Dynasty also ruled parts of Central Asia during the first millennium, and the Han Dynasty established the Protectorate of the Western Regions in 60 B.C.

By 1000 B.C., nomadic pastoralism became a dominant way of life and influenced the activities of the tribes in the region. Many of these groups practiced transhumance, the seasonal movement of people and their livestock. They maintained herds of sheep, goats, and camels and conducted animal migrations.

During the rule of the Tang Dynasty, along with the Sui Dynasty, is when the Chinese began their expansion to Central Asia. The Sui Dynasty caused internal conflicts among the Central Asia tribes. The Tang Dynasty also engaged in conflict over Central Asia with the Tibet Dynasty over territories in the Tarim Basin from 670–692 A.D. and in 763 A.D.. The Han Dynasty came to prominence and lasted from 206 BC – 220 A.D.. The Great Silk Road was established during the Han Dynasty and expanded by the Han Dynasty around 114 A.D.. The Han Dynasty is the most memorable and most arguably the most important since it marks the Golden Age in Chinese Culture. The Han Dynasty was the second imperial dynasty of China, preceded by the Qin dynasty (221–207 B.C.) and succeeded by the Three Kingdoms period (220–280 A.D.). The Han Dynasty can be separated into the Former Han (or Western Han) which occurred from 206 B.C. to 9 A.D.) and the Latter Han (or Eastern Han) which occurred from 25 AD to 220 A.D. By 100 A.D., four Empires covered the region: The Roman Empire, the nomadic Parthian Empire the Kushan Empires, and the Han Empire. All of these Empires resided along the Great Silk Road and all of them fell.

Many of the influences that occurred during this period of time are visible in the region. At the end of the 7th century, the religious army of Islam reached Central Asia. Furthermore, in the 8th century, Islam was introduced by Arab rulers and remains a defining characteristic of the Central Asia peoples as all five countries practice Sunni Islam with variations of Islam also practiced.

During the 10th and 13th centuries the Kyrgyz people migrated from the Yenisei River region in central Siberia to the Tian-Shan region. During the 13th century, under Mongol rule, Tajikistan was annexed and became part of the Mongol Empire. Around this time, the ancestors of the Turkmen, the Oghuz Seljuk tribes, and Mongols migrated to this area.^{iv} In the 14th century, Tajikistan became part of Tamerlane's Empire. Tamerlane also annexed present-day Uzbekistan, and Samarkand was made the capital. The Kazakhs, as a people, emerged as a strong and distinct ethnic group in the 15th century. Between the 15th and 17th centuries, the "southern part of modern Turkmenistan comes under Persian rule, while the northern part is dominated by the Uzbek-ruled states of Khiva and Bukhara."^v

During the 17th and 18th centuries the Qing Dynasty had incorporated parts of Central Asia into the Chinese Empire, but their dominance was cut short as inner turmoil halted the expansion. During the same time period, Kyrgyz people settled in modern-day Kyrgyzstan which was conquered by the Oirats (Mongol tribe after centuries of Turkic rule in 1658) Then in 1758, the Kyrgyz people were conquered and became nominal subjects of Chinese Empire. In the 18th century, materials like cotton, silk and karakul (a breed of domestic sheep) were sold from Bukhara, Uzbekistan to Russia, which brought prosperity as well as economic power to the region. The 18th and 19th centuries saw an increase and rise of independent Emirates and Khanates of Bukhara, Kokand, and Samarkand. In 1876, the Khanate of Kokand was conquered by the Russians and incorporated the land that is now Kyrgyzstan, into its empire. The Kazakh people during this time split into three groups: the Elder, Middle and Lesser Zhuzes, or Hordes, which were led by Khans.

1.2. History from the 19th Century to the Collapse of the Soviet Union

By the end of the 19th century, the Russian Empire, the Qing Dynasty of China, and other powers expanded into the area and seized control. Since then, Central Asia has been a playground for countries to play due to its highly important geo-strategic location, its proximity to other countries, trade routes, and natural resources.

There was a Central Asia Revolt in 1916 (or the Basmachi Movement), caused by the removal of Islam as a provision that kept peoples out of the conscription process. The Russian Revolution facilitated the declaration of an independent Turkestan, which was declared by the Government of Jadid Reformers (Turkestan Muslim Council) in Kokand. The autonomous areas of Bukhara and Khiva were also invaded. This resulted in the creation of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR); Bukhara and Khiva also became SSRs in 1918. Modern day Kyrgyzstan was the Kirghiz Autonomous SSR in 1920; Kazakhstan was the Kazakh Autonomous SSR in 1925 (Kazakhstan was also part of the Kirghiz SSR until it was granted its own SSR status); the Uzbek SSR and the Turkmen SSR was created in 1924. Tajikistan split from the Uzbek SSR. The Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast became a SSR in 1936 which was formerly the Kyrgyzstan Autonomous SSR.

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the then Soviet states were incrementally incorporated into the Soviet Union. Mongolia and Afghanistan were not, but were influenced by Russia. As the Soviet States were forcibly annexed, their unique and historical cultures including their language, customs, and traditions were replaced by the Soviet singular identity and the Russian language; atheism or religious neutrality was forced upon them. This left a cultural and religious void that bubbled to the surface after the Soviet Union collapsed. Because of the rapid industrialization, the rapid urbanization and the relocation of minorities and ethnic Russians to Central Asia, conflict still exists between ethnic groups particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and many are struggling to find and learn their native languages. The government of the Central Asia states are struggling to adapt to pre-Soviet annexation religious and faith and customs (e.g. Islam and marriage-by-capture).

Under Soviet rule, education and the literacy rates in the Kirghiz SSR increased. Along with this improvement, the Soviets set up large collectivist farms while slowly eroding and wiping out the Kyrgyz lifestyle. During the 1920s, many Kyrgyz resettled as part of land reform. The Kazakh during this time period (start of 1920s to the end of 1930s) suffered great losses due to starvation in the effort to stifle lifestyles and collectivize agriculture. In the year of 1868, Ukrainian and Russian peasants were resettled in Kazakhstan to begin industrialization and agrarian reform. In the 1940s, hundreds of thousands of Koreans, Crimean Tatars, Germans, and others were forcibly moved to Kazakhstan. In 1953, the Virgin Lands Campaign was created to help alleviate agriculture and populate sparsely settled areas.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, native traditions emerged and while this was positive, it impacted lifestyles and relationships between the different groups in Central Asia. The significance of the Silk Road faded away because of their cultural differences: Uzbekistan had its center of interest on agriculture whereas the Kazakhs preferred their nomadic pastoralism. Uzbeks were also traders and mercantilists, and were more sedentary than their Kazakh and Kyrgyz counterparts. The diversity and the economic prosperity of this region appealed to Russia. The potential for large infrastructure-projects, bilingual schools (where Russian was taught and became the primary language), and irrigation projects were established.

1.3. Independence Post-Soviet Era

The populations of Central Asia opposed integration of their lands into the Soviet Empire. Central Asian states played an integral part of the Soviet system as the areas were repopulated with non-Turkic peoples. They were used to house industrial centers to protect the industry from military strikes and the Nazi Army. Those who were accused of Nazi collaboration during World War II by the Soviets were forcibly deported to Central Asia. One of the most notable groups is the Chechens, many of which died on the way there or due to poor conditions. Much resentment is held against the Russians and Russian Government by Chechens because of these forced deportations. The Kazakhs also suffered heavy human losses at the hands of Soviet collectivization policies.

As the Soviet regime feared the influence of Islamic culture and the Turkic ethnicity, it decided to create five Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) in Central Asia. Through this plan, the individual republics were provided the chance to develop their national identities to a certain degree in order to pre-empt the emergence of a common “Turkestan” identity and more importantly to prevent the formation of Turkestan.

The economies of the five Central Asian Republics collapsed in spring 1991; none of the countries were prepared for independence. They began new state-building measures which proved. Each of the countries has experienced changes in power, governmental and constitutional changes, and uprisings and civil wars respectively. New traditions and languages were revived and policies favoring the titular ethnicities have become common and have isolated minorities. A prime example would be the ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan and the process of Kazakhization. Another example would be the revival of the custom in Kyrgyzstan, bride kidnapping, which is considered to be a form of human trafficking and overall a human rights violation. Overall many of the countries are considering switching from the Cyrillic script to the Latin script. Many publications in Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages appear in Latin. This transition is unlikely to happen with the Kazakh language as Kazakh is written in Cyrillic (with the influence of some Greek letters).

One of the main obstacles was the political system that allowed Soviet Union Communist Party bosses rise to power. Many of the old “Apparatchiks” rule in the countries today including: Kazakhstan’s Nursultan Nazarbayev, Uzbekistan’s Islam Karimov, and Tajikistan’s Emomali Rakhmon. In 2006, Turkmenistan’s Supramurat Niyazov died and Kyrgyzstan’s long-standing President Askar Akaev was ousted in the 2005 Tulip Revolution as well as his replacement, Kurmanbek Bakiev, was ousted in unrest in 2010 under similar circumstances which paved the way for democratic elections.

Each of the newly independent states experienced destabilization. As compared to other regions that have experienced annexation and then independence, Central Asia has been relatively calm. The events that occurred in the Central Asian states (see below) are normal and expected for states undergoing transition.

- Tajikistan endured a civil war lasting from 1992-1997 causing 50,000 deaths, 1.2 million displaced (according to UN figures) and a humanitarian disaster causing lasting discord and fragility. There are still occasional flare-ups of violence: Khorog in 2010 and the attacks in Dushanbe in September 2015.
- Kyrgyzstan experienced riots in the early 1990s between ethnic Uzbeks and ethnic Kyrgyz.
- Kazakhstan experienced student riots in the 1990 Alma-Ata riots

- Kyrgyzstan was the only country to have a “colored revolution” in 2005 which ousted former Soviet Community Party boss (and his family), Askar Akaev, from the country.
- In 2010, Kyrgyzstan experienced another revolt which resulted in the ousting of President Kurmanbek Bakiev and his family from Kyrgyzstan. Ethnic clashes also occurred in 2010 between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan and played large role in his ouster. Many from the Bakiev family are wanted on murder charges, inciting violence, and for fraud. Kyrgyzstan has gone through a bumpy transition on its way to be one of the few democracies in the region.
- Uzbekistan has had its share of poor publicity with Islam Karimov’s tactics and Uzbekistan’s unofficial policy of torture and disregard for human rights against his political opponents and alleged and confirmed extremists and terrorists. This was best demonstrated by the events in May 2005, the Andijan Massacre.
- Turkmenistan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev, “Turkmenbashi,” died in 2006, leaving a closed-country more susceptible to destabilizing factors. Current President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov, ascended to the Presidency (he was Niyazov’s dentist), and made a seamless transition. Berdimukhammedov has disassembled Turkmenbashi’s cult of personality while building his own simultaneously.
- Kazakhstan, since independence has remained the most stable despite random extremist/terrorist attacks in Aktobe, Atyrau and political violence such as the oil worker labor protest in Zhanaozen in December 2011. Economically, Kazakhstan is at the top and has expanded its political partnerships and has made a name for itself in the natural resource market.

The post-Soviet Era for the region has been mixed. Each of the countries has created new relationships, new policies, and have shared struggles and faced challenges. Each of the countries have been subjected to political, social, and economic pressures resulting from their closeness with Russia and their diplomatic relations with Russia or lack thereof with other non-former Soviet Union countries. Turkmenistan has maintained its stance of neutrality avoiding membership in Russian-dominated organizations. Turkmenistan’s membership in regional organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) has opened new markets and has facilitated new economic and security arrangements and partnerships, but at the same time has strengthened Russia’s grip over the region and individual countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

2. Country Analysis: Internal and External Dynamics

2.1. Kazakhstan at a glance:

- Official name: Republic of Kazakhstan
- Capital: Astana (Astana became capital in 1997—former capital was Almaty)
- Largest city: Almaty
- Government type: Republic; authoritarian presidential rule, with little power outside the executive branch
- Independence: 16 December 1991 (from Soviet Union)
- National legislature: based on Islamic law and Roman law, has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction
- Legislative branch: Bicameral Parliament
- Head of state: President Nursultan A. NAZARBAYEV (elected President December 1, 1991), elected again in 2005, and elected again in 2010 and made “leader for life.”

- Geographic location: Central Asia, south of Russia and northwest of China; a small portion west of the Ural River in eastern-most Europe
- Area: 2,717,300 sq. km (1 million square miles)
- Natural resources: major deposits of petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron ore, manganese, chrome ore, nickel, cobalt, copper, molybdenum, lead, zinc, bauxite, gold, uranium
- Population: 17, 400,000 (July 2013 est.)
- Languages: Kazakh (state language) 64.4%, Russian (official, used in everyday business, designated the “language of interethnic communication) 95% (2001 est.)
- Ethnic groups: Kazakh 53.4%, Russian 30%, Ukrainian 3.7%, Uzbek 2.5%, German 2.4%, Tatar 1.7%, Uygur 1.4%, other 4.9% (1999 census)
- Religions: Muslim 47%, Russian Orthodox 44%, Protestant 2%, other 7%
- Life expectancy: 62 years (men), 73 years (women) (UN)
- Internet domain: .kz
- International dialing code: +7
- GNI per capita: U.S. \$11,380 (World Bank, 2013 est.)
- Current GDP (USD): \$224.4 billion (2013 est.)
- GDP growth: 6.0% (World Bank 2013 est.)
- Unemployment rate: 5.2% (ILO 2013 est.)^{vi}
- Inflation rate (consumer prices): 5.8% (World Bank 2013 est.)
- Categorized by the World Bank as an Upper Middle Income country

2.1.1. Political development

In August 1995 the governing structure of Kazakhstan was converted from a parliamentary democracy into a presidential republic, and slowly, but gradually President Nazarbayev started to recruit family members for key positions in the national government as well as in the business sector. Nepotism has become a staple in Kazakh politics. Nazarbayev responded with threats, imprisonment and isolation towards opponents, but even his own daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva and her husband, criticized President Nazarbayev. Media outlets that did not support the government were closed and political opposition and political critics were and are silenced. Media repression continues. Due to international pressures regarding Kazakhstan’s crackdown on the media, Nazarbayev who can be best described as a “soft authoritarian” president whom loosened media restrictions to make Kazakhstan and himself appear more democratic.

Kazakhstan says that it is devoted to progressing and implementing democratic principles. However democratic reforms such as elections have fallen short of meeting international standards. A key component to the foundation of democracy is competitive, free, and transparent elections. Kazakhstan has held elections, but they do not meet international standards and always favor Nazarbayev and Nur Otan his party. The most recent election of President Nazarbayev was in late April 2015 where there was no opposition. He won 95% of the vote and the elections were deemed undemocratic and failed to meet international standards.

