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**SOURCES OF CONFLICT AND PATHS TO  
U.S. INVOLVEMENT**

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The preceding chapters have outlined numerous causes of and potential pathways to conflict in the Central Asia and South Caucasus region. Most of these causes are deeply entrenched and are likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future. Moreover, none of them operates in a vacuum: economic and political grievances, for example, reinforce each other and, combined in environments of political weakness, create far more risk of conflict than either would alone.

This chapter seeks to identify the key sources of conflict for each of the states and subregions in question, as well as to note which states within and outside the region are most likely to get involved. This analysis does not present scenarios for conflict evolution, but rather seeks to identify some of the ways that conflict can evolve in and around each of the states of the region. It then assesses the U.S. interest in this evolution and possible U.S. involvement/responses.

At the end of each country analysis, a table illustrates some of the key indicators of conflict drawn from this report and how they apply to the country in question. These are not so much causes of conflict per se as likely precursors—and thus useful indicators to watch for. Derived from the analyses in the preceding eight chapters of this report, these indicators are also in some cases syntheses of those analyses. For instance, the politicization of ethnicity (see Chapter Six) is not in itself a cause for conflict, but combined with group-level grievances and a perception of threat and insecurity at the group level, which may translate into more radical agendas, such politiciza-

tion becomes a useful indicator that the potential for conflict is increasing. An example of such a grievance may be an ethnic redress policy, carried out by the state, that privileges the eponymous ethnic group over groups that previously enjoyed advantages (for instance, Russophones). Mobilization by Russophone groups that seeks to combat this discriminatory policy may be an additional indicator of conflict ahead. Similarly, the privatization of force increases the capacity for individuals or groups to take extralegal violent action, which, as already discussed, is fairly likely to be met with violence by the state.

Insofar as transitions, whether to democracy or toward greater authoritarianism, are statistically linked with an increased risk of conflict (see Chapter Two), both processes need to be watched carefully. Moreover, whatever the political structures in place, the rise of political groups, legal or otherwise, that have clear ethnic, religious, linguistic, or clan affiliation and radicalized agendas, especially ones that identify other groups or the state as the source of the politicized group's problems, should be watched. The emergence of such groups has been a precursor to conflict in other parts of the world. Extralegal political activity of this sort is a sign that disenfranchised groups have found legal channels insufficient to address grievances, and are now seeking to change the system (see Chapter Two). Finally, the increased public awareness of corruption and rent-seeking behavior within a state is an important indicator that the state's legitimacy is waning, and a possible precursor to government collapse (see Chapters Two and Four).

There are also a number of factors relating to how states in and near the region interact that are likely precursors to conflict. Again, none of these will necessarily lead to violence, but they may make it more likely. For instance, a Russian military presence (as well as Russian economic behavior) can be a stabilizing factor, or it can be a sign that conflict is more likely. Which it is depends on the specifics of the situation, regional attitudes, and the responses of others, as well as what other indicators of conflict are present. If Russian presence or action is perceived as hostile by one or more states, the risk of conflict increases.

The increased militarization of the Caspian Sea is also dangerous and an indicator of increased risk even if Caspian claims are resolved, as

the presence of armed forces placed close to each other increases the risk of misunderstandings and military responses to other disagreements. Today, all of the Caspian littoral states have some level of military force on or near the Caspian, but Russia and Iran have the most significant and capable forces there. If current trends continue, however, within 10–15 years, Azerbaijani, Turkmenistani, and Kazakh force strength on and near this body of water will increase.

The development of alliances with neighboring or far-off states (including the United States) can also catalyze conflict in the region. Given the dynamism of the current situation, it would be downright foolhardy to attempt to predict the future of interstate alliances over the next 10–15 years in the region. However, it is possible to predict how states might respond to a range of scenarios by assessing their overall strategic interests (see Chapter Seven). For instance, given a combination of Russian pressure on the South Caucasus states and increasingly close relations between those states and Turkey, it is possible that, under certain circumstances, the Russian response to Georgian or Azerbaijani alignment with Turkey could be violent. Increasing perceptions of an Uzbek alignment with the United States, should that develop out of ongoing cooperation in the counterterrorist effort, may well make other states in the region nervous about Uzbek intentions, crystallizing an anti-Uzbek alliance in the region, perhaps even including Russia. Finally, a U.S.-Russian alliance (whether spurred by counterterrorism cooperation or by some other strategic development) may give Russia a sense that it has more freedom to pressure regional states to abide by its wishes, including by military means.

It is worth noting up front that a number of domestic factors historically linked to conflict and instability, especially when combined with other problems (see Chapters Two and Three), are present in all the states of this region. These include:

- A widening income and standard-of-living gap between the rich and the poor, combined with perceptions of relative deprivation.
- Increased macroeconomic disturbances such as high inflation, shortages and queues, wage arrears, and labor strife.
- Demographic downtrends such as low birth rates, high/young death rates, health, drug use, etc.

Not only are all of these factors present in the states of the region today, current trends suggest that they will persist over the course of the next 10–15 years and may in fact worsen in some countries. As with the other domestic indicators, the true risk of conflict depends in large part on a state's capacity to respond to problems and crises in ways that do not aggravate risks. In this sense, the weak state capacity and political institutions of this region do not bode well for their ability to do so.

Finally, one of the most likely precursors to conflict in this region is a succession crisis in one or more states. Successions can be catalysts for unrest and civil strife, particularly in authoritarian and transitional regimes. In Azerbaijan and Georgia, these are something to watch for in the immediate future. President Aliev of Azerbaijan is nearly 80 years old, ailing, and making efforts to designate his son as his successor. President Shevardnadze of Georgia is well into his 70s, is facing increasing discontent among the populace, and has said he will not run for re-election in 2005. In both countries, these two leaders have been instrumental in maintaining the state in the absence of lasting institutions. Their departure from power could easily lead to scenarios involving internal, and potentially external, strife.

In many of the Central Asian states, there may be time for the risk of a succession crisis to be averted through democratization, as the leaders of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan are in their 50s and early 60s. However, these authoritarian regimes are at risk of the sudden death, through illness, accident, or perhaps assassination, of their leaders. Moreover, as already noted, the democratization process itself is far from risk-free. Finally, it is worth highlighting once more that the Armenian polity is comparatively stable, and a succession crisis there is less likely (if not entirely impossible given the presence of extremist political parties and occasional political violence).

The evolution of the U.S. military presence and involvement in the region will also affect how conflict may or may not evolve. If U.S. military forces remain in place in CASC, the likelihood that they will become involved in regional conflict is increased. At the same time, for some states at least, the U.S. presence may mitigate the likelihood of conflict emerging, playing a stabilizing role by helping to support

the government and strengthen its control and possibly legitimacy. In other cases, however, the U.S. presence may make certain forms of conflict more likely. For example, local militant groups in one or more states may target U.S. forces, or regional states who see the U.S. presence as bolstering their own power may crack down on local opposition forces or take action against neighbors, spurring reprisals.

A country-by-country summary of indicators that may herald impending conflict is presented below. Data from individual chapters have informed the summaries.

## **CENTRAL ASIA**

### **Kazakhstan**

Kazakhstan's continued stability and growth depend in large part on the potential for large energy exports. Oil exploration and sales have fueled its economy to date, ensuring that it remains in relatively good condition, particularly when compared to its neighbors. Kazakhstan's high estimated reserves and the fact that it is likely to have the greatest diversification of export routes suggest that it can count on this situation continuing to improve—although it should be noted that should something go wrong, there is little for this fuel-export-dependent state to fall back on. As noted in Chapter Three, Kazakhstan is the only regional state to have attained a per capita GDP of over \$1,000 (\$1,250 as of 1999). The government has set up an oil fund to direct proceeds from energy development into other economic sectors, a pragmatic move that can help make its economic growth more sustainable. That said, 30 percent of Kazakhstan's population remains below the poverty line, and wealth is concentrated in the hands of a relatively small minority.

Kazakhstan is, like much of Central Asia, an increasingly autocratic state politically, with limited press freedom and power concentrated around President Nazarbayev and his inner circle. Corruption is routine, although not as bad as in some other countries of the region. Organized crime has had an important role in the local economy for years, and criminal groups are believed to be much involved in the oil sector. The drug trade has had an effect as well, with increasing numbers of users and at least one identifiable major trafficking route through the country.

Thus, the potential for discontent on the basis of political and economic grievances exists, although it may be somewhat mitigated by expected economic growth driven by energy exports. The potential for ethnic grievances is probably highest among the Russophone population in the country, which has lost much of its former privilege under Kazakhstan's policies of ethnic redress. Certainly, there are some rumblings of secessionism in Kazakhstan's heavily Russian-populated north, and there has been some development of ethnically based parties, an indicator of the politicization of ethnicity. However, the policies promoting the Kazakh language have been relatively mild to date, and there is little likelihood of conflict arising from the grievances engendered by them unless the Kazakh government undertakes a radical shift in approach. The government is also somewhat worried about the possibility of spillover ethnic tension among Uighurs in Kazakhstan as a result of Uighur separatism in neighboring China. From the religious perspective, Kazakhstan does not have a substantial militant Islamic movement, although groups like the Hizb ut-Tahrir have been distributing leaflets and seeking to attract membership here as elsewhere. Regardless of the true extent of the Islamist threat, the government has expressed concern about it, and Kazakhstan also perceives a threat of Islamic/insurgency violence. After the incursions into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in August 2000, Kazakhstan shifted many of its special forces units to the south of the country.

All that said, Kazakhstan, of all the states of the Central Asian region, can probably be expected to be relatively free of internal strife in the short term, at least until such time as Nazarbayev leaves power. At that point, the succession crisis that is such a danger for autocratic regimes such as Kazakhstan has become in recent years may well bring to the surface the range of economic, political, ethnic, and religious grievances that autocracy and comparative economic health had kept submerged. Another possible immediate source of internal conflict might be a sharp economic crisis, which could lead to public discontent with the government. Over the longer term, factors such as the development of ethnic relations in the country, the growth of organized crime and extralegal political, religious, or other movements, corruption, etc. should be watched carefully as possible indicators that internal strife is becoming more likely.

In terms of Kazakhstan's relations with neighbors and outside powers, there is also little immediate cause for concern. It has high levels of trade with its fellow Central Asian states, as well as with Russia. Kazakhstan took part in peacekeeping in Tajikistan, and established a peacekeeping battalion with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. While there is some continuing competition with Uzbekistan, the other large and relatively powerful state in Central Asia, relations are not hostile. While relations with China have not always been easy, they are at present fairly good, with the two countries discussing a range of possible trade ties, to include energy sales to China. Kazakhstan and China are also both founding members of the Shanghai Five/Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Kazakhstan enjoys relatively good relations with Iran, with which it has arranged oil swaps. It also has close ties with Germany and has received some assistance from Turkey (although bilateral relations have been on and off). Relations with the United States had cooled somewhat in recent years, but the United States has also provided a great deal of support to Kazakhstan, particularly through the Cooperative Threat Reduction program to eliminate the nuclear weapons infrastructure left in Kazakhstan by the collapse of the USSR. Ties with these Western states have also not precluded Kazakhstan's maintenance of close ties with Russia (from which it also imports energy and other goods). Along with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Kazakhstan takes part in a customs union with Russia and Belarus, the Eurasian Economic Community.

