

## Risks to security in Central Asia: an assessment from a small arms perspective

Christina WILLE

The security agenda in Central Asia has shifted. The risk of civil wars and strife spreading across borders is no longer seen as the central concern as was the case in the 1990s. Today, religious extremism, terrorism, the illegal narcotics trade and state collapse are considered to be the main security threats. Perspectives on these threats differ, however. Governments tend to highlight the threat to state stability, whereas others are more concerned with human security.

This article discusses contemporary risks to security in Central Asia from a perspective gained from research on small arms. Small arms research helps to assess threats to human security as it examines conflicts and insecurity among communities and individuals and the vulnerabilities experienced by certain population groups. It is equally concerned with the security of states, as small arms proliferation can undermine and weaken state structures to the extent that a state becomes incapable of providing law and order; state forces' use of small arms also affects governance and security.

Small arms assessments can therefore be a useful indicator of a deteriorating security situation, as they seek to identify the number of weapons available, in particular to users that constitute the most severe safety threat. Research focuses on estimation of stockpile holdings and assesses user practices and objectives. Assessments of stockpile management procedures have shown that in many cases leakages can contribute to uncontrolled small arms proliferation in times of crisis, a factor that often fuels conflicts.

Initial research on small arms in Central Asia was driven by the expectation of a strong link between arms availability and conflict risk. The civil war in Tajikistan saw large numbers of small arms move into the hands of opposition forces and had a significant influence on political discourse. In 2000 a researcher wrote that "... given the proportion the proliferation of small arms has already assumed within these countries, it can be argued that the easy availability of small arms itself may become the decisive factor transforming political disagreements into full-scale armed confrontations."<sup>1</sup>

This view of Central Asia being awash with small arms posing a significant threat to security was challenged by fieldwork conducted in Kyrgyzstan, which indicated low levels of firearm ownership within the general population. Suggesting that Kyrgyzstan was perhaps an "Anomaly in Central Asia", the researchers highlighted the need for "disaggregating regional generalizations" and suggested that small arms availability and risks might be much greater in post-conflict Tajikistan.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent fieldwork in Tajikistan, however, found that small arms proliferation among the general population

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Christina Wille is based in Geneva and works as an independent consultant on human security. She has been undertaking assignments for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Small Arms Survey, where she has carried out extensive field research in Central and South-East Asia, Central Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

was also remarkably low there and that most civil war weapons had been reintegrated into the state security apparatus.<sup>3</sup>

This article follows the classic approach to small arms research by focusing on determining the number of small arms available among three distinct user groups: the civilian population, the state security forces and non-state armed groups. Past incidents are analysed to assess the threat posed by the availability of small arms among the groups identified as presenting a security risk. The article concludes that small arms proliferation outside of state structures is limited in Central Asia. Internal security agents enforce the strict laws on civilian possession and maintain close control over the population. Uncontrolled proliferation of firearms is unlikely to become a major security risk provided government control mechanisms continue to function in this manner. Armed opposition forces, including Islamic extremists and terrorists, do not pose a significant insurgency risk to the state on the basis of their existing stockpiles, and are unlikely to acquire significant quantities of firearms unless aided by members of state forces. Nonetheless, they continue to be a disruptive force.

***Stockpile management structures and practices in several locations within Central Asia pose a risk of leakage.***

Available numbers show that the state security forces are by far the most significant holders and users of small arms in Central Asia. The main security concerns therefore relate to the practices and use of small arms by state authorities. Available information suggests that stockpile management structures and practices in several locations within Central Asia pose a risk of leakage and that this could potentially destabilize the security situation.

Moving beyond the analysis of patterns of small arms holdings, this article considers the motivation and incentives influencing the use of small arms. The close links that some sections of the security forces have developed with both legal and illegal business activities since independence pose a hidden security risk in Central Asia. Involvement in the narcotics trade in Tajikistan and distribution of revenues from natural resources to security forces in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have created systems of expectation, patronage and loyalty that undermine prospects of better governance. There are also concerns that changes in power structures could trigger violent confrontations between factions within the security forces.