Furthermore, the parliamentary elections of 2005 highlighted the lack of transparency. In the 2005 elections, Nazarbayev won a seven-year term; Nazarbayev won 91% of the vote. Two other candidates, Zamarkhan Tayukbay (from the party For a Just Kazakhstan) and Alikhan Baymenov (from the party Ak Zhol) were able to compete, giving the illusion of political party pluralism and further solidifying Nazarbayev’s hold on the opposition and on the government.^{vii} The 2011 Kazakhstan Parliamentary elections were considered a sham by the

international community. In 2011, parliament held a national referendum extending Nazarbayev's presidency without elections until 2020. The elections were an attempt to establish/appoint Nazarbayev as "President for Life" of Kazakhstan. It was passed unanimously by the Upper and Lower houses of the Kazakh parliament and later was rejected by the Constitutional Court facing international pressures. Instead, the Kazakh parliament sneakily "held early presidential elections three months later, and Nazarbayev won an additional four-year term with over 95 percent of the vote."^{viii} Nazarbayev won 95.5% of the vote which is high despite his popularity. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) had over 400 election monitors in the country before the election.^{ix} Exit polls conducted by "Kazakhstan's Association of Sociologists and Politologists" gave Mr. Nazarbayev 94.82% of the vote, based on an exit poll of 1.2% of those who voted, while the Institute of Democracy gave him 95.1%, based on a sample of 50,000 voters."^x Nine million people in Kazakhstan are eligible to vote, out of those nine million, 90% casts their ballots which points to voter fraud because of such a high voter turnout rate.^{xi}

Political competition is weak and the Nur-Otan party (meaning Radiating Fatherland) reigns dominant with 762,000 members and holds 83 out of 107 seats in Kazakhstan's Parliament. Nur-Otan is the result of a merger of many political parties including Asar (the party of his daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva), Fatherland (Nur-Otan's predecessor), Civic Party, and the Agrarian Party. Political opposition in Kazakhstan is virtually non-existent and when it does exist, it is most likely staged. There are nine registered political parties in Kazakhstan. The main opposition party, Alga! (Forward), has been disestablished after its party leader Vladimir Kozlov was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in jail for "calling for the forcible overthrow of the constitutional order," and "creating and leading an organized group with the aim of committing one or more crimes."^{xii} Kozlov was also the leader of Halyk Maidany, or People's Front Movement, which underscored the grievances against the government.^{xiii} The charges brought against Kozlov were regarding the 2011 events in Zhanaozen. The charges are alleged politically motivated and are designed to stifle political opposition. The Kazakhstan National Security Committee (KNB) led the criminal investigation against Kozlov and his associates. Using intelligence services underscores that Kozlov and other Alga! members involved are being targeted for their political activities, not protest matters. There are nine political parties registered in Kazakhstan as of May 2015.^{xiv}

The current status of political development in Kazakhstan remains static. Nazarbayev will remain in power for the foreseeable future until his death. Nazarbayev has no succession plan which is worrisome. Political party pluralism remains low and the opposition is expected to be silenced. Kazakhstan will continue to explore options with Western institutions like it did with the OSCE chairmanship in 2010 to appear more democratic. Kazakhstan will also increase its regional participation and is expected to join the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

On April 27, 2015, Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev was almost unanimously re-elected as President of Kazakhstan in a snap election by the population of Kazakhstan. This is his fifth term as President. Nazarbayev, age 74, won 97.7% of the vote; the opposition (said to exist to make the election appear more competitive) won the remaining 2.3% vote. OSCE deployed an Election Observation Mission team to make sure the elections met OSCE standards. The OSCE requested that 400 observers be deployed to voting facilities. OSCE observers stated that "voters were not offered a genuine choice."^{xv}

The Kazakhstan Central Election Commission stated that 95% turned out to vote and the Chairman of the Election Committee called the elections an "expression of civil society,

electoral activeness and political responsibility.” Nazarbayev was sworn in on April 29, 2015.^{xvi} Nazarbayev will be the age of 80 when his term ends in 2020.

2.1.2. Legal environment

A considerable proportion of Kazakhstan’s legal environment originates from Soviet times. The current legal framework is considered to be one of the best among the post-Soviet states but is still suffering heavily from the widespread corruption, lack of transparency, and the absence of an independent judiciary. The current legal system is based on civil law comprised of both elements from Islamic law particularly, *Adat*, which is customary law and Roman law as “legislative and other normative legal acts can be divided according to the constitutional, administrative, civil, criminal, labor and other material or procedural laws.”^{xvii} The Kazakhstan Constitution is at the top of the hierarchy of laws. The first Kazakh Constitution was adopted by the Supreme Council of Kazakhstan on January 28, 1993, amended in August 1995, and in October 1998, “the Parliament enacted a *Law on amendments and complements to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.” There are three branches to the Kazakh government: legislative (Senate and the Majlis), executive branch (Cabinet of Ministers and other central state institutions), and the judicial branch (Supreme Court and Constitutional Council).

The President is the head of state and the highest representative body is the bicameral Parliament comprised of the Senate and the Majlis. The Senate has 39 seats and its composition is based on “deputies elected in twos from each region, major city and the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at a joint session of the deputies of all representative bodies of the respective oblast, major city and the capital of the Republic.”^{xviii} The Majlis is comprised of 77 deputies: 67 elected from geographical electoral districts by voters and the other “10 deputies are elected on the basis of the Party Lists according to the system of proportional representation”^{xix} and serve five year terms. The Kazakh Parliament, in comparison to the United States Congress, carries out similar functions such as: making additions to the Constitution, approving budgets, granting war powers to the President by making decisions on war and peace and the use of armed forces.^{xx}

The judicial branch is the only branch that exercises judicial law in Kazakhstan and is comprised of regional, district, city, and town courts. The Constitutional Court’s functions are driven by Article 72 of the Constitution.^{xxi} The Constitutional Council’s members have a term of six years and the Council consists of seven members. The chairperson of the Constitutional Court is appointed by the President, two members are appointed by the President of the Republic, two by the Senate chairperson, and two by the Majlis.^{xxii}

Kazakhstan experiences a wide variety of crime taking place in urban and rural centers; most crime takes places in urban centers: “crime rates during 2012 rose substantially nationwide as compared to 2011.”^{xxiii} Crimes against foreigners are uncommon, but when they do occur, they are low level theft, purse snatching, assaults and robberies.^{xxiv} Financial fraud and corruption is growing and credit card information is often compromised.

2.1.3. Economic Potential and Challenges

Recognizing a change from a centralized economy to a free market economy, the introduction of the tenge currency, foreign direct investment, mass privatization, and exploitation of oil, Kazakhstan has managed to become one of the best performing former-Soviet Republics. Kazakhstan has vast oil and natural gas reserves and Kazakhstan is also the second largest oil

and gas producer of the former Soviet Union states, behind Russia. Kazakhstan's energy petroleum industry accounted for one-third of its GDP in 2008. Kazakhstan has a potential total of 95-117 billion barrels of oil reserves; proven reserves range from eight to 22 billion.^{xxv} Natural gas reserves are four trillion cubic meters and 1.5-2.35 trillion are considered proven.^{xxvi} The "Kazakh oil is now transported mainly through Russian territory via old Soviet pipelines...as well as via the new [CPC] system [formed in 1992] (Tengiz-Novorossiisk)."^{xxvii} The pipelines are old, decrepit, could cause environmental problems if they burst, and are costly to repair.^{xxviii} Defects in other major pipelines such as the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline have made countries reliant upon Russia and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline.^{xxix} Kazakhstan has also relied on rail networks and shipping for transport.

Kashagan, is an offshore oil field in Kazakhstan's Caspian Sea oil zone (divided among Caspian Sea consortium members) and was discovered in 2000 along with the oil field is the largest oil discovery in the last thirty years. Kashagan is the largest old field outside of the Middle East and the fifth largest in the world. The Kashagan oilfield is expected to be the largest oilfield outside of the Middle East with estimated reserves of 50 bbl/d.^{xxx} It is considered an oil megaproject as excavation has proven difficult. According to the Kazakhstan news outlet Tengri News, Kashagan is the most expensive oil project yet as "development has already absorbed \$116 billion,"^{xxxi} and "the field's commercial reserves are estimated to made from 9 billion barrels to 16 billion barrels of oil[;] geological reserves are estimated at 35 million barrels."^{xxxii} The project was activated in 2013 and pumping of oil began, but pipes were damaged and sulfur gas started to leak and operations ceased.

The Tengiz oil field is Kazakhstan's largest oil producing field and has undergone massive expansion led by Chevron, and exploration "[has risen in costs] from \$23bn to about \$40bn."^{xxxiii} The expansion took five years to complete and costs \$7.2 billion. Tengiz, by comparison, is the size of the American city, Chicago. According to Chevron, Tengiz also produces something called "sour gas" which is gas that has higher concentration toxic hydrogen sulfide. Due to this need, there will be a Second Generation plant with the largest sour gas processing units in the world.^{xxxiv}

Kazakhstan also is involved in the exploitation of the Caspian Sea resources and is involved in the demarcation process. There are multiple plans to divide up the Caspian Sea for resource exploitation. On January 25, 2006, the Presidents of Russia and Kazakhstan signed a *Protocol on Amendments to the Protocol on the Russia-Kazakhstan Agreement on Delimiting the Northern Part of the Caspian Sea*, aimed at exercising sovereign power over subsurface resource management. The instability of Russian energy politics and its "energy arrogance" has driven Kazakhstan to seek other energy partners, including "long-term partnerships with major international oil companies... which will enable [Kazakhstan] to exploit [their] natural resources effectively."^{xxxv} Russia has focused on blocking Western access to gas and oil to reduce competition: "in Central Asia, Russia has carried out the task of neutralizing alternatives to pro-Russian projects of integration in the post-Soviet space."^{xxxvi} Kazakhstan has taken the pragmatic foreign policy approach to demarcation by securing its own rights while recognizing the superiority of Russia only to not jeopardize its own ambitions.

The creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the integration of regional economies was designed to stabilize regional markets. The Kazakh tenge was devalued in February 2014. On August 19, 2015, the tenge lost more than a quarter of its value caused by a sharp fall in world crude oil prices. As a result, Kazakhstan introduced a freely floating exchange rate which helped stabilize Kazakhstan's economy. According to Reuters, "the

official tenge rate tumbled by [26.2%] to 255.26 per dollar on the Kazakhstan Stock Exchange in response to the policy shift.^{»xxxvii}

Kazakhstan's economy also "suffered a 40% fall in exports between January and July [2015], said National Economy Minister Yerbolat Dosayev." Imports shrank by 20% between January and July 2015. Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev called the EU and U.S. sanctions against Russia barbaric as the sanctions had a ripple effect throughout the region. Kazakhstan "also suffered under the impact of western sanctions against Russia and, as a metals exporter, from low commodities prices.^{xxxviii} Kazakhstan's economy was also impacted by the Chinese yuan and the "correction" to the Chinese economy.

2.1.4. Social and Demographic Challenges

Although the constitution regulates that the civil rights of all ethnic groups are equal, some special rights are only granted to ethnic Kazakh population and those who speak the Kazakh language which often plays a major role when it comes to obtaining better employment. This discriminates against non-Kazakhs and non-Kazakh speaking peoples. Ethnic Russians in the country feel especially targeted because of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the gradual yet dramatic decrease of ethnic Russians leaving Kazakhstan, and the process of Kazakhization. The Kazakh government initiated a Kazakh repatriation program to bring back those who had left Kazakhstan. The *Oralman* (Kazakh for returnee) program was instituted in 1991. According to a 2011 article from Central Asia Online, "300,000 Oralman families, or 1m people, resettled under the 2009 Nurly Kosh [program] over the past 20 years – moving largely to Mangistau, Southern Kazakhstan and Almaty Oblasts and to the cities of Almaty and Astana."^{xxxix} A revised program was developed in 2011 and will address the "geographical distribution, employment and the provision of housing" and land allotments.^{xi}

After the Soviet Union collapsed, Russians emigrated out of Kazakhstan because of a declining standard of living, policies of Kazakhization, and loss of identity with the new Kazakhstan. Between 1989 and 1999, the Russian population decreased from 6 million to 4.5 million.^{xii} Emigration during the 1990s hit a peak in 1994 when 300,000 were Russians left in Kazakhstan. By 2000, "migration from Kazakhstan alone constituted more than 28% of the internal migration in former Soviet territory."^{xlii} Currently, Russians have considerable populations in the North Kazakhstan Province (48.5% in 2006), Pavlodar Region (38.26% in 2007), Akmola Region (36.5% Russians in 2009), Kostanay Region (28.6% in 2009), and central Karagandy Region (39.17% in 2010).

Extremism and terrorism are a concern in Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian states. Uzbekistan alone (and for a while) faced an armed group, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), trying to overthrow the despotic Islam Karimov. Due to the increase and spread of radical Islam, Kazakhstan is facing internal stability caused by extremists. Multiple extremist/terrorist groups exist in Kazakhstan: the Soldiers of the Caliphate (Jund Al-Khalifah), the Hizb-ut Tahrir (non-violent pan-Sunni organization), Tablighi Jamaat, and many pro-Uighur separatist groups, including the East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO), are labeled extremist by the Kazakh authorities. Kazakhstan has the largest Uighur Diaspora and it is suspected that the Kazakh government labels pro-Uighur independence groups as extremist to appease China as the Chinese policy towards Uighurs has been of one domestic counter-terrorism threat, social isolation, and cultural destruction.

There have been many acts of terrorism throughout the country. The Kazakh government, to maintain its inclusive image, selectively applies the terms "terrorist," "terrorism," and

“terrorist act” to actions that are seen as a threat to Nazarbayev’s power and acts that can upset the status quo. Such an example would be the rioting caused by oil workers on strike in Zhanaozen. Kazakh police turned the situation violent, and as a result the incident was labeled “terrorist” because it upset the public order as laborers were protesting poor wages and poor labor conditions.

Spending on social issues and welfare is increasing, but still a large portion of the population remains poor. According to the World Bank, poverty levels dropped in Kazakhstan from 47% in 2001 to three percent in 2013.^{xliii} Based on the international poverty line, (based on GDP PPP), “corrected USD 2.50 per capita per day, poverty in Kazakhstan fell from 41 percent in 2001 to 4 percent in 2009.”^{xliv} Compared to a higher poverty line of 5 USD per day, poverty in Kazakhstan remains at 42%.^{xlv} Agriculture, while a low contributor to GDP (6% in 2011) employs one-fourth of the population at 26% in 2011.^{xlvi} Interestingly over 80% of Kazakhstan’s land was classified for agricultural use including 70% for pasture; arable land constitutes less than 10%.^{xlvii} Kazakhstan’s unemployment rate remains at 5.2%.

There is no major conflict between religion and state. Religious groups experience discriminatory treatment from the government. The Uighur population is often alienated. Freedom of religion in Kazakhstan is limited. Since 1999, minority religious groups have emerged and have registered with the state adhering to regulations which shows some progress; these relations are handled by the Religious Issues Committee. Missionaries (foreign and domestic) also face scrutiny and must register with the Ministry of Justice. Religious education is banned. According to a Freedom House 2014 report, the religious rights in Kazakhstan are on a downward trend, “as laws passed in 2005 banned all activities by unregistered religious groups” and in 2011, “law required [re-registration] of all religious groups, gave the government unprecedented authority to regulate religious communities, and forbade religious expression in government institutions.”^{xlviii}

Kazakhstan’s Constitutional Court on 26 May 2015 struck down the homophobic (anti-gay) draft legislation that prohibited the “propaganda of nontraditional sexual orientation” similar to the bill that Russia passed in 2013 and the bill that Kyrgyzstan is currently trying to pass. The law formally called, “On Protecting Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development” was introduced in February 2015. The text of the law was never made public. The Kazakh Court’s decision on the discriminatory law set a precedent and shows the strength of its national-level institutions. Some observers see Kazakhstan’s striking down of the law as a reputation management and some see the actions of the Supreme Council as a step to reaching democratic reforms.