The potential for resource-based conflict involving Kazakhstan must also be assessed as fairly low. Like the other energy-rich states, Kazakhstan is dependent on energy-poor Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan for water for irrigation. This dispute, described in more detail in Chapter Five, has been a significant one, but it seems unlikely to lead to actual strife. Insofar as Caspian seabed division is concerned, Kazakhstan has supported the Russian proposal of dividing the seabed and subsoil into national sectors while holding the waters in common. If the Caspian becomes increasingly militarized and an arena for hostile competition, Kazakhstan is likely to be involved. Although weaker than Russia or Iran, it does have more military capacity than many of its neighbors, and this advantage is expected to increase in coming years.

**Table 9.1**  
**Indicators of Conflict: Kazakhstan**

Indicator	Currently in Evidence	Likely in 10–15 Years	Possible in 10–15 Years
<i>Domestic</i>			
Popular movements form outside of legal channels, develop secretive, militaristic, radical agendas			✓
Privatization of force			✓
Increasing political “democratization”		✓	
Increasing authoritarianism	✓	✓	
Ethnic, clan, linguistic or religious political parties with radical agendas gain influence			✓
Widespread reports of corruption; frequent government-related scandals and crackdowns on same		✓	
Regionalization/secessionism			✓
Succession crisis			✓
<i>Regional</i>			
Unresolved Caspian claims	✓		✓
Russian efforts to exert influence by cutting off energy export routes		✓	
Foreign (Russia, Iran, other) support of insurgents/secessionists			✓
Militarization of Caspian Sea		✓	
Negative impact from revolution in Xinjiang, China			✓

Thus, prospects for conflict in Kazakhstan must be seen as focusing primarily on the danger of a succession crisis (which is unlikely in the immediate future), with a somewhat smaller likelihood of conflict emerging for other reasons. From the U.S. perspective, this means that involvement would probably be limited to some sort of international peacekeeping effort, if one develops. The one factor that could alter this situation would be a substantial U.S. presence in Kazakhstan in conjunction with the war on terrorism. To date, Kazakhstan has expressed willingness to host forces, but it has not been asked to provide any support beyond overflight access. That said, Kazakhstan’s facilities, which include fairly good infrastructure

and long runways, may make it appealing for future aspects of this or future operations. Moreover, its efforts at defense reform suggest that Kazakhstan will in the next 10–15 years have at least a small number of effective rapid-reaction forces (although the balance of its military will remain low-tech and with limited training and equipment). Thus, Kazakhstan could emerge as a partner for some regional missions, which might in some ways lead the United States to become more closely tied to this state and more likely to be drawn into a crisis.

### **Kyrgyzstan**

Kyrgyzstan has a per-capita income of only about \$300/year, marking it as one of the poorest states in the region. Moreover, the situation is not improving: Kyrgyzstan's ranking on the UN human development index has dropped since 1995. In part, this is because the growing burden of international debt (as a percent of GDP, among the highest in the region, along with Tajikistan) has precluded spending on domestic programs, deepening poverty.

The country's principal export is energy, in the form of electric power stemming from its (and Tajikistan's) control of the headwaters of the major river systems of Central Asia. It also exports gold. Despite its production of electricity, Kyrgyzstan is overall a major energy importer, with 85 percent of oil coming from abroad, although half of the fuel consumed in the country is illegally smuggled in. Much of the economy is dependent on local trade, with sales to Kazakhstan and Tajikistan and purchases from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan belongs, along with Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus, to the Eurasian Economic Community customs union. Kyrgyzstan's sizable debt to Moscow has recently been offset by the transfer of shares in 27 Kyrgyz industrial enterprises. Kyrgyzstan has had little success drawing Western investment into its economy, but increased Russian ownership of assets in Kyrgyzstan has the potential to distort some aspects of its economic interests.

Crime and corruption are major problems, with the illegal economy at nearly the same size as the official economy. Extortion and organized crime include a variety of activities such as car theft, trafficking in human beings and wildlife, drugs, money laundering, and various financial crimes. On a more local level, livestock theft is a common

problem. As Kyrgyzstan is a major thoroughfare on the route that illegal narcotics have been taking from Afghanistan to Russia and on to Western Europe, there is increasing concern that rising drug use in the country will contribute to the spread of HIV, straining the underfunded and low-capacity health system. Here, as in Tajikistan, opium was used as a barter currency in the middle 1990s.

Given this starting point, even under the best of economic circumstances, the best that Kyrgyzstan can hope for over the next 10 to 15 years is a very slow level of growth. Its balance of payments and debt problems will almost certainly persist over the next decade and beyond, as will the attendant problems, although it is possible that regional security stabilization could boost trade, helping to ease the situation somewhat. This, however, is a best-case scenario. Under less favorable circumstances, economic crisis becomes probable.

Once seen as Central Asia's model of democracy, Kyrgyzstan has also exhibited increasing authoritarianism under President Akaev in recent years. Nervous about the rise of Islamicism in the country, combined with the effect of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) incursions in 1999 and 2000, Akaev's government has been cracking down on Islamist movements and groups, but it has also imprisoned members of the opposition. Partly in response to concerns voiced by China, it has also become increasingly repressive in relation to its Uighur minority.

While the threat from the IMU, which sheltered in Afghanistan and received training and support there, has been diminished, other Islamist groups continue to gain support. The Hizb ut-Tahrir, for example, has been growing in popularity in Kyrgyzstan, starting from a primarily ethnic Uzbek, rural support base, but more recently spreading to other areas and ethnic groups. Hizb ut-Tahrir members, leaders, and pamphlet distributors are subject to arrest in Kyrgyzstan. Islamic political parties are banned in Kyrgyzstan as they are in all states of the region except Tajikistan.

The combination of a weak economy, widespread poverty, and increasing autocracy is a dangerous one. In this context, the potential for ethnic conflict also cannot be overlooked, especially as it overlaps with the religious dimension. Uighurs and Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan are generally perceived as more prone to Islamic fundamentalism, and

thus subject to more government attention. Assuming continued stabilization in Afghanistan, there seems little likelihood of a resurgent IMU launching the sorts of incursions that it did in previous years. However, the possibility of lower-level terrorist attacks by this group or other radical Islamist groups should be considered. Finally, while Akaev is relatively young, the increasingly authoritarian nature of his rule suggests the possibility for a succession crisis when he leaves power, and a variety of groups battling for control of the state. Thus, the risk of internal conflict in Kyrgyzstan, while not presenting an immediate threat, must be judged as real, and the situation in the country worth watching.

Although Kyrgyzstan also sought to build ties with Western states—particularly the United States and Turkey—in part as a means of diversifying its security away from dependence on Russia, after the IMU incursions and faced with a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan in the late 1990s, it became more accepting of Russian assistance—and influence. Russia has provided some military assistance, and Kyrgyzstan is a member of the joint counterterrorist “Central Asian Collective Rapid Deployment Force” that also includes Russia, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. Assistance from Turkey and the United States prior to September 11 was in the form of non-lethal supplies and counterinsurgency training.

Kyrgyzstan is also an original member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. As noted, it hosts a substantial Uighur minority, while a number of ethnic Kyrgyz live in China. Chinese-Kyrgyz relations have been strained in the past due to China’s failure to recognize borders, combined with its historical claims to Kyrgyz territory. More recently, however, relations have been positive. The Kyrgyz and the Chinese share a fear of Islamic fundamentalist political movements, and China has provided Kyrgyzstan with some \$600,000 worth of assistance, including tents, army gear, and at least the intention of training Kyrgyz soldiers in China.

Because of the interlocking borders and ethnic groups of the Ferghana Valley, where Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan meet, ethnic unrest and conflict in any one of these states would be unlikely not to affect the others. The vast majority of Kyrgyzstan’s Uzbek population lives in Ferghana, and borders in the region are uncertain and often contested. Following the IMU incursions,

Uzbekistan mined its borders and staged some military strikes into its neighbors' territories. Kyrgyzstan, too, has sought to mine and otherwise tighten up its border with Tajikistan. While to some extent the three states have sought to cooperate against what they agree is a common threat, they are also deeply suspicious of each other, often to a degree that precludes effective cooperation.

Given their tight connections, there is no question that, for example, a reignited civil war in Tajikistan would threaten Kyrgyzstan's capacity to maintain control. Renewed fighting there or in Afghanistan could create refugee flows that would strain resources. The drug trade that affects these states is also a potential source of continuing instability, as it is unlikely that the peace settlement in Afghanistan (much less its failure) will fully stem the traffic in one of the country's few cash crops.

Kyrgyzstan, like Uzbekistan, was eager to welcome a U.S. and coalition presence to its soil after September 11. At the time of this writing, U.S. forces are in place at Manas airfield near the capital, with plans to expand the presence further (and to make substantial improvements to the infrastructure in place). A bilateral agreement on the stationing of forces was signed with the United States and ratified by the Kyrgyz parliament in early December 2001. It is valid for one year but can be extended, and it explicitly allows for U.S. use of Kyrgyz installations in support of humanitarian and military missions (unlike agreements with other regional states, which are limited to humanitarian operations). A variety of other coalition states, including Britain, France, Italy, Canada, Australia, and South Korea, have also asked Kyrgyzstan for basing access.

While the United States has said that it does not plan to maintain a permanent presence in Kyrgyzstan, the facilities it is building there suggest a desire for at least the capacity to return. Brigadier General Christopher A. Kelly, commander of the 376th Air Expeditionary Wing, said of the facility that "we're establishing a mini-air force base from which we can fly a variety of military missions, mainly airlift, aerial refueling and tactical air."<sup>1</sup> The United States has also boosted its program of military-to-military contacts with Kyrgyzstan,

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<sup>1</sup>Telephone interview reported in Eric Smith and James Dao, "U.S. Is Building Up Its Military Bases in Afghan Region," *The New York Times*, January 9, 2002.

**Table 9.2**  
**Indicators of Conflict: Kyrgyzstan**

Indicator	Currently in Evidence	Likely in 10–15 Years	Possible in 10–15 Years
<i>Domestic</i>			
Popular movements form outside of legal channels, develop secretive, militaristic, radical agendas		✓	
Privatization of force		✓	
Increasing political “democratization”		✓	
Increasing authoritarianism	✓	✓	
Ethnic, clan, linguistic or religious political parties with radical agendas gain influence		✓	
Widespread reports of corruption and crackdowns thereon; frequent government-related scandals		✓	
Succession crisis			✓
<i>Regional</i>			
Energy cutoffs by oil/gas suppliers	✓	✓	
Hostile/semi-hostile Russian military presence			✓
Foreign (Russia, Iran, other) support of insurgents/secessionists		✓	
Extended U.S. military presence		✓	
Formal alignment with the United States			✓
Spillover from neighboring Central Asian states		✓	
Negative impact from revolution in Xinjiang, China			✓

holding a bilateral counterterror exercise with Kyrgyz forces in February. The U.S. presence brings a variety of benefits to Kyrgyzstan. Directly, the United States is paying for the use of Kyrgyz facilities. Less directly, Kyrgyzstan is benefiting from a program of increased military and economic assistance.

Kyrgyzstan is not a particularly appealing environment for a long-term presence, given high altitudes and poor infrastructure. While the coalition involved in the Afghanistan conflict was able to move

forces into the country, the effort was complicated and lengthy. That said, the infrastructure that the United States is now helping to put in place will change this. From Bishkek's perspective, a long-term U.S. and allied military presence is very much a positive factor. It can help stimulate Kyrgyzstan's weak economy, help the country's military build, train, and equip a capable force, and provide a measure of security against possible future incursions like those by the IMU of 1999–2000. Moreover, a U.S. presence sends a signal to Russia, China, and Uzbekistan that Kyrgyzstan has a very strong ally and protector.

