

Central Asia's Border Woes
& the Impact of
International Assistance

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Central Eurasia Project

Central Asia's Border Woes & the Impact of International Assistance

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About the Author

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The analysis and opinions in this paper are solely the author's and do not represent the views of the Hollings Center for International Dialogue or the Open Society Foundations.

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BCP	Border Crossing Point
BIG	Border International Group
BMSC	Border Management Staff College
BOMCA	Border Management Program for Central Asia
BOMNAF	Border Management Program for Northern Afghanistan
CABSI	Central Asia Border Security Initiative
CADAP	Central Asia Drug Action Program
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DPU	Drug Profiling Unit
EXBS	Export Control and Related Border Security Program
FSB	Federal Security Service (Russia)
GBAO	Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IBM	Integrated Border Management
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
INL	Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (US)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NBS	National Border Strategy
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NDN	Northern Distribution Network
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
POE	Port of Entry
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
TIR	Transports Internationaux Routiers

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive Summary and Recommendations

For the better part of the 21st century, the Central Asian republics have hosted a number of international programs designed to overhaul, equip, and reform the region's border control practices. Under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), the United States, and other sponsors, these programs have built barracks for guards at remote crossings, provided border police with high-tech equipment, bankrolled sophisticated ports of entry to facilitate the movement of goods and people, trained officers in the latest methods to detect forged documents, and drafted new strategies that enable states to depart from Soviet-era directives. The ultimate goal behind border aid is to help the Central Asian regimes achieve borders that are both more secure *and* open—more secure against threats such as narcotrafficking and cross-border extremism and more open to licit civilian crossings and lucrative trade flows.

Border control reform in Central Asia is a significant challenge even for the most competent programs and dedicated officials. The programs aim to equip, reform, train, and professionalize tens of thousands of border and customs officials across the vast geographic expanse of the five republics.

The UN, EU, OSCE, and U.S. programs discussed here have completed a long roster of difficult projects and have done so in an increasingly coordinated way to stretch limited resources as efficiently as possible. Yet there are major hurdles ahead. Central Asian border authorities—from the lowly border guard to the highest level officials in capital cities—remain corrupt, unreformed, and resistant to change. It can often be difficult to distinguish the quality of operations at ports of entry and borders that have received aid from those that have not. As they shift their focus to training initiatives in the years ahead,

the sponsors of border management programs must do more to gauge improvements in border control.

Still, there is no guarantee that border management programs will ultimately meet their long-term aims. The lagging political will of Central Asian governments, the thorny relations that govern their diplomacy, and the geopolitical forces in the region, all undermine the ideal of open and secure borders. Central Asian governments are adroit at absorbing aid without putting it to the use donors intended. Worse yet, the very insertion of donors and security-sector reform sponsors in Central Asia has affected the calculus of governments, increased their self-assurance, and encouraged their expectations of unconditional patronage.

Recommendations

- **Border management sponsors should broaden their definition of mission success and include civil society and nongovernmental organizations in measuring improvements in border control.**

Border management sponsors continue to define success in terms of projects completed, barracks built, and numbers of seminars held and border guards trained. But this confuses outputs with outcomes, and many assistance programs lack a systematic way to measure qualitative improvements in border control. Local NGOs and civilians living in border regions are most attuned to how borders function and are—with rare exceptions—an untapped source of data on corruption rates, emerging crises, and the quality of border officials. They are the best gauge of where the international community is in fostering “open and secure borders.”

- **Training programs should focus on the most essential skills Central Asian officials and guards need to learn, not what donors think they ought to learn.**

Rather than attempt to teach wide-ranging curricula that may not be suited to the region, border management sponsors should improve and focus on teaching the most essential skills border guards need. Border guard units are largely made up of civilian military conscripts. The recruits do not receive sufficient training in survival skills to help them manage the difficult challenges and subsistence-level conditions they face at remote outposts. Such training won't make a dent in corruption or trafficking, but it may help decrease worrying levels of absenteeism as well as suicide and homicide rates among border guards in certain countries.

- **The EU, UN, and OSCE, and the United States need to increase pressure on Central Asian governments that accept border management aid but fail to meet its conditions.**

Recipient governments have often failed to do the following: open crossings refurbished by international funds, implement new border security strategies developed in cooperation with border aid programs, maintain facilities handed over to them, and incorporate high-ticket items such as radiation detectors that are intended to improve border crossing security and procedures. Border aid programs need to exert concerted pressure together with their embassies and donors on Central Asian authorities who fail to meet their obligations. Such pressure may result in better security measures at some crossings, in others it may lead to more efficient crossing regimes that benefit civilian populations.

- **Cut programs that are out of step with geopolitical realities and that reward the most authoritarian states.**

Customs reform and trade liberalization programs are unlikely to work given corruption in the region or the protectionist dynamics of the Russia-led customs union. Moreover, highly authoritarian states like Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have for years adroitly absorbed border security assistance without meeting donor objectives. Their participation is an act of window-dressing. It is time for international funders and sponsors of border training to publicly acknowledge that these states have no intention of moving away from closed-borders policies given their geopolitical strategies and economic statecraft.

- **The international community's drawdown from Afghanistan should not become an unrestrained windfall for Central Asian republics.**

As the international community scales down in Afghanistan, some security and development assistance is likely to be diverted to Central Asian republics to the north. Money for the U.S.-backed New Silk Road initiative must be used carefully as Central Asian regimes see their proximity to Afghanistan as a windfall, an opportunity to reap further benefits and aid from international donors without meeting aid conditions. Instead, additional aid should be used strategically to cover budgetary shortfalls of viable, already existing initiatives. This money can help pay for the initial implementation of new border strategies in countries like Tajikistan. A strategic use of such funds may lessen the sting of seeing Taliban-appointed border guards eventually staffing multimillion dollar American and European-built barracks on the Afghan side of the border.

Introduction

Over the last decade, the Central Asian republics have hosted a number of international programs designed to overhaul, equip, and reform the region's border control practices. These types of programs are not unique to the Central Asian states but rather are part of a global willingness of donor states and international organizations to sponsor border management assistance.

In their sum total, the programs target the gamut of border functions in Central Asia. They include construction of border crossing points and guard barracks, assistance in revising border control strategy, provision of equipment (from night vision goggles to radiation detection machines), and training at all levels (from teaching border units how to detect forged passports to retraining customs officers in international trade regulations). The ultimate goal for many of these programs is to help the Central Asian republics achieve borders that are both more secure and more open.

Unlike many other development settings where multiple donors needlessly duplicate efforts and undermine one another in the process, the border management programs in the Central Asian region have become well-coordinated, rarely engaging in redundant efforts and operating with relatively modest budgets. Many are also highly mindful of the need to tailor programs to fit the peculiarities of each republic and adjust to the region's difficult operating environment.

Still, border control in Central Asia is not an easy sector to understand, let alone reform. In some republics, border services are well integrated into the repressive apparatus and resist efforts to make them more transparent. In other republics, border services are poorly equipped, minimally funded, and well beyond the control of their ministers in capital cities. In general, border police and customs services in the Central Asian republics are considered corrupt, unreformed, and ineffective.

This occasional paper takes on the issue of border management assistance to the Central Asian republics. It is based on the author's fieldwork and multiple trips to Cen-

tral Asia, including Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The analysis and arguments in these pages are based on interviews with international and Central Asian officials, subject experts, field visits to a number of border crossings and frontier regions, and internal documents and reports of international organizations.

These pages are organized into the following chapters. The next chapter presents a brief discussion of Central Asia’s border dilemmas. A subsequent chapter discusses programs funded by the United States, European Union, United Nations, and other sponsors; it traces their development and assesses their current initiatives. A chapter on case studies discusses the accomplishments and limits that these programs face on the ground. The case studies include episodes of customs reform in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, discussion of ports of entry (POEs) along Kyrgyzstan’s borders, and the mosaic of border projects in Tajikistan. The paper includes a chapter on the effect Afghanistan has on border assistance in Central Asia. A final chapter presents a series of recommendations for policymakers and the donor community.

Throughout its pages, this paper devotes attention to the political and economic dynamics that underlie border control practices in the region, dynamics that are a serious match for the most well-intentioned and well-thought out border assistance programs. The bottom line is that the border management programs have achieved a number of intermediate successes (such as building barracks, transferring technology, and creating a training architecture for the republics’ border officials); however, the broader goal of making Central Asia’s borders more secure and open remains elusive.

Map 1: The Central Asian Republics



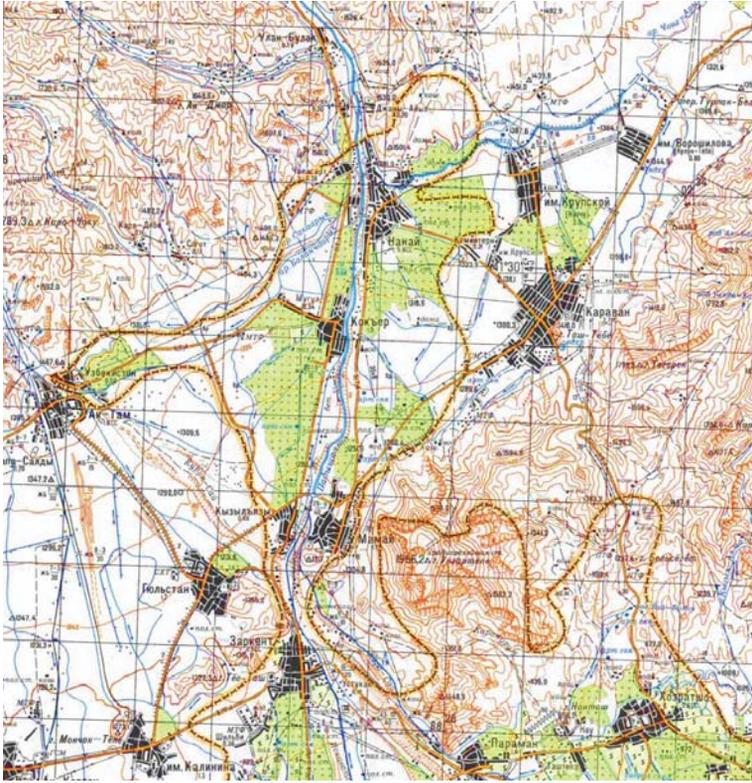
Source: Perry–Castañeda Map Library, University of Texas, Austin

Border Controls in Central Asia: Twenty Years and Onward

Upon their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asian states were guided by leaders who made bold declarations promising to cooperate on delimiting their newly inherited borders and promoting trade and regional prosperity. These promises were driven by acute concerns that their new and undelineated borders would be vulnerable to rising Islamist currents or cross-border ethnic conflict. At the same time, leaders were intent to hitch their republics to the profitable global economy. Kazakhstan promised to become a “bridge” between Europe and Asia, Kyrgyzstan declared itself the future Switzerland of the region, and Turkmenistan billed itself as an emerging Central-Asian Saudi Arabia.