2.1.5. Foreign policy

Kazakhstan mainly deals in agreements pertaining to oil and gas resources with Russia, China, the U.S., and the European Union (EU) being its main trade partners. The country tries to increase independence and to play Russia, China and the U.S. off each other as to maximize its geopolitical benefits. This embodies Nazarbayev’s multi-vector foreign policy which allows Kazakhstan to maintain ties with Russia while pursuing its interests outside of its immediate geographic area and with other regional and world superpowers. Under this foreign policy, Kazakhstan has made great strides in developing its political, economic, and security relationships with other nations and Western-oriented institutions and organizations.

Kazakhstan has dragged itself slowly closer to the West by holding the chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010, one of the few Former Soviet Republics to do so. Kazakhstan is also

developing relations with members of the regional organizations it belongs to outside of these frameworks to ensure cooperation with China without Russian interference. Kazakhstan has been active with NATO in military training (*see 2.1.6 Strategic perspectives*).

2.1.6. Strategic perspectives

Regional stability and security are key elements in Kazakhstan's foreign policy and domestic policy respectively. Kazakhstan's diplomatic efforts are also a focus as Nazarbayev continues to execute his "multi-vector foreign policy." Nazarbayev has been able to strike the balance between his Western-oriented pursuits and his regional pursuits which include relations between Russia and China. To avoid another Crimea-like situation, Nazarbayev has focused on its regional relationship more to execute Nazarbayev's vision of an integrated regional economic space through the Customs Union (which Kazakhstan joined in 2010) and finally through the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

Furthermore, after the OSCE Chairmanship in 2010, President Nazarbayev said it has been an "historic event for the entire OSCE community"^{xlix} that had been characterized by "the spirit of Astana." Kazakhstan still aims to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) as soon as possible. Kazakhstan also seeks closer ties to the U.S. security-political pact, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Kazakhstan and NATO signed an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) in 2006 and Kazakhstan is a member of the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) Program. Talks between NATO and Kazakhstan take place with the European Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). The key areas of cooperation between the two are political, military, and security-sector reforms, and counter terrorism efforts. According to United Nations mandates, there is a readily deployable infantry battalion called KAZBAT to participate in NATO-led peace keeping operations.^l Through the Planning and Review Process, a brigade called KAZBRIG "is a major project aimed to give Kazakhstan the rotational capability to continuously sustain a battalion-sized contribution."^{li}

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan's future seemed very bright in the early 1990s, as it had political competition, political pluralism, and equal political rights as well as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion. But during the term of President Askar Akaev, elections were manipulated and the level of corruption rose, which resulted in an upheaval in March 2005, also known as the Tulip Revolution. Akaev fled to Russia and was replaced by Kurmanbek Bakiev. This momentous event in post-Soviet history has paved the way for a new Kyrgyzstan that is open to democratic ideals, inclusiveness, and be recognized by the West as a democracy in a land of autocrats and authoritarians.

2.2. Kyrgyzstan at a glance

- Official name: Kyrgyz Republic
- Government type: Republic
- Independence: 31 August 1991 (from Soviet Union)
- National legislature: based on French and Russian laws; has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction
- Legislative branch: Unicameral Supreme Court
- Head of State: Almazbek Atambayev (since April 2011)

- Geographic location: Central Asia, west of China; neighboring Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and China; part of the tri-border country region, Ferghana Valley
- Area: 199,900 sq. km (77,182 sq. miles)
- Natural resources: abundant hydropower; significant deposits of gold and rare earth metals; locally exploitable coal, oil, and natural gas; other deposits of nepheline, mercury, bismuth, lead, and zinc
- Population: 5,720,000 (World Bank 2013 est.).
- Languages: Kyrgyz 64.7% (official), Uzbek 13.6%, Russian 12.5% (official), Dungun 1%, other 8.2% (1999 census)
- Ethnic groups: Kyrgyz 70.9%, Uzbeks 14.3%, Russians: 7.8%, Dungans: 1.1%, Ukrainians: 0.4%, Uighurs: 0.9% (UN Stats 2009 census)^{lii}
- Religions: Islam 75%, Russian Orthodox 20%, other 5%
- Life expectancy: 64 years (men), 72 years (women) (UN)
- Internet domain: .kg
- International dialing code: +996
- Current GDP (USD): \$7.226 billion (World Bank 2013 est.)
- GNI per capita (USD): 1,200 (World Bank 2013 est.)
- GDP growth: 10.5% (World Bank 2013 est.)
- Unemployment rate: 7.9% (ILO 2013 est.)^{liii}
- Inflation rate (consumer prices): 6.6% (World Bank 2013 est.)

2.2.1. Political development

In the mid 1990s, the country struggled with a political and economic regression, but after President Askar Akaev managed to build an attractive basis in order to gain foreign countries to support the state building process in Kyrgyzstan, the country was considered the most democratic and transparent country in Central Asia garnering it the name, “the Switzerland of Asia,” and “an oasis of democracy.” As Akaev changed his democratic political style, he became more authoritarian. After holding fraudulent parliamentary elections in February 2005, a political upheaval took place in March 2005 (known as the Tulip Revolution) and resulted in the election of Kurmanbek Bakiev to the office of President.

In April 2010, another political upheaval took place, which resulted in the resignation of former President Bakiev. In June 2010, a referendum devoted to changing the former republic type of government into a parliamentary democracy was successful, and legitimized the position of Roza Otunbayeva as President, which she took over in April 7, 2010. According to election observer of the OSCE, the elections confirmed that “fundamental freedoms” have been respected. Current President Almazbek Atambayev was elected in a Kyrgyz presidential election in 2011 and he took over the Presidency in December 2011. He is to serve one six-year term. He is a member of the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan, unlike its Central Asian neighbors, is a fragile democracy and does not have political party pluralism. There are several political parties in the country: the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), Ata-Meken, Ata-Jurt, Ar-Namys, and Respublika. The SDPK was formed in 1994 and is social-democrat in political orientation and is the most prominent political party in Kyrgyzstan.^{liv} Ata-Meken (Fatherland) Party joined the government led coalition in 2010 with the SDPK, Respublika and Ar-Namys, but withdrew from the faction in 2010. Ata-Meken is one of the oldest political parties in Kyrgyzstan, being established in 1992 and split from the Erkin Kyrgyzstan Party.^{lv} Ata-Meken also participated in all Parliamentary elections. The party leader or chairman, Omurbek Takebayev—who clashed

with now ousted President Bakiev in 2010—was nominated for President of Kyrgyzstan twice, but failed to secure the country's top position.^{lvi} The Ata-Jurt (Motherland) party was formed in 2006 under the ideology of right wing while espousing ethno-nationalism at the same time. Ata-Jurt was once part of the government-led coalition, but now it is in opposition to the government. The party had some members from the part of Kurmanbek Bakiev and opposes Atambayev; the party currently holds 28 seats in the Kyrgyz Parliament.^{lvii}

Ar-Namys is one of the major political parties in Kyrgyzstan and was formed in 1999, but former Prime Minister Felix Kulov (2005-2007); Kulov was also vice president in 1992. Ar-Namys was formed in December 2011 along with SDPK, Respublika and Ata Meken. The party traditionally has taken an opposition stance and was denied registration in the 2000 Parliamentary elections.^{lviii} Ar-Namys, in response, formed the People's Congress of Kyrgyzstan electoral alliance with three other opposition parties strengthening their more liberal stance on social issues and national politics.^{lix} Respublika was formed in 2010 and is in opposition to the government. In comparison to Western political parties, Respublika is right-wing and liberal (more right-wing) and focuses on the following principles: “nationhood, progress, cooperation, equality and responsibility, Eurasian vector of development and economic prosperity.”^{lx} The Kyrgyz political parties, although in a coalition, are often divided on issues of national interest such as Kumtor Gold Mine and political reform.

On October 4, 2015 Kyrgyzstan's Parliamentary elections were held nationwide. Half of the 5.8 million voters who are eligible to vote are expected to participate in the national parliamentary elections; 500,000 to 800,000 Kyrgyz citizens who live abroad are expected to vote in the elections. There are 14 parties (over 2,000 candidates) competing for the 120 seats in Parliament also referred to as the Supreme Council, the Jogorku Kengesh. The participating parties were: the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), Ata-Meken (Fatherland), the Respublika Ata-Jurt (also Fatherland) party, Bir Bol, the Kyrgyzstan party, and Butun Kyrgyzstan Emgek (United Kyrgyzstan Labor), the Onuugu-Progress party. Some other parties such as Ar-Namys (Dignity). Ata-Meken and Respublika Ata-Jurt merged into one party in October 2014. The SDPK captured most of the seats.

The success of the parliamentary elections permits Kyrgyzstan to keep its status as a democracy among autocratic and oppressive regimes. Based on preliminary results (with all votes not counted), the parties that were re-elected to the Supreme Council have pro-Russian policies, extending Kyrgyzstan's close relationship with Russia.

2.2.2. Legal environment

The Kyrgyz Republic has vastly changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its subsequent independence. Civil liberties under both former Presidents Akaev and Bakiev suffered. The Kyrgyz legal system was shaped under Soviet law and has elements of the French legal structure and the Russian legal structure. The Civil Code of Kyrgyzstan was reinvigorated in 1996 after replacing the old Civil Code which dated back to 1964. The second portion of the Civil Code was in 1998 and includes the following provisions: “general statements and regulations of civil-legal relationships; the law of property and other proprietary interests; obligatory rights including separate kinds of insurance; the law of intellectual property; inheritance law; application of norms of international and private law to civil and legal relationships.”^{lxi}

Justice is “administered” only by courts in Kyrgyzstan. Many of these courts are also part of the other Central Asian states. The three courts are: Constitution Court of the Kyrgyz

Republic which protects the Constitution of Kyrgyzstan and determines that constitutionality (or the unconstitutionality) of laws. The second major court is the “Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic is the supreme body of judicial power in the sphere of civil, criminal and administrative legal proceedings and exercises supervision over the judicial activity of oblast, city, district and military courts of the Republic.”^{lxii} The third major court is the Supreme Arbitrage of the Kyrgyz Republic and arbitration courts of municipalities “settle disputes between economic entities based on different forms of property, arising in the economic sphere and in the process of management.”^{lxiii}

There is also contract law, enterprise law, banking, immigration, labor, property —regulated by the Constitution and the “ the Law of the KR On the Denationalization and Privatization of State Property in the Kyrgyz Republic—, obligatory and intellectual property law (Battalova 2002, par. 12-19, 21). Intellectual property law was assigned under and regulated by “Department of Intellectual Property was established at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic – Kyrgyzpatent.”^{lxiv} Tax law is another important aspect of Kyrgyz Republic regulatory law and is regulated by the Jogorku Kenesh and the local and state administrative entities.^{lxv}

Corruption can be found at all levels and court decisions are often bribed, due to low salaries of judges and other legal persons. This remains one of Kyrgyzstan’s largest obstacles in building a sustainable and durable democracy and a threat to the country’s long-term stability. An April 2012 EurasiaNet article characterized Kyrgyzstan’s courts as being legal circuses, with uneducated and unqualified judges, a conviction rate of 100% as judicial are often unable to deliver acquittals.^{lxvi} Kyrgyzstan has been tinkering with the idea of introducing juries in cases. Kazakhstan and Georgia have implemented juries only in murder cases, but have been slow to implement the system across all levels and types of criminal offenses.^{lxvii} Council for Selection of Judges, created in 2011 as a product of the 2010 Constitution appoint judges, but are often influenced by political parties who are involved in the process.^{lxviii} In July 2012, juries were introduced based on “an amendment to the Law on Jurors in Kyrgyz Courts adopted by the national legislature” in May 2012 in accordance to and codified by the Kyrgyz Constitution, Article 15.6 and by Article 82.1 which states, “participate in the judicial process in the cases and in the order specified by the law.”^{lxix} Available research and primary sources reveal no implementation of the introduction of jurors into the Kyrgyz legal system.

Compliance with human rights improved and opposition to independent media outlets are less suppressed because of the Tulip Revolution. Kyrgyzstan’s institution of more democratic and liberal value-based reforms and Kyrgyzstan’s need for integration regionally and global Kyrgyz social policy is still in development as the country faces intolerance towards homosexuals (flirting with a law similar to the Russian law relating to homosexual-friendly policies), bride kidnapping and labor and gender equality. Kyrgyzstan’s integration into and participation in many regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation for Europe (OSCE), and the newer Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) will heavily influence or stump its democratic and legal prospects for becoming more open, transparent, and fair in its court proceedings and legal system.

2.2.3. Economic Potential and Challenges

Through privatization of small and medium-sized businesses, liberalization of prices, smart foreign exchange rate management and a stable national currency (the some), Kyrgyzstan’s economy gained strength after the Soviet collapse. In 1998, Kyrgyzstan became the first

country in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to join the World Trade Organization.

Gold represents approximately 80% of all export trades outside the CIS, which means Kyrgyzstan has narrow export diversity which reflects the country's natural resources. Kumtor goldmine is the country's largest mine which also produces the most gold. Operations at Kumtor goldmine are overseen by Canada's Centerra Gold. The Kumtor Gold Mine has faced calls by Kyrgyz politicians to nationalize the mine. The mine in recent years has become a source of contention and has become the focus of Kyrgyz political and social struggles as the Kyrgyz become more assertive in negotiating mining contracts and ensuring that the state, the mining communities, and the Kyrgyz people receive appropriately distributed benefits. The deals of the Kumtor Gold Mine have caused political upheaval as the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan in mid-April 2015, Joomart Otorbayev, resigned over failing to strike a deal with the Canadian company. The new Kyrgyz Prime Minister is Temir Sariyev.

2.2.4. Social and demographic challenges

Similar to the other post-Soviet countries, Kyrgyzstan has a multicultural society. The Russians represent the biggest ethnic minority in the state. Conflicts occur due to the numerous exclaves (ongoing border conflicts and ethnic tensions) and enclaves, as well as the Kyrgyz language is a necessity for high ranked political posts. Although equal human rights are granted to all citizens, some discrimination for ethnic minorities is visible. Furthermore, although Kyrgyzstan is a Muslim country, the functions of state is clearly separated from religion. In other words, it is a secular state.

Most Kyrgyz conform to Sunni Islam. Kyrgyz, Russians, and Uzbeks are the main ethnic groups. The Uzbeks reside in the South, especially in the southern city of Osh. The city of Osh and the southern portion of Kyrgyzstan has from time to time been the site of ethnic clashes in 1990s and in 2010. Kyrgyz and Uzbeks have divergent histories and get a long during times of tranquility. Uzbeks according to many human rights watch dog groups still face systemic discrimination at the hands of Kyrgyz persons and law enforcement.

The lush and vegetative tri-border area of the Ferghana Valley also poses issues and it has been deemed a hotbed for religious extremism. There are many extremist and terrorist groups respectively in Kyrgyzstan most prominently the Hizb ut-Tahrir and many Kyrgyz citizens have been reported to go fight alongside the Islamic State.

Kyrgyzstan, mirroring the action of its former conquering Russia, is attempting to pass an anti-gay propaganda bill similar to the bill that Russia passed in 2013. The Kyrgyz anti-gay law includes harsher penalties such as one year of imprisonment for violating its provisions. Due to the structure of Kyrgyzstan's legislature, the bill requires three readings and subsequently three passing votes. The bill has gone through to readings and two favorable votes: 15 October 2014 and 24 June 2015. Each of the readings passed with landslides with the June reading receiving 90 votes in favor and two against.