That said, a U.S. presence is a two-edged sword for both parties. The U.S. presence may provide a measure of stability, but those forces are also a possible target for militants; and if anti-U.S. Islamist feeling continues to grow in the country, attacks on U.S. bases, facilities, and personnel become more likely. This could be exacerbated if the U.S. presence garners public hostility, as there are some signs it may be doing. Insofar as it raises hackles in Russia, China, and Iran, it can also have negative political repercussions for the strategic interests of both the United States and Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, none of the factors that make violence and conflict in Kyrgyzstan possible will immediately disappear simply due to the presence of U.S. forces. Kyrgyzstan hopes, and the United States fears, that this will make the United States more likely to get involved in helping to settle Kyrgyzstan's problems. Even if the U.S. presence is not permanent, but the bases are maintained to provide access to U.S. forces if necessary for future contingencies, a closer U.S.-Kyrgyz relationship, while far from a commitment to Kyrgyzstan's security, does make it more likely that the United States will feel pressured to get involved in stabilizing conflict on Kyrgyz territory should it occur. The potential for spillover of conflict into Tajikistan (if spillover from Tajikistan is not in fact the cause) creates further incentives for the United States and others to become involved.

### **Tajikistan**

Tajikistan is among the poorest states in the world and is the poorest in this region, with poverty over 50 percent (the average monthly wage is \$10), a per-capita annual income of \$290, and rampant unemployment (over 80 percent in some regions). Tajikistan has

dropped on the UN Human Development Index since 1995 and is the lowest-ranked state in the region. Entire sections of the country subsist largely on the assistance provided by humanitarian organizations. Tajikistan's exports include electric power and aluminum, the latter in turn heavily dependent on the country's imports of alumina. Like Kyrgyzstan, it is a heavy importer of oil and gas, and carries a large debt burden and faces a difficult balance of payments/debt situation. In addition to large public-sector external debts, Tajikistan has substantial bilateral debt, half of it within the CIS. Russia is a particularly large creditor.

To some extent, Tajikistan's continuing problems can be attributed to the aftereffects of its civil war of 1992–1997, in which government loyalists fought a coalition of Islamic, democratic, regional, and ethnic opposition factions. It was a conflict overlaid by regional and clan feuds and ethnic rivalries and further exacerbated by struggles among warlords, criminal groups, and drug traffickers. As the war continued, drug and arms trafficking became the major economic activity, enabling warlords to consolidate power in key areas, power they largely kept after peace was negotiated.

The end of the war brought with it some genuine political liberalization, but central control remains limited; tribal, criminal, and other leaders remain in charge (if not control) of large swaths of land. Organized crime maintains high levels of influence over government bodies (local and national). Corruption is pervasive and reaches all sectors of the government, as well as members of the Russian armed forces that continue to be deployed in Tajikistan. While the power-sharing regime that incorporates opposition members into President Rakhmonov's government represents a step forward, tension between groups and regions remains a volatile factor, and many regional leaders, despite ostensible incorporation into the government, are not trusted by the Rakhmonov regime. Local groups, in turn, assert that the government does not distribute funds and resources to former opposition strongholds. On the one hand, this level of state weakness suggests that Tajikistan is one of few states in the region not at risk of a succession crisis. On the other hand, this is less comforting when it is recognized that this is largely because there is little power to succeed to, and that the country remains in a very real political crisis as it is. Moreover, the Rakhmonov regime, despite its limited control, is exhibiting some dangerous signs of authoritarian-

ism, namely the crackdowns on opposition members who are not incorporated in government structures, and the results of the 1999 presidential election, which Rakhmonov reportedly won with 97 percent of the vote and a 98 percent turnout.

The drug trade remains one of the few sources of income for local residents (opium was used as a currency in the middle 1990s), and insurgent groups such as the IMU have repeatedly taken advantage of good relations with local leaders (IMU leaders fought alongside the opposition in the civil war) in parts of the country outside of central government control to establish and maintain bases. The arms trade and other illegal trafficking also continue, and the unofficial/shadow economy is estimated to be at least as large as the official economy.

Thus, the prospects for a continued peace in Tajikistan do not inspire confidence, as almost all of the identifiable risk factors are in place in this country. Economic and/or political crisis of some sort seems almost inevitable in coming years, with the only question being the extent to which it further destabilizes the country as a whole (and with it the interconnected region). The tribal/ethnic/religious/regional components of divides within the country stem from continued distrust and a real absence of national consolidation and identity. Moreover, although Tajikistan is alone in Central Asia in accepting a measure of Islamic participation in government (in the form of the former opposition Islamic Renaissance Party, or IRP), the central government continues to arrest members of other groups, such as the Hizb ut-Tahrir. Moreover, Islamicism appears to be spreading in Tajikistan, with the IRP expanding its membership in regions once considered predominantly secular, even as it appears to be losing ground to groups such as the Hizb ut-Tahrir in more traditionally religious areas. As in Kyrgyzstan, the Hizb ut-Tahrir has spread its base of support beyond the ethnic Uzbek population to include more Tajiks and others.

With the large (if debatably effective) Russian military presence in Tajikistan, it is little wonder that relations between the two countries remain close. To a large extent, Tajikistan can accurately be described as a client state of Russia, given the troops and Russia's influence over government structures. A founding member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Tajikistan has also had some

small-scale bilateral military contacts with China. Iran, which reportedly supported the opposition during Tajikistan's civil war, was also active in seeking a settlement, hosting and promoting meetings and discussions between the combatants. Since 1997, relations between Iran and Tajikistan have been fairly good.

Tajikistan was a route for supplies being sent by Russia, and to some extent Iran, to the Northern Alliance as it fought the Taliban for control of Afghanistan in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Moreover, the Northern Alliance itself was largely composed of ethnic Tajik and Uzbek forces, united against the Pashtun-based Taliban. Afghani factions were also involved in Tajikistan's civil war, and elements of the Tajik opposition, as well as the IMU, received support and training from the Taliban.

As already noted, there remains tension as well as common interests among Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. While Uzbekistan supported the Tajik government during its civil war, it also served as the staging ground for at least one opposition incursion. After the IMU incursions into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in 1999, Uzbekistan offered Tajikistan assistance in going after IMU rebels in its territory. When that offer was not accepted, Uzbekistan nevertheless went ahead with bombing raids into Tajikistan. In 2000, however, Tajikistan agreed to the presence of Uzbek helicopters in its airspace. But it remains concerned about Uzbek and Kyrgyz border mining and continuing border disputes with Uzbekistan. It has also expressed worries about reports of discrimination against ethnic Tajiks in Uzbekistan, which includes restrictions on Tajik-language literature and possible deportations from border regions.

Prior to September 11, Tajikistan was hesitant to build ties with the United States and NATO. This can be seen as a reflection in large part of its security dependence on Russia. Even after September 11, Tajikistan initially took great care in its language and proposals. It has, however, permitted U.S. and other coalition forces to use its facilities in support of humanitarian missions (as well as search and rescue and combat "if necessary"). France received permission to station six Mirage-2000 fighter-bombers in Tajikistan for the duration of the campaign and to use Tajikistan facilities for its forces en route to Afghanistan. Italian and U.S. forces, too, have reportedly flown into Tajikistan, and status of forces agreements are in place. In

exchange, Tajikistan is receiving aid packages from a variety of countries, including Japan, France, and India, as well as help with refurbishing its airports and facilities, many of which were deemed unusable by coalition forces. Tajikistan and France are developing a plan for future military cooperation, to include training, and there are reports of Indian assistance in both base modernization and air force training. Tajikistan has also recently joined NATO's Partnership for Peace, the last of the post-Soviet states to do so.

Tajik officials have stated that they expect the foreign presence to be long term, since the stabilization of Afghanistan is likely to take quite some time. Certainly, as with Kyrgyzstan, the stationing of foreign forces and assets in Tajikistan (other than the Russian forces, which remain as well), has implications for the country's security. Tajikistan, however, presents even more challenges than Kyrgyzstan, for in addition to poverty and difficult terrain (even worse than that in Kyrgyzstan), the lack of central government control over much of the country creates challenges for operations and movements. Moreover, the internal situation in Tajikistan is more immediately volatile than that in Kyrgyzstan, and, as already noted, the likelihood of further conflict is high. The criminalization of much of the country means that if conflict erupts, the same factors that came into play during the civil war will return—including struggles for control of drug routes (and if narcotics production begins to move out of Afghanistan, for that as well), ethno-tribal-regional conflict, etc.—with a very real potential for Tajikistan, or at least some parts of it, to begin to look something like Afghanistan did circa 2000. If this happens, the international community will face clear incentives to seek to prevent the development of Tajikistan as a center of the drug trade and potentially a safe haven for terrorism. If this happens while foreign forces are already in place in Tajikistan, and building relations with what state structures exist, there is little doubt that the conflict would quickly be internationalized and that some or all of these foreign forces, including Russia's, could find themselves operating in an environment of increasing hostility. Moreover, as already noted with respect to Kyrgyzstan, it is unlikely that conflict in Tajikistan would be limited to that state alone; there is a clear risk of spread to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

**Table 9.3**  
**Indicators of Conflict: Tajikistan**

Indicator	Currently in Evidence	Likely in 10–15 Years	Possible in 10–15 Years
<i>Domestic</i>			
Popular movements form outside of legal channels, develop secretive, militaristic, radical agendas	✓	✓	
Privatization of force	✓	✓	
Increasing political “democratization”	✓	✓	
Increasing authoritarianism	✓	✓	
Ethnic, clan, linguistic or religious political parties with radical agendas gain influence	✓	✓	
Widespread reports of corruption and crackdowns thereon; frequent government-related scandals	✓	✓	
Regionalization/secessionism	✓	✓	
<i>Regional</i>			
Energy cutoffs by oil/gas suppliers	✓	✓	
Foreign (Russia, Iran, other) support of insurgents/secessionists	✓	✓	
Extended U.S./European military presence			✓
Conflict spillover from neighboring Central Asian states		✓	
Negative impact from revolution in Xinjiang, China			✓

### **Turkmenistan**

If most of the CASC states exhibit some signs of personalized authoritarianism, or “sultanism,” Turkmenistan is furthest along on this particular path. Saparmurat Niyazov’s rule is based on Soviet structures, loyal security forces, and increasingly a cult of personality, the closest parallel to which might be found today in North Korea. Political parties are banned, and the media are entirely controlled by the government. Public meetings are forbidden. Niyazov has named himself president for life, but he has also promised to step down in 2010, although there are rumors that rather

than holding an election, Niyazov will proclaim himself king so as to ensure succession by his son.

Politically isolated by choice, Turkmenistan is not the poorest state in the region. Although its UN Human Development Index ranking has dropped since 1995, with a per-capita annual income of \$670, it is in better shape than many. However, gas, water, energy, and salt rations are provided to citizens, and the price of bread is regulated. The water that Turkmenistan depends on for irrigation is controlled by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Like the region's other fuel exporters, Turkmenistan has heavy export concentration, with most of its exports derived from its gas sales. But Turkmenistan is alone in the region in continuing to sell over half of its gas to other CIS states, a factor attributable in large part to sales to Ukraine. It actually imports less from Russia, proportionately to its other imports, than from other states in the region. It also has substantial trade with Iran, with which it has arranged gas swaps.