Yet after independence, Soviet border institutions and organizations in Central Asia quickly collapsed. Each republic had to cobble together border and customs services from the bits and pieces of Soviet bureaucracy that remained. Before new border authorities could be reconstituted and deployed, there was the pressing issue of affixing territories, since it was uncertain where one republic began and another ended. Although the republics agreed to inherit the territory that they held as Soviet republics, delimitation and demarcation would prove no easy task. Late-Soviet maps indicate that many towns and industrial sites located near the border of one republic had expanded and spilled over into the other side. Moreover, the republics’ infrastructures were generally not self-contained. Infrastructure was built to channel production to the Soviet command economy rather than to give each republic exclusive roads, rail lines, and electric grids. Kyrgyz highways traversed sections of Uzbekistan, and Uzbek rail lines passed through long sections of Turkmenistan.¹

Map 2: Detail of Kyrgyz-Uzbek Border in North Fergana Valley



Source: Soviet Map (1986)

By the turn of the 21st century, the promises of cross-border cooperation remained unfulfilled. Delimitation proceedings proved fractious and untenable.² Some border areas (ports of entry and green borders alike)³ were becoming sites of escalation and mismanagement where border guards indiscriminately closed crossings, solicited bribes, and even fought their counterparts on the other side. Border policies themselves became the object of disputes, with Central Asian leaders accusing one another of deliberately mismanaging their borders.⁴

One explanation is that security issues trumped cooperation and openness. The republics were simply reacting to existing and potential security threats in their region and acting, as their capacities allowed, to regulate exit and entry from their territories. The security concerns were indeed there: Tajikistan had collapsed into a violent civil war in the 1990s, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan had orchestrated a series of violent cross-border attacks in the Fergana Valley in 1999, and the “Global War on Terror” would arrive

in the region with gusto in 2001. Moreover, a growing number of diplomatic disputes would compound these tensions and make cooperation difficult. This was particularly the case with Uzbekistan, which as the region's most populous and militarily powerful state, would periodically threaten neighboring states over their policies on migration, water use, and security.⁵

Central Asia's republics soon embarked on divergent and unilateral approaches to border control. These policies were driven partly by security issues as well as by each republic's unique economic statecraft. Uzbekistan, for instance, quickly emerged as the region's foremost protectionist and autarchic state. It maintained currency controls and a strict monopsony on cotton that it would buy cheaply from domestic producers and sell abroad at market rates. It also set rapacious tariffs on imports that ranged from 40 to 90 percent. In light of this, border controls became the most crucial defense in protecting the autarchic economy and the crucial revenues it delivered to the state.⁶

By contrast, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan hitched their economic horses to global market economies and initially pursued reforms that required trade-friendly, open border policies. Kyrgyz officials, intent on making Kyrgyzstan a trade corridor and foreign investment magnet, focused on enabling flows of goods along ports of entry and paid little attention to sensitive stretches of border, even at the height of the extremist incursions in the Fergana Valley. Tajikistan, having spent much of its first decade in civil war or recovering from it, had border services in name only, and the Russian 201st Division was tasked with guarding Tajikistan's side of the boundary with Afghanistan. Even as their capacity recovered, Tajik officials had little incentive to police their borders. The drug trade that traversed Tajikistan from Afghanistan monetized the impoverished economy and created a stream of revenue for officials and warlords. Little wonder that Tajik officials did not adopt proactive border controls.⁷

With its central regional location, Uzbekistan became the region's most aggressive border policeman. It strangled trade, restricted passage, and made the experience of crossing its borders exceedingly difficult and unpleasant for citizens of other Central Asian countries. A Kyrgyz Republic citizen from Batken recalls his experience transiting from south to north Kyrgyzstan across Uzbek territory in the 1990s:

Even when that transit route was open to us, it was never easy. Uzbek border guards harassed travelers—Tajiks a bit more than Kyrgyz—opening and x-raying everything, slashing the soles of shoes that people were wearing to look for drugs, and even breaking eggs that parents were carrying to their kids in the dorms in Bishkek.⁸

The situation among the customs services was no better. The customs services of the Central Asian republics adopted operating templates from the Soviet era that were not

conducive to cross-border movement and trade. They became the region's most corrupt services even in states that had made seemingly earnest privatization and liberalization reforms. Consider the protrade Kyrgyz Republic. In 2006 and again in 2008, Chinese and Kyrgyz authorities made starkly different customs revenue declarations for goods moving across the two ports of entry on the Kyrgyz-Chinese border.⁹ While the discrepancy is partly due to the fact that Kyrgyz customs officials continue to valueate by weight rather than by type of good, it also indicates that customs authorities in Kyrgyzstan are likely keeping most trade volume off the books in exchange for lucrative bribes.

While international organizations warned against the perils of unrestrained corruption and economically-damaging tariff barriers, it was Central Asian civil society that provided the earliest and most detailed warnings about the border control practices of Central Asian states. In Kyrgyzstan's side of the Fergana Valley, for instance, business representatives, frontier communities, and civil society organizations were routinely monitoring borders and providing real-time data of indiscriminate border closures, bribe rates, damage to trade, and warnings about escalation of border incidents.¹⁰

It was in this environment that external border management assistance came to Central Asia. The next chapter surveys the chief initiatives.

Photo 1: Sign on Kyrgyz highway that traverses a section of Kazakh territory



Source: Author. © George Gavrilis

Border Management Assistance Programs

Within the last 12 years, the Central Asian region has come to host a variety of border management assistance programs.¹¹ Some are well-funded and others operate on shoestring budgets. Taken together, the sponsors offer aid that covers practically all aspects of border management. The International Organization on Migration (IOM) focuses on improving border management information systems at ports of entry and was essential in introducing new passport systems in the region, and training Central Asian officials how to secure and check travel documents.¹² The OSCE is now actively involved in overhauling Central Asian states' border security strategies and training officials. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the EU jointly sponsor a multiyear program across all five republics that seeks to overhaul all Central Asian border services. Russia discretely advises Tajikistan and Kazakhstan on border control and provides training. China, under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, has donated equipment to Kyrgyz border guards on an ad hoc basis in service to good neighborly relations. The United States provides a range of equipment and training through a half-dozen government agencies.

These sponsors have different reasons for their involvement in Central Asia. Some see the region as part of their global portfolio. The IOM, for example, seeks to help all participating states improve the security of passports and professionalize the processing of people at border crossings.¹³

For the United States, the first border assistance programs in Central Asia were discrete and focused on high-order security issues—such as providing technology to detect nuclear contraband in the 1990s. After 9/11, the United States ramped up its security assistance to Central Asia given its proximity to Afghanistan and increased the budget of security-sector reform programs.¹⁴ In the process, this spurred a competitive dynamic with Russia and China who worried that U.S. involvement would create a permanent American

strategic foothold in the region that would come at their expense. Russia's interest in Central Asian border control dynamics became wrapped up in a number of issues: monitoring the transit of Afghan opiates, promoting Moscow's vision for a regional customs union, remaining strategically engaged with select Central Asian republics, and keeping a mindful watch on Western assistance.¹⁵

The U.S. role would soon expand to include helping Central Asian authorities respond to a broader range of cross-border threats—from extremists to Afghan opiates. For the European Union, border assistance became a centerpiece in its Central Asia strategy—a strategy that sought to deter trafficking of drugs and people across Eurasia to the borders of Schengen Europe while also seeking to make the region more democratic.¹⁶

The rest of this chapter examines three donors/programs in particular: (1) The region-wide Border Management Program for Central Asia which is run jointly by the EU and UNDP; (2) U.S. initiatives; and (3) the border security projects sponsored by the OSCE. These programs are the major border aid initiatives in the region and—given their large footprint and broad mission scope—are the focus of this chapter. Despite their different histories, funding sources, and operating structures, these initiatives have at least two features in common. One is a desire to promote borders that are both secure and open; indeed, the mantra of “secure and open” borders is often heard among officials on the ground who implement these initiatives.¹⁷ The second commonality is that the donors aim to transform border management and its officialdom—not only border officials at ports of entry (such as airports and land crossings) but also guards at remote border crossings, customs officials who are entrusted with collecting crucial revenue, and high state officials who make border control policy.

The Border Management Program for Central Asia

Since 2003, the EU has been exporting border management assistance to the Central Asian republics via the Border Management Program for Central Asia (BOMCA), which has sought to train border guards, provide technology and infrastructure at border crossings, and prod states to manage their borders in cooperation with their neighbors. BOMCA is funded by the EU and implemented by the UNDP through a network of five in-country teams.¹⁸

BOMCA's first operations began under the direction and sponsorship of the Austrian government and quickly faced hurdles. French and Austrian officials in the program were divided about how to best deploy the program's limited resources to address the region's vast border control needs. BOMCA was besieged with requests from participating countries for border control equipment and pledged equipment well beyond the program's

budget. This served as an early lesson about operating hazards in the region; BOMCA's officers became more adept at processing requests for technical assistance and deflecting egregious demands by host governments who thought of BOMCA as an equipment-bearing gift horse.

BOMCA's first major challenge came in 2004 when the government of Tajikistan replaced the Russian military units guarding its border with Afghanistan. As a ragtag force of Tajik guards took position,¹⁹ BOMCA scrambled to provide an assessment and create a plan of action. The assessment revealed a total lack of training, equipment, and infrastructure—deficiencies that donors believed had to be addressed if Tajik officials were to fight trafficking in opiates and precursor chemicals.²⁰ Moreover, Tajik border guards and officials were not accustomed to working together at border crossings and competed for scarce provisions and housing. The exit of the Russian units also had an unforeseen economic effect. The Russian soldiers had set up trading posts at their compounds and used their monthly wages to purchase goods from local traders. The sales monetized the impoverished economy in villages otherwise cut off from national markets. When the soldiers departed, communities along the frontier were plunged further into poverty.²¹

BOMCA concentrated its greatest initiative on the Tajik-Afghan border. While the American military focused primarily on the western sector, BOMCA invested its efforts on more remote stretches to the east in Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO).²² BOMCA trained border staff, provided operational handbooks, and equipped border crossings with vehicles, high frequency radios, night-vision equipment, generators, computers, drug-testing kits, and passport readers. The Tajik initiative would eventually expand to include higher-order training and the building of modernized border facilities and barracks for authorities.²³ It also generated lessons that BOMCA carried to future phases.

Among the lessons learned was the need for better coordination. BOMCA did not consult with the Russian government about its plans to revamp the Tajik border, an omission that greatly irked Moscow, which had no intention to stop provisioning and mentoring Tajik security forces even as it had removed its soldiers from the Tajik-Afghan border. In subsequent years, BOMCA's Dushanbe office held monthly coordination meetings and took great pains to keep the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) team in Dushanbe involved.

By 2006 BOMCA secured funding from more EU-member states. This diluted the Austrian imprint on the program but gave it a stronger pan-European identity and enabled it to take on more activities. Twelve projects comprised the new plan of action. These included legal reforms of border laws, the creation of trained canine units for interdiction, training of airport authorities, and organization of mobile border control units for remote frontier areas.²⁴

A core component of BOMCA's action plan in this period was the promotion of Integrated Border Management (IBM) in approximately 20 border crossings across the region—the majority of these in the densely populated Fergana Valley. At these pilot crossings, BOMCA encouraged the Central Asian states to adopt IBM methods as used by the EU. IBM consists of three pillars: (1) intra-agency cooperation; (2) inter-agency cooperation across a state's customs, border police, immigration, and military; and (3) international or cross-border cooperation with counterpart agencies. IBM systems can have a series of benefits for border management. They lower the cost of border control when contiguous states pool policing resources. They prevent unnecessary escalation by giving border authorities a point of contact with their counterparts so incidents can be resolved locally. They may also prevent corruption by enabling agencies working in shared quarters to monitor one another.²⁵

BOMCA expected IBM to gradually transform how Central Asian governments ran their borders. That is, IBM would get governments to shift away from Soviet principles of unilateral and aggressive control toward more cost-effective and efficient modes based on cooperation and risk management that would improve security and enhance licit movement of goods and people.²⁶ As one former BOMCA official explained to the author:

The point is that BOMCA is trying to get the five governments to see border management and border posts not as cost centers gobbling up scarce government budgets, but as revenue generators bringing in much needed customs revenue. Getting the various border agencies to work together can only strengthen this important difference in approach.²⁷

Central Asian officials resisted this idea, partly because of growing tensions in their diplomatic relations but also because their border authorities were drawn from the military and resisted cooperating with guards of neighboring states.