Passing of the draft law would no longer allow Kyrgyzstan to fulfill its international obligations to equality and political rights. Kyrgyzstan is party of to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Equality for all is also enshrined in the Kyrgyz Constitution; this law would violate the constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic. The law would put restrictions on media and peaceful assembly violating Article 31 of the Constitution: "the right to free expression of

opinion, freedom of speech and press.” The Kyrgyz Constitutions also declares that “the propagation of national, ethnic, racial and religious hatred, gender as well as other social supremacy which calls to discrimination, hostility and violence shall be prohibited” under Section 4 of Article 2.

Kyrgyzstan’s anti-gay bill demonstrates Russia’s increasing influence in its political affairs and now the country’s moral affairs. The discriminatory draft law has received international condemnation from the United Nations, global human rights groups, Western countries and domestic activists. Homophobia in Kyrgyzstan is systemic and many gay Kyrgyz men are often abused (beaten, threatened and arbitrarily detained) by police and in police custody.

2.2.5. Foreign policy

Kyrgyzstan was the former home of U.S. Air Base Manas Transit Center, near Bishkek International Airport. President Rosa Otunbayeva announced that the contract for the base will be extended, but due to political tension over the U.S. presence at Manas, the base was closed in July 2014 to coincide with the U.S. withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. The base was to support NATO logistics and served as an alternative logistical hub after the 2005 closure of the Karshi-Khanabad Air Base (or K2 Airbase) in Uzbekistan (*see Uzbekistan Foreign Policy*). Additionally, a Russian air base, Kant Air Base, is a leftover military installation from Soviet times. China is also becoming increasingly important, particularly in terms of trade and infrastructural development for Kyrgyzstan. Interestingly, Kazakhstan plays an essential role for Kyrgyzstan in the region, due to important transit functions in terms of trade and pipelines transport.

After Almazbek Atambayev assumed the Presidency, he flew to Turkey on his first official visit as President to increase bilateral trade. The move, as Atambayev did not visit Russia first (as most Central Asian presidents do and do so regularly) signified that Kyrgyzstan was looking to diversify its strategic partnerships. This is a grand departure from the usual Kyrgyz politicking as “former Kyrgyz presidents has been to play one superpower against the other in order to gain maximum benefit for Kyrgyzstan and its ruling regimes” and “have led to two forced regime changes in a decade.”^{lxx} Russian assistance to Kyrgyzstan comes in two forms—economic and military—which both result in Russia have a more dominating and controlling presence in Kyrgyzstan.

President Atambayev’s foreign policy also reached out to the more eastern Asian states such as Japan in which the Kyrgyz relationship played on the two countries long relationship, spanning over two decades. Kyrgyzstan is looking to attract more foreign investment into the country. This was also the purpose with having President Atambayev visit Turkey. This further advances the more modern, more Kyrgyz-oriented, and more assertive foreign policy. This has proven to be working as Turkey (at the time of 2012) has stated that it will increase Turkish investments to Kyrgyzstan over the new few years totaling \$450 billion if favorable investment climate is created and “both sides will work towards increasing bilateral trade turnover between the two countries to \$1 billion by 2015 from \$300 million in 2011.”^{lxxi}

2.2.6. Strategic perspectives

The new government and the following governments have to look for economic opportunities due to the fact that resources are scarce. Kyrgyzstan has used its natural resources to attract foreign investors, but changes in the political climate and a more assertive and nationalistic

Kyrgyzstan government may push foreign investors away. The natural resources exploration and exploitation opportunities provided by Kyrgyzstan will further drive its relationship with the West. The most important task for Kyrgyzstan to complete in the realm of both economics and politics is balancing its own self-interests against close ally and former colonizer, Russia. Kyrgyzstan must be able to establish a sustainable and stable environment in order to get the economy running smoothly and to protect its countries resources.

Kyrgyzstan, regarding its Western partners, is concerned with foreign investment opportunities and political stability. Kyrgyzstan hosts Kumtor Gold mine, an open pit mine in Northeast Kyrgyzstan, which is owned and operated by Canadian Centerra Gold via Kumtor Operating Company (KOC). The mine, which has been operational since 1997, has become the center of political, social, and economic struggle in Kyrgyzstan as the Kyrgyz seek to nationalize the mine as they feel they need great control over their resources and that the revenue is not being equally distributed. Environmental damages caused to drinking and irrigation resources and glaciers that supply the drinking and irrigation water have been tainted. Centerra Gold/KOC has set up the Issyk Kul Development Fund to give back to the local mining communities. One percent of the revenue from Kumtor Gold Mine is placed in the fund and is spent based on government's spending plans and with government priorities. The operation at Kumtor has met local resistance as local had protested the operation of the mine and the presence of a foreign company by blocking roads which resulted in the forced shut down of the mine. If nationalization of the mine were to occur, it could have the potential to devastate the Kyrgyz economy as the Kyrgyz government would have to upfront the operating costs, provide jobs and benefits, and carry out routine maintenance and engage in environmental safeguards. All of these are pricey. It is unclear if the mine were to be nationalized if the Issyk Kul Development Fund would cease to exist.

Kyrgyzstan was considered a strategic asset to the European and Western coalition partners. The U.S. ran Afghanistan-related logistics operations out of Bishkek International Airport at Ganci Airbase. Due to political strife and the end of U.S. operation and the withdrawal of U.S. troops Manas Transit Center (the facility was downgraded), the U.S. has lost influence in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan before the closure of Manas was the only country to host both a U.S. airbase and a Russian airbase. Kyrgyzstan at this time represented the political struggle between Russia and the U.S. over the strategic area of Central Asia.

Kyrgyzstan also shares a border with China. Here there are ethnic, cultural, and historical linkages with the Turkic Uighurs that reside in the far Western Province Xinjiang also known as the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. China has also invested in Kyrgyz gold mine and gold mine exploration meeting the same fate as Centerra Gold's KOC by addressing protests by local and more assertive demands by the Kyrgyz government. From a strategic standpoint, Kyrgyzstan's large natural resources make it an attractive location for investors, but due to the wealth, the Kyrgyz has more maneuvering power.

Tajikistan

In Tajikistan, a civil war took place from 1992 to 1997, because of internal instability and growing conflicts and infighting between the elite. Tajikistan remains one of the poorest Former Soviet Republics and the poorest country in Central Asia. The government neglects to pursue the democratization process and President Emomali Rakhmon (also seen as Emomali Rakhmonov) is constantly expanding his power.

2.3. Tajikistan at a glance

- Official name: Republic of Tajikistan
- Government type: Republic
- Independence: 9 September 1991 (from Soviet Union)
- National legislature: based on civil law system; no judicial review of legislative acts; has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction
- Legislative branch: Bicameral Supreme Assembly
- Head of State: President Emonmali RAKHMON (or Rakhmonov) (since 6 November 1994; head of state and Supreme Assembly chairman since 19 November 1992)
- Geographic location: Central Asia, west of China, north of Afghanistan, neighboring Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan
- Area: 143,100 sq. km (55,251 sq. miles)
- Natural resources: hydropower; some petroleum, uranium, mercury, brown coal, lead, zinc, antimony, tungsten, silver, gold
- Population: 8, 208,000 (World Bank 2013, est.)
- Languages: Tajik (official language closely related to Persian), Russian widely used in government and business
- Ethnic groups: Tajik 79.9%, Uzbek 15.3%, Russian 1.1%, Kyrgyz 1.1%, other 2.6% (2000 census)
- Religions: Sunni Muslim 85%, Shia Muslim 5%, other 10% (2003 est.)
- Life expectancy: 65 years (men), 71 years (women) (UN est.)
- Internet domain: .tj
- International dialing code: +992
- Nominal GDP: USD 13.65 bn (2009 est.)
- GNI per capita (USD): \$870 (World Bank, 2011 est.)
- GDP growth: 7.4% (World Bank 2013 est.)
- Unemployment rate: 10.8% (ILO 2013 est.)^{lxxii}
- Inflation rate (consumer prices): 5.0% (World Bank 2013 est.)

2.3.1. Political development

In 1992 a civil war took began, after the collapse of the regime of the former communist president Rahmon Nabiyev. In 1994, Emomali Rakhmon, leader of the People's Front of Tajikistan (PF), took over the presidency after elections without the participation of opposition parties. When it comes to elections, opponents were not allowed to participate, and political opposition figures was suppressed and partly arrested.

The collapse of the health, education system, infrastructure and society suffers from extreme poverty. Tajikistan slowly but gradually recovered economically, especially due to the favorable world prices of aluminum and cotton. Despite some economic growth, Tajikistan is the poorest state in Central Asia and in the Former Soviet Union. Democracy and market reforms are yet to be established, the international community tolerates the authoritarian rule of Emomali Rakhmon and his government. President Rakhmon has created fewer problems and attracts less attention than his Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan counterparts.

Demonstrating fragility and factionalism inside Tajikistan, 22 people died Friday September 4, 2015 in Dushanbe during a shootout at a government defense complex that left thirteen

militants and nine police officers dead. On September 6, 2015, it was reported that President Rahmon stated that the attacks against the police were staged by Islamic State sympathizers who “pursued the same goals as the Islamic State.” The leader of the rogue group of militants was former Deputy Defense Minister, General Abduhalim Nazarzoda. On Wednesday September 16, 2015, Tajikistan’s forces killed rogue General Nazarzoda. Also killed were 12 militants were killed including four government troops. The attacks occurred in the capital of Dushanbe and the nearby city of Vahdat. General Nazarzoda had fled to the Ramit Gorge after he was ousted from his position and charged with treason. Retired and active servicemen were reported to support Nazarzoda.

Tajikistan also cracked down on religious freedom in the country. The banishment and criminalization of the IRPT (also known as the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan Islamic Party of Tajikistan) in September 2015 represents further political opposition in Tajikistan and Rahmon’s paranoia. The Tajikistan Government claims that the party’s failure to enter into March 2015 Parliamentary elections motivated the banning of the Party due to “inactivity.” The exiled party leader of the IRPT, Muhiddin Kabiri, was accused of aiding the dead Defense Minister responsible for the shootout in Dushanbe according to Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty on September 17, 2015. This highlights Tajikistan’s fragility after its five year civil war which ended in 1997.

2.3.2. Legal environment

The Constitution of Tajikistan, like many nations, is the Supreme Law of the Land according to Article 10 of the document. The Constitution of Tajikistan was introduced in November 1994 and has been amended two times: September 1999 and June 2003. The Constitution provides for the separation of powers and the establishment of a democratic, legal, secular and unitary state, according to Article 10.

The national legislature is based on a civil law system without judicial review of legislative acts. The national constitution was adopted as supreme law in 1994. Tajikistan has an independent judiciary but is considerably influenced by the executive branch and is susceptible to corruption. Because of the low law salaries of judges, they are vulnerable to bribery. Tajikistan has been dealing with corruption through its legislature, legal system, and with regional organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The following laws are meant to curb corruption: the *Presidential Decree on Additional Measures to Step up the Struggle against Economic Crime and Corruption*, the *Law on the Fight against Corruption*, and the relevant sections of the Criminal Code. According to the United Nations report on Tajikistan’s public administration, a “nation-wide anti-corruption plan has yet to be developed and adopted, and an interdisciplinary anti-corruption coordinating body envisaged in the Presidential Decree has yet to be established.”^{lxiii} The fight against corruption is compartmented like it is in many countries where there are different types of agencies and organizations fighting different types of corruption. For example, the tax administration would detect and investigate tax corruption, fraud, and bribery (e.g. Anti-corruption Division within the Tax Police Department).

Tajikistan is a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE has been extremely active in stabilizing Tajikistan’s still fragile post-war political and legal environment through police reform, legal reform, and electoral reform to stabilize post-civil war Tajikistan. The OSCE strives to prevent corruption and to promote transparency and democratic elections and most importantly human rights in a region marred by a terrible human rights record. The OSCE office in Tajikistan is the largest interstate and

interregional organization. The OSCE engages in democratic efforts including a civic education program for youth and young adults in the remote areas of the country, to develop electoral and political processes to meet the country's commitment to democracy and civil and political rights. The OSCE specifically assists with the development of the legal system by engaging in capacity building (a law on Civil Service was passed in 1999), developing the legal system and trains law practitioners of all levels.

The legal environment has improved since the end of the civil war in 1997, but many problems remain. Like many authoritarian regimes, the legal system is used to the President's advantage and is used to repress groups that may threaten their power and any perceived threats to the stability of a country. While Tajikistan is secular, is not friendly towards those who outwardly practice, tolerate, and embrace Islam. Tajikistan's population primarily consists of Sunni (95%) and Salafi Muslims (5%). Mosques and parishioners are to register with the government. In October 2011, the ground was broken for construction for the largest mosque in the Former Soviet Union to accommodate 115, 000 worshippers despite the country's intolerance for Islam. In recent years, the government of Tajikistan has closed down hundreds of unregistered mosques. According to the United States' Commission on International Religious Freedom 2013 report on Tajikistan, Tajikistan is a country of particular concern. Tajikistan in 2009, after passing a highly restrictive law, "has increased the criminal and administrative penalties for violations" and "religion law places onerous administrative burdens on religious groups, which prevent or control religious activity" and non-violent groups that are unregistered are deemed "illegal."^{lxxxiv} The law also prevents private religious education, "requires state permission for an institution or organization to provide religious instruction, and requires that both parents provide written permission for a child to receive approved instruction."^{lxxxv}

2.3.3. Economic Potential and Challenges

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Tajik economy crumbled. Key trade goods were and are cotton and aluminum, but these products have not yet reached the level of output which they had before the country's independence, and thus, have not made a significant economic impact. Tajikistan's GDP barely managed to reach pre-independence levels in recent years. Tajikistan's GDP growth rate is 7.4% and its current GDP per capita is 1,036.58 (est. 2013) USD; its GDP is \$8.508 billion (2013). According to 2014 World Bank figures, Tajikistan growth slipped to 6.7% after a decrease in remittances (declining two percent) and weaker "industrial export growth" affected by lower prices for cotton and aluminum.^{lxxxvi} Tajikistan's GDP is well below the other Central Asian states making it the poorest Central Asian state. Economic reforms nearly only took place in the small and medium business sector, consequently large industrial enterprises faced lacks of financial and professional resources, which resulted in a drastic decrease of production.

Tajikistan is relatively unattractive to foreign investors due to its proximity to conflict areas, the adversarial business climate, and the lack of financial and professional background of local counterparts, political bureaucracy, and widespread and rampant corruption. Tajikistan relies heavily on foreign assistance mainly from Russia, China, and Iran and international financial institutions and organizations such as the EU and the World Bank.