### ***Small arms in Central Asia***

#### SMALL ARMS AND THE SOVIET LEGACY

Central Asia as a geographic entity is subject to multiple definitions. For the purposes of this article we consider the countries south of the Russian Federation and east of the Caspian Sea, and which were part of the Soviet Union until 1991. These are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.<sup>4</sup> The history of these states has had important impacts on patterns of small arms ownership; the laws controlling civilian possession of firearms and the operational procedures of the security forces are essentially a Soviet legacy in all five states.

The continuity in legal arrangements governing small arms in the post-Soviet era reflects the broader pattern of political transition in Central Asia. Independence was gained largely by default as the Soviet Union collapsed, rather than through large-scale, home-grown resistance to Soviet rule. The leaders of the newly independent Central Asian states came from the elites that had dominated politics during the final years of the Soviet Union, and they demonstrated little interest in institutional reform.<sup>5</sup> They continued to depend on key state security forces (in particular those of the Ministries of the Interior) to maintain control, and did not seek to change the strict legal framework that controlled private firearm possession.

Researching small arms in Central Asia is challenging. Few facts and figures on weapon holdings and related security issues are published, and the attitude that it is preferable not to share information prevails. Another difficulty is that statements are subject to bias. Government representatives prefer to represent their countries as stable, secure and effectively controlled.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, government perceptions of external threats to security, such as terrorism and illegal drug trafficking, can appear inflated. Opposition figures and non-governmental organizations may also exaggerate the extent of instability, while taking pains to deny the presence of small arms at their demonstrations. These motivational biases are evident in the significant divergence of reports from official and non-official sources.<sup>7</sup>

It is just as difficult to establish exact procedures by which the security services manage their weapons stockpiles. Formal procedures have been carried over from the Soviet era, but these are often not adhered to. However, the extent of malpractice is difficult to establish with limited information, and based only on incidents where malpractice has come to light as a result of a particular crisis. It is likely that practices vary considerably throughout the region, but it is beyond this paper to examine variations in detail. This article draws on the results of fieldwork carried out by the Small Arms Survey (SAS) in Kyrgyzstan in 2003 and Tajikistan in 2004, as well as research carried out by International Alert in Kazakhstan. Fieldwork has not been possible in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, due to restrictions on research.

#### CIVILIAN GUN OWNERSHIP

Very few private citizens in Central Asia own a gun. If all citizens were to pool their firearms, they would be far outnumbered by those of state security forces. Fieldwork carried out by the Small Arms Survey in 2003 and 2004 in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan found that private family firearm ownership was neither widespread nor popular and there was little demand for guns.<sup>8</sup> In Kyrgyzstan in 2002 there were 7,410 registered hunters, who, according to their association, owned some 15,000 registered hunting guns.<sup>9</sup> In Tajikistan, the Ministry of the Interior stated in 2003 that there were 10,000 registered hunting guns.<sup>10</sup> The Small Arms Survey estimates that between 23,000 and 67,000 guns were in private ownership in Tajikistan in 2004, which included weapons caches from the civil war. For Kazakhstan, International Alert quotes "indirect sources" that the estimated number of weapons owned by civilians was around 65,000.

**Table 1. Firearms per inhabitant in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan**

	<i>Estimated number of firearms in civilian possession</i>	<i>Estimated population<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Number of firearms per 100 inhabitants</i>
Kazakhstan	65,000 <sup>b</sup>	15,233,844	0.4
Tajikistan	23,000–67,000 <sup>c</sup>	6,944,506	0.3–1

#### Sources

<sup>a</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2007, "Central and South Asia", *The Military Balance 2007*, pp. 301–330.

<sup>b</sup> John Heathershaw, Emil Juraev, Michael von Tangen Page and Lada Zimina, 2004, *Small Arms Control in Central Asia*, International Alert Eurasia Series no. 4, p. 24.

<sup>c</sup> Stina Torjesen, Christina Wille and S. Neil MacFarlane, 2005, *Tajikistan's Road to Stability: Reduction in Small Arms Proliferation and Remaining Challenges*, Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper no. 17, p.16.