The BOMCA program is currently in its eighth phase and funded until June 2014. BOMCA 8 is largely a training-focused project that seeks to professionalize and build up the capacity of Central Asian border services. This represents a departure from the initial emphasis that BOMCA gave to infrastructure and equipment. As one BOMCA official put it, "Whereas in the past it was 80 percent equipment and 20 percent training, now it's the reverse."²⁸

BOMCA 8 is retooling its training approach to foster sustainable education for border guards. While BOMCA officials had previously sponsored training seminars for border police across the region, program officials worried that their training efforts would not prove sustainable especially as the Central Asian governments could not guarantee that trained officers would train others. BOMCA thus decided to adopt a "train the trainers" approach that will prepare officials who will serve in national training centers located in each of the five republics.²⁹

Through the “train the trainers” approach, BOMCA aims to create a consortium of trainers. The first consortium meeting took place in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in May 2011 with participants from four Central Asian republics. The meeting gave BOMCA the green light from regional governments to proceed with its new approach, and it created enthusiasm among border authorities who were eager to discuss training issues at the multilateral level. Border officials played a lead role in crafting recommendations including how to keep each other informed and how to structure working groups in future meetings.³⁰

At the same time, the May meeting highlighted the substantial challenges ahead. Invitees from Turkmenistan stayed away, Uzbek government representatives were silent during the proceedings, and the working groups shied away from sharing crucial information with their counterparts.³¹ Central Asian officials noted that training in IBM methods would be integrated into the curriculum only “when appropriate,” giving themselves latitude to continue unilateral border control tactics.³²

BOMCA faces a number of challenges in the years ahead. One of these challenges relates to the recent shift toward training initiatives. Central Asian governments respond more favorably to technical and infrastructure assistance. That is, they are much more likely to accept equipment, barracks, latrines, and buildings that serve border officials than they are to accept substantive training programs. While border officials and guards may benefit from the training modules, their governments prefer that programs like BOMCA fund buildings for training centers rather than the courses that will be taught there. BOMCA’s officials will have to invest substantial energies to keep the Central Asian governments involved in the training programs in the years ahead. This is a challenge that BOMCA shares with U.S. and OSCE initiatives.

A second challenge concerns the program’s growing interest in engaging local communities. In November 2011, BOMCA initiated a pilot program involving communities in Kyrgyzstan’s Batken oblast, an area bordered on three sides by Tajikistan. The frontier is an arena for periodic small-scale violence involving ethnic Kyrgyz and Tajiks over scarce resources such as pastures, water rights, property, and even jobs.³³ The idea behind BOMCA’s community meetings was to bring locals and border officials together to discuss how to resolve conflicts relating to the (mis)management of the border. Such community-based initiatives are a crucial part of resolving problems stemming from border control; however, they are unlikely to have the desired effect in light of BOMCA’s limited budget and small staff.

A third challenge stems from BOMCA’s operating structure and the EU–UNDP partnership on which the program is based. Part of the EU–UNDP tension is over branding. Officials in Brussels and European donors have often grumbled that the program is internationally more associated with the UNDP than it is with the EU, and thus there is a need to rebrand the program to emphasize that BOMCA is a gift to Central Asian states

from European taxpayers. Another source of discomfort concerns the UNDP's methods of implementing the program. The work of BOMCA's country teams have, at times, been frustrated by top-down delays in staffing, procurement, and contracting—delays that are notoriously associated with the UNDP's bureaucracy.³⁴ At the same time, UNDP officials note that they typically take a smaller cut than other potential implementing partners and that they are able to offer policy input and guidance to BOMCA by virtue of the large UN footprint in the region.³⁵ UN officials have privately been critical of the EU's approach in Central Asia as being overly securitized. As one official told the author, "It is important to integrate more UNDP methods into BOMCA so that it's not only EU practices that are being promoted."³⁶ These tensions are likely to persist, and one BOMCA official explained to the author that it is possible that the EU will ditch the partnership with UNDP in future BOMCA phases.

The United States

U.S. policy in Central Asia is largely associated with the Manas Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan, the Northern Distribution Network, and now the New Silk Road initiative.³⁷ But these relatively controversial associations overshadow an older and more complex engagement with security-sector reform in the region. Indeed, since the 1990s the United States has played a substantial, if less visible role in border management assistance to Central Asia.

U.S. assistance is segmented across a number of government agencies that run distinct border aid programs. The Department of State has been transferring equipment to a number of Central Asian republics through the EXBS program, the Department of Defense has trained the republics' special forces that may serve in sensitive frontier regions, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) sponsored a multi-year customs reform and training program in several republics, the Department of Justice has worked on drug enforcement capacity at ports of entry in the region, and the Department of Homeland Security and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement have footed the bill for a number of border security programs.³⁸

The United States also has an imprint on regional border security through indirect and discretionary means. The U.S. government funds community-based policing programs in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, a number of which are located in frontier districts and may contribute to security by backstopping border control organizations.³⁹ Indirect influence also comes via the substantial funds that Washington gives to international organizations. The United States is a major funder of IOM and the lead funder of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime—the principal organization in counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan and Central Asia. The United States also fills many high-level posts in key

organizations that work in the region. For instance, the BOMCA program previously was headed by an American military official,⁴⁰ and the head of the OSCE border unit in Vienna is an American with experience at the Department of Homeland Security. This influence creates unease, with one OSCE official in Tajikistan complaining, “The Americans keep forgetting that the OSCE is a multilateral organization.”⁴¹

The United States also funds the region’s border needs in discretionary ways. The Northern Distribution Network has allowed the United States to transfer to states like Uzbekistan equipment and monetary assistance that will be used for security in border regions and to upgrade ports of entry.⁴² U.S. embassies in the region have substantial discretionary funds that they have used to upgrade border crossings; the multimillion dollar Ak-Tillek freight crossing on the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border was bankrolled and donated by U.S. embassy funds.

A number of observations can be made about the role of the United States in border assistance in Central Asia. First, although the United States is less visible than other border reform sponsors in Central Asia, it outspends them. Second, U.S. spending is increasingly concentrated on projects along Central Asia’s borders with Afghanistan. Third, while the United States is also involved in training initiatives in coordination with BOMCA, the OSCE, and IOM, it continues to expend much of its effort on infrastructure and the equipment needs of border authorities.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

In recent years, the OSCE has emerged as a key player in security sector reform across Central Asia, including border management assistance.⁴³ This role includes a number of objectives—helping states draft new border laws, training members of border services, and providing support for IBM initiatives in the region. These objectives are in step with other players in the region who are keen on fostering borders that are both secure and open.

But they are not without controversy and represent a gradual shift of OSCE activities from initiatives in human rights and democracy toward security sector reform. An internal UN report written after a meeting between UN and OSCE officials in 2006 gives one possible explanation for the shift:

The OSCE has to pursue a vast range of activities in Central Asia—from environmental protection to promotion of human rights and democracy. After being criticized by the Central Asian Presidents as pursuing unbalanced activities between the three baskets, the Central Asia OSCE Centers, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, seem to be cautious in promoting projects in the fields of democracy

and human rights, which are of utmost importance for conflict prevention. One could judge this approach from the reports made by different OSCE representatives at the meeting. In order not to be perceived as significantly engaged in politically sensitive internal affairs, OSCE representatives seem not to maintain permanent contacts with the officials who influence the process of political decision making. The overall OSCE performance in the Central Asian region has been seriously limited by the ruling authoritarian regimes for some time now. The OSCE has been perceived by the ruling elites as a Western vehicle endangering their authority in societies. Therefore, and with an obvious involvement of other powerful stakeholders in the region (including China), every effort was made to redirect the said activities of the OSCE towards economic assistance, development, and ecology rather than democracy, building civil society, media freedom, etc.⁴⁴

While the UN document may be overstating the shift of OSCE activities toward security-sector reform, border management assistance has unquestionably become a substantial part of OSCE missions in Central Asia, especially in Tajikistan. There, the mission is structured into three distinct sections: Human (in charge of elections, rule of law, antitrafficking initiatives, and human rights); Police-Military (border services and police reform); and Economy and Environment. While the three sections have roughly equal staff and work from a unified budget of \$6-7 million, in reality OSCE's border-related activities outweigh the others.⁴⁵ Partly, this is because border initiatives benefit from additional funding. The organization's Border Management Staff College and technology training initiative in Tajikistan draw on an extraordinary budget that is equivalent to OSCE-Tajikistan's entire annual ordinary budget. What is a windfall for border management initiatives is ultimately a strain on the regular staff of the OSCE mission who have to manage the administrative spillover.⁴⁶

Although the OSCE is a late entrant into the border management field in Central Asia, it has already made its mark in two respects. First, the OSCE played a lead role in assisting the Tajik and Kyrgyz governments to develop National Border Strategies (NBS). This is an essential task as regional governments continue to use border laws and strategies that are thinly-revised bundles of Soviet military regulations and directives.⁴⁷ The Tajik NBS, for example, envisions a radical revision of existing border laws and seeks to change the profile of border guards from army recruits to paid, professional soldiers.⁴⁸ The Kyrgyz Republic's NBS will supersede laws on the books that currently prevent border authorities from coordinating policing and sharing crucial intelligence with their counterparts. Unfortunately, neither the Kyrgyz nor the Tajik governments have implemented these border strategies and the lack of progress is creating growing anxiety inside the OSCE.⁴⁹ In February 2012, the head of the OSCE conflict prevention center visited Dushanbe and attended a meeting on border issues that included representatives from the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Union ambassadors, a meeting that ended without indication that the NBS would be implemented.⁵⁰

The OSCE has made its second mark with the Border Management Staff College (BMSC). Although located in Dushanbe, the BMSC is part of a regional border reform strategy. Informally known as the OSCE “border college,” the BMSC provides six-month training programs for mid- and high-level officers and has trained officers mostly in the Afghan, Kyrgyz, and Tajik border services. Although the border college was intended to showcase the OSCE’s capacity for border sector reform, it has gotten off to a rough start. As one international official working in Dushanbe explained to the author in November 2011, “The initial year of the BMSC was a disaster. No one could put together a curriculum and there was no idea of the target audience. Everybody was let go.” A troubleshooter was brought in to reorganize the curriculum and attract enrollment from other republics, but his tenure appears to have been short-lived. At the time that this publication was drafted, a new head and deputy head have been appointed to the border college in an attempt to resuscitate it, but questions remain about the status, purpose, and future of the college.³¹

Emerging Training Structure

The international community has established a relatively comprehensive training structure for Central Asian border authorities. Three institutions in Tajikistan now provide various levels of training to border authorities: (1) The Higher Border College; (2) The Border Guard Training Center; and (3) the OSCE border academy:

- The Higher Border College was set up by BOMCA with support from the U.S. embassy in Dushanbe and handed over to the Tajik government in 2007. The college offers cadets a four-year course of study based on a curriculum set by the Tajik government.
- The Border Guard Training Center is located in the Leninskii area on the outskirts of Dushanbe and is also supported by international actors, in particular the IOM and Russia. The center provides junior officers with three to four months of advanced specialized training. Junior officers who distinguish themselves in the program are eligible to be appointed as deputy chiefs in the border services. The capacity of the center has increased from 300 to 500 cadets and graduates approximately 100 officers per year.
- The OSCE border college (BMSC) in Dushanbe provides mid- and high-level officers with six-month training modules. The BMSC was established in 2009.

A host of other training programs have been set up in the region. The UN and IOM run training facilities in provincial cities in Tajikistan, the U.S. sponsored a multi-year customs reform and training program (see Case Study: Taking on Customs Reform), and BOMCA is ratcheting up its “train the trainers” program to populate national training centers in the Central Asian republics. Central Asian border officers also have the opportunity to engage in intensive training in C.I.S. states, and Central Asian cadets study in border colleges in Moscow and Almaty. In neighboring Afghanistan, there are over 30 training facilities for border police and customs authorities.

