



Economic Development in Central Asia Is a Long-Term Security Concern

The September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States led U.S. policymakers to realize that instability, failed and failing states, and economic and political underdevelopment present security concerns not just in the states that suffer directly from these problems but in the global community as a whole. From this perspective, political, social, and economic trends in Central Asia—comprising Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—merit attention. The prospects for long-term economic growth and stability in the region remain uncertain and will depend on Central Asia's approach to balancing internal security challenges with political and economic liberalization. Despite strong economic growth rates in recent years, there is evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with economic policies and corruption, growth of organized crime networks, and deteriorating social conditions that pose major challenges to the regimes in the region. These factors could potentially foster regional instability and conflict, with implications for U.S. security goals such as counterterrorism and counternarcotics.

A study of economic and security trends in Central Asia by RAND Project AIR FORCE suggests that the United States should balance its strategic military relationships in the region with the potentially disparate goal of fostering domestic reform and sustainable economic development. As the United States clarifies its long-term military relationships and commitments, it should take several key issues into account:

- **Central Asia's economic future lies primarily within its own neighborhood.** The United States does not have a direct, compelling economic interest in Central Asia outside Kazakhstan's oil sector. Nor does most of Central Asia depend on direct economic assistance from or trade with the United States. Central Asia will increasingly diversify its economic and military relationships with neighbors such as Russia, China, and Iran, potentially displacing U.S. influence in the region. However, U.S. actions may have an effect on shaping the involvement of Central Asia's neighbors. Regional powers that share the U.S. goals of fostering development should be engaged, and cooperation with Russia may be crucial.
- **Regime change in the region may occur with little warning and in spite of the efforts of the United States.** If U.S. policymakers decide to maintain a military presence in the region, it may be necessary to consider a wider range of approaches such as a lower-profile presence and hedging strategies that lower the risk of long-term denial of access and perception of the United States as a regime patron.
- **A "nuanced" approach may be necessary in dealing with more authoritarian regimes.** Although human-rights concerns may test U.S. foreign policy goals, disengagement from Central Asia may compromise overall strategic goals for the region. Policymakers should consider the costs and benefits of engaging alternative power centers within and outside Central Asian regimes, possibly enlisting support from other regional powers where common ground can be found.
- **Economic and military assistance to the region should be more sharply focused to avoid the highest-risk outcomes.** Failed state scenarios would result in major regional problems that would undermine U.S. strategic goals. However, policies that may be critical to stability, such as agricultural reform and free trade, remain beyond the direct influence of the United States. The United States may need to focus its diplomatic capital and economic resources on specific issues, such as political liberalization.

The United States has limited ability or interest in becoming a regime patron in Central Asia, but it may play a significant role in shaping the prospects for development by influencing the nature and pace of political and economic reform. ■

RAND RESEARCH AREAS

THE ARTS
CHILD POLICY
CIVIL JUSTICE
EDUCATION
ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT
HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
NATIONAL SECURITY
POPULATION AND AGING
PUBLIC SAFETY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
SUBSTANCE ABUSE
TERRORISM AND
HOMELAND SECURITY
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
WORKFORCE AND WORKPLACE

This product is part of the RAND Corporation research brief series. RAND research briefs present policy-oriented summaries of individual published, peer-reviewed documents or of a body of published work.

Corporate Headquarters
1776 Main Street
P.O. Box 2138
Santa Monica, California
90407-2138
Tel 310.393.0411
Fax 310.393.4818

© RAND 2006

This research brief describes work done for RAND Project AIR FORCE and documented in *Economic Dimensions of Security in Central Asia*, by Sergej Mahnovski, Kamil Akramov, and Theodore Karasik, MG-417-AF (available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG417/>), 2006, 118 pp., ISBN: 0-8330-3866-4. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. **RAND**® is a registered trademark.

RAND Offices Santa Monica, CA • Washington, DC • Pittsburgh, PA • Jackson, MS • Doha, QA • Berlin, DE • Cambridge, UK • Leiden, NL



PROJECT AIR FORCE

THE ARTS
CHILD POLICY
CIVIL JUSTICE
EDUCATION
ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT
HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
NATIONAL SECURITY
POPULATION AND AGING
PUBLIC SAFETY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
SUBSTANCE ABUSE
TERRORISM AND
HOMELAND SECURITY
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
WORKFORCE AND WORKPLACE

This PDF document was made available from www.rand.org as a public service of the RAND Corporation.

This product is part of the RAND Corporation research brief series. RAND research briefs present policy-oriented summaries of individual published, peer-reviewed documents or of a body of published work.

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world.

Support RAND

[Browse Books & Publications](#)

[Make a charitable contribution](#)

For More Information

Visit RAND at www.rand.org

Explore [RAND Project AIR FORCE](#)

View [document details](#)

Limited Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law as indicated in a notice appearing later in this work. This electronic representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for non-commercial use only. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents for commercial use.