The low level of private firearm ownership is particularly apparent if firearm numbers are related to population figures. Statistically, only about one person in 100 owns a weapon in Tajikistan (Table 1). In reality, this figure will be lower, as gun owners usually have more than one firearm. One person in 200–400 people may have between two and four firearms.

These are very low ownership rates compared with other countries, notably the United States, where there is nearly one gun per citizen (see Table 2). Even allowing for the possibility of underestimation in the figures for Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, it is clear that private gun ownership in Central Asia is very low by international standards. Small arms observers in Kyrgyzstan have observed an increase in demand for private firearms in the aftermath of the "Tulip Revolution" of March 2005.<sup>11</sup> However, numbers are still very small, underlining the overall point that private firearm possession is not a common phenomenon in Central Asia (a total of 335 new firearms licences were issued in 2005 compared with 176 in 2004).<sup>12</sup>

**Table 2. Estimated gun ownership per 100 inhabitants**

State	Guns per 100 inhabitants
Tajikistan	0.3–1
Kazakhstan	0.4
Japan	0.6
Netherlands	2
Brazil	1–17
Sweden	24
United States	83–96

Source: Stina Torjesen, Christina Wille and S. Neil MacFarlane, 2005, *Tajikistan's Road to Stability: Reduction in Small Arms Proliferation and Remaining Challenges*, Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper no. 17, p. 91.

The low level of private firearm ownership is a consequence of the legal framework and cultural attitudes inherited from the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union, firearm possession was limited exclusively to hunters registered with the hunters' association and law enforcement officials. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have made few changes to these provisions, and while no specific information is known about private gun ownership in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the Soviet heritage of these regimes would suggest that ownership rates are very low.

Gun crime remains rare in most Central Asian states, with political killings in Kyrgyzstan being a notable exception (as discussed below). Reported levels of homicide and armed robbery are very low in all Central Asian states.<sup>13</sup> While the true extent of crime remains without doubt under-reported, focus groups in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan confirmed the overall impression that the threats of crime and violent crime are not perceived as significant by ordinary citizens. Central Asian states differ in this respect from many countries where small arms assessments have been carried out and where the overriding concern has been the threat to human security from crime as a consequence of lawlessness and conflict.

#### SMALL ARMS STOCKPILES IN CENTRAL ASIA

Security forces are the primary holders of small arms in Central Asia, in contrast to most of the developed Western world.<sup>14</sup> No state in Central Asia discloses figures on the extent of its arsenals.

**Table 3. Estimated size of state bodies holding firearms**

	<i>IISS estimates</i>	<i>SAS estimates</i>
<i>Kazakhstan</i>		
Army	46,800	
Air Force	19,000	
MVD (Ministry of the Interior)	20,000	
State Border Protection Forces	12,000	
Maritime Border Guard	3,000	
Presidential Guard	2,000	
Government Guard	500	
<i>Total</i>	<i>103,300</i>	
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>		
Army	8,500	10,900
Air Force	4,000	
Border guards	5,000	5,000
MVD		17,000
SNB (National Security Service)		1,200
<i>Total</i>	<i>17,500</i>	<i>34,100</i>
<i>Tajikistan</i>		
Army	7,600	8,000
Air Force	800	
Border guards	5,300	1,200
MVD		20,000–28,000
Drug Control Agency		350
Presidential Guard		1,000–2,000
Other ministries and agencies		5,000
<i>Total</i>	<i>13,700</i>	<i>35,550–44,550</i>
<i>Turkmenistan</i>		
Army	21,000	
Navy	700	
Air Force	4,300	
<i>Total</i>	<i>26,000</i>	
<i>Uzbekistan</i>		
Army	40,000	
Air Force	15,000	
Internal security troops	19,000	
National Guard	1,000	
<i>Total</i>	<i>75,000</i>	

*Sources*

SAS estimates: Kyrgyzstan: S. Neil MacFarlane and Stina Torjesen, 2004, *Kyrgyzstan: A Small Arms Anomaly in Central Asia?* Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper no. 12, p. 14; Tajikistan: Stina Torjesen, Christina Wille and S. Neil MacFarlane, 2005, *Tajikistan's Road to Stability: Reduction in Small Arms Proliferation and Remaining Challenges*, Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper no. 17, p. 95.