This chapter took stock of EU–UN, U.S., and OSCE border aid programs in Central Asia, outlining their history, evolving aims, and various initiatives. The commonalities across the programs outweigh their differences. All share an interest in helping Central Asia’s states better balance security with openness at their borders. Additionally, the programs have recently shifted toward training and away from the usual haunts of security sector reform such as infrastructure and technology transfers. The shift toward training will not be without difficulties. Central Asia’s officials are eager to receive free high-tech equipment and aid to build facilities and border infrastructure but they remain lukewarm when it comes to less lucrative training initiatives. Central Asian officials are uncomfortable with this shift which douses their expectations of patronage and lessens their enthusiasm for border aid programs.⁵²

The next chapter presents a series of case studies about implementation. The case studies discuss the challenges that these programs face in the offices of regional capitals as well as on the ground at Central Asian border crossings.

Case Studies

This chapter presents a series of case studies that discuss the effect border management assistance has on the ground in the region. The first case study discusses U.S.-sponsored customs reforms in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan—reforms that aimed to train customs officials and brokers to more efficiently move trade across regional borders. The second case study compares three Kyrgyz Republic ports of entry that received variable aid from international donors. The final case study discusses the mosaic of programs being implemented in Tajikistan, the Central Asian republic with the highest concentration of border assistance. These case studies demonstrate the breadth of assistance that Central Asian states have received. They also demonstrate the major political obstacles and resistance that these programs face on the ground from the very governments and officials they seek to assist. In some cases, these obstacles derail programs entirely. In other cases, the programs manage to implement their initiatives but without clear improvement in the quality of border management.

Taking on Customs Reform

Customs agencies in Central Asia are at once corrupt, politicized, and resistant to reform. Positions in the customs services are routinely bought and sold, and customs officials have used their positions to amass personal fortunes in ways that are detrimental to international trade as well as the government's ability to raise revenue. Consider the Kyrgyz Republic. Despite joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the late 1990s, the Kyrgyz Republic had continued to use a simplified import tax that was against WTO rules. The tax assessed goods at about 25 cents per kilo irrespective of the item in question.³³ The list of goods that qualified for the simplified tax grew substantially as the former Bakiyev government listed goods that were beneficial to its fortunes and those of its clients. After

the fall of the Bakiyev government in April 2010, agencies in the south of the country simply stopped reporting customs data and refused to hand revenue over to the central government in Bishkek.⁵⁴

Customs services are used to serve strategic ends in state building and geopolitics. In Uzbekistan, the government imposes egregiously high customs rates on imports and restricts exports to maintain an autarchic, protectionist economy. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, customs policy is inherently caught between the push and pull of WTO-encouraged reforms and the draw of Russia's economic sphere.⁵⁵ It's no surprise that few donors wanted to sponsor and undertake customs reform in the region.

Despite these difficulties, USAID embarked on a \$16 million, four-year customs reform project in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The recently-completed project sought to coax customs officials away from outdated, inefficient, and insular Soviet-era procedures that were promoting corruption and preventing trade liberalization. The project trained officials in new information systems and technologies and the adoption of global trade and customs standards.⁵⁶ The idea motivating the program was that such reforms might reduce corruption and push the republics along a free-trade path that would promote development and economic growth.

In Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the USAID program provided technical assistance that was intended to overhaul legal policy and customs management. The program functioned in conjunction with international financial institutions—such as the Asian Development Bank—which had also funded aspects of customs reform. In Tajikistan, USAID worked with contractors with expertise in trade facilitation who managed to institute a system that simplified the customs evaluation process. Customs evaluation is reliant on customs brokers who must assess the value of goods crossing borders. The evaluation process, if not automated and simplified, can be extremely laborious as customs brokers must assess the shipment, look up information on tax rates and fee schedules, manually input the data, calculate the tax, determine fees, and relay it to government customs officials. The new system allowed customs brokers to calculate customs fees and tariff rates in a greatly expedited manner.⁵⁷ The brokers used a software that automatically calculated tariff rates and fees when provided with basic information about a shipment or goods. A valuation that previously took brokers three hours could now be completed in minutes. Despite this initial success, there were two problems. First, there was a missing technical link; there was no digital hookup between the customs brokers and the customs officials, requiring brokers to print out copies of the valuations and hand-deliver them to customs authorities. Second, Tajik customs officials had little capacity to simultaneously implement the multiple reforms, and training of officials moved at a slow pace. As one circumspect project official stated, “We had more money than the states had the capacity to absorb. We needed more time, not more money.”⁵⁸

In Kyrgyzstan, the country's turbulent transition after the ouster of President Bakiyev compounded the difficulties of customs reform. In the summer of 2011, the customs chairman in President Otunbayeva's interim government suddenly attempted to nationalize the private customs brokerage market. Under the envisioned nationalized system, taxable goods would be kept at warehouses controlled by the customs chairman. The chairman also threatened to take over the Customs Consultative Committee, which included representatives from local NGOs and business organizations, and served as a nascent if ineffective public oversight body.⁵⁹ Although the government ultimately did not nationalize the brokerage market or take over the consultative committee, Kyrgyz officials may have simply been feigning intervention in order to send those implementing customs reform on "deliberate goose chases to waste time and prevent the program from making major changes."⁶⁰

In Kazakhstan, the customs reform projects faced different but equally frustrating hurdles. After the 2010 revolution in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakh authorities abandoned the idea of risk management and began checking all goods inbound from Kyrgyzstan. Kazakh customs and border officials started going through shipments "with toothpicks," opening crates and TIR carnets on shipments transiting across their territory. This created huge backlogs at the border and major problems for the shipments when they arrived at onwards destinations with broken seals. Customs reformers retooled and found a niche providing grant assistance to Kazakhstan, helping the Kazakh government apply for the \$50 million World Bank grant for customs infrastructure. The grant was ready for the taking so long as the Kazakh applicants filled out proper forms, completed checklists, and fulfilled basic requirements. Despite the assistance, the Kazakh government botched the application and ended up receiving only a partial grant.

The fate of customs reform in Kazakhstan underscores yet another impediment to trade facilitation programs—one that is geopolitical in nature. The customs union agreement between Kazakhstan and Russia that went into force in 2010 was designed both to protect Russian trade and industry from a massive influx of Chinese goods and to reassert a measure of political statecraft in the former Soviet sphere. The customs union has in many ways become an alternative to the WTO and international initiatives to facilitate and liberalize trade, which are likely to get little traction in the region. Indeed, President Atambayev sees Kyrgyzstan on the wrong side of the customs union border and is lobbying Moscow for membership to the union.⁶¹ Consequently, the prospects are grim for customs reform, WTO compliance, and trade liberalization in the region.⁶²

Kyrgyzstan—A Tale of Three Border Crossings

Ports of entry and formal border crossings are centrally important for the Kyrgyz Republic's position as an entrepôt, regional transit route, and re-export hub. This section discusses how three such crossings have fared from 2006 to 2012.⁶³ The three border crossings differ in a number of ways. They are located in different places on Kyrgyzstan's borders, they handle different volumes of traffic and trade, and they have received varied levels of attention from donors who sponsor border aid. Yet, all three tell similar cautionary tales: Corruption dynamics and diplomatic tensions affect how these crossings function and the extent to which they are open to licit movement of goods and people. External assistance, such as training and technology transfers, cannot necessarily overwrite corruption or the snap political decisions that Central Asian officials make about their borders. Ultimately, it is difficult to distinguish the quality of functions at ports of entry that have received aid from those that have not.

AK-JOL (KYRGYZ-KAZAKH BORDER)

A short ride from Bishkek, Ak-Jol is the border crossing on the main highway between the Kyrgyz capital and Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest city. Between 2006 and 2009 there was a huge growth in the triangle and shuttle trade in the region. Traders based in Kyrgyzstan imported Chinese goods and repackaged them as Kyrgyz goods for shipment to Kazakhstan. This allowed them to sidestep Kazakh-Chinese customs duties which were higher than the simplified customs rates effective along the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border.

In 2009, by virtue of an IBM initiative sponsored by BOMCA, Kazakh and Kyrgyz authorities began to perform passport and vehicle checks jointly. This single, unified check greatly expedited traffic and was considered a major advance in cross-border cooperation between the two countries' customs agencies. The IBM experiment was short-lived as Kazakh authorities fell back on their side in anticipation of joining the customs union with Russia.

Before Kazakh and Kyrgyz authorities had the chance to reinstitute joint checks, President Bakiyev was overthrown, and a violent episode of ethnic conflict took place in Osh in the south of Kyrgyzstan. Kazakh authorities responded immediately to the April 2010 revolution by closing all 10 border crossings.⁶⁴ Ak-Jol was gradually reopened but the simplified customs rates that had enabled the Kyrgyz-Kazakh trade were scrapped. The heavy trade previously brought in on trucks descended into a chaotic "shuttle trade" with porters hand-carrying 50-kilos of goods across the border.⁶⁵ This snarled traffic and created chaos at what was the region's premier border crossing and an important milestone for BOMCA.⁶⁶

As of April 2012, the situation at Ak-Jol appears unimproved. Analysts have reported that in early 2012, groups of youth on the Kyrgyz side were taking 20 *som* from shuttle traders to help them climb a barbed-wire fence adjacent to the border crossing. Reportedly, the Kazakh side is currently constructing higher containment walls to prevent shuttle traders from scaling the fences. As of late March 2012, long lines of trucks remained stopped at the border crossing.⁶⁷

KARA-SUU (KYRGYZ-UZBEK BORDER)

The Kara-Suu crossing is in the vicinity of Osh, a town and region that have for years hosted a substantial presence of NGOs and international organizations, including OSCE security sector reform and mediation programs and UNDP and USAID development initiatives. While border management programs, such as BOMCA, have outfitted crossings in the Osh oblast, sponsored mobile border outposts, and have even trained guards who serve in the area, the Kara-Suu crossing itself has operated with relatively little international assistance.

In Soviet times, Kara-Suu (Qorasuv) was an unremarkable and small Fergana Valley farming town bisected by an irrigation canal that served as the line between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republics. After the Soviet collapse, Kara-Suu would come to host the largest market in the Fergana Valley, stocked mostly with goods from China.⁶⁸ The original border crossing at Kara-Suu consisted of a makeshift bridge built by Uzbek civilians who wanted access to the Kyrgyz market. The town became a quasi-legal crossing when Uzbek and Kyrgyz posts were constructed to monitor foot traffic that could average as much as 40,000 persons a day. In 2006, a bribe of 10 to 20 cents was reportedly required for a single crossing while porters who took part in the shuttle trade are said to have paid flat fees for all-day access.

After the ouster of Bakiyev and ethnic conflict in Osh in 2010, Uzbekistan further tightened border control measures. As a consequence, traffic and trade along the Kara-Suu crossing were disrupted. NGOs monitoring the crossing reported that bribes for access to the other side increased threefold and that a payoff equivalent to five dollars was required to move 100 kilos of goods across the crossing. Trade volumes at Kara-Suu declined by 60-70 percent in the wake of the revolution and appear unlikely to recover soon.