Poor governance and the government's failure to implement banking and political reform aimed at tackling corruption remain the main obstacles for Tajikistan to develop a friendly foreign investment atmosphere. Micro financing organizations and efforts continue to grow, "are typically well governed, and are filling many gaps left by the weak banking sector."^{lxxxvii}

Tajikistan's black market is also growing which can be attributed to its currency controls which have boosted its underground economy caused by the lack of remittances (because of the Russian economy and Tajikistan's economy is dependent on remittances), "with less currency flowing into the country, the Tajik somoni has slid almost 17 percent so far this year, to 6.23 somoni per dollar, according to the official exchange rate" and were accused of speculating on the currency which caused financial exchanges to shut down.^{lxxviii} This has forced many to trade currency illegally and there are customers because of the high demand and that banks are not selling hard currency and "economists warn that Tajikistan could emulate neighboring Uzbekistan, where the difference between the National Bank rate and the black market rate has grown to over 40 percent."^{lxxix}

The micro-financing according to the World Bank Study, has had the greatest impact on rural areas which are typically the poorest. The World Bank is committed to assisting Tajikistan develop its financial and private sectors "through policy advice, technical assistance, and financial support" through banking legislation, transaction modernization and development.^{lxxx}

However, recent reforms have improved Tajikistan's business environment, and like many reform undertaken by fellow Central Asian states, have provided more investor protections. According to the World Bank Report, Tajikistan, "Tajikistan became the 147th State party to the Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards...on November 12, 2012."^{lxxxii}

2.3.4. Social and Demographic Challenges

Degrees at school and universities are easily obtained with bribery. The country faces massive labor migration, a relatively high HIV/AIDS infection rate, and drug trafficking. Through a security lens, Tajikistan has to deal with extremist Islamic groups and constant crackdowns on Muslims. Tajikistan has also seen a rise in its Salafi Muslim population. Salafi Muslims believe in a pure form of Islam. Unfortunately, many Wahabbi extremists identify themselves as Salafis which has prompted a harsh crackdown in Tajikistan to prevent extremism from flourishing and to maintain a secular state.

Due to the terrain and geography (half of the territory is higher than 3,000 meters), it is considerably difficult to provide adequate infrastructure. Tajikistan has many infrastructure projects that need to be completed. Tajikistan does and will continue to benefit from its network of hydroelectric power plants. Iran has been instrumental in funding Tajikistan's development projects.

Poverty remains, by large, one of the larger social struggles of Tajikistan. Approximately 51% of the population has to make ends meet with less than \$2 USD per day. Economic growth has resulted in a decline of poverty. The national poverty rate dropped from 81% to 47% in 2009. An increased in the standard of living and further poverty reduction are goals of Tajikistan's National Development Strategy to 2015.^{lxxxiii} The government has been accused of squandering public funds on image-enhancing projects like a large mosque and palaces throughout Dushanbe.

2.3.5. Foreign Policy

Tajikistan is highly dependent on international support and international donor funds. The European Union became a strategic partner of Tajikistan and is working “to facilitate Tajikistan economic transition, promoting inclusive, sustainable human and economic development.”^{lxxxiii} Tajikistan and the European Union signed a Partnership and Co-operation Agreement in 2004 which entered into force in 2010. The partnership agreements focuses on strengthening economic partnerships, the desire to promote international peace and security, and to protect the rule of law and human rights all while encouraging regional cooperation.^{lxxxiv} The European Union has also become a foreign policy priority for Tajikistan.

Due to Tajikistan’s unfavorable and landlocked geographical position, Russia is still the most important partner in terms of political, economic, and military support. Russia is interested in Tajikistan for many of the same reasons it is interested in its other former Soviet subordinates: provides a strategic context to maintain its sphere of influence, countering Western and Chinese influence, and to house Russian troops. In April 2015, Russia reaffirmed its military relationship with Tajikistan focusing on the deterioration of the security situation after NATO forces have moved out of the region after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.^{lxxxv} Tajikistan shares a 1,200km border with Tajikistan and Russia’s Russia’s 201st Motorized Rifle Division is stationed near the border and troops from the 201st Motor Rifle Division will be staying until 2042.^{lxxxvi} The Kremlin-backed media outlet, Russia Today, reported in April 2015 that Russia is to give “about \$1.2 billion worth of weapons and military equipment to the Central Asian nation of Tajikistan, which is currently threatened by invasion from the Islamic State” as part of Russia’s modernization package for Tajikistan and to strengthen border security between Afghanistan and Tajikistan.^{lxxxvii}

Meanwhile, Tajikistan’s relations with neighboring Afghanistan have improved in the past years; the relations with Uzbekistan still remain very tense and problematic over resource scarcity and border security. The tension between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan arises out of the energy sector, particularly regarding the controversial water issues, and is “borne out of similarity, proximity, and scarcity.”^{lxxxviii}

Tajikistan is also cultivating closer ties with other major countries in the region such as Iran, Turkey, and India. Turkey, when the Soviet Union collapsed, had its sights on its Turkic republics as they share linguistic, religious, and cultural ties. The Turkey-Tajikistan relationships began in 1991 when Turkey recognized Tajikistan’s independence and 60 protocols have been signed between two countries since then and at the time of this publication. The two countries since 2012 have focused their relationship on agriculture and technology. Turkey’s trade volume in 2012 with Tajikistan exceeded \$500 million dollars. The country has also engaged in “an agreement of cooperation between the state television broadcasters of the two countries, agreements of cooperation between the ministries of agriculture as well as energy,” a memorandum of understanding between banks, and a cultural exchange program for the year 2013-2014.^{lxxxix} Other cultural projects are facilitated by the Dushanbe Coordination Office of the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) and the Turkish Language Research and Application Centre (TÖMER) in Dushanbe.

Education still remains an issue for Tajikistan. President Rahmon announced the closure of the Gülen schools inspired by the teachings of the Fethullah Gülen. The Gülen movement schools were the top performing schools in the nation. The schools underscore the conflict between Tajikistan’s government and the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The closure of the schools highlights the ongoing and escalating conflict between the AKP and the

opposition in Turkey. Other Central Asian states have already closed the Gülen Schools in the past.

The India-Tajikistan relationship has also expanded in the realm of security, trade and energy creating a strategic partnership between the two countries. Relations between the two countries started after the collapse of the Soviet Union and when India recognized Tajikistan's independence in 1991. India's relationship with Tajikistan is the only successful example of India's "Connect Central Asia Policy" which has left India without a robust strategic policy. The Farkhor Air Base, located 130km south of Dushanbe, Tajikistan is jointly operated by the Indian and Tajik Air Forces and is only India's only air base outside of its borders. The base was established in May 2002 by India and has previously served as a transport base to supply the Afghan Northern Alliance and before becoming a strategic military asset served as a hospital to treat Afghan fighters.^{xc} Tajikistan is also important to India as Tajikistan is close to the highly-contested Kashmir area and serves as a way for India to protect its interests politically.

In the areas of trade relations and energy cooperation, the partnership could easily expand as "India's total trade with Tajikistan has gone up from \$10.7 million in 2004-05 to \$41.33 million in 2010-11" but are below levels of what they could be.^{xci} Tajikistan is one of the richer countries when it comes to hydroelectric power and has many precious gems and minerals which make it an attractive trading partner for India. The lack of infrastructure in Tajikistan does pose an obstacle for India. India is currently an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Tajikistan has been a full supporter of full India membership in the organization.

For information about the Tajikistan-Iran relationship (*See Iran under New Emerging Actors*).

2.3.6. Strategic perspectives

President Emamoli Rakhmon has been able to secure and enlarge his power and is expected to stay in office until the foreseeable future. Presidential terms are seven years according to the Constitutions. President Rakhmon has been in power since 1994. The population is aware of the risk of another civil war and will do anything to prevent violent upheavals in the future. To prevent this and to grow the country, it is essential that the country restructures the economic and social system to reduce nepotism, and tribal loyalties and to increase the social welfare of its citizens.

Tajikistan also faces problems with its neighbors: it has border conflicts with Kyrgyzstan due to two Tajik enclaves on Kyrgyz territory, Vorukh located south of the mountain of Ak-Tash and Western Qalacha near the Kyrgyz railroad station. Sarvan is the Tajik enclave in Uzbekistan and is known as Sarvak, Sarvaksoi and Sarvaki-bolo which is completely surrounded by Uzbekistan and is located in the tri-border region of the Ferghana Valley and in the Isfara Valley. Tajikistan also faces Islamic movements of Uzbek groups in the Tajik mountains and is a matter of Tajik concern.

The relationship with the Iran is becoming increasingly vital. (*See Iran under New Emerging Actors*).

2.4. Turkmenistan

After the death of the former ruling dictator Saparmurat Niyazov, who named himself "Turkmenbashi," which literally means "Father of the Turkmen," the former Vice-Prime

Minister Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, was elected new President on 11 February 2007—the elections were held without the permission of the participation of political opponents. Turkmenistan still remains isolated not only from Central Asia, but from rest of Asia and the West. The country still maintains its non-aligned status, declaring and practicing neutrality in many geopolitical organizations and demonstration neutrality regarding the conflicts such as Crimea, the Caspian Sea deals, and staying out of the new AIIB and the security organizations such as the CSTO and the SCO.

2.4.1. Turkmenistan at a glance

- Official name: Turkmenistan
- Government type: Republic; authoritarian presidential rule with little power outside the executive branch
- Independence: 27 October 1991 (from Soviet Union)
- National legislature: based on civil law system and Islamic law; has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction
- Legislative branch: Two parliamentary bodies
- Head of State: President Gurbanguly BERDYMUKAHMEDOV (since 14 February 2007)
- Geographic location: Central Asia, bordering the Caspian Sea, between Iran and Kazakhstan
- Area: 488,100 sq. km (188,456 sq. miles)
- Natural resources: petroleum, natural gas, sulfur, salt
- Main exports: Oil, gas, textiles, raw cotton
- Population: 5,240,000 (World Bank 2013 est).
- Languages: Turkmen 72%, Russian 12%, Uzbek 9%, other 7%
- Ethnic groups: Turkmen 85%, Uzbek 5%, Russian 4%, other 6% (2003)
- Religions: Muslim 89%, Eastern Orthodox 9%, unknown 2%
- Life expectancy: 61 years (men), 69 years (women) (UN)
- Internet domain: .tm
- International dialing code: +993
- Nominal GDP: USD \$41.85 billion (World Bank 2013 est.)
- GNI per capita (USD): \$6,880 (World Bank, 2013)
- GDP growth: 10.2% (World Bank 2013 est.)
- Unemployment rate: 10.7% (ILO 2013 est.)^{xcii}
- Inflation rate (consumer prices): 10% (2009 est.; World Bank 2013 est is NA)
- Ranked as Upper Middle Income country by the World Bank

2.4.2. Political development

After Saparmurat Niyazov had elected himself head of state by direct elections in October 1990, he replaced communism with a unique version of independent authoritarian nationalism, led by a pervasive cult of personality—his own personality. Although the constitution stated that the country was democratic and was based on a presidential republic with the separation of powers, Niyazov established a brutal regime which became increasingly dependent on its domestic secret service and security forces. In 2006, Niyazov began to isolate the country from international and regional organizations. China was the only nation which remained important to Niyazov's regime.

President Supramurat Niyazov, also known as Turkmenbashi (“Father of All Turkmen”), passed away on 21 December 2006 because of a heart attack at age 66. He ruled Turkmenistan under Soviet rule and after independence since 1985. Turkmenistan faced a power vacuum that was not allowed to form after the seamless transition of power to former dentist Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov. There was fear of violence and hope as many hoped a new President would pull back the curtains on the secretive state. Before Niyazov’s death, there was only one political party, Democratic Party of Turkmenistan.

There was great hope for a democracy or at least a less authoritarian and megalomaniac leader and a more transparent government. The seamless transition to an unknown political and public figure, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, was welcomed as he was a political newcomer and was not part of the Soviet Communist apparatchik. The transition went smoothly with no turmoil, but offered no opportunity for political pluralism and a debate about the future of the country to take place. Since Niyazov’s death in 2006, Berdymukhammedov has done away with much of Turkmenbashi’s cult of personality and installed his own. There was not much in changes in leadership, leadership style, and policies. The transition was uneventful and Turkmenistan remains still one of the most secret and reclusive countries in the world.

After the election, Berdymukhammedov underlined the continuation of Niyazov’s policies, but after his first year in office, some changes in domestic policies such as health care and education as well as discrimination policies were already visible. Now Turkmenistan is trying to establish relationships with states which are located outside Central Asia. Turkmenistan still considers itself part of the non-aligned movement and Turkmenistan is not part of any of the regional security organization that other Central Asia states are.

2.4.3. Legal environment

Turkmenistan’s legal environment is constitutionally well regulated with an independent judiciary (but judges are hired and fired by the president). Like its neighbor and transitioning countries and economies, Turkmenistan needs to strengthen rule of law and access to justice for its entire population, as well as to promote civil society activity by promoting freedom of speech, access to information and to promote religious freedom. Under the current President Berdymukhammedov, these reforms will be hard to achieve as he is engulfed in his own cult of personality. Reforms in Turkmenistan have been focused on political and economic reforms.

Turkmenistan is a unitary state led by a totalitarian President. In 2006, it was stated that the Turkmen law was transitioning from Soviet law, but will include elements of Islamic law (because of the history of Turkmenistan). Turkmenistan is a civil law country with its laws hierarchically organized. The Constitution of Turkmenistan establishes permanent neutrality and the Turkmen Constitution promotes human rights according to Article 3: “to ensure conditions for the free development of individual personality, and also commits to protect the life, honor, dignity, freedom, individual inviolability, and natural and inalienable rights of the citizen.”^{xciii} The Constitution also calls for a separation of powers as codified by Article 4 as it is divided among three branches: Legislative, Executive, and Judicial. The Majlis is the highest representative body (which is similar to Uzbekistan’s representative body) and is the equivalent to a Parliamentary body.

While the Constitution of Turkmenistan is all encompassing and reflects the legal system of many democratic countries such as the United States and Western European Parliamentary

Systems, the Constitution is obviously not held and its' legally structured inherently flawed due to the nature of its leadership structure. Holding to the idea that democratic reform should follow economic progress or develop simultaneously, "Turkmenistan's post-independence transition towards a market-oriented economy supported by democratic and pluralistic institutions can be viewed as slow."^{xciv}

Like any developing nation and like many of the Former Soviet Republics, the country faces corruption in the form of bribery. The regulatory framework and the legal system of Turkmenistan have harmed its commercial development as they fall short of international standards and, "they do not seem to be applied in practice, since there is no functioning stock exchange and there appears to be no public issuance of shares."^{xcv} In Turkmenistan, you have to pay to be "introduced" to the Government of Turkmenistan in other words receiving a letter of invitation to visit the country. Turkmenistan has repeatedly ranked high (numerically low on a wide scale) on the corruption index indicating a high level of corruption. Transparency International in 2013, ranked Turkmenistan 170 out of 174. Political corruption and corruption in the public service sector also exists.

2.4.4. Economic Potential and Challenges

Especially in the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Turkmen society suffered extreme poverty. The economy slowly recovered, but in 1996, a total collapse slowed economic development. Structural reforms in the economic environment remain very low and many areas are still under strict control of the state. Privatization only took place with small unprofitable entities. Oil, gas, and cotton are the most important trade products, which account for approximately 80% of total exports, but also agriculture outputs like grain crops, rice, and vegetable become increasingly essential. However, the society has only a low domestic purchasing power. Similar to the Soviet planned economy, Turkmenistan's economy is considered in long-term programs. The country's economy remains underdeveloped. The country has little interaction with global markets.

Economic corruption is often a driver in the lack of foreign direct investment in the country. Even with Turkmenistan's status of the world's fifth largest gas producer, it has been unable to take advantage of its rich resources. As of November 2014, Turkmenistan produces roughly 70 billion cubic meters of natural gas each year and to break this monopoly has begun to export gas to Iran and China. The closed-out nature and the neutrality stance of the government (derived from the non-aligned movement which Turkmenistan considers itself still a part of) does negatively affect the country.