IISS estimates: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2007, "Central and South Asia", *The Military Balance 2007*, pp. 301–330.

Estimates can be derived from an assessment of the size of the security forces (see Table 3), but this information is not complete. The Small Arms Survey has derived estimates of the size of the various forces. The Ministry of the Interior (MVD) is the most important security organ in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, employing some 17,000 personnel in Kyrgyzstan and 20,000–28,000 in Tajikistan. The armed forces are relatively small in comparison, numbering just under 11,000 in Kyrgyzstan and 8,000 in Tajikistan.<sup>15</sup> However, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan may not be representative of the broader pattern for the region; according to information published in *The Military Balance 2007*, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan maintain much larger armies, suggesting that these two countries would hold the most significant stockpiles of small arms in the region. Turkmenistan appears to lie between the two groups of states. It should be noted, however, that the estimates in Table 3 are incomplete because of the lack of data for internal security forces such as the Ministry of the Interior and the successor organs to the KGB (Committee for State Security), which are very important in the region.

There are great uncertainties in estimating stockpiles from the strength of the armed forces. The ratio of firearms per person varies between countries, and there are no specific estimates for Central Asia. However, based on international comparisons it would be reasonable to suggest that in Central Asia the number of firearms held by the armed forces is roughly equal to the number of service personnel.

Experts agree that the army inventories are in poor condition and resemble those of the former Soviet Union. The most common weapons are Kalashnikovs (AK-47s, AK-74s and AKM Kalashnikovs), Makarov pistols and Dragunov sniper rifles.<sup>16</sup> There is no evidence of large-scale modernization of inventories or substantial imports of weapons in recent years.<sup>17</sup>

### *Calculating the security risk: past use and threat of use of small arms*

#### STOCKPILES AND LEAKAGES

Stockpile leakages were one of the main sources of weapons in the Tajik civil war 1992–1997. The war was fought between the United Tajik Opposition, comprised of Islamic and democratic opposition groups, and supporters of the secular regime who sought continuity with the Soviet period. The two factions fought each other largely through regionally-based militias and acquired their weapons through local community leaders. The militias supporting former Communist Party First Secretary Rakhmon Nabiyev's election to the presidency had particular access to national law enforcement structures for supplies, and also received weapons from the governments of the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan.<sup>18</sup> The opposition purchased some guns in Afghanistan and used stocks from the security forces when available. Members of the Russian Army unit stationed on the Tajik–Afghan border, the 201st Motorized Rifle Division, reportedly sold their stocks to both sides in the conflict.<sup>19</sup> The easy availability of government stocks in the context of disintegrating central power and increasing political tensions accelerated the outbreak of war.

Ten years after the end of the war in Tajikistan, leakages from government stockpiles continue in Central Asia. Thefts from stockpiles have been reported in Kyrgyzstan. For the period 1993–2002 the Military Prosecutor's Office in Kyrgyzstan assessed a total of 1,100 cases of theft, and more than 30 officers and 500 soldiers were charged with criminal offences. Between 2000 and 2002, seven incidents of large-scale firearms theft by military personnel were registered.<sup>20</sup>

The management of government stockpiles is a matter of concern in Kazakhstan too. According to International Alert, there has been no official inventory carried out in Kazakhstan since independence. Attempts to undertake one have reportedly met resistance from the military. It has been alleged that arson has even taken place in order to cover up the loss of weapons from stockpiles.<sup>21</sup>

At present, while apparently frequent, leakages are not occurring on a sufficient scale to threaten regional stability because there is no large-scale demand for arms. However, past experience indicates that weakly managed security forces, which are unable to prevent leakages, constitute a significant risk factor in turning low-level political stand-offs into armed confrontations during periods of political instability, in particular when the security forces have a stake in the confrontation. Being the most significant holders of small arms in the region, management and control over the security forces is crucial for future stability.