Photo 2: Kara-Suu in better days.
Consumers and shuttle traders queuing to enter Uzbekistan in 2006



Source: Author. © George Gavrilis

BURGONDU (KYRGYZ-UZBEK BORDER)

The Burgondu crossing on the north side of the Fergana Valley has largely been overlooked by border management sponsors, partly because it is away from the high-density, high-risk Osh area. For a number of years, the hamlet of Burgondu (adjacent to the crossing) had been an appealing destination for Uzbek migrant laborers and smugglers. Uzbek laborers would sneak over the border away from the sight of officials at the formal crossing. Kyrgyz villages would hire Uzbek laborers to build houses during the town's earlier construction boom or to pick cotton in the fields. The town was also a destination for smugglers who illegally exported cotton and gas from Uzbekistan. Due to subsidies and price controls in Uzbekistan, these goods could be smuggled out and sold at more lucrative market rates in Kyrgyzstan. In 2006, smugglers reportedly paid Uzbek guards the equivalent of 20 to 50 cents to look the other way.

The border at Burgondu today is more expensive and dangerous to cross than it was several years ago. The Uzbek border services have fortified ditches and barbed wire in the

green crossings to make passage difficult, and locals believe that border guards are more willing to shoot. As a result, fewer Uzbek laborers and smugglers make the crossing into Kyrgyzstan, and bribe rates have increased substantially.⁶⁹

These three vignettes about Kyrgyzstan's border crossings indicate that corruption is alive and well at all border crossings in the region and that governments can make unanticipated, snap decisions that create major disruptions at borders. Moreover, the vignettes indicate that improvements in border management can be tenuous and undone quickly by political and economic developments. Because of these dynamics, border crossings that received a healthy infusion of infrastructure, training, and equipment can still deteriorate and come to resemble crossings that have received little assistance. The quality and substance of border management at the Ak-Jol crossing, in many respects, is not much different from Kara-Suu and Burgondu. It is difficult to imagine that more aid will be able to change this dynamic in the short term.

Tajikistan's Border Aid Bounty

Presently, Tajikistan is awash with impressive assistance projects that are meant to make the country's borders more secure and open. These projects include legal reform, training, and procurement of equipment and infrastructure related to border management. Assistance programs in Tajikistan have to contend with extremely remote and mountainous frontier geographies, major political impediments that include corruption and drug smuggling, and the country's location next to Afghanistan, a global hotspot, and Uzbekistan, an authoritarian regime with the region's most powerful army.

Taking stock of these projects in Tajikistan's tough setting requires counting both outputs and outcomes; that is, noting the many projects that are complete or underway and assessing what impact these have had on border management. While the number of projects implemented across Tajikistan has been remarkable, their impact has been limited.

Training programs have been available for Tajik border officials for nearly a decade. However, many of these programs were small, underfunded, experimental, or highly discrete. It is only recently that stakeholders have shifted emphasis toward training (or capacity-building as it is often called among practitioners). The BOMCA program, where now 80 percent of the program is focusing on training, is an example of this trend. According to one estimate, approximately 1500 Tajik border and customs officials have received training in one capacity or another since 2006.

Officials who work on border control initiatives in Tajikistan are circumspect on the impact of this training. One noted that this number represents only a small portion of officials in the border services. There are currently an estimated 8000 border guards,

1000 customs officers, and 400 drug control agents in service. Another official believes that as a consequence of the training, border authorities are more systematic and professional at checking documents; however, he admits that this has had no effect on deterring drug smuggling or corruption.⁷⁰ Other officials interviewed expressed displeasure with the content of the training itself. One American political officer noted that despite providing funds for an academy, the U.S. embassy “hasn’t had enough influence at the academy over the curriculum and the Tajik director there is not helpful.”⁷¹

The issue of training may seem mundane, but its importance cannot be overestimated given the incredibly harsh conditions that border guards face at many of their frontier posts. Richard Lewington, formerly a BOMCA official in Tajikistan, paints a stark picture:

On one of our visits in the autumn of 2008 to monitor the progress of our projects along the Tajik-Afghan border, we were stopped by a patrol of Tajik border guards—who patrol the “green” border on foot. They stopped us and said that there should have been a third soldier, but he had thrown away his rifle and disappeared. Had we seen him? We had not, but afterwards I asked the border guards’ officer travelling with us what would happen when the soldier was caught. The officer said that if he gave himself up, the soldier would get three weeks in a Tajik military prison. But if he were caught he would get three years. This incident helps to understand the tough conditions in which a conscript border guard lives and works, if he is prepared to run the risk of three years in a military prison.⁷²

More recently, an official working at a multilateral organization revealed an alarming and unpublicized increase of border guard suicides and guard-on-guard homicides that have taken place. The official cited gaps in training as part of the problem noting “we teach border guards how to drive patrol cars and crawl along ditches on the border but not how to cope and avoid going bonkers in some of these isolated outposts where they spend a year or more.”⁷³

Training deficiencies could ultimately be addressed by the National Border Strategy (NBS), yet it remains in implementation purgatory. In addition to overhauling antiquated border control laws, the strategy anticipates that the current system, which uses military recruits, will shift to paid, professional border guards. The idea is that this professional force will function more efficiently while deterring the flow of contraband across the border.

The Tajik government is unwilling to implement the NBS and President Rahmon seems intent on ignoring it into oblivion. The Russian foreign ministry has also expressed objections to the strategy fearing that the NBS will close existing legal ambiguities in Tajik law and prevent Russia from reinserting itself into Tajik border security.⁷⁴ Perhaps the

greatest impediment to the NBS is that it is unclear who will pay for it. The creation of a paid professional force will not only require a huge training effort but will also require stable revenue to pay for salaries, benefits, and overhead. As one BOMCA official said, “It’s not in our budget. In fact, it’s not going to be in the OSCE or even the U.S. and Russian budget.”⁷⁵

The international community has made two discernible strides in Tajikistan on the issue of border management. The first is the coordination of international efforts. Despite the various challenges posed by the operating environment, border management programs have developed good coordinating mechanisms. The chief coordination mechanism in Tajikistan is the Border International Group, which allows border management stakeholders to meet on a monthly basis to present projects, monitor progress, and troubleshoot.⁷⁶ Before each meeting, an updated matrix is sent to all group members that notes the stage of ongoing border projects in the country, including training initiatives. One official notes that before the introduction of the coordinating mechanism, donors had to guess who was doing what; in one case, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and BOMCA were training the same drug profiling units at the same crossing point just two weeks apart.⁷⁷ Such duplication rarely occurs now.

The second stride is on border management infrastructure. Indeed, the roster of completed and nearly completed projects is impressive. It includes border crossing facilities (ports of entry), remote patrol outposts and barracks, and cross-border bridges whose budgets range from half a million dollars to tens of millions. Many of these facilities are built in extremely remote and mountainous areas which pose particular challenges in construction and upkeep.⁷⁸ For example, the Darvaz-Kalaikumb border crossing point that was built by BOMCA in 2007 in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast is two to three days travel time by car from Dushanbe.⁷⁹ The long awaited renovation of the Kyzyl Art crossing was 70 percent completed by 2012—a delay that is attributable to the fact that construction at such high elevations can only take place about four months of the year; in the meantime, Tajik border facilities at the oblast consisted of two converted 40,000-liter water tanks that have windows and doors cut into them.⁸⁰ Additionally, the United States and BOMCA program funded the construction and overhaul of 15 outposts on Tajikistan’s border with Afghanistan, and it is estimated that another 15 to 20 need to be constructed to adequately house guards and cover the border.⁸¹

Donors were eager to renovate official ports of entry into the country, but the BOMCA program and U.S. embassy considered it essential to also upgrade the decrepit outposts—in remote stretches of green border and away from official crossings. At these border outposts, border guards confront long months of subsistence living. In outposts that lack access to market towns and cold storage facilities, border guards grow crops, make bread, and even hunt and poach wildlife to add meat to their diet.⁸² The idea behind

creating modern outpost facilities with cold storage, electricity, clean water, and sufficient barracks is that it will give border guards a modicum of comfort and allow them to focus their energies on policing the border instead of scrapping together their next meal.

While the construction of these facilities qualifies as an implementation accomplishment, there remain a set of unresolved problems. One problem is the Tajik government's posture as a recipient, a source of increasing discomfort among the donor community. Many international officials worry that available levels of aid are allowing the Tajik government to abdicate fiscal responsibility. Ahead of the 20 year celebration of independence, Tajik officials sponsored a host of lavish building projects that included the world's largest flagpole, a grotesque and overpriced presidential palace, a massive nine-story library that will hold nonexistent books, and a well-appointed border outpost baptized *Istiklol* (independence) where Tajik border guards reportedly patrolled on horseback. Meanwhile, remote outposts are chronically short of supplies and electricity and many donor-funded outposts have not been well-maintained by the Tajik government. One American official reports that U.S.-funded programs for the Tajik border have had to expand funding to include maintenance plans "because the Tajik government did not hold up its end of the bargain to take care of facilities that were handed over."⁸³

Another unresolved complication is the role of neighboring countries. Tajikistan is dependent to a great extent on the border policies of neighboring Uzbekistan. Consider the story of the Patar-Andarkhan crossing on the Tajik-Uzbek border. In 2009, the Uzbek government unilaterally closed down the border crossing alleging that Tajik border guards did not have the proper training or facilities necessary to process people and goods moving through the crossing. The closure created economic hardship for frontier residents, especially for Tajik towns that hosted border markets frequented by Uzbek shoppers. BOMCA scrambled to build a modern crossing facility on the Tajik side with the understanding that Tashkent would open the border as soon as the new facility came online. Once the facility was open, the Uzbeks refused to open the border.⁸⁴ The crossing remains closed today. Uzbekistan's posture does not bode well for trade or diplomatic relations. Of the 14 official border crossings on the Tajik-Uzbek border, the Uzbek foreign ministry has submitted to the Tajik government a list of 6 crossings that it intends to close permanently.⁸⁵ This is consistent with the closed-borders policies that Tashkent has increasingly pursued since independence.⁸⁶

The case studies in this chapter have demonstrated a series of implementation failures and successes in border management assistance. But it is important to note that even the successes of implementation—border crossings refurbished, remote outposts outfitted with generators, training academies built, and numbers of officials trained—are a limited success story. These accomplishments are ultimately a means toward a longer-term goal of professionalizing border control in the region and attaining borders that better balance

security with openness. Such longer-term outcomes remain elusive but increasingly pressing as attention and money will shift to Central Asia with the drawdown in Afghanistan in 2014. As one border aid official warned, “We are not at all prepared for 2014.”⁸⁷

The next chapter discusses the effect of Afghanistan on Central Asia’s borders and explains how the years immediately ahead will alter the calculus of Central Asian governments toward security assistance, particularly border aid.

Photo 3: High-voltage lines crossing over Pyanj River from Tajikistan to Afghanistan



Source: Author. © George Gavrilis

The Afghan Effect

At a closed-door, high-level gathering in Paris in 2008, the United Nations' special representative to Afghanistan urged ministers from Eurasia, the Middle East, and South Asia to jointly tackle common security challenges and identify achievable projects to assist Afghanistan and improve the security of the broader region. Officials from Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan enthusiastically proposed a series of win-win projects and resolved to work together to fight the drug trade, share intelligence to combat terrorism, and build roads, rails, pipelines, and bridges to Afghanistan.⁸⁸

After the conference, Central Asian officials did a unilateral about-face. The Uzbek ambassador publicly complained about Afghanistan's "narcoaggression," and Tajik officials expressed willingness to help Afghanistan so long as that meant that the international community would fund more projects in Tajikistan.⁸⁹ Since the Paris gathering, Afghanistan has further deteriorated, and the Central Asian states are arguably no more cooperative when it comes to so-called "win-win" regional projects.

Afghanistan is a false common issue, unlikely to jump-start regional cooperation. Indeed, Central Asian states have fundamentally different ways of coping with their proximity to Afghanistan. Tajikistan maintains a largely porous border and exports some electricity to Afghanistan.⁹⁰ Uzbekistan, by contrast, has sealed off its border with Afghanistan and—with the exception of granting passage to the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) and providing electricity to Kabul and northern Afghanistan—allows little cross-border movement of people and trade. Central Asian regimes do not treat their proximity to Afghanistan as a threat worthy of banding together; instead, they see it as an opportunity to justify unilateral policies and to reap further benefits from international donors who have money to spend on security and development initiatives.