Autocracy and poverty have fed crime and corruption here as they have elsewhere in the region. The shadow economy in Turkmenistan is estimated to be 60 percent the size of the official GDP. Although not a narcotics producer of any volume, Turkmenistan has become a route for drug traffickers and those who smuggle precursor chemicals to Turkey, Russia, and Europe. Here, too, the country's role as a transit state for the drug trade is increasing domestic illegal drug use, with the U.S. State Department's INCSR estimating unofficially that over 10 percent of the population may use illegal drugs.<sup>2</sup>

Niyazov's autocratic rule has to some extent limited the development of radical Islam in his country, although accurate and reliable information on this and similar domestic issues in Turkmenistan is difficult to come by. People of Turkmen ethnicity make up nearly 80 percent of the country's population. The largest minority group is the Uzbeks (just under 10 percent), followed by Russians (about 5 percent). The population is expected to continue to grow in coming years. If Niyazov's control falters, either in a transition of power or for some other reason, ethnic, religious, political, and economic

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<sup>2</sup>*International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, March 2001. See <http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/global/drugs>.

conflict all become possible as grievances whose expression the state has suppressed seek outlets in the absence of institutions capable of channeling them.

Over the next decade, Turkmenistan's share of Caspian natural gas export potential is expected to rise as Uzbekistan's declines due to domestic consumption. But this is also dependent on Turkmenistan's capacity to secure markets, particularly in Turkey and the Far East. The most viable alternative/supplement to routes through Russia is Iran, and it is likely that swaps with Iran will increase. But supplies from Iran and Azerbaijan may well be sufficient to saturate the Turkish market, leaving the Far Eastern option. The possibility of a route through Afghanistan to Pakistan and perhaps on to India has been discussed and may become possible if and when a political settlement of the Afghanistan conflict stabilizes that country. Other options for transporting and monetizing Turkmenistani gas hold promise, such as liquefying it for overwater transport or using other means of physical or chemical transformation for easier transport.

As a Caspian littoral state, Turkmenistan contests some areas of the Caspian with Azerbaijan. Although it was ambivalent about its stance on the division of the sea and seabed until recently, it now advocates the position that each littoral state have a national coastal zone of control that extends 10–20 miles into the Caspian. It also argues that no development of subsoil gas and oil deposits in disputed areas should take place until agreement is reached.

Turkmenistan has been consistent in insisting on its nonalignment, to the point of isolationism. Although it remains vulnerable to Russian economic pressure stemming from its dependence on Russian gas pipeline routes, it has not tried to balance that pressure by building political relationships with a variety of other states, as have many of its neighbors. While it has sought alternative pipelines and routes (for instance through Iran or Afghanistan, as noted above), it has avoided formalizing relationships within or outside the CIS. For instance, Turkmenistan never joined the CIS collective security treaty, it has signed but not ratified an EU Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, and although it did join Partnership for Peace, it has not been active in that organization.

Turkmenistan has been somewhat more amenable, however, to relations with Iran, driven in part by its desire for an alternative gas export mechanism. It also took a pragmatic line to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, negotiating a trade agreement and hosting informal talks between Northern Alliance and Taliban factions in 2000, although stopping short of official recognition of the regime. This can be at least partially explained by a belief that through good relations with the Taliban, Turkmenistan could avoid being targeted by insurgents trained in Afghanistan and could preclude Taliban support to whatever Islamist opposition might emerge on its own soil.

Since the collapse of the Taliban, Turkmenistan has discussed a range of possible cooperative projects with representatives of the interim government. In addition to gas pipelines, these include highway investments and electricity infrastructure. But the continued uncertainty of the political, economic, and military situation in Afghanistan makes any near-term implementation of such plans unlikely.

When it comes to the coalition as a whole, however, Turkmenistan has argued that its neutral status precludes the use of its territory for military forces involved in the war in Afghanistan, although it is willing to allow overflight for humanitarian missions. In January 2002, Turkmenistan acted on this policy and turned down a German request for airbase access in support of the coalition effort. That said, it should be noted that other states in the region, too, have excluded the use of their territory or airspace to support combat operations, and that Turkmenistan did allow the limited use of an airfield near the border with Afghanistan for humanitarian support.

Turkmenistan may see internal unrest, as noted above, in the event of a succession crisis or other economic or political crisis (and the latter could bring on the former). Turkmenistan is likely to get involved in conflict over the Caspian, as a littoral state. It will continue to be a battlefield of the war on narcotics, although not the most significant one of the region. It is not, however, a likely locale for major international conflict of any sort.

Other than multinational peacekeeping in the event of internal conflict, U.S. involvement in Turkmenistan is likely to be limited for as

**Table 9.4**  
**Indicators of Conflict: Turkmenistan**

Indicator	Currently in Evidence	Likely in 10–15 Years	Possible in 10–15 Years
<i>Domestic</i>			
Popular movements form outside of legal channels, develop secretive, militaristic, radical agendas			✓
Privatization of force			✓
Increasing political “democratization”		✓	
Increasing authoritarianism	✓	✓	
Ethnic, clan, linguistic or religious political parties with radical agendas gain influence			✓
Widespread reports of corruption; frequent government-related scandals and crackdowns on same			✓
Succession crisis			✓
<i>Regional</i>			
Unresolved Caspian claims	✓		✓
Russian efforts to exert influence by cutting off energy export routes	✓	✓	
Foreign (Russia, Iran, other) support of insurgents/secessionists			✓
Militarization of Caspian Sea		✓	

long as the country maintains its current isolationist foreign policy. If policy shifts, for whatever reason, the United States might seek to build stronger relations with this gas-producing state, particularly if planned gas pipeline routes connect Turkmenistan to Asia, increasing its strategic significance. If this happens, the likelihood of the United States taking a more active role in Turkmenistan’s problems, and potentially conflicts in or near that state, would increase. That said, Turkmenistan, along with Tajikistan, has some of the worst infrastructure of Central Asia, with much of the country not tied in to transport infrastructure. Its military is weak and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Even with major political reforms and economic growth, it would take years for Turkmenistan to reform its military to a point of real competence. Contamination of soil and water is a problem, as it is in neighboring states. The terrain is

mostly desert. Thus, as long as alternatives exist, Turkmenistan is not an appealing operational environment. That said, plausible scenarios can be envisioned in which alternatives are not sufficient to rule out the need to plan for the possibility of operations in Turkmenistan.

### **Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan is in second place after Turkmenistan as the most authoritarian/sultanistic regime of the Central Asian region. President Karimov has banned all opposition parties, restricts and censors the press, and maintains strict control over religious bodies. All opposition has been forced underground, and media censorship has extended to coverage of the ongoing war in Afghanistan: Karimov has limited the extent to which the U.S. and coalition presence in his country is discussed by its media. In January 2002, Karimov extended his presidential term from five years to seven by means of a referendum that made barely a pretense of democracy: 91 percent of voters were recorded as supporting the extension of Karimov's term.

From the economic perspective, Uzbekistan is in comparatively good shape when considered alongside its neighbors. Of the CASC states, only Uzbekistan has regained the GDP level of 1991. Annual income per capita is \$720. It is the only state in the region that is not heavily dependent on imports and has the most balanced trade structure of the eight regional states. That said, figures may well be unreliable. Uzbekistan appears to have a substantial debt burden as a percent of its GDP. The government has fought efforts to liberalize foreign exchange and trade regimes, making longer-term prospects questionable. It is the only state in the region that does not have a World Bank/IMF poverty reduction program in place. Foreign investment has gone down recently, in part due to government regulation and corruption.

Despite its large reserves, Uzbekistan is not a major exporter of natural gas. Its share of gas production is likely to decrease further in coming years, as domestic consumption rises. By 2005, its gas exports should be negligible, and Uzbekistan will become a net importer of crude oil to fill its energy needs. This may limit its capacity in the future to use gas exports to pressure neighbors that currently

depend on it for that resource, namely Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, on which Uzbekistan in turn relies for its water.

As is typical in the region, Uzbekistan has burgeoning and substantial problems with crime and corruption. There are close links between major criminal organizations and at least some political leaders. Foreign criminal groups, for instance from Korea, have also been active in Uzbekistan, particularly in the Ferghana Valley. That said, crime is a factor more of corruption than of economic development. Compared to other states in the region, Uzbekistan's shadow economy is low compared to its official economy. This is attributable, in part, to government control of economic activity and slow economic reform. Uzbekistan's role as a transit state for narcotics has also led to a burgeoning health crisis within the country. The United States government has estimated some 200,000 drug abusers in Uzbekistan (out of a population of about 24–25 million).

The combination of autocracy, corruption, and limited economic development, here as in neighboring states, creates real risks of internal conflict. If Karimov's grasp on power should fail, for whatever reason, a struggle for succession may emerge involving economic and political interests, as well as criminal groups, in a variety of short- and long-term alliances. A situation in some ways similar to the civil war in Tajikistan in the 1990s becomes plausible.

This is of particular concern because in Uzbekistan, too, political and economic divides overlay ethnic and religious allegiances. Ethnic Uzbeks make up just over three-quarters of the population of Uzbekistan, and the government has to some extent pursued policies of "ethnic redress," privileging Uzbeks over other ethnicities. However, the more likely source of internal ethnic conflict may be Karakalpakstan, a special administrative region in western Uzbekistan with substantial autonomy. Because Karakalpaks in Karakalpakstan enjoy a measure of self-rule and an elite structure independent of that of Uzbekistan as a whole, this area carries the potential for secessionism (as has happened with similar regions elsewhere in the former Soviet Union). This is unlikely in the near term, but it might become more probable if and when the regime in Uzbekistan weakens.

Insofar as religion is concerned, there can be no question that Islam Karimov's regime views political Islam as hostile. To some extent, the feeling is mutual. Groups such as the IMU and the Hizb ut-Tahrir take as their primary goal the removal of Karimov from power. The danger that such movements will become a true grassroots opposition that can challenge the regime is increased by the general crackdowns on all Muslims in Uzbekistan. It does appear that the appeal of such groups in Uzbekistan is growing, spreading beyond its traditional rural, Ferghana Valley base.

As already noted, the question of ethnic and religious rifts in any of the countries of Central Asia cannot be viewed in a vacuum. Aside from the shared concern about Islamic militants—and the somewhat differing views on how to respond to those concerns—Uzbekistan and its neighbors are caught in a tangle of shared and conflicting interests. Uzbekistan's Karimov and Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev both see themselves and their countries as regional leaders, and therefore each sees the other as a rival. Uzbekistan claims territory in all of its neighboring states, while the large Uzbek diaspora provides a potential pretext for Uzbek meddling in the affairs of others—something those neighbors fear will turn into an excuse for imperialistic behavior on the part of Uzbekistan. Similarly, some neighbors fear that Uzbekistan's efforts to police and pacify the Ferghana region, and its pressure on neighbors to track down militants and extremists, are part of a larger effort to extend influence, rather than just guarantee security. Events over the last two to three years do suggest that, if nothing else, Uzbekistan's evolving security policy appears to include the right to intervene in neighboring states if it perceives its own interests to be threatened.

If the IMU is likely to have had its capacity substantially degraded by the operations against the Taliban in Afghanistan, it and similar organizations may well retain or regain the capacity for at least small-scale harassment and terrorist acts, in Uzbekistan and elsewhere. Uzbekistan's own desire and perceived security need for regional leadership can also spark conflict, given its extraterritorial enclaves within Kyrgyzstan, the intermixing of Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik populations in all three countries, and resource tensions. Conflict could begin with Uzbek assistance for co-ethnics abroad, or an effort to track down and prevent attacks from militants who have fled to or are based in neighboring states. Insofar as the U.S. military presence

in Uzbekistan bolsters the regime and its perception of its regional influence, such scenarios may be even more likely today than they were prior to the September 11 attacks.