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#### MOUNTAIN CACHES: THREATS FROM ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

Political and radical Islamic groups have long been regarded as a threat by the secular governments of Central Asia. Today, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is the most prominent organization openly challenging President Islam Karimov's regime in Uzbekistan. This insurgent group fought in the Tajik civil war and, operating in the Fergana Valley, mounted successful incursions from Tajikistan into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (where it is banned) in 1999 and 2000.

There is evidence that Islamic fundamentalist groups have been weakened as a result of international action in the "war on terror" coupled with crackdowns led by Central Asian governments. The United States-led Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in particular has substantially weakened the IMU. The IMU leader Juma Namangani was killed in the fight for Kunduz in northern Afghanistan in 2001, where he sided with Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters. Islamist sympathizers remain in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, possibly organized as sleeper cells.<sup>22</sup> However, there does not appear to be a significant risk of insurgency at present, though terrorist attacks are a concern.

In Tajikistan, since the 1997 peace accords, Emomali Rahmon's regime has gradually removed all former warlords not loyal to the government from positions of power. Some opposition leaders have maintained private caches of weapons, but at present they do not pose a significant threat to the government; the opposition is no longer coherently organized and seems unable to attract new supporters—disaffected young men who might become new recruits have tended to leave Tajikistan for work in the Russian Federation and elsewhere.<sup>23</sup>

Hizb-ut-Tahrir, another radical Islamic group in Central Asia, seeks to unite all Muslim countries in a unitary Islamic state ruled by Shariah law and thereby challenges the secularism and even existence of Central Asian states. The movement is officially committed to non-violence, however, and only splinter groups may possibly seek to obtain stockpiles for violent attacks.

Despite the apparently successful countermeasures against opposition groups, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have experienced terrorist or insurgent attacks in the recent past. Most activists come from radical groups based in the Fergana Valley, a region split between the three countries. Governments in the region claim that attacks in 2006 were perpetrated by affiliates to the IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir. However, the veracity of these claims is somewhat unclear.<sup>24</sup>

The acquisition of firearms may have been one of the main aims of recent attacks. A Kyrgyz–Tajik border post was attacked on 12 May 2006 by a group of armed men: two Kyrgyz and three Tajik border guards were killed, and 19 assault rifles and one heavy machine-gun were stolen. The law enforcement agencies in both countries have responded with force to these attacks, resulting in shoot-outs between state officials and gunmen. A number of those arrested or killed have been found in possession of illegal weapons.<sup>25</sup> These incidents have also highlighted the vulnerabilities of security forces and the lack of serious stockpiles among insurgents.

Some observers have argued that the tactics used by Central Asian governments against anyone suspected of sympathizing with radical Islam may have increased the pool of fundamentalist sympathizers. However, there does not appear to be a significant risk of insurgency at present, as the nature of terrorist and insurgent operations suggests that insurgents do not have major capabilities, and it seems unlikely that they will acquire the organizational capacity and large weapon stockpiles necessary to mount a serious challenge to state power. At present, insurgent organizations constitute a "disruptive but manageable force",<sup>26</sup> and this is unlikely to change as long as no new havens for terrorist groups or easy supplies of weapons emerge within the region. The security incidents, however, highlight the importance of adequate stockpile protection to prevent terrorist groups from gaining access. In particular, as weapon sources in Afghanistan have been reduced, government stockpiles in Central Asia are now some of the most obvious sources of firearms.

#### VIOLENCE AND THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE CONNECTED TO ILLEGAL BUSINESS

Events over the last two years in Kyrgyzstan have highlighted what appears at present to be the most serious and perhaps overlooked security concern in Central Asia. The Tulip Revolution of March 2005 in Kyrgyzstan led to a violent aftermath. After the president fled the country, there were two days of lawlessness and looting in the capital Bishkek. In the months after the revolution, a number of influential politicians, officials and business people were the victims of contract killings and violent attacks.