The lack of governmental and political transparency also deters investors because of the risk associated with misinformation and secrecy. Turkmenistan's restrictive freedom of movement policy is also worrisome as the country is strict on who it lets in and out. The freedom of movement of its people is also worrisome as Turkmenistan will be unable to develop its networks and its human capital—according to economics one of the most important elements of developing an economy—to further develop and diversify its narrow-based economy.

2.4.5. Social and Demographic Challenges

Although Turkmenistan's laws and regulations state that all citizens have the same civil rights, ethnic minorities (e.g. Uzbeks, Russians, Kazakhs opponents of regime etc.) often face discrimination regarding education and civil services. They are banned from the right to vote in parliamentary elections. Furthermore, former President Niyazov propagated his extreme

national ideology of the “perfect Turkmen.” President Niyazov also considered himself to be the Father of all Turkmen engulfing himself and the country in his eccentric and pervasive cult of personality. Upon Niyazov’s death, it was expected that his cult of personality would be dismantled, but it was only replaced by the new President’s, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, affinity for himself.

Concerning salary income inequality, the greatest among the Central Asia states with grave differences between urban and rural living conditions, the regime tried hard to improve the social security system. It also considers providing handicapped people, sick people, and providing maternity benefits. When Niyazov declared himself as President for Life in 1999, he drastically cut back on social welfare programs while spending money on lavish and often outrageous projects.

Human rights abuses are reported to run rampant in the country. Many international human rights watchdog groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) describe the human rights situation in Turkmenistan extremely repressive, “media and religious freedoms are subject to draconian restrictions, and human rights defenders and other activists face the constant threat of government reprisal” and that torture remains widespread.^{xcvi} Citizens of Turkmenistan are forced to see its leader’s face throughout the country, are forced to attend hour long events and are not allowed to leave or use the toilet according to HRW 2014 World Report on human rights.^{xcvii} There is little media coverage that actually report what is going on inside in the country. A simple glance at news outlets reporting news on Turkmenistan only highlight the President’s visits and what things he is doing for the people of Turkmenistan. There are no independent media outlets, limited internet access (even though it has expanded under the Presidency Berdymukhammedov). Internet fees are \$100 month, which many cannot afford and internet activity is monitored along with other electronic and telecommunications activity.^{xcviii} The Turkmen government has been accused of making false accusations to imprison political opponents, human rights advocates, and many have been victims of what HRW calls “enforced disappearances” and many of those kidnapped are believed to have died in detention.^{xcix}

Religion and state are largely kept separate and only Sunni Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church are officially recognized and are tightly controlled by the regime. Groups are forced to register and face regular government scrutiny. According to Amnesty International, a 2013 code, “Provisions in the Code of Administrative Offences, which came into force in January, punished the import, export and distribution of religious materials.”^c Many Jehovah’s witnesses were imprisoned in 2013; one remains in jail.^{ci} Similar to the situation in Tajikistan, no “congregations of unregistered religious groups or communities are allowed, and religious communities have been unable to register for years” in Turkmenistan.^{cii} This creates a high risk for those who wish to practice religion in private. A new 2013 law determined that “new fines for involvement in unregistered religious activity”; the law is to go into force in 2014.^{ciii}

2.4.6. Foreign Policy

The government of Turkmenistan is strictly autocratic. Russia and Ukraine are the most important customers of natural resources and therefore play an essential role in Turkmenistan’s foreign policy. Russia is a recipient of Turkmen gas; Turkmenistan started exporting gas to China in 2009. In spite of the increased attention from the western world in the region, President Niyazov kept close contacts to the Taliban regime after the terror attacks against the U.S. on September 11, 2001. Turkey, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Iran were used as a counterweight to Russia playing important roles in Turkmenistan’s

foreign policy. The EU-Turkmen relations are mainly based on mineral fuels import from Turkmenistan and machinery and transport equipment to Turkmenistan. The EU is Turkmenistan's most important import partner and third most important export partner. Turkmenistan's weak democratization process, poor human rights record, and its current foreign policy have so far intimidated western countries from pursuing economic contracts with Turkmenistan.

2.4.7. Strategic Perspectives

Although some saw Berdymukhamedov as a reformer, he has not made any policy departures from the policies of Niyazov. The only development is the export of gas to China in 2009. As far as the transformation process from the former Soviet planned economy to a market economy, Turkmenistan slowly but gradually has to implement structural reforms. Berdymukhamedov has still not managed to achieve economic independence from oil and gas exports. The country needs further reformation of the health care system as well as the educational sector.

While Turkmenistan's non-aligned position and devotion to the now phased-out and geopolitically unrealistic neutrality in all affairs have been beneficial, Turkmenistan can capitalize on its potential. Turkmenistan has much vulnerability such as being close to the Afghan border. A violent incident broke out in February and May 2014 where there was a shootout between Turkmen border guards and a "small armed group that crossed the border from the Ghormach region of Afghanistan's Faryab Province" along the Turkmen-Afghan border according to Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty's Turkmen Service, Azatlyk. Radio Free Europe also reported that "Qishloq Ovozi[, a blog,] has previously reported that there are militant groups in northern Afghanistan who are allied with the Taliban but are led by ethnic Uzbeks."^{cv}

A similar incident happened in September 2014, where Turkmen border guards crossed into Afghanistan chasing away reportedly the Taliban who resided along the border according to Eurasia Net.^{cv} As a result of this activity and tensions mounting between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, Turkmenistan like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have decided to close their borders. This shuts off the ethnic Turkmen populations in Afghanistan that reside close to the border, causing problems if a refugee crisis situation ever were to occur. Construction equipment appeared along the Turkmen-Afghan border in October 2014: "Turkmenistan's frontier with Jowzjan's Khamyab district, which neighbors Qarqeen."^{cv} Despite Turkmenistan's neutral stance, it cannot shield Turkmenistan from regional forces such as the Taliban and violence that has plagued its neighbors for over two and three decades respectively.

2.5. Uzbekistan

In March 1990, the ethnic Uzbek outsider and strong leader Islam Karimov became head of state of Uzbekistan. He started his term with suppression of media, opposition groups, and minorities. After the terror attacks against the U.S. on September 11, 2001 Uzbekistan provided logistical support to the U.S. with an airbase, the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base, which closed when U.S. and EU criticized Uzbekistan's handling of the 2005 Andijan events and accused the Uzbek government of human rights abuses. The remaining German military base located in Termez Airport in Uzbekistan used by Karimov to pressure against EU sanctions. Germany had been paying Uzbekistan 10 -15 million Euros per year.^{cvi}

2.5.1. Uzbekistan at a glance

- Official name: Republic of Uzbekistan
- Government type: Republic, authoritarian presidential rule with little power outside the executive branch
- Independence: 1 September 1991 (from Soviet Union)
- National legislature: based on civil law system; has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction
- Legislative branch: bicameral Supreme Assembly
- Head of State: President Islam KARIMOV (since 24 March 1990; when he was elected president by the Supreme Soviet)
- Geographic location: Central Asia, north of Afghanistan; neighboring Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan
- Area: 447,400 sq. km (172,700 sq. miles)
- Natural resources: natural gas, petroleum, coal, gold, uranium, silver, copper, lead and zinc, tungsten, molybdenum
- Main exports: Cotton, gold, natural gas, mineral fertilizers, ferrous metals, textiles, motor vehicles
- Population: 30,240,000 (World Bank 2013 est.)
- Languages: Uzbek 74.3%, Russian 14.2%, Tajik 4.4%, other 7.1%
- Ethnic groups: Uzbek 80%, Russian 5.5%, Tajik 5%, Kazakh 3%, Karakalpak 2.5%, Tatar 1.5%, other 2.5% (1996 est.)
- Religions: Muslim 88% (mostly Sunnis), Eastern Orthodox 9%, other 3%
- Life expectancy: 66 years (men), 72 years (women) (UN est.)
- Internet domain: .uz
- International dialing code: +998
- Nominal GDP: USD 56.80 billion (World Bank 2013 est.)
- GNI per capita (USD): 1,900 (World Bank 2013 est.)
- GDP growth: 8.0% (World Bank 2013 est.)
- Unemployment rate: 10.8% (ILO 2013 est.)^{cvi}
- Inflation rate (consumer prices): 14.1% (2009 est.) official data; based on independent analysis of consumer prices, inflation reached 38% in 2008. World Bank 2013 estimate is unavailable at this time.

2.5.2. Political development

President Islam Karimov declared his intention to build a modern secular democratic state based on the rule of law with a quick transformation to a free market economy, but since student protests (involving 3,000 students from the Agriculture College in Tashkent)

demanding more democracy and better economic reforms in 1992 in response to a fellow student being shot by police over the desire for price reform,^{ciX} he began to form a tough regime around him with a strong internal security apparatus and little power for all remaining political officials. The autocratic leadership was justified by the government in respect of the chaotic circumstances in neighboring Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Corruption can be found in all governmental institutions at all levels and clan and tribal politics play an essential role in the realm of replacement of high-ranking governmental positions.

2.5.3. Legal environment

Uzbekistan's national legislature is based on a civil law system and nominally has an independent judicial branch. Legal decisions are made by the President, Cabinet of Ministers, and various ministries and regional mayorats (mayorships). The Cabinet of Ministers which is composed of the Prime Minister, his deputies, ministers, chairmen of state committees and the head of Karakalpakstan (an autonomous region in Uzbekistan) exercise Executive Authority and issues ordinances that affect all state organizations, enterprises, and bodies. Uzbekistan's Constitutional Court is the most powerful of the three courts (the other two are the Supreme Court and the High Economic Court) and renders the constitutionality of legislative and executive branches. The High Economic Court settles all disputes in the commercial sectors of the economy between local and state bodies; "the Economic Procedure Code provides that foreign parties have the same procedural rights and duties as Uzbek parties in matters before an Uzbek court."^{cx}

Although the constitution declares the separation of powers, in fact the president and its proponents have enough power to intervene in any court decision. President Islam Karimov appoints and removes judges arbitrarily mostly to suit his political and own power-preserving needs. The rule of law in Uzbekistan is minimal and the national constitution does not successfully protect fundamental rights and freedoms.

Uzbekistan's legal system faces many challenges. The structure of the country's power structure excludes many from freely participating and ensuring that the rights of citizens are ensured. Foreign investment and separately the regional security threats and economic, social and political problems has been impeded according to the UN in a 2006 report titled, *The Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women according to the Chairman of Uzbekistan's National Human Rights Centre*.^{cxI} Chairman Saidov stated that "expanding women's rights and ensuring gender equality was fundamental to Uzbekistan's quest to achieve the Millennium Development Goals."^{cxII} Since 2006, around 200 NGOs exist in Uzbekistan, but many of the organizations are thought to be under heavy State influence and are not able to operate freely and serve the interest of the women of Uzbekistan. This boils down to Uzbekistan's poor rule of law. In a 2007 Freedom house report, Uzbekistan ranked last. Freedom house has declared Uzbekistan not free. The ten-year anniversary of the Andijan Massacre provides a yardstick on Uzbekistan's performance regarding rule of law and human rights: little progress and slow progress.

Progress in Uzbekistan is difficult and fundamentally flawed. A 2011 Human Rights Watch Report states that widespread human rights abuses still exist in the country especially in its criminal justice system. Corruption is also widespread. Neither has improved with the adoption of habeas corpus which was adopted by the government in 2008. Habeas corpus is not transparent as "police and investigators can hold suspects up to 72 hours before bringing them before a judge for a habeas corpus hearing, a period incompatible with human rights

norms,” arbitrary detentions still exist and habeas corpus trials are not made public which undermines fairness according to the report.^{cxiii}

There have been many attempts to reform the judicial system. The UNDP had initiated the December, 2000 new edition of Law “On Courts” of Uzbekistan which will help Uzbekistan adopt international practices and best standards. This program focused on four areas: developed mechanisms for separation of powers; implements new institutions of justice system (civil and criminal courts); “empowers the Judicial Department to operationally (logistics and finance) support the courts, acting in strict compliance with the principle of court independence;” and implement democratic tools.^{cxiv} While these reforms have been implemented, nothing has changed.

There are other challenges that the Uzbek legal system faces: international pressure about its human rights and human rights abuses record, its juvenile justice system, fair trials, independent and impartial courts and civil liberties. Religious intolerance is also an issue that can be dealt with through the legal system. Until there are fundamental reforms and political changes, it is unlikely that any court or judicial reform will take place and actually be implemented.

2.5.4. Economic Potential and Challenges

Uzbekistan has resources of cotton and gold, as well as of oil and gas. Exploitation of these resources was accelerated remarkably in the early 1990s and exports were limited to meet domestic consumption levels. Controversy has plagued Uzbekistan’s cotton sector and cotton exports as Uzbekistan has enlisted the citizens of Uzbekistan including school-aged children to pick cotton. To many this is forced labor and child labor, but the Uzbek government dismisses the accusations calling the cotton picking a citizen’s duty to help Uzbekistan thrive. There have been numerous accounts documented of medical workers, civil servants, teachers and students having to pick cotton and coerced to do so by facing penalties. Solidarity Center, a NGO, released a fifteen page document which stated that public organizations, including schools, were required to provide between 30 percent and 60 percent of their staff for the duration of the harvest, and in some cases, up to 80 percent of their staff. Children often had no classes during these weeks because teachers were working in the fields.^{cxv} This negatively impacts the exports of the Uzbek cotton as in 2012, 100 international clothing manufacturers refused to use Uzbek cotton. Many equate the forced work as a human trafficking problem.

Uzbekistan has planned to increase gold production output. Uzbekistan is home to Manatau, one of the largest gold pit mines in the world. The slumping Russian markets have also impacted the Uzbek gold commodities market in May 2015 and also experiencing the effects of the drop in the prices of oil and gas. The slump in the Russian economy could produce economic conditions for Uzbekistan and the other Central Asian states by pushing their inflation to double digits. The current inflation rate according to the Government of Uzbekistan is 5.5-6.5. The Uzbek national refinancing rate is nine percent according to a 2015 Uzbek government figure.

So far Uzbekistan has not managed to convert from the former Soviet planned economy to a total free market economy. The country tested several economic models and structural reforms are slowly developed and implemented. Uzbekistan’s economy started to significantly grow in 2002. In order for Uzbekistan to maintain a steady growth rate, changes need to be made to the private sector according to a recommendation made by the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) as Uzbekistan's "fiscal policy remains prudent, with a balanced budget, and the banking sector is stable, [well-capitalized] and highly liquid."^{cxvi}

2.5.5. Social and Demographic Challenges

According to the Uzbekistan's law and regulations, all permanent residents of Uzbekistan have the right of citizenship without ethnic or religious discrimination and share the same civil rights. The international organization Freedom House assessed the Uzbek regime ranked amongst the eight nations with the worst human right records for 2005. This ranking was mainly due to the Andijan Massacre, reports of Karimov boiling people alive, and the arrest and torture of political dissidents and the conditions at Jaslyk prison, and other documented human rights violations. Uzbek citizens receive limited information about news which could pose a threat to the regime. The Uzbek police and security apparatus have the legal right to imprison people without any cause or without a warrant.