Beyond the region, Uzbekistan has sought to preserve as much independence as possible, refusing to accept Russian military assistance and instead seeking to build ties with the United States and Turkey, efforts that were, until recently, limited in large part by Uzbekistan's continued autocratic policies and human rights abuses. Uzbekistan withdrew from the CIS collective security treaty and joined GUUAM, the Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova grouping whose existence was intended and seen, at least in part, as a statement of independence from Russia. After the IMU incursions of 1999–2000, Uzbekistan appeared to warm somewhat to Moscow and its offers of assistance, but it stopped short of accepting any substantial military aid.

Prior to September 11, U.S. assistance to Uzbekistan was limited. It included some joint training of U.S. mountain combat units and Uzbek armed forces, as well as provision of some nonlethal military equipment. Turkey and Uzbekistan had begun to build a relationship, in which Turkey provided some material assistance and Turkish troops helped train Uzbek special forces units. Iran, which cooperated with Uzbekistan to some extent in the efforts by both countries and Russia to support Northern Alliance forces in Afghanistan, had little luck building more solid relations with the Uzbeks. Uzbekistan also joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in June 2000 and accepted assistance from China. Because this assistance included sniper rifles, it made China the only state other than Russia to provide lethal assistance to a Central Asian state prior to September 11. Uzbekistan has also signed bilateral agreements with India. Relations with Pakistan were strained due to Pakistan's reported links to the IMU.

The IMU certainly received support from Al Qaeda and the Taliban, and it established bases in Taliban-held areas of Afghanistan in the late 1990s and early 2000s, providing impetus for Uzbekistan's continuing support to the Northern Alliance (which was, as noted, predominantly Uzbek and Tajik in makeup). However, in middle to late 2000, it appeared that Uzbekistan might be seeking a different approach, perhaps hoping that rapprochement with the Taliban

could result in an end to its support of the IMU and increased security along Uzbekistan's southern border. In fall 2000, Karimov stated that he did not see the Taliban as a significant threat and urged a coalition government composed of Northern Alliance and Taliban forces. A few weeks later, the Uzbek ambassador to Pakistan met with representatives of the Taliban in Islamabad and reportedly reached an agreement for Uzbekistan and Afghanistan not to interfere in each other's affairs.

With the commencement of the U.S.-led coalition operation in Afghanistan, the situation changed drastically. Uzbekistan has a tremendous interest in peace in Afghanistan, and a reignited and/or protracted conflict posed the risk of an influx of refugees into Uzbekistan, straining resources, introducing possible insurgents, and threatening the survival of the regime. This, combined with Uzbekistan's wish to establish independence from Moscow and its longstanding desire for a closer relationship with the United States makes it not surprising that Uzbekistan was the first country to offer access rights to U.S. military forces for operations in Afghanistan. For Uzbekistan, this was an unprecedented opportunity to enlist the United States as a partner, to bolster the government and the stature of the country, as well as to assist in alleviating some of its security concerns. To date, the United States has repaid Uzbekistan's generosity by targeting IMU bases in Afghanistan, providing economic assistance, refurbishing infrastructure that U.S. forces are using in country, and signing a bilateral agreement promising to "regard with grave concern any external threat" to Uzbekistan. This is, of course, far short of any sort of security guarantee or alliance. That said, the very presence of U.S. forces in Uzbekistan suggests a tripwire, if not a political commitment, to Uzbekistan for at least as long as they remain in place.

While the United States has stated that support and assistance are contingent on democratization and improvement in the human rights sphere, Karimov's January referendum does not say much for the prospects of this being a successful mechanism for changing the nature of the regime. It is also worth noting that Uzbekistan has agreed to access for humanitarian or search and rescue purposes—not combat operations. Over time, Karimov's authoritarian rule and efforts to use the war on terrorism as an excuse for further crack-downs on political opposition forces will place the United States in

an increasingly awkward situation. Moreover, the United States may face a tension between its growing cooperation with Russia (and its relations with other states) and its presence in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states. To date, the United States has been insistent that it does not plan a permanent presence in the region, but in Uzbekistan, as in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, it may well find it difficult to leave entirely, particularly as Uzbekistan has much to gain from keeping the United States in place and engaged for as long as possible.

Despite the pitfalls, there may be strategic reasons for maintaining at least the option of presence in/access to Uzbekistan. It has the best support infrastructure of the region, and it has 10 of the region's 36 airfields with runways over 7,500 feet (including 4 of the 12 longer than 10,000 feet). This makes it the most capable base for major airlift operations in the region. It also has some of the most capable military forces in the region (although this is a fairly low bar, and Uzbekistan's forces remain largely in poor condition), and possibly the best potential to develop a small number of truly competent elite units in coming years.

That said, U.S. forces found that even these "best" facilities required that they deploy with more personnel and equipment than is standard—they needed to bring far more in the way of support infrastructure than is generally the case. Uzbekistan's terrain is not as challenging as, say, Tajikistan, but its desert, river valleys, and mountains are not particularly hospitable, either. Pollution and contamination are real problems, as is the food supply.

An extended U.S. presence in Uzbekistan runs a real risk of involving the United States in Uzbekistan's internal cleavages, as well as its tensions with neighboring states. The withdrawal of forces in the near term, combined with the maintenance of close military ties and provision of economic assistance, mitigates that danger but does not remove it completely. U.S. forces, facilities, and personnel may also emerge as an appealing target for anti-Karimov forces insofar as they are seen as bolstering his regime. It is therefore plausible to argue that insofar as conflict in or involving Uzbekistan is likely over the course of the next 10–15 years, U.S. involvement in some form in that conflict has recently become far more probable.

**Table 9.5**  
**Indicators of Conflict: Uzbekistan**

Indicator	Currently in Evidence	Likely in 10–15 Years	Possible in 10–15 Years
<i>Domestic</i>			
Popular movements form outside of legal channels, develop secretive, militaristic, radical agendas		✓	
Privatization of force		✓	
Increasing political “democratization”		✓	
Increasing authoritarianism	✓	✓	
Ethnic, clan, linguistic or religious political parties with radical agendas gain influence		✓	
Widespread reports of corruption; frequent government-related scandals and crackdowns on same		✓	
Succession crisis		✓	
Secessionism		✓	
<i>Regional</i>			
Extended U.S. military presence		✓	
Formal alignment with the United States			✓
Russian efforts to exert influence by cutting off energy export routes			✓
Foreign (Russia, Iran, other) support of insurgents/secessionists	✓	✓	
Conflict spillover from neighboring Central Asian states		✓	
Negative impact of revolution in Xinjiang, China			✓

### Trans–Central Asian Conflict

As the above discussion indicates, ethnic and religious conflict in Central Asia, if it emerges, is unlikely to be limited to a single state. Just as IMU incursions affected Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, any similar movement will not limit itself to any one of these regimes, linked as they are by ethnicity, religion, and intercutting borders. The IMU itself, now significantly degraded in its

capacity, will continue (insofar as it survives) to see Islam Karimov's government in Uzbekistan as its primary target, but it is likely to continue to carry out operations in Kyrgyzstan and may also seek to shelter once more in Tajikistan, where it can easily find sanctuary in the Pamir mountains. In fact, as long as Tajikistan remains a country with large swaths of land outside of central government control, it will remain an appealing base of operations for the IMU and similar groups with targets throughout the region. Whether or not the Hizb ut-Tahrir itself continues to adhere to its nonviolent philosophy for attaining some of the same goals as those held by the IMU, it is also likely that some of its members may become radicalized over time (particularly as they are likely to develop contacts with more radical individuals and groups as a result of the prison sentences that local regimes impose on Hizb members). The increasing alienation of the population in Central Asia, where the majority of residents are faced with political and economic disenfranchisement, benefits radical groups who not only provide a mechanism for political expression, but are often able to pay their members and soldiers with monies received from foreign sources and illegal enterprises (such as narcotics smuggling). Because it appears that such groups are growing beyond their traditional poor and rural support bases, they are likely to remain a real concern to regional states and, if the United States remains either physically present or otherwise involved in the region, to U.S. forces and personnel as well.

Prior experience indicates that regional states may have difficulty cooperating against these or other common threats, and that their own conflicts over influence, resources, and terrorism also present a danger of conflict. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have accused each other of harboring violent oppositionists, and not without evidence. All the states of the region have land claims and border disputes with their neighbors; Uzbekistan has some sort of territorial dispute with every other Central Asian state. Large ethnic diasporas of the eponymous ethnic groups of each of these states on the territories of their Central Asian neighbors (as well as in China and Afghanistan) combined with policies of ethnic redress in most of these states create a danger of international conflict as states seek to support their co-ethnics on the other side of national borders.

Moreover, the other Central Asian states are concerned that Uzbekistan will use cooperation to counter common threats or to

support/defend its co-ethnics as an excuse for imperialistic behavior. It has justified the mining of borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, including in contested areas, by arguing that it is done to prevent IMU-style insurgencies, although the only result so far has been civilian casualties. The Uzbek air force has also launched unsanctioned attacks into the territories of these countries. At the same time, as noted above, Kyrgyzstan too has mined its borders with Tajikistan. Also, as already discussed, Uzbekistan has pressured these states to crack down on Hizb ut-Tahrir and similar groups. Kyrgyzstan has generally complied and has extradited some individuals, but the situation continues to create tension. Disputes over gas and water have also marred relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

## **SOUTH CAUCASUS**

### **Armenia**

Armenia is something of an outlier in the region. It has maintained a relatively stable domestic political situation despite economic stagnation, debilitating emigration, and the murders of a prime minister and a speaker of parliament. It has been able to do so in large part because the cease-fire in its conflict with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, although oft-challenged, remains in place.

That said, Armenia faces severe economic decline, attributable in part to the costs of holding on to the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, within Azerbaijan, and the resultant blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey. Income inequality is high, and the annual per-capita income is low at \$490. It is estimated that about 80 percent of the population lives at or below the poverty level of less than \$25/month. Though the official unemployment rate is 17 percent, unofficial estimates put it as high as 50 percent. The extralegal economy is estimated at 78 percent of the size of the official economy. Corruption is a problem here, as it is throughout the region.

Armenia is a large importer of oil and gas and heavily dependent on Russia for its imports. Its continuing conflict with Azerbaijan makes it unlikely to have a role in Caspian energy development as a transit state, although transit through Armenia would be shorter and possi-

bly less dangerous than planned transit through Georgia. Armenia does have plans to diversify its gas imports by means of natural gas from Iran, lessening its dependence on Russia.

In the meantime, its debt for gas deliveries from Russia have mounted, and Armenia agreed to a debt-equity swap that granted Russian gas suppliers controlling interest in Amrosgazprom, the Armenian gas distribution monopoly. Negotiations for stakes in other Armenian enterprises are ongoing. That said, Armenia's debt sustainability problem does not appear to be unmanageable.

Unlike other countries in the region, economic or other discontent can be expressed in protests and demonstrations. While there has been violence in the parliament and continues to be tremendous disagreement within the government and among the polity, Armenia is more prone to contentious elections than to succession crises. The population is largely ethnically homogenous and predominantly of the Armenian Orthodox faith. Thus, the risk of internal conflict in Armenia is relatively low, although the risks that conflict with Azerbaijan will be renewed remain significant, and there is a substantial domestic constituency for a more belligerent attitude (see discussion below).