Arms availability has increased as a result, as discussed above, but this in itself does not constitute the real security threat. The real concern stems from the context in which weapons have been used in Kyrgyzstan. The events surrounding the Tulip Revolution brought the close ties between business, organized crime and state structures into the open. The violence that followed the revolution was to a large extent funded by organized crime. Opposition to Akayev's regime came from a variety of interest groups, and the absence of clear opposition structures and a lack of funds among many of the more idealistic groups made it possible for criminal leaders to join the movement. Their interest was mainly in usurping the Akayev family—reported to control much of the state's assets—and competing for access to markets (both legal and illegal).<sup>27</sup> The political changes since the revolution have strengthened the hold of organized crime on politics.<sup>28</sup>

For 10 years prior to the Tulip Revolution (1995–2005), known drug barons occupied seats in parliament, making them immune to prosecution. After the revolution, when Feliks Kulov was Prime Minister (September 2005 to December 2006), three deputies with known criminal connections were assassinated, along with one person who was seeking to become a deputy. Some observers believe that, following these assassinations, criminal bosses have become more reluctant to become directly involved in politics, and instead prefer to work through connections to politicians.

The connections between illegal and legal businesses and the security forces are not unique to Kyrgyzstan. In Tajikistan there is evidence of considerable involvement by government and security officials in the illegal narcotics trade. This appears to have been an important source of revenue for both sides during the civil war.<sup>29</sup> The peace accord integrated warlords from both sides into the state security forces, with the consequence that criminal elements were brought into the heart of the security apparatus. One of the most telling indicators of this connection is the near absence of violence associated with the illegal narcotics trade on one of the world's most significant transit routes (narcotics from Afghanistan pass through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to the Russian Federation and the European Union). Large parts of the illegal drugs trade in Tajikistan are thought to be protected by state security forces working in collusion with criminals.<sup>30</sup> This ensures short-term stability, but undermines the state's ability to address organized crime, with long-term consequences for economic

development. There is also a risk of violence erupting as it did in Kyrgyzstan should there be changes in power structures in the future.

#### NATURAL RESOURCE REVENUES AND THE SECURITY FORCES

In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan massive security apparatuses are supported by natural resource revenues from oil and gas. In Uzbekistan the Karimov regime distributes natural resource revenues among those in charge of the National Security Service and the Ministry of the Interior, which controls the police. This ensures the security forces' continued support for the regime in a situation where ordinary and unarmed citizens show increasing signs of frustration with the deteriorating economic situation. The events of 13 May 2005 in Andijon, when security forces killed between 300 and 500 demonstrators (according to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights), illustrate the extent to which the security forces are prepared to support the Karimov regime.<sup>31</sup>

The dependence of the security forces on natural resource revenues also constitutes a hidden threat to stability. The International Crisis Group predicts that the security services in Uzbekistan would vigorously defend business interests in the natural resource sector, as it provides them with a major source of income.<sup>32</sup> It is reported that wealthy and influential individuals within Uzbekistan who are presently outside the regime maintain links with organized crime.<sup>33</sup> This carries the risk that such individuals would seek to use their connections to increase their access to power if an opportunity arose. There is a potential of large-scale violence between groups competing for access to revenues.

In Turkmenistan the state security services are also closely linked to natural resource revenues. Gas revenues have allegedly been paid into a Deutsche Bank account to which key figures in government and the security services have personal access.<sup>34</sup> These individuals appear to be offered access to gas revenues in exchange for suppressing potential threats to the regime, both among the elite and at the grass roots.

### *Conclusion*

The analysis of small arms stockpiles and ownership and use patterns confirms some key assumptions usually held by governments in the region about state stability and effectiveness in countering terrorism and religious extremism. Opposition groups and terrorists who would like to see the secular governments in Central Asia tumble do not have the necessary weapons capability to mount a serious threat. Practices inherited from the Soviet period also ensure that controls on private activities make the emergence of highly capable armed opposition movements unlikely in present circumstances.