The country suffers from poverty. Statistics from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) puts the figure at 16% (75% of those who are living below the poverty line live in rural areas) in 2011 and the per capita GDP Per Capita, PPP (2011) is \$3,827.^{cxvii} The poverty rate used to be 28%. The UNDP report identified that Uzbekistan has made significant progress in decreasing malnutrition and reducing low-income rates and the report identified that social cohesion "has been maintained through more equitable income distribution, the creation of employment opportunities with a specific focus on rural areas, and attention given to vulnerable populations" and the same applies to gender equality."^{cxviii}

Uzbekistan faces a common problem of developing or transitioning countries, not enough employment and a great employment and income disparity between the rural and the urban areas. This disparity has driven many working-age people (many young to older adult males) to find employment in Russia and Kazakhstan; remittances totaled 12% to 15% of the GDP from 2010 to 2012.^{cxix} This is compounded by a large number of the Uzbek population being under the age of 60.3% which may cause a "youth bulge" affect which is usually and negatively linked to internal stability and social unrest.

Uzbekistan also faces many health challenges that are associated with a developing or semi-developed country particularly the spread of HIV/AIDs which has hit hard its Central Asian neighbors such as Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan also managed to keep the rate of the spread of infection regarding tuberculosis low. The government has also decreased maternal mortality rates by providing better healthcare.

2.5.6. Foreign Policy

Uzbekistan is the only country among the Central Asian republics which is self-sufficient in the area of food and energy supply.

Uzbekistan has severe conflicts with its neighboring countries Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan and especially with Tajikistan (mined border between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). Uzbekistan does not show a lot of willingness to improve the situation. Uzbekistan suspended its membership and participation in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in 2012, but still participates in the more economic-oriented organization, the Shanghai Cooperation

Organization (SCO) and has expressed interest in joining the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). From this move, it seems like Uzbekistan, like many other Central Asian states, it moving away from more Russian-centric organizations, to more multilateral organizations that are more focused on economics and development rather than security and military arrangements and policy.

After September 11, 2001 and the resulting fear of evoking terrorism in the region, Uzbekistan sought bilateral ties with Russia and also to a limited extent with the U.S. and EU. But after the Andijan Massacre in 2005, the U.S., the EU, as well as other international institutions revoked financial support and the EU partly sanctioned Uzbekistan for human rights violations. The sanctions were eased by the EU and the EU lifted the arms embargo sanction completely in October 2009. To many the lifting of the sanctions allows the Uzbek government to not be held accountable for their actions. Human rights violations committed by the Uzbek government including arbitrary arrests, torture and poor treatment of detainees, “compulsory relicensing of lawyers,” and “interference in the work of human rights organizations” demonstrates the poor disregard that the Karimov Administration has for human rights and how seriously he does not take reforms.^{cxx}

After the U.S. chastised the Uzbek government over the Andijan Massacre, Uzbekistan banned and evicted the U.S. from the Karshi-Khananbad (K2) air base. In 2001, Uzbekistan joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which signaled the regional direction towards Russia and China and a clear resentment towards western democratic influence. Uzbekistan’s involvement in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) has wavered. Uzbekistan suspended its membership voluntarily in June 2012. This has not significantly impacted the drills as Uzbekistan barely participated in the rapid-reaction drills or the military drills. Uzbekistan justified the voluntarily suspension because the CSTO, “ignores Uzbekistan and does not listen to its opinions.”^{cxxi} Uzbekistan had suspended its membership in 1999, but rejoined in 2006 after it received international condemnation over the events in Andijan.

2.5.7. Strategic perspectives

Although Islamic groups are not seriously endangering the Uzbek regime, because the groups are yet too weak to influence all social classes significantly, the country has to pay attention to these movements. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is the largest extremist/terrorist threat to the country as the group’s existence relies on the overthrow of Karimov. The IMU was driven out of Uzbekistan and many IMU fighters are now Furthermore according to Central Asian experts, Uzbekistan is considered to be the country with the highest potential for an unpredictable and maybe violent political transition among the former Soviet republics.

Uzbekistan remains a strategic location for military operations. Despite the falling out between the EU and the U.S. and renewed relations that followed, Uzbekistan is still attractive to Western countries. As the Islamic State grows and the Central Asian states are faced with external threats and their citizens who are fighting in Syria and Iraq respectively expected to return home, Uzbekistan understands their use to those who wish to fight global terrorism.

3. Major external players

3.1. China

Diplomatic relations between China and the Central Asian republics started with independence of the countries in December 1991. For China, Central Asia offers numerous new opportunities. China is interested in economic and security issues as the Chinese are concerned about the Muslim Islamist or extremist movements in this region. In China's own western Xinjiang Region, they face a rebellious Uighur population. For transportation, Tajikistan and particularly Kyrgyzstan are the most important partners, as they serve as transit countries for Chinese products, being the crossroads between West and East and are along the new Great Silk Road. As the SCO is a high priority on Beijing's agenda and considered to be the second most important regional organization besides the AIIB, Uzbekistan's acceptance or membership in the organization is very much appreciated by China. China also needs Central Asia states' cooperation on the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road projects

Central Asian republics gradually decreased their skepticism towards Russia and China as the republics often represented a Central Asian perspective in a global context. Trade relations started to boom in 1998 after the economic crisis in Russia. Foreign trade with Central Asian countries is now a top priority as China is aware of the huge amount of natural resources as Chinese energy demands increase. When it comes to China distributing developmental aid, it is clear that this is characterized by a high degree of self-interest. China invested in several Central Asian oil and gas fields as well as pipeline infrastructure to expand the energy partnership which will aid Chinese economic growth. China also invests in infrastructure and exploration of natural resources to benefit China's own economy. In the future, China will try to further strengthen its position in the region and the new AIIB provides China that very opportunity. It plans to be actively involved in the development of Central Asia's hydro-carbon sector and to improve the related pipeline infrastructure. For this reason, China is not only an attractive partner for Central Asia but also for Russia, which currently does not have enough financial resources to renovate the outdated huge Soviet-era pipeline network in which most of Kazakhstan's gas flows through as Kazakhstan lacks its own self-sufficient structure. China tries to boost Central Asia's purchasing power in order to enable them to buy more Chinese products.

Furthermore, China knows that the U.S. increased its presence due to the terror attacks on September 11, 2001 and reduced engagement with the region after Afghanistan and Iraq wars ended, whereas China, due to its geographic proximity, will stay engaged with the countries. China understands Central Asia's development and state-building needs: improved and new infrastructure, stronger ties to East Asia, and development money and most importantly an alternative to Russia. Russia's assertive and downright illegal actions in Crimea have many Central Asian states spooked especially Kazakhstan.

China did not only gain economic strength within the last few years, but China also requires military strength to fully exert its influence in Central Asia. The international community is concerned about the huge defense and weapons spending, but China claims that these are only for defense purposes. In contrast to Russia, the U.S. and members of the European Union (EU) (Germany), China lacks a permanent military presence in Central Asia but will take advantage of the many regional organizations.

The Chinese Diaspora in Central Asia has been significantly increasing since the collapse of the Soviet Union due to the (easier) ability to migrate. Particularly, the Uighurs and Dzungars

(a Muslim people of Chinese origin), from the suppressed Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of China are already form a considerable part of ethnic minorities. Regarding the Uighur population, China and Kazakhstan have formed a relationship which is staunchly anti-Uighur despite Kazakhstan being considered a more favorable home than China for Uighurs.

3.2. European Union

Immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the European Union (EU) was in the middle of its own development and reinforcement of its international position. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks and the following international fight against terrorism in Afghanistan, the EU was forced to engage itself with the entire Central Asia region more intensely. The main EU-oriented interests are security issues such as combating terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal migration/immigration, human trafficking and supporting the democratization process, as well as energy security maintenance for Europe. European companies heavily invest in Kazakhstan as it offers the friendliest business climate among the region's resource rich countries. The EU's focus in Central Asia started when the Central Asian states were granted and declared their independence.

Trade between EU member states and Central Asian republics respectively operate under the frame of most-favored nation (MFN) status in terms of tariffs. The PCA (Partnership and Co-operation Agreement) regulates also various trade related matters such as the provisions on the elimination of quantitative restriction, state aids, and competition. Kazakhstan's, Kyrgyzstan's, Uzbekistan's, and Tajikistan's EU-trade relations are regulated with the PCA whereas Turkmenistan's PCA agreement is yet not ratified by the EU bodies. Turkmenistan's bilateral trade is governed instead by an Interim Trade Agreement which was signed in 1998. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are the other two resource rich countries (besides Kazakhstan) in Central Asia. Therefore trade between EU and these two states has been steadily increasing. Trade between the EU and Turkmenistan for 2013, totaled 1.957 million Euros: 866 imports and 1091 exports with an export balance of 255 million Euros.^{cxxii} Concerning Uzbekistan, trade between the two has steadily increased as a general trend. For the years of 2009 to 2013, exports have vastly exceeded imported goods.^{cxxiii} For 2013, total trade between the EU and Uzbekistan was 1.655 million Euros.^{cxxiv}

European Union interest concerning Central Asia rose significantly due to Ukraine-Russia gas dispute at the end of 2005, which provided a wake-up call to the EU in order to get away from Russian natural resource dependence. Therefore, the diversification of the European Union's energy supply becomes a key issue in its energy security policy forcing it to seek new partners and energy opportunities. The EU addresses Tajikistan in a regional context under the June 2007 European Council understanding called European Union and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership. This partnership covers relationships for all five Central Asia states and focuses on using common bilateral and regional economic and security approaches. The 2007 New Partnership was further solidified by the European Community Regional Strategy Paper (hereafter: Regional Strategy) for Assistance to Central Asia for the period 2007-2013. The Regional Strategy covered financial assistance, democratic, economic, and social issues and mapped out the assistance and how it was to be used. The Regional Strategy sets out European Committee "response, objectives and priorities for European Community support for Central Asia...together with an indication of the means to be used to provide assistance primarily under the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI)" with a budget of 719 million Euros.^{cxxv} The aim of the EU assistance program to Central Asia can be narrowed

down to three priorities: Central Asian regional cooperation and good neighborly relations; reduction of poverty and increase the standards of living; and promote good governance and economic reform. Security is also a key objective for the EU when it comes to Central Asia as the European Security Strategy outlined many of the issues that Central Asia is currently facing such as terrorism, extremism, organized crime (drug trafficking and human trafficking), and weapons proliferation (such as WMDs, and WMD-related materials and technology).^{cxxvi} The EU focuses on internal stability to include prevent and effectively dealing with terrorism, enhancing the judiciary and the rule of law, corruption, and improving the trade and investment climate.

The EU strives to improve the democratizations process as well as the human rights in Central Asia. The EU has a Rule of Law Initiative, which began in December 2011 for a duration of 36 months, which is the platform for Central Asia and wishes to carve out best international practices and international standards for Central Asia to include: democracy, human rights, good governance, rule of law, and judicial reform. The core objective and purpose of the Rule of Law Initiative is to foster political dialog and support the country's judicial and legal reforms which "contributes towards the development of a stable and democratic political framework, functioning economic structures and the promotion and respect of human rights, as called for by the EU strategy for Central Asia."^{cxxvii} The Rule of Law initiative will target primarily five Ministries of Justice and Ministries of the Interior (Rule of Law Initiative Coordinators), public/government-owned institutions and practitioners of law. This is quite the undertaking made by the EU as the structure of the Central Asia states may make the success and implementation of reforms more difficult. There are four components of the project: Forums for dialogue focusing on conferences and technical working groups to enhance policy; training for legal professionals; communication/mapping/networking which focuses on the creation of experts, communication and information access tools; and lastly advice facility—"background analyses and studies will complement dialogue events and serve to advance policy."^{cxxviii} The EU promotes human rights among all partner nations and has criticized Central Asian states for their human rights record.

Even though the EU is partly represented in the region, there is great potential to become a significant external player in Central Asia. Western critics should avoid misinterpreting the anti-western attitude of the SCO and should strive for common ground and interests in the Central Asian region and work with individual countries as they would be more receptive to bilateral agreements. As the region becomes more integrated and more willing to work with other regional organizations outside of the geographic area and as bilateral relations between Central Asia and EU member states grow, the EU will become a powerful and strategic ally with Central Asia. Expectedly, once this happens, the EU will move to more concrete relationships such as investment and trade rather than focusing on development assistance and nation-building and capacity-building efforts.

3.3. Russia

The Russian Federation undoubtedly has the longest shared history and the longest relationship with the Central Asian countries, dating back to the 18th century when the Tsarist Empire slowly but gradually expanded its empire southwards via Kazakhstan into Central Asia. During the post-Soviet period, Russia did not care a lot about Central Asia, but when Putin became President, the Russian policy towards Central Asia rapidly changed, highlighting the geostrategic importance of the region. Russia is also interested in domestic stability and security as well as concerns about Islamist extremism and terrorist movements in its near abroad countries. Current Russian relations with the Central Asian reflect the post-Soviet collapse relationship: up and down with longer periods of stability and cooperation.

Moreover Central Asian migrant workers play a significant role as Russia's economy, and is somewhat dependent on unskilled and cheap labor from Central Asia. Migrant workers from Central Asia also rely upon the Russian labor market to send back remittances to their home countries (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). Migrant laborers in Central Asia are also facing an increasingly xenophobic, nationalistic, and pro-Russian atmosphere which has resulted in targeted discrimination and violence. Many migrant workers have been killed by extremely violent and Nazi-inspired groups. The SOVA Center in Russia keeps track of the violence. President Vladimir Putin has condemned the hate crimes publicly and has signed into law in 2002 legislation/criminal code provisions—Articles 282 and Article 213 which criminalizes hooliganism— against inciting racial enmity and hate crimes. Like most Russian provisions in the criminal code, the addition to the criminal code is vague and its enforcement and interpretation is left up to an interpretative judicial system. Many of the hate crimes have been deemed hooliganism carrying a lesser penalty. However, Putin has continued to discriminate against homosexuals in the country and those who support the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) alliance(s) in Russia and has passed controversial anti-gay legislation in 2013.

The contributions of Central Asian raw materials towards Russia is shrinking, as Central Asian countries seek alternatives and diverse purchasers and investors to establish contracts with new infrastructure networks and companies in order to become less dependent on Russia's infrastructure investments. When it comes to military and security relations, a trend is visible that the Central Asian countries seek closer defense cooperation with Russia. Russia's closest military and political ally in Central Asia is Kazakhstan. Russia leased an area of 11 million hectares based on a bilateral agreement. In 1995, Russia and Kazakhstan signed significant border protection agreements. Russia still leases Kazakhstan's Baikonur Cosmodrome which often launches Russian Proton-M rockets.

Kyrgyzstan is a very important outpost for the Russian forces as Russia has a military presence at Kant Airbase; Russia does not pay rent for Kant airbase and has leased Kant airbase until 2032. A 2013, EurasiaNet article states that Kant Airbase was “designated as a base for the Collective Security Treaty Organization's [(CSTO)] new Collective Air Forces, assuming that structure in fact gets built.”^{xxix} The long presence of the base and the eviction of the U.S. Airbase demonstrated the strong Kyrgyz-Russian relationship.

Cooperation between Russia and Tajikistan is legally based on more than 150 treaties and agreements and Russia is for Tajikistan the main supplier of military equipment. The legal cooperation between Russia and Turkmenistan is based on the concluded treaty on “joint measures to create the armed forces of Turkmenistan” in 1992. This was a guarantee by Moscow to secure Turkmenistan. Bilateral relations between Russia and Uzbekistan are

legally based with more than 200 treaties and agreements. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan was one of the most active partners in the fields of security and defense with Russia. This has changed over the years in terms of regional security structures. Both countries are focused on anti-terror and counter-terrorism measures and work on this issue unilaterally and bilaterally.