Armenia maintains very close ties with Russia, relying on it for security assistance. Russia provided support during the war with Azerbaijan and continues to do so, in the form of military equipment, spare parts, supplies, and training. Russian units and equipment are also stationed in Armenia. The two countries have signed a security assistance treaty. Armenia also has some military ties with the United States, but these have been limited in part by constraints placed on the United States by the Freedom Support Act, which prevented real military assistance to either combatant in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. With these restrictions eased in the wake of September 11, it is expected that ties between the United States and Armenia will grow. Armenia is also an active participant in NATO's PfP program.

Armenia's relationship with Turkey remains tense over Turkey's insistence that its government was not at fault in the mass deaths of Armenians in Turkey in 1915, a tension exacerbated by Turkey's support for Azerbaijan. Armenia does have a strong relationship with

**Table 9.6**  
**Indicators of Conflict: Armenia**

Indicator	Currently in Evidence	Likely in 10–15 Years	Possible in 10–15 Years
<i>Domestic</i>			
Popular movements form outside of legal channels, develop secretive, militaristic, radical agendas			✓
Privatization of force			✓
Increasing political “democratization”	✓		
Increasing authoritarianism			✓
Widespread reports of corruption; frequent government-related scandals and crackdowns on same		✓	
<i>Regional</i>			
Russian efforts to exert influence by cutting off energy export routes			✓
Conflict with neighboring states		✓	

France, which has been involved, along with the United States and Russia, in mediating the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It also has good ties with Iran.

Armenia is unlikely to become a major staging area for U.S. operations, and it is an unlikely place for U.S. troops to be deployed in the foreseeable future. That said, it does have some capable airfields, two with runways over 10,000 feet, which would be capable of supporting most NATO aircraft. These could potentially be useful for operations not just locally, but into the northern Persian Gulf region. It has one of the more capable militaries in the region and is one of the more likely to develop a capable rapid-reaction force in coming years. On the other hand, while roads in and between the major cities are better maintained than those elsewhere in the region, secondary and tertiary roads and related infrastructure are poor.

### **Azerbaijan**

Like Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan’s hopes for prosperity rest on its oil reserves. Petroleum accounts for 83 percent of its exports, demon-

strating a high degree of export concentration. Sixty percent of this oil goes to the EU. Azerbaijan also has the highest level of imports from Russia in the region (21 percent). A portion of this is natural gas. Although Azerbaijan is a gas producer in its own right, it does import a small amount from Russia—enough that when Russia cut off gas supplies in October 2000, Azeris organized street protests. Depending on the success of exploration, Azerbaijan can be expected to be a significant oil producer into 2010–2015. Kazakhstan, however, is increasingly seen as the more important oil state of the Caspian, with Azerbaijan increasingly viewed as a prospective gas producer over coming decades. In the meantime, it is reasonable to assume that Azerbaijan will glean profits from both oil and gas exports.

In an effort to offset some of the problems that export concentration in the fuels sector can engender, the IMF made a recent installment of loans to Azerbaijan contingent on the creation of an “oil fund” that would redirect energy development proceeds to other sectors of the economy. With the fund now in place, the IMF and the Azerbaijani government disagree on whether it should be managed by the executive or the legislative branch of Azerbaijan’s government.

Despite the prospects that its oil wealth would suggest, the people of Azerbaijan remain poor. Per-capita income is \$460 per year, and Azerbaijan scores lower on the UN Human Development Index than neighbors Armenia and Georgia. The shadow economy is large, estimated at 90 percent of the size of the official economy. Corruption is a tremendous problem—Azerbaijan is consistently ranked near the bottom of global rankings of states on this measure.

Azerbaijan must be seen as somewhere between an autocracy/sultanistic regime and a democracy, although increasingly leaning toward the former. Aliev, as president, has been increasingly authoritarian, and his rule ever more personalistic. As he ages, the dangers of a succession crisis begin to loom large, and he has sought to take steps to name his son his successor. Azerbaijan does have an opposition, composed of a variety of diverse movements and groups. Opposition leaders (and members) of a certain stripe (for instance, Islamists) or those who are seen as a real threat by the Aliev regime find themselves harassed and subject to arrest on trumped-up charges. Some have left Azerbaijan and gone into exile. The press,

too, is increasingly subject to censorship, and there is reason to think that elections and voting are rigged.

The Islamist movement in Azerbaijan appears to be fairly small and to have limited appeal, although continuing crackdowns on it by the Aliiev regime could in time further radicalize its members. Moreover, continued economic deprivation combined with increasing limits on political freedom may in coming years make the Islamist movement more appealing to some segments of the population. Azerbaijan is fairly homogenous ethnically (over 90 percent Azeri). Past incidents of ethnic violence have been directed against the Armenian minority. That said, there are some subnational identities in Azerbaijan with the potential to become more important if political entrepreneurs are able to take advantage of them to mobilize groups. This is possible if the regime begins to weaken and the many economic and political grievances in Azerbaijan rise to the surface. Finally, conflict in Russia, in the northern Caucasus, could spill over into Azerbaijan. Of particular interest are Lezgin nationalists in Dagestan and the broader possibility of strife in that region.

In the more immediate term, however, Azerbaijan is at more risk from reignited conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. The 1994 cease-fire left 20 percent of Azerbaijan under Armenia's control and hundreds of thousands of Azeris internally displaced from that territory (estimates suggest that between 700,000 and one million people are affected). If war returns, Azerbaijan's political and economic growth and development will suffer. If a peace settlement is reached and all or part of the displaced people return to their homes, the resulting strain on the economy of Azerbaijan could foment a crisis. As in Armenia, there is strong domestic support among the opposition for actions that could well reignite conflict.

As a Caspian littoral state, Azerbaijan has claims on oil and gas fields therein. Azerbaijan is a supporter of Russia's proposed solution to Caspian claims: that the seabed and subsoil be divided along international boundary lines while the waters are held in common. Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan have competing claims over several oil fields, including ones that Azerbaijan is already developing. In July 2001, Iranian gunboats threatened a British Petroleum research vessel in what Azerbaijan considers its territorial waters in the Caspian.

Azerbaijan has a strong relationship with its neighboring state Georgia, with which, along with Ukraine and Moldova, it is a founding member of the GUUAM grouping (now also including Uzbekistan, as noted above). At present it remains largely dependent on Russia for export routes for its natural gas and oil, although a “Western route” for oil to Europe through Georgia now supplements the “Northern route” through Russia. Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, and the United States have supported the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which would begin in Azerbaijan, transit Georgia, and terminate at the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan in Turkey (oil could then transit the Mediterranean by tanker). There are also plans for a parallel gas export route (although gas cannot be transported over water as easily, as noted in the discussion of Turkmenistan above).

Azerbaijan’s relations with Russia have been tense. Aliev’s government has been adamant and consistent in its refusal to allow Russian troops to be stationed in Azerbaijan and more recently has largely rebuffed Russian efforts to re-establish close ties. One of the reasons for Azerbaijan’s interest in developing multiple pipeline routes for oil and gas is to minimize its dependence on Russia, and thus limit Russia’s leverage. The expectation that these routes will be built has already helped Azerbaijan chart a more independent foreign policy. Azerbaijan also hopes that by building close ties with Turkey, the United States, and NATO as a whole, it can guarantee its independence from Russia for the long term.

Azerbaijan has built a close cooperative relationship with Turkey. Turkey sponsors its (and Georgia’s) participation in NATO-led peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia (as part of NATO’s KFOR stabilization force in Kosovo) and provides military assistance, including training and refurbishment of bases. Turkey is also Azerbaijan’s largest single trade partner. Most recently, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have signed a tripartite security cooperation agreement that commits Turkey to provide more military assistance and training. While this is still far short of formal alignment, it does cement the relationship even further than before and, combined with the Turkish presence in Azerbaijan, sends a clear signal to other states, including Russia.

**Table 9.7**  
**Indicators of Conflict: Azerbaijan**

Indicator	Currently in Evidence	Likely in 10–15 Years	Possible in 10–15 Years
<i>Domestic</i>			
Popular movements form outside of legal channels, develop secretive, militaristic, radical agendas			✓
Privatization of force			✓
Increasing political “democratization”		✓	
Increasing authoritarianism	✓	✓	
Ethnic, clan, linguistic or religious political parties with radical agendas gain influence			✓
Widespread reports of corruption; frequent government-related scandals and crackdowns on same		✓	
Succession crisis		✓	
<i>Regional</i>			
Unresolved Caspian claims	✓		✓
Militarization of Caspian Sea		✓	
Formal alignment with Turkey		✓	
Russian efforts to exert influence by cutting off energy export routes	✓	✓	
Foreign (Russia, Iran, other) support of insurgents/secessionists			✓
Conflict with neighboring states		✓	

Azerbaijan’s relationship with the United States was limited by arms sales and assistance restrictions imposed on the warring parties in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by the Freedom Support Act. In March 2002, however, these restrictions were lifted, and the United States has, since September 11, shown signs that the relationship with Azerbaijan will be developing more in the future, particularly in areas related to the coalition against terrorism. Azerbaijan has the potential to build some capable military formations in coming years, particularly with assistance from states such as Turkey and the United States, although this would require that it devote considerable effort and resources.

As things stand, crisis or conflict in or relating to Azerbaijan is reasonably likely to draw in Turkey and involve Russia, which is understandably ambivalent about U.S. and Turkish ties to its close southern neighbor, in some capacity. As the U.S. relationship with Azerbaijan develops, the likelihood that the United States will be involved also increases. Moreover, as a possible basing area for military operations outside its territory, Azerbaijan offers some advantages, including proximity to the Persian Gulf region. Access rights to an Azerbaijani airfield are reportedly being sought by Turkey, which argues that there are two airfields in Azerbaijan that could be brought up to NATO standards. On the other hand, Azerbaijan is relatively underdeveloped industrially compared to Armenia or Georgia. High unemployment and poverty typical of the post-Soviet region are a problem in Azerbaijan as well, as is pollution and poor water, air, and soil quality. Road conditions are poor in ways typical of the region.

### **Georgia**

Georgia's economy has been ravaged by years of domestic unrest, which has included civil war and secessionist movements in several regions. Georgia's GDP in 2000 was half the level of 1991, and the shadow economy is estimated to be 85 percent the size of the official economy. In fact, it is difficult to overestimate the extent to which crime and criminal groups are involved in Georgia's economy and political system. Georgia is very dependent on Russia for natural gas and has a high debt burden, with half of its debt bilateral. Sixty percent of the population lives at or below the poverty level. Georgia's debt has, in fact, fed its poverty problem, as debt service has precluded higher spending domestically. Insofar as the balance of payments and debt situation is unlikely to change significantly for Georgia, even under the best of circumstances it will continue to experience severe economic difficulties. In this environment, external shocks or crises could prove particularly volatile.

In the meantime, the domestic political situation continues to be in turmoil, with de facto separatism in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, an influx of refugees (reportedly including a number of militants) from Chechnya in the Pankisi Gorge, and general lawlessness and lack of control in many regions. While Georgia under President Eduard

Shevardnadze has made a public commitment to political and economic liberalization, corruption is rampant, even compared to other states in the region, and Shevardnadze's rule has come under increasing criticism from within his country. At the same time, the president's ability to command respect abroad has helped him maintain foreign support, which in turn has helped him stay in power at home. As Shevardnadze ages, and the Georgian public gets increasingly unwilling to tolerate the corruption and economic collapse that has continued under his rule, the likelihood increases that there will be a change in power. Given the political and economic situation in Georgia, and the history of conflict, it is extremely optimistic to expect that a peaceful political transition would be easy to achieve. While it is possible that Shevardnadze's eventual departure from power will help Georgia begin to develop as a democracy, it is also possible that it will spark a succession crisis that destroys the few institutions and government structures that exist in this country.

