

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

The previous issue of the China and Eurasia Forum (CEF) Quarterly addressed the narcotics problem and its negative impact on the region. Terrorism is another key challenge faced by the governments today. On the one hand, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was effectively destroyed during the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan; the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in Xinjiang has demonstrated limited activity in the 2000s; and Al-Qaeda seems to prioritize other theaters for staging its operations. On the other hand, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) continues to stress the persistent threat of terrorism, the Andijan uprising demonstrated how fragile the region is, and the Taleban is gaining ground in parts of Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda, moreover, is still operating in the vicinity despite its low profile in the region.

This setting provokes a number of questions of critical importance for present and future counter-terror efforts in the region, and this is particularly crucial considering the stakes involved: First, the remaining nuclear materials in the post-Soviet Central Asian states are particularly vulnerable to smuggling and theft. Second, continued instability in all of the Central Asian states (with the partial exception of Kazakhstan), combined with a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan will also give terrorists the upper hand in disrupting the stability of region. A forewarning was given during the Andijan upheaval in 2005, and the turbulence unfolding in Kyrgyzstan the same year with criminal interest supporting the "revolution". Third, the young population in Central Asia and their increased interest in drugs and extremism could also prove to be a global time-bomb if a more viable alternative future for these youngsters are not available. In Tajikistan over 50 percent of the population is below 18 years of age, and the current drug abuse threatens to wipe out an entire generation. Moreover, the narcotics trade is a virtually unending source of financial resources for criminals with terrorist links. This is indeed a challenge of momentous proportions and a recruitment base with great potential for terrorist networks.

In order not to be caught off-guard, there is a need for a nuanced understanding of terrorism, its attraction, and how best to counter such threats. This, combined with a chronic ignorance of Central Asia as a region, makes the Eurasian region one of the most important theaters in the global war on terror to date.

Many initiatives have been set up and some seem to realize the potential threat of terrorism. Rarely however do they realize the inter-connection between the Central Asian drug trade, terrorism, state

infiltration, and criminal networks. The European Union's contributions against such activities have been dismal, and the EU has shown little interest in funding efforts to counter such operations. A consensus on terminology is also lacking and this affects any anti-terrorism response negatively. The concept of terrorism has been misused by some governments in the region to crack down on their opposition forces, and also by Western states to crack down on governments they feel do not meet their democratic or human rights standards. Indeed, the case of Xinjiang testifies to the confusion and disagreement on the terminology of terrorism: some argue that terrorism presents a significant threat; some argue the opposite, while others assert that these positions do not mean anything and the term "terrorism" itself masks the debate as to whether the region has the right to self-rule.¹ Another part of the problem is that disengagement from the governments in the region presents its own set of security problems and any effective measures against terrorism is impossible without their involvement.

Any effective response must involve measures at all different levels, international, regional, national and at the grassroots. As in the case of narcotics networks, there is a strong transnational strain in the current wave of terrorism. Both governments, and to some extent the terrorists themselves, often seek to internationalize the problem – creating the appearance of a united front. Governments often seek to shift attention beyond its borders, blaming neighbors or other states, even if the terrorists often are exclusively national in orientation and goals. Some subordinates to Al-Qaeda often also seem to use this label to create a propaganda effect although the particular attack may be part of their ongoing domestic struggles. In Chechnya for example, their aims are primarily national even if there is an international component in recruitment. If governments and international actors continue to confuse the objectives of the local terrorist movements with those of Al-Qaeda - which has an international agenda to undermine the U.S. through its interests worldwide so as to enable the creation of an Islamic superstate - they will fail to understand the terrorists' motives and how to counter such threats.

Failures in these efforts are regularly blamed on either governments or the international community's joint efforts, be they the EU, UN, or the OSCE. Here, globalization, in combination with Western cultural hegemony, authoritarian governments, and widespread poverty are often viewed as the primary triggering factors behind terrorism. Though these factors are important, the problem is more complex and specific to the particular situation at hand. The eradication of poverty, greater engagement with governments facing the terrorist threats, together with

¹ S. Frederick Starr, "Introduction" in Starr Ed. *China's Muslim Borderland* (NY: M.E. Sharp, 1994).

a more sensitive global policy are a few of the many issues that need to be addressed. Focusing on the structural problems behind each of the different conflicts will prove crucial; this is however not to say that all conflicts could be resolved with peaceful means. Terrorism inadvertently impact citizens' security and liberties and the task at hand is to limit such violations as much as possible.

The authors to this issue have devoted time to reflect on the origins of terrorism and terrorist organizations in the region, and suggestions for viable counter-terror responses. Readers will find that the articles in this issue clash with one another. This reflects the complexity of the terrorism debate. Indeed, this also testifies to the uncertainty surrounding terrorism in Central Asia and neighboring regions, which also makes it such a pressing issue. Our hope is that our readers will find the articles stimulating.

Today, information on the presence of Al-Qaeda in Central Asia and Xinjiang is largely unclear. There are also a lot of heated debates as to which are moderate Islamic groups and which are the radical ones operating in this region. "Akromiya" which allegedly instigated the Andijan uprising last summer and the Hizb ut-Tahrir are but two examples of this. Meanwhile, terrorist activities against Central Asia's energy infrastructure have not materialized and protection of these, especially the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline running from Kazakhstan to Xinjiang will prove important for an attractive investment climate in the region. On a broader perspective, it is clear that the region and its partners need to cooperate more closely together to counter any threats which would undermine the stability of the region.

A further note: To increase the usefulness of the journal, we need your assistance. We have had three consecutive issues with special topics so far - Energy and Security (November 2005), Narcotics (February 2006) and now Terrorism (May 2006). We are very interested in what you think of the China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly and will be conducting a survey to gather feedback from our subscribers via email and our webpage. We seek your cooperation in filling in the questionnaire which we will release shortly. This will help us in our effort to improve the journal.

Finally, on behalf of the CEF team, we hope you enjoy your read!

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