The Russian Diaspora holds much clout among the major external players in Central Asia, being the most significant role and the longest historical development. The first wave of Russian settlement took place in the end of the 19th century and during the Soviet Union millions flooded Central Asia in order to work in the established factories and to develop agricultural structures. The 1953 Virgin Lands Program (or Virgin Lands Campaign) was a program that relocated two million Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian persons to Kazakhstan, which caused Kazakhstan's non-Kazakh population to skyrocket. The campaign was aimed at increasing the Soviet Union's agricultural production to address issues negatively affecting food security in Russia. Kazakhstan has the most ethnic Russians which account for nearly 22% of its population: the total estimated population of Kazakhstan is 17.6 million and Russians account for 4.6 million. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic Russians suddenly became a minority due to nationalistic policies that focus on more native customs and Turkic languages—effectively replacing Russian as the national language even though Russian remains an official and regional language in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan respectively. Ethnic Russians still representing a significant number of people, they are afraid about the growing nationalist movements within the Central Asian countries which has the potential to replace Russian customs and Russian cultural symbols or foment anti-Russian sentiments

When it comes to Russia's developmental and economic aid engagement, Russia's main assistance in the last years included writing off debts under loans lent by the former Soviet Union in particular under the framework of the "Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative." Furthermore, Russia tried to assist in the areas of education, improvement of national institutions, administrations, industrial development and trade facilitation. Moreover, Russia tries to foster capacity building in the field of environmental protection and is interested in combating and developing legislation against all possible threats of terrorist movements. The five Central Asian countries agree on this initiative as Central Asia is in a rough neighborhood. There are fears of a spillover because of the Afghanistan War and when the U.S. ended combat operations in Afghanistan in late December 2014. The Central Asia states have already seen an uptick in activity such as the gun battle in September 2014 between ethnic Turkmen Afghans and the Taliban. According to Central Asia Online, in late August 2014 "[ethnic] Turkmens in Shah District fought off a Taliban offensive for three days."^{cxix}

Russia's creation and dominance over multiple regional organizations also demonstrates Russia's commitment to strategic partnerships and a strategic presence in Central Asia. Russia, which headed the now failed Commonwealth of Independent States, is using the regional organizations to keep a political tight grip (or trying to keep a tight grip on some countries) on many former Soviet states that are still part of the organization, many of which are Central Asian states. Russia and the Central Asian states also share memberships in the security and military oriented CSTO (Uzbekistan suspended its membership), the Chinese-designed and led economic-focused Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the newest economic and free-trade organization/bloc, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Russia, through its dominance (or desired dominance in the SCO) within these organizations, desires to keep the Central Asian states closer as many former Soviet states have abandoned Russia as an economic partner have looked to the West instead. Russia needs the Central

Asian states' participation in these regional organizations to maintain its regional supremacy. Unfortunately, many of the Central Asian states rely on Russia for money, loans, and cooperation. The ability to have a say in their own affairs is lacking and heavily influenced by Russia.

3.4. United States

For the U.S., Central Asia is a region of growing importance, but faces challenges there mainly a burgeoning Russian influence. On one hand, Central Asia is located in the center of the "Axis of evil" (Iran, Iraq, and North Korea) as U.S. president George W. Bush defined the region in the context of the global war on terrorism. Less stable countries such as Iran, China, and Russia, are eager to participate in the exploitation of the huge energy and mineral reserves in Central Asia and also foster the liberalization and democratization process in Central Asia. The U.S. is also interested in Central Asia due to its strategic geopolitical location and would allow the U.S. to expand its sphere of influence.

The U.S. established diplomatic relations with the Central Asian republics after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992, and built embassies in all five newly independent states' capitals. Furthermore, the U.S. supported their desire for membership in western international organizations such as NATO. Throughout the 1990s, diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the Central Asia States remained on a rather low level, but the diplomatic activities as well as its general engagement in Central Asia changed completely after the September 11 terror attacks. Subsequently, the U.S. foreign policy was adjusted to meet the new conditions in the region and the U.S. signed a series of military treaties and defense agreements with the Central Asian countries. The U.S., by doing so, took advantage of the countries' locations near its new battleground of Afghanistan using Kyrgyzstan's Manas International Airport (Ganci Airbase and also known as the Manas Transit Center) for logistics and a transit hub and the Karshi-Khanabad Airbase in Uzbekistan.

For the U.S., stability in the Central Asian including economic development and human assistance to support Central Asia is important to prevent Russia, China, Iran and other from undermining the U.S. influence in the country. Also proper development of the social and physical infrastructures of the Central Asian states would ensure smooth operations for U.S. operations out of Uzbek and Kyrgyz Airbases respectively and would reduce the possibility of large-scale violence called by the instability and elements of terrorism in the Central Asian states. Simply, the U.S. presence acted as a deterrent.

U.S. investment in the Central Asian region is much greater than in Russia and many other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries except Azerbaijan. The U.S. signed with all five Central Asian republics trade agreements that focus on investment links and strong trade as "merging Central Asian economies constitute growing markets for U.S. exports and services and strategic destinations for investment in sectors such as oil/gas, mining, manufacturing, and food processing."^{cxix} The U.S. has many agreements in already existing including bilateral investment trade agreements with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and in 2004 a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) was signed "to encourage and facilitate the exchange of goods and services to secure favorable conditions for long-term development and diversification of trade between and amongst the Parties."^{cxxii} Accession into the World Trade Organization also remains a priority between the U.S. and the Central Asian states.

Furthermore, the U.S. has invested in multiple developments in the Central Asian region. Within the early 1990s, aid and assistance programs to supported the development of political systems, economy and the civil society (including Open Society Foundations and Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty news services), military assistance was developed. The Central Asian militaries received training from the U.S. military and the possibility to attend military and language schools in the U.S., under the frame of the International Military and Education and Training (IMET). According to the U.S. Department of State, IMET “facilitates the development of important professional and personal relationships, which have proven to provide U.S. access and influence in a critical sector of society that often plays a pivotal role in supporting, or transitioning to, democratic governments.”^{cxxxiii} IMET has three functions which pertain to expanding the U.S.’s influence in Central Asia: “impart skills and knowledge”; “Provide training and education that augments the capabilities of participant nations' military forces to support combined operations and interoperability with U.S., NATO and regional coalition forces”; and to “Expose foreign military and civilian personnel to the important roles democratic values and internationally recognized human rights can play in governance and military operations.”^{cxxxiv} The program also increases the civil-military relationship.

Although U.S. multinational energy firms and other private foreign investors became recently discouraged to further invest Central Asian countries due to doubts about transparency and prejudices of increasing corruption, many U.S. energy companies are engaged in the Caspian Sea Basin exploration as well as exploitation of natural gas and oil; many oil and gas companies such as Exxon and Shell have been active in the region for nearly 20 years.

When deciding upon distribution of foreign aid to the Central Asia states to combat against human trafficking, unemployment rates, and massive labor migration, human rights offenses and reform are considered. Turkmenistan as well as Uzbekistan are the most repressive regimes in the world and have faced criticism from the U.S. over human rights abuses. For this reason the U.S. assistance in these two countries is considerable smaller, in particular in Turkmenistan due to their lack of transparency on the matter and many other civil matters as information in the country is quite controlled and censorship is rampant and free speech is practically non-existent.

The U.S. still provides foreign aid for the countries to develop. The total amount of funds requested for Turkmenistan for FY 2015 is 5.1 million USD. For Kazakhstan, 9.7 million USD was requested for FY 2015; for Kyrgyzstan, 41.7 million USD was requested for the FY 2015 year; Tajikistan, 29.9 million USD was requested for FY 2015; and for Uzbekistan, 10.3 million was requested for FY 2015.^{cxxxv} U.S. foreign aid to Turkmenistan through USAID is heavily focused on good governance, healthcare (particularly lowering the infant mortality rate), and economic growth. These core areas also addressed in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan (in addition to social sector support), Tajikistan (in addition to agriculture and food security), and in Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan is also working with USAID on a Country Development Cooperation Strategy (FY 2015-FY 2019).

4. New emerging actors

The reason of these actors’ interests in Central Asia are mainly rooted in cultural and ideological similarities, aspiration of regional and supra-regional security and stability, the desire for closer economic cooperation, and enhanced. As the governments of the post-Soviet began to form respectively and continue to grow developing separate from each other, each

Central Asian state can offer regional countries and actors and multi-state groups great benefits. Most of these benefits are economic and political.

4.1. Iran

Relations between Iran and the Central Asian region date back to the time of the historical Great Silk Road. With the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Iran faced the development of nine newly independent states in its immediate neighborhood. Due to the favorable geographical position, Iran plays an important role as an alternative transit country for the landlocked Central Asian countries, in order to avoid transit ways through Russia. As regional cooperation is especially important for Iran, Iran is very much interested in tightening its relations with Central Asia. Many of the emerging and existing regional threats in Central Asia have the potential to affect Iran.

Iran's disadvantage for further cooperation and deepening of relations with the Central Asian countries are domestic, economic, political which makes it particularly difficult for private investors to develop their strategies in Central Asia. Iran has been involved in the development of Caspian Sea oil and gas reserves, as the Caspian Sea is off of Iran's Western Coast. This would make Iran an important ally to Kazakhstan in terms of divided the Caspian Sea resources, contract agreements and negotiations, oil and natural gas transport infrastructure, and oil diplomacy especially dealing with Russia.

In recent years, Iran has taken advantage of its common cultural ancestry with Tajikistan to carve a niche in Central Asia. Tajikistan is the only non-Indo European speaking country in the Central Asia region. Tajik, Tajikistan's national and official language is a form of Persian and Tajik uses the Persian script. Iran was the first country to open an embassy in Tajikistan's capital of Dushanbe. Iran also assisted in mediating the devastation Tajik Civil War (1992-1997). Iran is the second largest investor in Tajikistan after China. Iran has invested heavily in infrastructure projects in Tajikistan such as the Sangtodeh-2 Hydroelectric Power Plant (HPP). The Sangtodeh-2 HPP started constructed in the 1980s and construction stopped due to the lack of financing and Iran expressed interest in funding the project which was finalized in 2005. The HPP on the Vakhsh River produced its first unit in 2011. The HPP is operated by Iranian company Sangob. Iran will most likely further to investments into Tajikistan's energy sector. Trade between the two countries, as Iran considers Tajikistan to be its main ally in Central Asia, has increased from "\$ 400 million in 2010, up from \$ 250 million in the previous year" and Iran contributed 65.5 million in foreign direct investment.^{cxxxvi}

The Anzob Tunnel is a resurrected Soviet Era transportation tunnel that would allow Tajiks to transit goods during harsh climate and allow the flow of trade all year. The Anzob Tunnel connects Dushanbe to the Northern Fergana Valley. Construction of Anzob Tunnel began in 2003 and construction was completed in 2006; Iran invested 31 million USD into the project and was expected to cost 110 million USD.^{cxxxvii} The tunnel has garnered a dangerous reputation with falling and crumbling rock and water damage and running water and ventilation is poor. A social media site posted video of the tunnel calling it the death tunnel because of the poor construction and poor maintenance.

4.2. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

The first records about Arabs in Central Asia date back to the eighth century when nomadic Arab communities arrived in the historic places of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan such as Bukhara and Samarkand during the Muslim conquests. But as the Arabs lived rather isolated and did

not marry with other ethnicities the Arabic language could survive until the 20th century. But during the tsarist conquest and the later rule of the Soviet Union, the Arabs were forced either to flee or to completely integrate into the Central Asian societies.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) developed close relations with the Muslim countries of the former Soviet Union. The relations are driven due to shared religious values, as Mecca, which is somewhat a must go there once in a lifetime, is located in Saudi Arabia.

The foreign policy of the UAE is in contrast to this of Saudi Arabia more focused on economic issues even though displaying sympathy for fellow Muslim countries. Previously the foreign policy of the UAE was directed towards industrialized states from the West. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union opened for the UAE new prospects in terms of political, cultural, but predominantly economic relations in the near neighborhood. The emerging economies of Central Asia are increasingly aware of the significance of Dubai as an intraregional key transit hub for imports and exports.

The economies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE are based on the exploitation of its enormous natural resources. Saudi Arabia has the largest and the UAE the world's fifth largest proved oil reserves, which means they are, in contrast to China, Europe and the U.S., not dependent on energy supply from Central Asia. The trade and investment relations between Central Asia and Saudi Arabia received new impulses when the Central Asian governments and banks gradually opened up to Islamic banking.

On the whole the biggest advantage of both countries, which makes them to significant opponents of other external players of the Central Asian region, is the similarity of the country profiles and strategies.

4.3. Turkey

Turkey shares Turkic ancestry with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and explains the long lasting commonly shared historic roots between Turkey and the four Central Asian republics. The idea of Pan-Turkism between the five countries (including Xinjiang Province in China) has been entertained. Turkey's relationship with Central Asia is focused on economics and regional cooperation: "a working democracy and free-market economy; political and economic reform process; political and economic stability and prosperity in the region; ...an environment conducive to regional cooperation; to support their vocation toward Euro-Atlantic institutions, and to assist them to benefit from their own energy resources" as stated by now Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu (then Foreign Affairs Minister) in 2012.^{cxxxviii}

The collapse of the Soviet Union motivated the Turkish leaders to immediately develop friendly relations and strong ties with the Central Asian states forming an unofficial pan-Turkic alliance. The mutual sympathy originates from the same ethnicity and culture, the Turkic language family— Central Asia countries' culture was suppressed by the Soviet system as the Soviet system provided a singular ideological identity. Although the Turkish desire for sustainable and influential investments as well as religious, cultural and educational power in Central Asia was high, the financial resources were rather limited in the 1990s. After Central Asia's independence, Turkey let the newly independent states feel that they were Third World. In the late 1990s, Turkey realized that their first approach was not helpful and it

had to completely change the foreign policy towards Central Asia in order to keep bilateral relations.

Regarding Turkmenistan, Turkey was the first country to recognize the new independent state and was the first country to open an embassy in Ashgabat.^{cxix} Turkey has recently become Turkmenistan's largest trade and investment partner with trade totaling 3.5 billion USD in 2012.^{cxl} President Berdymukhamedov stated that the issue of a free trading zone for Turkish firms operating in specific parts of Turkmenistan is considered. The year of 2012 marked a significant increase in relations as Turkmenistan's President visited Turkey and Turkey's President visited Turkmenistan in 2013. There are also 600 Turkish companies registered in Turkmenistan and "Turkish companies assumed contracting work in the country, totaling more than 34 billion USD."^{cxli}

Turkey's development aid programs for Central Asia have also rapidly developed and big steps have been taken in the fields of educational, social and cultural cooperation projects. Turkey has also expressed interest in joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Kazakh President Nazarbayev extended Turkey and invitation to join the EEU. Turkey became a dialog partner for the SCO in April 2013. Turkey's membership in the SCO makes Turkey the only NATO member with membership in the SCO and an organization dominated by Russia and China. Interestingly, the SCO was to act as a counterweight to NATO. Turkey's status signals that Turkey, a country with a lot to offer, is seeking to solidify its influence somewhere other than the EU as its accession into the EU has remain stalled as Erdoğan see the SCO as "more powerful" than the EU.^{cxlii} This is part of the wider regional economic policy of Kazakhstan and it highlights Turkey's need to belong to an economic and political organizations; Turkey's accession into the European Union is still stalled.

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