Other possible flashpoints for conflict in Georgia include spillover from the war in Chechnya, which could culminate in Russian intervention and perhaps even takeover of parts of northern Georgia. Various other Russian North Caucasus conflicts (the Ingush-Ossetian conflict, tensions between the Karachai-Balkars and the Circassians) could also spill over into Georgia if they flare up. Russian support for separatists within Georgia has precedent (Russians are widely believed to have aided the Abkhaz movement) and may recur, given the many ethnic and subethnic groups and identities in Georgia. The one thing that seems unlikely to be a factor in Georgia is political Islam. Ajaria, a region inhabited by Muslim ethnic Georgians, tends to be a secular place, where the people identify far more as Georgians than as Muslims.

Georgia has sought to develop a Western political orientation even as Russian troops remained in place on its soil. Russia maintains ground and air force bases within Georgia, in part with an ostensible peacekeeping mission, although its forces have been accused of assisting separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (and not without evidence). Although Russia has withdrawn forces from two of its four bases in Georgia, it was guilty of foot-dragging in doing so, and negotiations on the two remaining bases remain difficult. It has also overflowed and reportedly attacked Georgian territory in pursuit of Chechen rebels.

Georgia's effort to demonstrate and cement its independence from Russia has taken two primary forms. One was a role in the Caspian energy trade, for which Georgia promises to be a key transit state for oil and gas en route from the Caspian to Europe. The other was a concerted effort to build ties with Western states. The two are, of course, related, as the United States and Turkey have supported efforts to build the pipelines through Georgia even as they have developed military and other ties. Georgia has been particularly successful in building ties with Turkey, which sponsors its (and Azerbaijan's) participation in NATO-led peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia (as part of NATO's KFOR stabilization force in Kosovo), provides military assistance, and has become Georgia's single largest trade partner. Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey have signed a tripartite agreement on regional security (noted above in relation to Azerbaijan). Turkish military advisors are in place in Georgia, and Turkey leases a Georgian airbase, where it now has a military presence. As with Azerbaijan, Turkey's increasing political and military involvement in Georgia, while short of actual alliance, does send clear, and unwelcome, messages to Moscow.

Assistance from the United States to Georgia had been more low-key throughout the middle to late 1990s, with the United States pleased to let Turkey take the leading role in building ties with Georgia, Azerbaijan, and several Central Asian states. Since September 11, however, U.S. ties with Georgia have grown to encompass assistance to the Georgians in efforts to eradicate Chechen rebels and other groups or individuals believed to be linked to Al Qaeda, who Georgia has said may be sheltering in the Pankisi Gorge among Chechen refugees. It is worth noting that Georgia has for years refused to accept Russian arguments that such rebels were in Pankisi, in part because Russia was offering its military support (and thus stepped up military presence). U.S. assistance is in the form of training and equipment provided to Georgia, and it has been careful to maintain consultations with Russia with regard to this endeavor.

In addition to the fight against Al Qaeda and related groups, Georgia offers some strategic advantages for other potential operations. As the only state in CASC with access to the open sea, it is a possible entry point for operations throughout the Caspian region. It is also sufficiently close to the Middle East that its airfields could be used for operations in the northern Persian Gulf, Iraq, Iran, or Turkey. Half of

the twenty airfields in the South Caucasus with runways over 7,500 feet are in Georgia. Georgia has fair rail links to Armenia and Azerbaijan, although the road network is in poor condition and the lack of government control over large areas of the country may make land transit dangerous.

At the time of this writing, the United States has been insistent that its presence in Georgia will be minimal and will not include combat operations. In the meantime, Russian, Turkish, and U.S. forces are now operating on Georgian territory. Georgia's hope is almost certainly that U.S. and Turkish involvement will help speed the final withdrawal of Russian forces and cement Georgia's independence from Russian influence and leverage. However, the very reasons that U.S. troops are now in place—the possible presence of Al Qaeda-backed militants and the Georgian military's own insufficient capacity to patrol its borders—effectively combine with the many other faultlines and possible causes of conflict in Georgia to create a very volatile situation. Conflict in Georgia at some level has been almost constant since independence, and escalation of one or more of the existing fights seems relatively likely. With both Turkey and the United States now more deeply involved in Georgian security, their involvement in such developing conflicts becomes increasingly probable. Insofar as their efforts appear to be supportive of the existing (and increasingly unpopular) government, moreover, U.S. forces stand the risk of becoming a target of opposition groups, creating additional dangers. Finally, as the consolidation of central control over Georgia and establishment of a functioning state on its territory will be a long-term and difficult endeavor, one must ask to what extent the United States will be willing and able to commit personnel and resources to it—as well as taking on the difficult task of managing relations with Russia, given its strategic interests in what it sees as its southern “underbelly.” Without help and support to consolidate central control and build a functioning state, however, Georgia runs the risk of disintegrating into a state of anarchy and war, where terrorists, criminals, and others may find safe havens. Certainly the United States, Russia, Turkey, and, indeed, all interested parties share an interest in preventing such an outcome. Their capacity to achieve it, and moreover to do so cooperatively without doing irreparable damage to other strategic interests, remains in question.

**Table 9.8**  
**Indicators of Conflict: Georgia**

Indicator	Currently in Evidence	Likely in 10–15 years	Possible in 10–15 years
<i>Domestic</i>			
Popular movements form outside of legal channels, develop secretive, militaristic, radical agendas	✓	✓	
Privatization of force	✓	✓	
Increasing political “democratization”	✓	✓	
Increasing authoritarianism			✓
Ethnic, clan, linguistic or religious political parties with radical agendas gain influence	✓	✓	
Widespread reports of corruption; frequent government-related scandals and crackdowns on same	✓	✓	
Succession crisis		✓	
Secessionism	✓	✓	
<i>Regional</i>			
Extended U.S. military presence			✓
Formal alignment with Turkey		✓	
Formal alignment with the United States			✓
Russian efforts to exert influence by cutting off energy export routes	✓	✓	
Foreign (Russia, Iran, other) support of insurgents/secessionists	✓	✓	
Conflict spillover from neighboring states	✓	✓	

### Trans-Caucasus Conflict

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the most likely cause of renewed interstate fighting in the South Caucasus. Nagorno-Karabakh, a region inside the territorial borders of Azerbaijan that is populated primarily by Armenians, sparked an outright war between the two neighbors that ended with a cease-fire in 1994—and with Armenian control of Nagorno-Karabakh (which in principle is independent) as well as a swath of Azerbaijani land connecting Armenia to it (as

noted above, this has led to a large number of internally displaced refugees in Azerbaijan). Peace talks have continued since that time. It is generally agreed that any settlement would require the return to Azerbaijan of the land outside of Nagorno-Karabakh occupied by Armenia, as well as some sort of land bridge to Nakhichevan, an Azeri-populated territory that is administratively part of Azerbaijan but located on Armenian territory, on the border with Iran. Recently, with both sides increasingly recognizing the war's economic and political costs, a settlement has begun to appear more possible. However, the success of peace talks remains far from assured, and opposition movements in both Azerbaijan and Armenia that take a more belligerent view than the current leadership will grow stronger if they fail—making a resumption of conflict more likely. Certainly, public opinion in both states is a long way from pacifist, and Armenian politicians speak in favor of outright annexation, while Azerbaijan is far from resigned to the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh, much less any other territory. As both sides raise their military spending and Armenia plans for a larger army, it appears that these states may be considering renewed conflict as a real possibility (or seeking to deter each other in an arms race, which in turn may also increase the risk of conflict).

In addition to the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, the presence of many ethnic and subethnic groups and identities in Georgia has repercussions for neighboring states. One possible scenario over the next 10–15 years, for example, might include Armenian efforts to support co-ethnics in Armenian-inhabited parts of Georgia that are contiguous to Armenia. If Georgia remains weak, it is even possible to speculate that Armenia might seek to annex some portion of this territory.

### **Trans-Caspian Conflict**

A critical issue that affects all the states of the Caspian region is, of course, the legal status of the Caspian Sea itself and the division of its fossil fuel-rich seabed. Until the question of which countries control which portions of the seabed are resolved, the Caspian's energy resources cannot be fully exploited. While the legal questions hinge on whether the Caspian should be seen as a sea (in which case it is covered by the Law of the Sea Convention, and the sea and undersea resources should be divided into national sectors) or a lake (in which

case the resources should be developed jointly), the negotiations that have been ongoing since the collapse of the Soviet Union have reflected somewhat more complex concerns.

Russia has advocated a solution that calls for the division of the seabed and subsoil of the Caspian into national sectors along international boundary lines, with the waters held in common. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan also support this approach. Iran argues that the Caspian seabed and waters should be divided so that each of the five littoral states controls 20 percent (Iran would receive less than 20 percent if the Caspian is divided by the mechanism Russia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan favor). Turkmenistan, which insists that no one should begin development on subsoil gas and oil deposits in disputed territories until these issues are resolved, has advocated a condominium principle (which would apply if the Caspian were deemed a lake), with each state having a national coastal zone of 10–20 miles into the sea, but does not disagree with the principle of dividing the sea as an alternative option. Despite many meetings and discussions, the five states have remained unable to reach agreement as of the time of this writing.

The extent to which this problem can lead to actual conflict appears limited, but not entirely negligible. In July 2001, as noted above, Iranian gunboats threatened force against a British Petroleum research vessel in what Azerbaijan sees as its territorial waters. This earned Iran stark rebukes from not only Azerbaijan, but also its partner on many issues, Russia. Soon after, however, Turkmenistan declared that Azerbaijan was illegally claiming fields in the Caspian, as no demarcation was as yet agreed. Meanwhile, although Russia and Iran currently maintain the largest and most capable military forces in or near the Caspian, the other littoral states are building up their capabilities. As long as the Caspian issue remains unresolved, each of them has a strong incentive to deploy increasing numbers of forces to the Caspian itself, both to deter attacks or conflict, and to ensure that they can respond if it occurs. Of course, insofar as other states see this militarization as threatening, such a situation can lead to further militarization, thus raising the overall risk of conflict.