Human security concerns do not stem from large-scale, uncontrolled small arms proliferation among non-state actors. Moreover, with the exception of the use of explosives in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, terrorist attacks have been primarily targeted at state security forces or institutions linked to the security sector, and have not attempted to harm ordinary citizens in public places. Crime rates are low, and controls on private firearm ownership make incidents of armed violence between civilians an extremely rare event.

Small arms analysis points instead to some serious, and relatively hidden, security threats in the region. These originate from the governance of the state security forces. There is evidence that powerful individuals within the security forces expect to be financially rewarded for the position they take in political power struggles, for their facilitation of legal and illegal business and for ensuring that the state's legitimate threat of use of force can be utilized for private or factional interests.

The sanctioned use or threat of force by individuals and structures within the security forces contributes to present stability, but under more strained conditions there is an implicit threat that weapons held by the state security apparatus could be used for private factional interests. Events in Kyrgyzstan have shown that violence is likely to erupt at times of a power struggle: the end of one regime will create a vacuum that emerging powers, including criminal business interests, will seek to fill. Such instability may over the long term increase the demand for private firearm ownership.

The absence of violence gives a misleading impression. At first sight, it appears that the illegal narcotics trade in Central Asia is benign as levels of violence are kept low and ordinary citizens do not suffer the violent effects of illegal business in Central Asia in the same way as the narcotics trade is associated with violence in many European or North American cities.

But the involvement of security forces in organized crime constitutes the main long-term threat to the future security and stability of the region because of the easy availability of arms to these groups. The lack of accountability among state security forces also constitutes a serious constraint to good governance and opportunities for long-term economic development that would lift the population of Central Asia out of poverty. If recent experience is anything to go by, vulnerable groups and opponents to the regimes are likely to experience harassment or even violence from state security forces. The ability of the most powerful and well-connected individuals to increase their wealth through natural resource revenues and illegal business decreases the incentive to create economic conditions for sustainable economic development. In the long run such practices are not conducive to creating security and stability.

Visible proliferation of small arms and open violence are not the only indicators of security problems. States that appear strong because they successfully prevent armed external opposition and violence among citizens can still have serious internal weaknesses that threaten state and human security and need to be addressed through security sector reform.

#### Notes

1. Bobi Pirseyedi, 2000, *The Small Arms Problem in Central Asia: Features and Implications*, Geneva, UNIDIR, p. 86.
2. S. Neil MacFarlane and Stina Torjesen, 2004, *Kyrgyzstan: A Small Arms Anomaly in Central Asia?* Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper no. 12, p. 1.
3. Stina Torjesen, Christina Wille and S. Neil MacFarlane, 2005, *Tajikistan's Road to Stability: Reduction in Small Arms Proliferation and Remaining Challenges*, Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper no. 17, at <[www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/sas/publications/o\\_papers\\_pdf/2005-op17-tadjikistan.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/sas/publications/o_papers_pdf/2005-op17-tadjikistan.pdf)>.
4. During the Soviet era, Middle Asia consisted of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and did not include Kazakhstan. Soon after independence, during a meeting in Tashkent, Central Asian leaders decided that Kazakhstan belonged in the Central Asian Region.
5. President Akayev in Kyrgyzstan is something of an exception. He was elected President in 1991 because he did not belong to any of the dominant political factions at the time; he was, however, a member of the Communist Party.
6. MacFarlane and Torjesen, 2004, op. cit., pp. 2–3.
7. MacFarlane and Torjesen, 2004, op. cit. and Torjesen, Wille and MacFarlane, 2005, op. cit.
8. MacFarlane and Torjesen, 2004, op. cit. and Torjesen, Wille and MacFarlane, 2005, op. cit.
9. S. Neil MacFarlane and Stina Torjesen, 2007, *Small Arms in Kyrgyzstan, Post-revolutionary Proliferation*, Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper no. 12, revised and updated, at <[www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/sas/publications/o\\_papers.html](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/sas/publications/o_papers.html)>, p. 26.
10. Torjesen, Wille and MacFarlane, 2005, op. cit., p. 17.
11. The Tulip Revolution resulted in the overthrow of President Askar Akayev following protests against the results of parliamentary elections held in February and March 2005. President Akayev fled Kyrgyzstan shortly after the outbreak of violence and signed a resignation statement at the Kyrgyz embassy in Moscow in April 2005.
12. MacFarlane and Torjesen, 2007, op. cit., p. 63.
13. MacFarlane and Torjesen, 2004, op. cit., p. 20 and Torjesen, Wille and MacFarlane, 2005, op. cit., p. 35.
14. Aaron Karp, 2006, "Trickle and Torrent, State Stockpiles", in Small Arms Survey, *Small Arms Survey 2006: Unfinished Business*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 37.

