

OFFICIAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

An inventory of conflict prevention / resolution and peace building initiatives would not be exhaustive without taking into consideration local mechanisms of conflict resolution. Local actors, both within the government and wider society, are not passive objects waiting for international involvement in conflict situations. Since in the chapter 4.4. and 4.5 I have tried to outline the issues concerning local NGOs and other civil society institutions, I will focus here on official conflict management mechanisms.

Following the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the governments of the region have been confronted with the massive challenge of creating an identity as a national state, with the consequence that the defence of national interest is the first reflex when dealing with regional issues such as water and energy management, transport and trade and the environment, but also when considering border and minority issues. Despite this situation and the tensions experienced during the last ten years, the Central Asian states have managed to avoid going to war with each other. This means that these states have found mechanisms ei-

ther at inter-state, national and local levels that are capable to regulate disputes.

At the economic level, all the states (with the main exception of Turkmenistan) have officially embraced economic reform policies. However, the implementation of such policies has varied in practice from one country to another, and within each country from one region to another. This has resulted in an increased fragmentation of an area formerly characterised by a one set of laws and regulations (the Soviet one). The same situation has occurred for issues such as land privatisation. On the other hand, during the last nine years, the integration process of the Central Asian states seems to have acquired a more tangible reality in the form of the Central Asia Economic Union (CAEU)⁴¹. Through this institutional frame the states of the region have begun to create an organizational instrument to coordinate their policies in differ-

ent areas (energy, water resources, migration...). However, impediments to regional cooperation and coordination exist and are well defined: legacies from the past, differences in development strategies and the impact of various external factors.

Due to the fact that the Amudarya and Syrdarya basins go through all six countries in the region (Afghanistan⁴², Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), a multi-party process is essential as far as water management is concerned. Several inter-state bodies have been created since 1992 in order to regulate the use of water in Central Asia. As shown by a recent study⁴³ mandated by SDC, disputes over water allocations show that inter-state bodies are still not able to solve critical issues since they often lack the necessary political commitment from the highest spheres of the concerned governments.

For example, even though the Aral Sea Basin Program (ASBP) and the International Fund for the Aral Sea (IFAS) are administered by a council of deputy prime ministers, a solution that should assure a high level of political commitment, none of the

⁴¹ The CAEU was created in 1994 under the name of the Central Asian Economic Community or CAEC by Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan joined the organisation in 1998.

⁴² Until now, Afghanistan did not pose a problem when it comes to regional water management, whenever this country will find a more stable form of government that would allow a process of economic development to re-start, then Afghanistan would require larger quantities of water for agricultural and possibly industrial use. This would bring a new player to be accommodated when dealing with the management of the Amudarya basin.

⁴³ For a comprehensive overview of the question refer to, *Inventory of Inter-State Institutions, Regional Projects and National Bodies*, Swiss Coordination Office, Bishkek, 2001.

state legislatures has legalized the ASBP and IFAS authorities. This leaves water management largely up to the states. Moreover, this reinforces the position of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan that have opted for bilateral solutions⁴⁴ and have so far boycotted attempts by international organizations to mediate. These governments fear that outside intervention will increase the bargaining power of the two weaker parties in this relationship i.e., Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In Central Asia, the ASBP and IFAS would provide a basis for joint approaches and actions. At national level, different ministries try to integrate the actions of the inter-states bodies into national policies, strategies and programs. At the provincial level, participation of local governments, the private sector, civil society organizations and institutions is needed to translate these policies and programmes into action and provide feedback. Civil society is often an important mechanism for parties directly concerned by water issues, to express their views. This aspect of participation is almost totally ignored by the governments of the region.

Security and the so called "fight against terrorism" seem to be one of the only sectors where Central Asian states have developed a certain degree of co-operation, resulting in the creation of a variety of interstate structures, frameworks and

forums⁴⁵, some of which have been sponsored essentially by the Central Asian states themselves. International actors sponsor other structures: the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS, supported by the Russian Federation), the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP), the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) and finally the United Nations and the OSCE.

As far as the structures sponsored by the Central Asian states are concerned, the Central Asia Economic Union (CAEU) also has a military and security co-operation dimension. Within this framework, a tripartite peacekeeping battalion, Centrasbat, has been created. Despite the fact that Centrasbat has never been more than a military-diplomatic showcase, the leaders of the four countries signed in April 2000 an agreement on co-operation in fighting terrorism, extremism and trans-border organised crime. The IMU incursions in summer 2000 tested this pledge of co-operation. Even though a coordinating centre for the defence, interior and security forces of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has been formed in Khujand, the cooperation did not take the form of a joint task force of

the concerned states to destroy the bases of IMU as proposed by the Kyrgyz government.

On the ground. Uzbek security forces are systematically tightening the borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Measures such as the introduction of a visa requirement for Tajik citizens travelling to Uzbekistan and the mining of a large portion of the borders have certainly not improved the day-to-day relations between the neighbouring states in the Ferghana valley and have contributed to increasing the difficulties to trade and communication in the region.

The IMU incursions have also been accompanied by an increased repression by national security forces of Islamic dissident groups particularly of the IMU and Hizb-e Tahrir in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The situation is however more complex and the fact that Tajikistan is the only country in Central Asia, which has involved Islamic forces in its governing coalition⁴⁶, is an important factor within multilateral security cooperation arrangements.