Proximity to Afghanistan for the Central Asian republics is more windfall than threat. Uzbekistan has reaped hundreds of millions of dollars in transit fees from the NDN,⁹¹ Tajikistan has benefited from the construction of cross-border bridges and high-

ways in frontier areas, and the Kyrgyz Republic has gained lucrative rents and contracts from the United States in exchange for allowing the Manas Transit Center to operate.⁹²

This windfall currently far outstrips threats from spillover. It is hard to see how this will change even if Afghanistan further deteriorates. While the rhetoric of Taliban-driven extremism infecting Central Asia has been plentiful, the threat of spillover remains remote. Afghan-based extremists are a threat to Afghanistan's political incumbents, not to Central Asian regimes. A more realistic and less pressing concern is that Uzbek or Tajik militants will seek refuge in Afghanistan as they did in the 1990s during Afghanistan's last bout of civil war.

The issue of drug trafficking in many ways resembles that of extremism. Tajik officials talk big when it comes to the threat posed by Afghan opiates and the need for drug interdiction (Tajikistan is the main conduit for Afghan opiates via the so-called Northern Route). In reality, Tajik officials have little incentive to curtail trade. The transit of Afghan opiates across Tajikistan is a lucrative business valued at \$2 billion per year. It monetizes the Tajik economy and rivals the economic impact of other sectors and industries.⁹³ In a perverse way, it contributes to Tajikistan's stability by giving both central and provincial officials access to revenue that they can use for their personal fortunes, to maintain political clients, and to cover public sector shortfalls. The Tajik border services are a crucial part of the equation and are, as a number of international and Tajik officials and experts maintain, part of the conduit that allows drugs access and protected passage into Tajik territory.⁹⁴ As a recent U.S. government report states, "While the overall increase in drug seizures this year is a sign of wanting to show progress, the drop in heroin and opium seizures suggests that state security agencies and departments are still reluctant or unable to arrest and prosecute high-level drug smugglers."⁹⁵ In this respect, Tajik officials have great incentive to portray drugs as part of the need for better border aid but little incentive to pursue interdiction intensively due to the windfall provided by Afghan opiates.⁹⁶

While Tajikistan has managed to attract substantial aid and donor attention given its location next to Afghanistan by advertising the threats posed by extremist and narcotics spillover, the aid and attention have resulted in at least two problems. First, the growing investment in bridge and road infrastructure along Tajikistan's frontiers now means that Tajik border regions are better connected to Afghanistan than they are to Dushanbe;⁹⁷ indeed, bridges connecting remote areas of Afghanistan and Tajikistan are in better shape than bridges connecting Dushanbe to Gorno Badakhshan.⁹⁸ One international official who manages projects in remote parts of Tajikistan reports that the bridge connecting a principal route between Dushanbe and Khorog in Gorno Badakhshan collapses routinely once a year. Tajik authorities only make partial repairs to the bridge with the expectation that international donors should be responsible for financing a replacement.

Second, donor investment on security-related infrastructure along Central Asian border regions with Afghanistan is overshadowing community-development projects. The U.S.-financed bridge and customs facility at Nizhniy Pyanj on the Tajik side of the border are estimated to have cost in the tens of millions of dollars, more than the entire annual USAID budget for Tajikistan. The Japanese-funded highway (estimated to have cost well over \$100 million) in the south of Tajikistan, connects Kolkhozabad to Nizhniy Pyanj—an area that is sparsely populated. The town of Nizhniy Pyanj, which was envisioned to become a thriving market town, remains a tiny backwater with muddy streets and ramshackle houses. As one official said, “Very little of the regional development has trickled down to the local level. Frontier villages don’t even have electricity.”⁹⁹

The windfall is relative. According to one border management program official in Dushanbe, in 2012 the U.S. government is spending approximately \$800 million on the Afghan side of the border whereas the Tajik side of the border is slated to receive approximately \$10 million in projects.¹⁰⁰ The border management infrastructure has been much better on the Tajik side traditionally but this is about to be reversed. The Tajik government is reportedly incredulous that Afghan facilities may outshine its own.

Looking Ahead and Recommendations

Over the better part of a decade, border management programs in Central Asia have registered a number of accomplishments. The programs have built a substantial training architecture for the region's border services and made major infrastructure improvements at numerous ports of entry and remote border outposts, especially in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It is also worthy to note that border and customs authorities at international airports across Central Asia have markedly improved their capacity to process arrivals and departures and examine travel documents.¹⁰¹

Yet major hurdles remain. Some of these relate to the sheer scale of the task of reforming tens of thousands of border officials across the vast geography of five republics. Other hurdles are internal to the programs, their structure, and relations with donors. Still other impediments to reform are attributable to the political will of Central Asian governments and the thorny relations that govern their diplomacy. And so the goal of making Central Asia's borders both "open and secure" remains a work in progress.

There are a number of actions that border management sponsors can take in the years ahead to make their programs more effective. They must: (a) develop better and more public ways to measure outcomes and improvements in the quality of border management in Central Asia; (b) pare down training curricula so border guards learn what they need, not necessarily what donors think they ought to learn; (c) increase pressure on Central Asian governments standing in the way of reform; and (d) confront the region's geopolitical forces that run counter to their program aims. These actions can be implemented in the following ways:

MEASURE SUCCESS BETTER: Unsurprisingly, border management programs in Central Asia—as in other complex development environments—are better at measuring outputs than outcomes. While the programs are excellent at monitoring implementation, sharing information with one another on their projects, and reporting to donors, they are less capable at measuring the impact of their programs on the quality of border management.¹⁰² Border management officials are aware of this and admit that building barracks or providing high-tech equipment will not necessarily lead to better border control practices. As one U.S. embassy official candidly summed up the dilemma, “It’s hard to show outcomes when you are constructing buildings.”¹⁰³

To better measure impact, border management programs should engage decisively with local communities, civil society organizations, and business councils.¹⁰⁴ These local organizations are tuned in to the problems along borders and can provide consistent information on issues that include crossing times, corruption rates, and other issues that affect border control. After all, local communities are major stakeholders in the issue of border management and first-hand observers of how their borders are managed or mismanaged. Harnessing the role of local communities and NGOs can feed better and more systematic data to border management programs about what has improved, what has not, and what emergent issues deserve their attention.

PARE DOWN TRAINING EXPECTATIONS: The international community has built a solid training architecture for the Central Asian border authorities, but the content of the training remains a huge challenge. As discussed earlier, states have been resistant to input from the United States, the EU, and the UN in developing new curricula for border authorities. This is especially the case where training and curricula involve one republic sharing sensitive information on policing methods with a neighboring state.¹⁰⁵

Additionally, donors often hand down agendas with training initiatives that may be too ambitious or ill-suited for the region. For example, officials running training programs along the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border noted that donors require them to deliver an untenable number of courses. In one case, a training program involved a three-page list of modules for border guards that included instruction in foreign affairs and HIV handling—modules cut and pasted from aid programs outside the region.¹⁰⁶ In the years ahead, donors have to disabuse themselves of the tendency to demand that more and more modules be included in the training programs they bankroll. Instead, they should focus on teaching the essentials thoroughly and emphasize increasing enrollment and graduation rates.

TROUBLESHOOT POLITICAL OBSTACLES: Central Asian governments are conflicted when it comes to border aid. On the one hand, they are eager to receive aid, infrastructure, and equipment; on the other hand, they are unwilling to use it in ways donors expect.

There are many examples of this. In Bishkek and Dushanbe, security experts noted that the multi-million dollar truck x-rays and radiation detectors given to border authorities languish unused. “The radiation detecting machines at Ak-Tillek are never on,” grumbled one expert.¹⁰⁷ The failed customs reform push is another example, where the governments took part in training and equipment transfers but failed to facilitate trade at their borders. This is also the case with other major ports of entry that received funding, such as Ak-Jol (Kyrgyz-Kazakh border), Nizhniy Pyanj (Tajik-Afghan border), and nearly every Uzbek border crossing that received international assistance. As one customs reform consultant explained, the problem is “80 percent political will.”

Border management programs and donor governments have not risen to the challenge of these political impediments. At a recent meeting on the NBS where Tajik, OSCE, and European ambassadors were present, the head of Tajikistan’s State National Security Committee used the occasion to ask for helicopters. This demand demonstrates the Tajik government’s continued expectation of aid irrespective of its failure to reform its border police, implement the NBS, and keep its promises to maintain the facilities that international programs built, paid for, and handed over. Embassies representing donor governments and programs should take their frustration public and pressure recipient governments in a coordinated and sustained way to keep their promises.

CONFRONT REGIONAL PITFALLS: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and—most recently—Kazakhstan have become spoilers for border management aid in the region. They participate nominally in the programs but pursue policies that run counter to the idea of open *and* secure borders. While border management programs can sidestep Turkmenistan, which sits on the geographic margins of Central Asia, Uzbekistan poses a greater problem by virtue of its location right in the middle of the region. International officials usually agree that Uzbekistan’s closed-borders policies cause trouble for the entire region, yet they disagree about how to cope with these policies. One UN official interviewed suggested entirely cutting out Uzbekistan from border aid while another disagreed, stating metaphorically, “You put food on the table and whoever wants to eat, eats.”¹⁰⁸

However, it is difficult to imagine diplomatic pressure on Uzbekistan as long as it hosts the Northern Distribution Network, the essential supply line for non-lethal goods going into Afghanistan in support of American and NATO forces. While the United States might be unwilling to pressure Tashkent, it is important to at least admit that efforts to save Afghanistan are having unintended complications on border management assistance in Central Asia. Indeed, one of the recurring themes in this paper has concerned the traps of funding projects in environments rife with corruption. The very insertion of donors and security-sector reform sponsors in Central Asia has affected the calculus of governments, increased their self-assurance, and encouraged their expectations of continued and generally unconditional patronage.

Recommendations

What should be done in the years ahead? This section concludes with several recommendations for those border assistance programs that will survive the economic crisis and continue to operate in the region for the remainder of the decade.¹⁰⁹

Measuring Outcomes Better:

- Border management sponsors should be more public, systematic, and frequent about measuring outcomes and improvements in border control.
- Civil society organizations, NGOs, business councils, and local communities should be given an increased role in measuring outcomes in border control assistance. Local NGOs and civilians living in border regions are the most attuned to improvements and problems of border control. They are a potentially consistent source of data on openness, corruption rates, emerging crises, and excellent partners for border management sponsors in determining qualitative changes in border control.
- The OSCE, BOMCA, and United States are separately sponsoring initiatives that engage local communities. These should be coordinated with one another to maximize feedback from local communities.

Troubleshooting Training Troubles:

- Programs should decisively cut out training modules not suited to the region and focus on critical aspects of training that have been neglected. Program sponsors must address the deficit of survival training in the curriculum and recall that border guards are civilian recruits who are not always prepared for the long and difficult periods of isolation they will face at remote outposts in many frontier areas.
- The OSCE border college's birthing pains may finally be over but its new leadership faces the tough task of defining its purpose, raising its status, and guaranteeing its future. Critical in this is an increase in enrollment. The border college is a high-ticket budget item, and its performance in the short-term will reflect on all training initiatives in the region, not just the OSCE.

Confronting Political Will:

- Border management sponsors, donors, and their representative embassies in the region should act decisively and publicly when Central Asian governments fail to keep their promises, especially when it comes to maintaining facilities and equip-

ment that international programs have paid for and handed over. Grumbling quietly does little to change the behavior of Central Asian governments.