## **PATHS TO CONFLICT AND U.S. INVOLVEMENT**

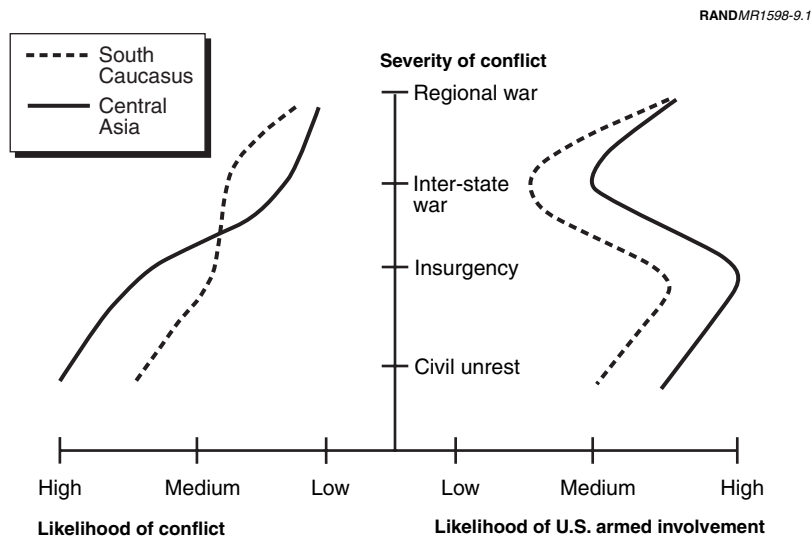
All of the analyses suggest that there are numerous causes of and potential pathways to conflict in CASC. Most of the causes are deeply entrenched and are likely to remain in place for the next 10–15 years and probably much longer. The general conclusion emerging from the research is that, in view of the faultlines and risk factors in place, it would be surprising if some form of armed strife did not break out in the region during the next decade and a half. But that in no way means that U.S. military involvement is likely in any such strife. The most likely forms of armed conflict in the region are incidents of internal strife, whether they take the form of Islamist-supported insurgencies, unrest that may accompany a breakdown of state control in one area and the assumption of state-like functions by non-state bodies, or violence that follows mobilization along ethnic lines because of local grievances, or a mixture of any or all of the above. However, such incidents of armed conflict are also the most likely to be localized, and most are apt to be contained by the regime in question. The connection between such a form of strife and the threat to U.S. interests that would lead to the decision to deploy U.S. forces in the region is not obvious or automatic, and such conflict is unlikely to trigger quick U.S. deployment to deal with the strife.

## **CONFLICT LIKELIHOOD, CONFLICT SEVERITY, AND POTENTIAL FOR ARMY DEPLOYMENT**

We differentiate the pathways to potential deployment of Army forces with a mission that is internal to the region (rather than external, such as deploying to Uzbekistan in support of operations in Afghanistan) by *subregion* and *severity of conflict*. We use “subregion,” of course, to distinguish Central Asia and the South Caucasus as distinct areas. We use “severity of conflict” to describe the scope (extent of contested space) and intensity (extent of casualties) of hostilities. In the context of the Caspian region, we see severity as a continuum, ranging from intrastate, localized, and usually temporary mob violence, to intrastate organized armed action against a regime (and usually associated with an alternative political program), to an interstate armed conflict, all the way to an interstate war that involves several states and their armed forces. Admittedly, the categories sketched above overlap and some insurgencies may be

more severe in terms of casualties than some interstate wars. But on the average, as signposts on the continuum, and especially as these types of armed strife might play out in CASC, we believe that the continuum roughly approximates the range of low conflict severity associated with various forms of civil unrest, to insurgency, to an interstate war, all the way to high conflict severity associated with a regional war. Figure 9.1 provides a notional representation of the relationship between conflict likelihood and conflict severity in a perspective of the next 10–15 years. The likelihood of U.S. involvement varies along both axes. We stress that the figure is notional and subject to modification if basic conditions were to change. The rationale for the representation is discussed below.

The likelihood of different types of conflict varies between the two subregions. Intrastate, unorganized, and localized unrest of some form is more likely in Central Asia than in the South Caucasus because of the presence of more entrenched authoritarian regimes, lower socioeconomic levels, greater vulnerability to the appeal of



**Figure 9.1—Notional Representation of Conflict Severity, Conflict Likelihood, and the Potential for Army Deployment in Central Asia and South Caucasus**

Islamists, and greater ethnic heterogeneity. The high conflict likelihood in Central Asia at the low levels of conflict severity stems from the general thrust of all the analyses in this report, which have pointed to the existence of a multitude of grievances and to the expectation of some form of armed unrest in one or more of the Central Asian states, even if the unrest is not organized by an alternative political group seeking power. Most of the same reasons are present in South Caucasus, though not all and not always at as high a level of severity. The relative difference between the two subregions notwithstanding, there is high likelihood of conflict in an absolute sense.

The same reasons for differentiating between South Caucasus and Central Asia apply to the assessment of the likelihood of the two subregions to drift toward more organized forms of politically motivated conflict, with insurgencies and guerrilla wars being more likely in Central Asia than in South Caucasus. Although conflict types more akin to an insurgency are less likely in both regions than the sporadic and probably localized forms of strife that may accompany civil unrest, Central Asia retains a fairly high vulnerability to insurgency in an absolute sense.

We reverse our assessment of conflict likelihood in the two subregions at the higher levels of conflict severity, with South Caucasus more vulnerable to interstate war than Central Asia. The currently dormant Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict is the primary cause for this assessment, though it is not the only plausible conflict pairing in the subregion. Whether stemming from potential Georgian alignment with Turkey or from Georgia's internal implosion, an Armenian-Georgian conflict is also plausible in a long-term perspective. There is also the potential for one of the South Caucasus states to become involved in a border war with a state external to the region, with plausible scenarios centering on Russia, Iran, and Turkey. But interstate war in Central Asia is limited mainly to Uzbekistan resorting to force in pursuit of its perceived ethnic, resource, or economic goals in the region. The already high preponderance of power wielded by Uzbekistan in the region and the likelihood that this will continue lowers the likelihood of any use of force, since it isn't needed to achieve the regime's regional goals. In terms of conflict potential for a war with a state external to the region, the likelihood is also relatively low, in that geography limits interaction with Iran,

Afghanistan, and China, and there are fewer existing (and potential) interstate disputes in place. Russia is an exception in that it has important interests in and many potential areas for dispute with Kazakhstan, but here the Russian preponderance of power is so overwhelming that it is difficult to imagine that Russia would have to resort to the use of force to secure its interests. As long as Russian policy continues to be cautious regarding support for Russophones in Kazakhstan and as long as the Kazakhstani regime continues to be careful in its treatment of that population, the potential for Russophones in Kazakhstan to provoke a conflict remains low. In any event, because internal causes of conflict in South Caucasus in almost all cases have a direct link to disputes with external state actors, the potential for interstate war does not differ greatly from the potential for organized intrastate conflict in that subregion. On the other hand, the link between internal causes of conflict and external state actors in Central Asia is more tenuous, leading to a lower assessment of likelihood for interstate war in Central Asia.

In an absolute sense, we assess the likelihood of a regional war as fairly low in both subregions, though, for the same reasons mentioned in the discussion of the likelihood of an interstate war, there is greater likelihood of a regional war in South Caucasus. The link between internal causes of conflict and external state actors is more intertwined in South Caucasus. In Central Asia, an Uzbekistani turn to the use of force stands as the most important factor that could lead to a regional war. However, as outlined earlier, Uzbekistani predominance of power also makes the turn to the use of force in support of regime goals less necessary.

The pathways to deployment and armed involvement of Army forces to CASC as part of U.S. military involvement are a function of U.S. interests and an assessment of risks and benefits, and thus they vary by subregion and conflict severity. The September 11 attacks and the consequent U.S. presence on the ground in Central Asia has elevated the likelihood of involvement of U.S. troops in armed strife in Central Asia. An S-shaped curve portrays the likelihood of U.S. deployment and armed involvement in strife in both subregions, though the likelihood is higher in Central Asia. Any insurgency in Central Asia is likely to have Islamist elements and, as such, carries a strong likelihood of provoking a U.S. armed response. Because of the lesser role of Islam in South Caucasus, and the potential for other ideological

motivations for an insurgency, a U.S. response in that subregion may not be as automatic. The same rationale is behind the lower U.S. likelihood for deployment and armed involvement in both subregions if mob violence/civil strife were to break out. The caveat that accompanies the above assessment is that the existence of many unknowns and the fact that the security environment (especially in Central Asia) is highly fluid make the assessment highly subject to change. The context for U.S. involvement will be crucial, and much depends on the behavior of external actors (Russia, China, Iran, Afghanistan).

Nevertheless, the likelihood of Army deployment to Central Asia with a mission that is internal to the region has increased greatly in the post-September 11 security environment, at least for the near term. For one, the United States has committed itself to provide assistance to Uzbekistan in case of spillover of combat operations from Afghanistan. Similarly, certain types of armed strife and unrest in Uzbekistan (or, to a lesser extent, in Tajikistan), if led or organized by sympathizers of Al Qaeda or the Taliban, may lead to the involvement of Army troops in an advisory role to the Uzbekistani (or Tajik) military. Finally, the developing close relationship between Uzbekistan and the United States introduces the potential for reverse influence and manipulation of the patron by the client, which could draw the United States into combat operations in defense of Uzbekistan and its regime.

We assume that U.S. involvement in a conflict in CASC at the higher levels of conflict severity would have to stem from geopolitical (realist) concerns, primarily the counterterrorist campaign, but also defense of or assistance to an ally or acting to secure energy supplies. Uncertainty about the likely length of U.S. presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia complicates any assessment. That said, interstate conflict in Central Asia is most likely to involve Uzbekistani regional ambitions, and in such a case the United States would be most likely to try to limit the strife and keep out of the fighting. In South Caucasus, interstate conflict is most likely to feature renewed Azerbaijani-Armenian fighting. The United States has stayed out of the conflict previously and will probably try to do so in the future. U.S. actions may be limited to preventing or moderating such a conflict to stop its escalation to a regional war.

At the highest levels of conflict severity, larger geopolitical concerns are likely to be present in any decision to deploy, and such a deployment may be a part of a larger U.S. policy aimed at Russia, China, Iran, or Afghanistan. Since regional war in South Caucasus is likely to involve either a NATO ally (Turkey) and/or Russia and/or Iran, U.S. likelihood of involvement in such a war is greater than in a purely interstate war in South Caucasus. Because of the ramifications of a regional war in the Caspian region on the counterterrorist campaign, U.S. involvement in both subregions is assessed as equal in likelihood and fairly high in an absolute sense.

At lower levels of conflict severity, geopolitical concerns are supplemented by a humanitarian rationale for U.S. involvement, making potential Army deployment both more likely (because of additional reasons for involvement) and easier (in the sense of being potentially less costly because of a lower likelihood of casualties). A multitude of humanitarian scenarios can be constructed for each subregion. Of course, any U.S. military involvement in a contingency in South Caucasus or Central Asia is likely to be a coalition operation, and the views and roles of U.S. allies as well as potential adversaries would have to be taken into account in any assessment of the risks involved.

A critical determinant of the potential for U.S. involvement in CASC in the future will be the evolution of the counterterrorist campaign. Success against the Islamist and terrorist elements in Afghanistan and its environs and subsequent pacification of Afghanistan will probably bring about a lessening of U.S. interest and presence in Central Asia and a gradual return of pre-September 11 geopolitical considerations to govern U.S. military involvement in the region. A lower level of success will probably mean an increased U.S. presence in the Caspian region. The pace of the development of energy resources in the region is another important consideration and has a primary link with the growth of U.S. interests in the area. When it comes to energy resource exploitation, oil is more important than gas, and assuming no major new discoveries of oil in the region, the importance of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan is likely to rise in importance to the United States from the perspective of the next 10–15 years. Kazakhstan's dependence on a Russian pipeline network means that its importance to the United States is not likely to grow as much as Azerbaijan's.

The important caveat for the conclusions above is to note that high likelihood of conflict does not mean that conflict is inevitable. There are important dampeners of conflict, especially at the higher levels of conflict severity, that can counteract the many conflict accelerators in place. For example, the presence of authoritarian regimes has the effect of channeling dissent into more conflictual modes, but it also raises the price for dissent and thus deters some of it. In addition, parallel state structures and shadow economies soften the impact of the corrupt and sometimes inept policies of the regimes upon the citizens of the state. There are also safety valves in place, such as the potential for migration to Russia (either permanently for Russophones or as labor migrants for most of the others).