15. Until 2005 Tajikistan depended on 12,000 troops from the Russian Federal Border Guard for control of its southern border with Afghanistan. Since 2004 Tajik border forces have gradually taken over this role, but continue to rely on Russian advisers. (Library of Congress—Federal Research Division, 2007, *Country Profile Tajikistan*, at <lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Tajikistan.pdf>, pp. 16–17.)
16. MacFarlane and Torjesen, 2007, op. cit., p. 25.
17. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) review on military spending found low rates of 1–2% of GDP for four of the Central Asian countries and 3.8% for Turkmenistan. (Sam Perlo-Freeman and Petter Stalenheim, 2003, "Military Expenditure in the South Caucasus and Central Asia", in Alyson J.K. Bailes et al., *Armament and Disarmament in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, SIPRI, at <editors.sipri.se/pubs/CentralAsia.pdf>, pp. 15–16). Very little of the defence budget has been spent on arms. For the period 1992–2002 Kazakhstan accounted for nearly all reported imports in the region according to SIPRI trend indicator values. These were limited to aircrafts and air defence equipment and did not include SALW. (Björn Hagelin, 2003, "Arms Transfers to the South Caucasus and Central Asia Compared, 1992–2002", in Alyson J.K. Bailes et al., op. cit., pp. 21–24).
18. Torjesen, Wille and MacFarlane, 2005, op. cit., pp. 9 and 57.
19. Torjesen, Wille and MacFarlane, 2005, op. cit., pp. 65–66 and 88.
20. MacFarlane and Torjesen, 2007, op. cit., pp. 28–29.
21. John Heathershaw, Emil Juraev, Michael von Tangen Page and Lada Zimina, 2004, *Small Arms Control in Central Asia*, International Alert Eurasia Series no. 4, at <www.international-alert.org/publications/getdata.php?doctype=Pdf&id=44>, p. 22.
22. Svante E. Cornell, 2006, "The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration?" *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 1, at <www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/February\_2006/Svante\_Cornell.pdf>, p. 59. The information on IMU cells in Kazakhstan is based on "US Diplomat Sees Growing Terrorism Challenge in Central Asia", *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, 30 October 2003, at <www.rferl.org/features/2003/10/30102003165203.asp>, quoting Elizabeth Jones, US Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia.
23. Torjesen, Wille and MacFarlane, 2005, op. cit.
24. Experts have pointed out that law enforcement agencies in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have a tendency to use the labels IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir indiscriminately (MacFarlane and Torjesen, 2007, op. cit., p. 62).
25. MacFarlane and Torjesen, 2007, op. cit., pp. 61–62.
26. Cornell, op. cit., p. 59.
27. MacFarlane and Torjesen, 2007, op. cit., p. 58.
28. Cornell, op. cit., p. 64.
29. Cornell, op. cit., p. 54.
30. Cornell, op. cit., p. 55.
31. OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2005, *Preliminary Findings on the Events in Andijan, Uzbekistan, 13 May 2005*, Warsaw, 20 June, at <www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2005/06/15233\_en.pdf>, p. 23.
32. International Crisis Group, 2007, *Central Asia's Energy Risks*, Asia Report no. 133, 24 May, at <www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4866>, p. 3.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
34. Global Witness, 2007, *Germany Must Launch Full Inquiry into Turkmen Funds in German Banks*, press release, 3 July 2007, at <www.globalwitness.org/media\_library\_detail.php/558/en/germany\_must\_launch\_full\_inquiry\_into\_turkmen\_fund>.