- The United States, EU, UN, and OSCE should pressure Uzbekistan to open the Patar-Andarkhan crossing on the Tajik-Uzbek border, a promise that Uzbek authorities have not fulfilled.
- Program representatives and their embassies should firmly and publicly request a timetable from the Tajik government for implementing the NBS.
- The U.S. government should consider repurposing some Af-Pak and New Silk Road funds to pay for the initial implementation of Tajikistan's NBS. This will take financial pressure off aid programs whose budgets are limited (such as OSCE and BOMCA). It will also prevent the Tajik government from using fiscal excuses for postponing the implementation of the NBS.

Working around Regional Pitfalls:

- Admit to what can't work. Program goals should be attainable in the context of the region's geopolitical dynamics.
- Customs reform should not be pursued in any state that has autarchic economic policies or that is part of the Russian-led customs union.
- Publicly call out Kazakhstan on its unhelpful border closures and the sad state of the once promising Ak-Jol crossing. Kazakh policymakers are averse to criticism that lumps them in the same developmental category as the rest of the region. Targeted criticism may prod them to improve the situation at Ak-Jol.
- Border management assistance programs in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan should be phased out. States like Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have for years adroitly absorbed border security assistance without meeting any of its objectives. Their participation is an act of window-dressing intended to show that they are cooperative and multilateral. In reality, they have no intention of moving away from their closed-borders policies.

Notes

1. Complicating the situation was the location of a number of large Tajik and Uzbek sovereign enclaves (Vorukh, Shahimardan, and Sokh) located in southern Kyrgyzstan. On enclave conflicts, see David Trilling, “Ferghana Valley: Tajik-Kyrgyz Border a Potential ‘Karabakh’,” *EurasiaNet.org*, June 4, 2009.
2. The most successful delimitation proceedings in the region appear to have been those between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Delimitation proceedings between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan became particularly difficult and bogged down in delays and disagreements.
3. A green border is defined as the segment of an international border that runs between official ports of entry and where crossing is generally not allowed.
4. On the political and local dynamics of the republics’ new borders, see George Gavrilis, *The Dynamics of Interstate Boundaries*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
5. On the Central Asian states and their international relations, see Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia’s Second Chance*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005.
6. Nick Megoran, “The Critical Geopolitics of Danger in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23: 555–580 (2006); and Gavrilis, *The Dynamics of Interstate Boundaries*, p. 109.
7. See George Gavrilis, “The Tajik Solution: A Model for Fixing Afghanistan,” *Foreign Affairs* online, November 2009; and “Why Regional Solutions Won’t Save Afghanistan,” *Foreign Affairs* online, October 18, 2011.
8. Interview with author, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, November 9, 2011.
9. According to statistics of the Central Asia Free Market Institute (CAFMI), the Chinese reported a figure of \$9.2 billion for 2008, while the Kyrgyz government reported \$730 million. Provided to author by CAFMI research associates, Bishkek, November 10, 2011.
10. Interview, CAFMI researcher associates, November 10, 2011; also author interview with business representatives in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, August 2006.
11. The Stimson Center published an excellent compilation of border management assistance programs. The report noted that many of these programs were initiated in two waves—the first in the 1990s as civil conflict flared globally; the second after 9/11 as Western states became increasingly concerned with cross-border terrorism, document security, and international travel. <http://www.stimson.org/books-reports/post-conflict-borders-and-un-peace-operations/>
Also, see Susan Ginsburg, *Securing Mobility in an Age of Risk: New Challenges for Travel, Migration, and Borders*, MPI: Washington, D.C. (2010).

12. <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/activities/asia-and-oceania/pid/488>
13. For example, the IOM publishes the Passport Examination Procedure Manual. This manual is published in a number of languages and is used to train immigration and border police on how to examine passports for forgeries and alterations through hundreds of examples, tips, and instructions.
14. See for example, Lora Lumpe, "U.S. Military Aid to Central Asia 1999–2009: Security Priorities Trump Human Rights and Diplomacy." Open Society Foundations Occasional Paper Series, No. 1 (October 2010).
15. The Chinese role in security assistance in the region now rests heavily on the SCO, which is formally a multilateral organization but in practice is heavily influenced by Chinese geostrategic interests and security concerns. For different takes on geopolitics and competition in Central Asia, see Alex Cooley, "Cooperation Gets Shanghaied: China, Russia, and the SCO," *Foreign Affairs* (December 14, 2009). <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65724/alexander-cooley/cooperation-gets-shanghaied>; and Andrew Kuchins, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1005Afghan.pdf>. On Russian cooperation with the United States over Afghanistan, Kuchins recently stated, "In an ideal world, I would like to be less dependent on Russia. But what are our options for getting things into or out of Afghanistan? It's a pretty formidable challenge." In David M. Herszenhorn, "Russia May Let NATO Use Airfield as Afghan Hub," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2012.
16. Strategy for the European Union's New Partnership with Central Asia; also see, Jos Boonstra, "Is the EU-Central Asia Strategy Running Out of Stream?" EUCAM 17 (May 2011).
17. As indicated in author's field research on the subject of border management in Central Asia in 2006, 2009, and 2011.
18. Until 2010, the in-country teams were also assigned to the Central Asia Drug Action Program. The drug program is now being implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit.
19. Russian military units had remained to guard the border with Afghanistan following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.
20. BOMCA officials spoke of this early assessment in a number of interviews with the author in 2006 and 2009.
21. Interview, Philip Peirce, Regional Program Manager, BOMCA, Bishkek, August 21, 2006.
22. A BOMNAF official explained that this division of geographic labor is not formal but emerged from a coordination meeting in 2007. Since then, it has mistakenly been cited as a formal and intentional division. Interview, William Lawrence, Program Manager, BOMNAF, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, November 18, 2011. The BOMNAF program is focused on building infrastructure and providing training to border police on the Afghan side of the border with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. BOMNAF officials share offices with BOMCA-Tajikistan. The program has an outstanding website that conveys the logistical and geographic difficulties of provisioning border crossings and remote outposts in the region: www.bomnaf.org
23. Richard Lewington, "The Challenge of Managing Central Asia's New Borders," *Asian Affairs* (July 2010): 221–236.
24. As noted in various BOMCA internal documents that BOMCA officials shared with author.
25. Interview, Tamas Kiss, Project Manager for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, BOMCA, Bishkek, August 21, 2006.
26. The theme of lingering Soviet border control methods came up in multiple interviews with BOMCA officials. It also featured prominently in BOMCA briefings and reports made available to the author courtesy of BOMCA staff. However, it is important to note that Central Asian republics may have been holding on to the idea of Soviet-style border controls in theory, not practice. Soviet-era controls

necessitated thorough and aggressive inspections of all goods and people crossing borders. In practice, most newly-independent Central Asian republics did not inspect most flows at their borders and exercised little on-the-ground control. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are notable exceptions.

27. Author communication with Richard Lewington. October 2009.
28. Interview with BOMCA official in Dushanbe, November 2011. Another official in BOMCA's Bishkek headquarters explained that only the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan are slated to get some infrastructural assistance from BOMCA in the future and that this will be strictly devoted for renovation of existing facilities. Interview with BOMCA officials in Bishkek, November 9, 2011.
29. All Central Asian republics have national training centers. Tajikistan's center was constructed with BOMCA's assistance in 2004. The most advanced center in the region is in Kazakhstan and was built in 1941 as a Soviet military facility. The center in Kyrgyzstan at Novopokrovka consists largely of barracks and meeting rooms but lacks bathroom facilities. See, BOMCA's "Invitation to Bid: Procurement of Civil Works to Construct a Laundry and Bathhouse Complex for Border Troops Training Center at Novopokrovka." 2012.
30. According to Almaty Forum Report, May 2011 [in Russian].
31. At the Almaty meeting, representatives from the various republics made presentations on border guard numbers and capacities. One BOMCA official argued that this is one of the appealing aspects to participation even among more insular states. "If the Uzbeks come, they may get some information on what Kyrgyzstan has." Interview, BOMCA, Bishkek, November 9, 2011.
32. Moreover, BOMCA officials explained that Central Asian representatives found the term "consortium" objectionable as it implied the creation of a binding multilateral institution; instead, it was decided to use the looser and safer word "forum" for future meetings.
33. An OSCE official in Osh explained to the author in 2006 that Batken was an increasing source of concern and that OSCE was working on a major project to map local resource conflict and create mediation mechanisms. Also, see David Trilling, "Ferghana Valley: Tajik-Kyrgyz Border a Potential 'Karabakh'," *EurasiaNet.org*, June 4, 2009
34. As explained to author by a former BOMCA official. On the implementation dynamics and challenges of UNDP-led programs in the broader region, see Scott Smith, *Afghanistan's Troubled Transition: Politics, Peacekeeping, and the 2004 Presidential Election*, Boulder: First Forum Press, 2011.
35. For example, GIZ takes a larger overhead fee when managing such projects.
36. In addition to the local community pilots, BOMCA's future training initiatives will also include basic elements in gender mainstreaming and human rights.
37. See, Alexander Cooley, *Base Politics: Democratic Change and the US Military Overseas*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008; and *Great Games, Local Rules*, forthcoming from Oxford University Press, 2012. Also see, Joshua Kucera, "Withdrawal from Afghanistan Could Kill the US-Russia Reset," *The Atlantic* (October 26, 2011). <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/10/withdrawal-from-afghanistan-could-kill-the-us-russia-reset/247357/>
38. For a list of U.S. programs offering border management assistance in the former Soviet Union and other regions see Stimson survey. <http://www.stimson.org/books-reports/post-conflict-borders-and-un-peace-operations/>
39. Author discussion with U.S. official working as police advisor in Central Asia. November 2011.
40. The American BOMCA chief brought expertise to the position but also caused great consternation among EU donors who felt that the program should be headed by a European. Consequently, his short-lived tenure was followed by an extended leadership vacuum from which BOMCA has recovered.
41. As stated by an OSCE official in Dushanbe in the vicinity of author. November 17, 2011.

42. Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*; and David Trilling, "Northern Distribution Nightmare," *Foreign Policy*, December 6, 2012.
43. David Lewis, "Reassessing the Role of OSCE Police Assistance Programing in Central Asia," Open Society Foundations Central Eurasia Project, Occasional Paper No. 4 (April 2011).
44. United Nations, Code Cable, "OSCE Central Asia Regional Heads of Mission Meeting," UNTOP, Dushanbe to United Nations, New York, May 8, 2006.
45. Additionally, the OSCE mission in Kyrgyzstan is undertaking a massive training of 5000 mediators in the Osh oblast, the site of recent ethnic conflict and in the shadow of major border flashpoints. Interview, UN official, Bishkek, November 12, 2011.
46. One officer explained that "everything is borders, borders, borders these days at OSCE." Discussion with author, Dushanbe, November 20, 2011.
47. See, Uzbek Law on the Border, no. 8820-1, August 20, 1999, signed by President Karimov (revised April 30, 2004); and Publication of Kyrgyz Border Law, Government Resolution no. 530/17, October 30, 1992 [both in Russian].
48. Tajikistan's NBS was adopted by the government in April 2010. See, OSCE Press Release, "Recently Adopted OSCE-supported Tajik National Border Strategy Presented to International Working Group," OSCE Office in Tajikistan, May 4, 2010; and Permanent Mission of the Republic of Tajikistan to the OSCE, "Statement by the Head of Delegation of Tajikistan, Ambassador Nuriddin Shamsov," Vienna, July 10, 2010.
49. As one international official admitted to the author, "People keep talking about it nervously at meetings, 'what are we going to do about the border strategy?'" November 20, 2011.
50. Author communication with international official in Dushanbe, April 14, 2012.
51. The author made several requests to meet with BMSC officials in November 2011 but these scheduled appointments were cancelled the day of the meetings. The official in charge at the time is no longer at the BMSC.
52. Scholars have previously noted how the insertion of donors in developing environments can fuel corruption and create expectations of continued patronage by recipient governments. On Central Asia, see Eric McGlinchey, *Chaos, Violence, and Dynasty: Politics and Islam in Central Asia*. Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburg Press, 2011; on Africa, see Nicolas van de Walle, *Overcoming Stagnation in Aid-Dependent Countries: Politics, Policies and Incentives for Poor Countries*. Center for Global Development, 2005.
53. This was previously 20 cents per kilo.
54. There is speculation that the mayor of Osh was behind this move and that Kyrgyz transitional officials in Bishkek were powerless to reverse it.
55. On the WTO, Russia, and the post-Soviet sphere, see Anders Åslund, "Why Doesn't Russia Join the WTO?" *The Washington Quarterly* 33, 2 (April 2010): 49-63.
56. In 2008 and 2009, the international community was pushing the Central Asian republics to open regional trade corridors. In this period, border management programs were considering partnerships with the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (CAREC), which with Asian Development Bank pledges in the billions of dollars intended to build a major road infrastructure across the region.
57. Uniform Automated Information System (UAIS).
58. Interview with author, Bishkek, November 8, 2011.
59. Otunbayeva, at the time, was advocating for an expansion of public councils that would grant civil society an oversight role in a range of government affairs and promote accountability from the various ministries. The customs chairman appears to have used the push for public councils as an excuse to

take over the previously existing customs consultative committee. I owe this information to a colleague in Bishkek.