The security challenges posed by the 1999 and 2000 incursions in the Ferghana Valley (and in Sukhandarya district of Uzbekistan) by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), have neither generated a far-reaching joint response by the CAEU states nor consolidated a separate CAEU security identity. If on one hand the in-

⁴⁴ So far, bilateral swap agreements on water resources and energy (e.g., the agreement between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan signed in December 2000) have averted major crises in the short-term

⁴⁵ For a detailed discussion on security cooperation structures in Central Asia refer to Roy Allison, "Structures and Frameworks for Security Policy Co-operation in Central Asia, by Allison Roy and Janson Lena (Eds.), *Central Asian Security*, London /Washington, 2001.

⁴⁶ The 1997 peace accord between the government and the United Tajik opposition stipulated that 30% of the official posts be allocated to members of the opposition, which consisted mostly of Islamic Revival Party members. The current minister of Emergencies, Mirza Ziyouev, has allegedly fought alongside IMU leader Juma Namangani during the 1992-1997 Tajik civil war.

cursions have produced several re-
criminations between the states af-
fected of the Ferghana Valley, on the
other hand CAEU states did rally be-
hind Russian (CIS) security struc-
tures and the Shanghai Co-operation
Organisation⁴⁷.

The security agenda within the SCO
meetings has led to the creation of
a joint centre for combating terror-
ism in Bishkek, which, however, has
so far not been operational due to
the lack of funding. According to one
source⁴⁸ "recent statements by
Uzbek president Karimov and Rus-
sian officials already attest to the
difficulties facing the newly created
organization⁴⁹. The Uzbek president
has expressed concern that the SCO
should not become a Russian instru-
ment to mount anti-US initiatives in
the region".

If, until recently, the Central Asian
states have not been ready to re-
lease their military and security ties
with Russia (both bilateral or through
the CIS frame), the situation will
probably change after events of 11
September. The current US-led war
in Afghanistan and the clear support
provided by Uzbekistan (and in a
more limited form by Kyrgyzstan,
Tajikistan and Kazakhstan) will have
a deep impact on the security frame-
works created by CAEU and the Con-
ference on Interaction and Confi-
dence Building Measures in Asia
(CICA)⁵⁰, on the role of regional se-
curity co-operation organisations
such as the CIS and the SCO and in

general on the multi-lateral and bi-
lateral security treaties and arrange-
ments in which the different states
are participating.

The situation within the security di-
mension reflects a more general
trend when dealing with regional
cooperation and interstate institu-
tions. More than engaging in signifi-
cant cooperation with each other, the
Central Asian states have preferred
to develop bilateral, case-by-case
solutions marked by the protection
of perceived national interests. This
situation has often exacerbated com-
petition among regional actors and
has diminished the impact of regional
cooperation institutions and initia-
tives.

When dealing with conflict and ten-
sions at national and local level, the
authorities are a key and very ac-
tive actor, even though often a reac-
tive one (more than a pro-active /
preventive one). Authorities are al-
ways very keen to block the emer-
gence of conflict, unfortunately their
means may often be of the repres-
sive type (especially when dealing
with issues linked to the expression
of political opposition). On the other

hand, the experience of the Tajik
peace process shows that govern-
ment and opposition have been able
to develop and maintain a mecha-
nism for (mostly) non-violent con-
flict settlement (the Commission for
National Reconciliation)⁵¹.

Another factor that has an influence
when dealing with official conflict
management mostly at local and
national level: the majority of the
current Central Asian leaders (older
than 30) have a common back-
ground. The Soviet Communist Party
and Soviet administration have pro-
vided them with a common set of
symbols and reference values. The
same system and schools have so-
cialized most of the present leaders
and if they don't know each other
personally, they probably share a
common set of values and intellec-
tual tools. These links and shared
networks facilitate a common under-
standing of issues and the informal
communication. Even though (unfor-
tunately) little is known by interna-
tional operators about these infor-
mal networks of communication
among officials⁵² of different coun-
tries in Central Asia, project experi-
ence⁵³ shows that this common men-
tal / social frame (reinforced by the
use of Russian as lingua franca) of-
ten greatly facilitate the discussion
among parties when dealing a con-
flict situation.

⁴⁷ In addition to Uzbekistan, SCO's members in-
clude China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and
Tajikistan.

⁴⁸ Randa Slim, *Preventing and managing conflicts
in the Ferghana Valley*, unpublished document, 2001.

⁴⁹ "Russia has misgivings about Shanghai Co-
operation Organization", *Eurasia Insight*, 20 June 2001.

⁵⁰ CICA is based on the model of the OSCE and has
a broad membership base (the Central Asian states,
Russia, China, Turkey, India, Pakistan and other Asian
states). CICA has little operational value but may be
an instrument with a certain potential when dealing
with confidence - building measures.

⁵¹ Even though with the support of external actors
such as the UN and the OSCE

⁵² Some sources reported informal cooperation
actions between the governors of the regions of Osh
(Kyrgyzstan), Sughd (Tajikistan) and Andijan
(Uzbekistan).

⁵³ From local to Oblast (region) level.