60. Interview with author, Bishkek, November 8, 2011.
61. On Atambayev's other plans to boost cross-border regional trade, see Myles G. Smith, "China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway Project Brings Political Risks," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, March 7, 2012. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5731>
62. As this went to press, Russian officials declared their intent to seek membership for Russia in the WTO. Even if Russia joins the WTO, this will not necessarily alter customs and trade dynamics in Central Asia. The Customs Union is more consequential for Central Asia's borders than the WTO.
63. Based on the author's research in Kyrgyzstan in 2006 and 2011.
64. In addition to closing crossings, Kazakh authorities began constructing a border fence along the Chuy River border with Kyrgyzstan. In late 2011, the author travelled along the border and observed the fortifications in the areas near Bishkek and Tokmok.
65. Author interview with consultant based in Bishkek, November 8, 2011.
66. When the author asked a BOMCA official about the state of Ak-Jol, the official despondently shook his head and replied, "It's a disaster."
67. I owe this update to a colleague in Bishkek.
68. The goods at the Kara-Suu market arrive via Irkeshtam, the southern crossing on the Chinese-Kyrgyz border. Goods going through Ak-Jol initially traversed the northern crossing at Torugart.
69. One estimate is that a bribe to Uzbek guards here now costs approximately \$2, while a local resident informed the author that border guards make an on-the-spot estimate of the value of goods and take 30 percent of the value in payment or in kind.
70. Interview with international official, Dushanbe, November 2011.
71. Interview, U.S. embassy official, Dushanbe, November 2011.
72. Lewington, "The Challenge of Managing Central Asia's New Borders," p. 229.
73. Interview with humanitarian official, Dushanbe, November 2011.
74. It is important to distinguish here between the view of Moscow and local Russian representatives of the BIG who are more collaborative.
75. This budget problem also affects neighboring Afghanistan. Afghan army and border police posts are not filled by conscription; rather they are based on paid volunteers. As a result, a substantial portion of the defense and border control budgets in Afghanistan consist of salaries of troops and border guards. These salaries are currently covered to a large part by international donors and the United States in particular. The Afghan state would have to divert a substantial portion of its GDP to cover salaries. While the numbers of envisioned border guards in Tajikistan are much lower than in Afghanistan, Tajik authorities would be hard-pressed to cover the salaries of border services under the NBS.
76. BIG members include the United States, OSCE, UNDP, BOMCA, various EU-member states, IOM, UNODC, UNHCR, Russia, and Japan. The ADB was invited to the group but does not take part.
77. Interview with international official, Dushanbe, November 2011.
78. In some cases the U.S. government gives the funds to ADB, which finds contractors to build the facilities.
79. As noted by the official who oversaw the project.
80. Lewington, "The Challenge of Managing Central Asia's New Borders," p. 227.
81. Many of these are built on the footprints or ruins of border outposts built in the Soviet era.

82. This seems to be the case mostly in border crossings in remote GBAO. However, one U.S. official touring a remote stretch of the Tajik-Kyrgyz border reports seeing border guards cutting down a patch of forest for firewood in an area 60 kilometers from the nearest border crossing. Interview, Dushanbe, November 2011.
83. These maintenance problems have caused donors to approach construction differently. Some build with sturdier material (such as concrete vs. linoleum floors) and others are including renewable energy sources such as windmills and solar cells into the construction of the outposts.
84. EU funders were reportedly furious that the \$1 million facility, the most expensive built by BOMCA-Tajikistan, was languishing unused.
85. The bilateral crossing near Pendzhikent, an ancient ruined town on the Silk Road is on the list of sites destined for closure. Patar is not on the closure list as it was originally classified as an international crossing. It is extremely difficult for states to justify permanently closing crossings designated as “international.” See photos of Patar border crossing and inauguration ceremony of new facilities, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/asia-plus/5841207645/in/photostream/>
86. Interestingly, Tajik officials and strategists privately admit that Uzbekistan is their greatest national security concern; yet they publicly attribute their troubles to neighboring Afghanistan.
87. Conversation with author in Dushanbe, November 2011.
88. United Nations, Informal Ministerial Meeting of Afghanistan and Its Neighbors, Paris, December 14, 2008. [Internal UN memo].
89. These declarations followed in the weeks and months after the Paris meeting.
90. On the region’s electricity politics and energy shortages, see Nate Schenkkan, “Central Asia: Struggling to Keep the Lights On,” *EurasiaNet*, January 31, 2012. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64930>
91. Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*; also see “Roadblocks on the New Silk Road: The Challenges of Externally Promoting Central Asian Economic Cooperation,” EUCAM Watch No. 11 (February 2012). There have been some interesting recent developments in the NDN, which is meant to feed essential supplies into Afghanistan from Central Asia. The vast majority of NDN goods enter Afghanistan through Uzbekistan. As a result, Uzbekistan receives the lion’s share of the transit fees, and Tajik officials are eager to increase their cut. The Tajik government is now pestering the U.S. government to send more material through Tajikistan. According to the one consultant based in Central Asia, the proposal may be causing some friction between the Department of Defense and USAID. USAID, facing severe cuts in many of its Central Asia programs, is looking to expand its development projects in south Tajikistan in the form of funding for road, rail, and warehousing infrastructure.
92. Author’s field visit to Manas Transit Center, June 2011. Note: Even Kazakhstan has benefited from the perceived Afghan-spillover threat. For instance, Kazakhstan made Afghanistan a big part of its OSCE presidency and used the issue to play up its role as a strategic security partner with Europe, the United States, and Russia. As noted by author during participation in Euro-Atlantic Partnership Forum–Astana, Kazakhstan (May 2009).
93. Dushanbe and a number of other towns and areas adjacent to drug routes are awash in luxury cars. This is part of the trickle-down effect of the drug economy, but mostly it is a function of the use of cars as a laundering and bartering tool in the sale and transit of drugs.
94. Almost all experts and international officials interviewed in Tajikistan indicated this, and provided a combination of logical reasoning and specific evidence to support it.
95. See, 2012 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report. <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2012/vol1/184102.htm>
96. The various border management programs in Tajikistan discussed in previous sections are well aware of these countervailing dynamics; however, the BOMCA and OSCE border-management programs do

- not have the capacity or mandate to tackle the issue directly. UNODC, however, is one of the major sponsors of counternarcotics initiatives in the region. See its multi-year initiatives and action plan inaugurated in 2007, *Securing Central Asia's Borders with Afghanistan*, UNODC (September 2007); and *Rainbow Strategy: A Regional Solution to a National Challenge*, UNODC (2008).
97. A number of international donors have financed such projects. The United States and the Aga Khan foundation, for example, have bankrolled the construction of several cross-border bridges and the Japanese funded a highway in southern Tajikistan that connects Kolkhozabad to Nizhniy Pyanj on the Afghan border. This highway is one of the finest in Central Asia. During a field visit in November 2011, the author saw Japanese engineers working on road upkeep.
 98. Interview, William Lawrence, BOMNAF, Dushanbe, November 2011; also, see Sébastien Peyrouse, "Tajikistan's New Trade: Cross-Border Commerce and the China-Afghanistan Link," PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo, No. 169 (September 2011).
 99. Interview with William Lawrence, Program Manager, BOMNAF, Dushanbe, November 18, 2011.
 100. In an interview, the official said, "Everyone is dissatisfied because the United States upped the game." In discussing border aid dynamics on the Afghan side, he elaborated on the problems caused by uneven donor funding. For instance, he indicated that the United States not only builds more expensive facilities but that it also plunks down expensive equipment. The United States spends more on electric generators at the border outposts it builds than programs like BOMNAF spend building the actual outposts. "It's not a generator, it's a power station."
 101. This was stated by a number of program management officials, especially those in BOMCA and IOM. There are, of course, limits to the improvements. The author was informed by one program official that the training and reorganization of the Drug Profiling Unit at Manas Airport in Bishkek had been a disappointing experience.
 102. These systems include complex matrices that measure outputs and outcomes in many categories that relate to border control. Outcome measurements include categories such as: more efficient processing times for individuals crossing borders; lower corruption; increases in drug interdiction; and so on. Additionally, field program officials are often compelled to visit donors to dissuade them from funding projects within programs that they believe will not have optimal outcomes. For instance, an officer of the BOMNAF program visited Brussels to convince EU funders that the success of the program required continued efforts in infrastructure. Afghan border police were in dire need of barracks and infrastructure, and there would be no point in training them if there was no shelter or housing available for them on the border to carry out their tasks. The visit was successful and the BOMNAF program has continued to spend the majority of its budget dealing with housing and equipment shortfalls that Afghan border police face.
 103. Author interview, Dushanbe, November 2011.
 104. One prominent NGO head in Tajikistan complained to the author, "All this aid comes in for border projects and civil society organizations have no say in how it gets used."
 105. This seems to be a persistent problem. Back in 2006, the commander of a border guard base in Kyrgyzstan told the author that one of the objectives of border policing is to intercept spies from neighboring countries who are trying to infiltrate the Kyrgyz Republic's territory.
 106. Author interview with training expert, Dushanbe, November 2011. Such training modules are often created to accommodate issues that donors believe are critical for local security officials to learn. The author noticed the same training dynamics in an earlier trip to Afghanistan that included a visit to the German-funded Afghan National Police training center in Mazar-e Sharif March 2009.
 107. Author interview, Bishkek, November 2011.
 108. Officials and experts interviewed on the subject gave interesting examples: One noted that Turkmen

government officials routinely cancel meetings with representatives of border management programs (despite the fact that Turkmenistan is a participating state); another noted that Kazakhstan has also become a major problem for the region, “the Kazakhs participate just to get some money and say they participate.” When it comes to border reform, another expert argued, “The Kazakhs basically wait to see what Russia tells them to do.”

109. Border management programs in the Central Asian republics are likely to survive the economic crisis for several reasons: First, they are relatively cheap. Second, donor-driven security-sector reform is going strong in Central Asia. Third, the United States and the EU are unlikely to give these programs the chop as they remain a major avenue of strategic engagement in the region (arguably, the only remaining comparative advantage relative to Chinese and Russian influence).

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