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# **GEOPOLITICS AT THE WORLD'S PIVOT** **EXPLORING CENTRAL ASIA'S SECURITY** **CHALLENGES**

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JACQUELINE LOPOUR





**GEOPOLITICS AT THE WORLD'S PIVOT:  
EXPLORING CENTRAL ASIA'S SECURITY CHALLENGES**

**Jacqueline Lopour**



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## ABOUT THE CENTRAL ASIA SECURITY INNOVATION PROJECT

Project Leader: **Margaret Skok**, a CIGI Senior Fellow and former Canadian ambassador to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Launched in spring 2015, this project explores regional security and governance in Central Asia, focusing on six major challenges: anti-terrorism, border management, human and narco-trafficking, energy and nuclear security, as well as transboundary water management. Employing a think-tank approach, a series of conferences, workshops, panels and supporting research papers will be used to explore ways to strengthen Central Asia's regional institutional and governance architecture in the security sphere. The project will be undertaken in close consultation with bilateral and multilateral partners, as well as with Canada's own security and defence experts and stakeholders — drawing on their legislative and policy expertise. This is a knowledge-sharing initiative that aims to examine how best to respond to the escalating security challenges in this region.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Jacqueline Lopour** is a research associate in CIGI's Global Security & Politics Program. At CIGI, her research interests include exploring major security challenges in Central Asia. She also works on CIGI's Fixing Climate Governance project, which is designed to generate fresh ideas on how to more effectively approach climate change negotiations. Prior to joining CIGI, Jacqueline spent 10 years as a political and leadership analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency in Washington, DC. She provided numerous written and verbal briefings to top United States government officials and participated in meetings with various international leaders and government representatives. Her main areas of focus were political developments in South Asia and the Middle East, and she has lived in and travelled extensively throughout the region. Jacqueline holds a B.A. with Honors in English Literature and History from the University of California, Los Angeles.

## ACRONYMS

CANWFZ	Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone
DFATD	Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (Canada)
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (United Nations)
HIV/AIDS	human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome
IJU	Islamic Jihad Union
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
LEU	low-enriched uranium
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WTO	World Trade Organization

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Central Asia's five countries — the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan — hold considerable geopolitical significance for global security. The Central Asian countries share borders with Russia, China, Iran and Afghanistan, and are rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, uranium, coal, gold, copper, aluminum and hydroelectric power.

Central Asia's unique geopolitical placement, valuable resources and the legacy left by the former Soviet Union have resulted in a host of complicated security challenges, including water security and transboundary water management; energy security; terrorism; narco-trafficking; migration and human trafficking; nuclear security; and border management. The issues transcend national boundaries and lend themselves to multilateral approaches. To date, regional cooperation has been piecemeal and stymied by the fact that many issues are inherently tangled with the others.

Central Asia's security challenges closely align with Canada's national security and foreign policy priorities, as well as with Canada's trade and investment interests, and thus suggest natural pathways for Canada to expand engagement in the region. The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) has launched a project to work closely with the Central Asian states to explore new security and governance models that address their security priorities, with the aim of facilitating multilateral cooperation and helping the Central Asian states drive innovative, tangible and practical security solutions.

## INTRODUCTION

Central Asia is a complex geopolitical region that has significant implications for global security. With a population of 66 million, it lies at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East and Asia, and has vast natural resources, many of which are only beginning to be explored. Historically, these advantages have placed it at the heart of tensions between some of the world's most powerful states and contributed to an array of thorny transboundary security issues. The governments of the Central Asian states have identified several main themes as key security priorities: water security and transboundary water management; energy security; terrorism; narco-trafficking; migration and human trafficking; nuclear security; and border management.

Although these issues primarily affect the region itself, they have important implications for Canada's national interests. Central Asia's security challenges are closely aligned with Canada's foreign policy and national security priorities, which include a focus on Asia, supporting effective governance, increasing Canadian investment abroad — including in developing countries — addressing counterterrorism and non-proliferation, and reducing global drug and human trafficking. Furthermore, Canada's interests and investments in Central Asia are diverse and include sectors such as mining, agricultural machinery, agri-food, knowledge industries, aerospace and infrastructure, as well as education and training programs. Canada's continued success and participation in these areas relies on the region maintaining stability, security and good governance. Canada can play an important role in leading a multilateral dialogue with the Central Asian states to identify how best practices developed in Canada can be adapted to fit the unique local circumstances of the governance and security challenges in Central Asia.

This paper introduces Central Asia's geopolitical significance and explores several inter-related security challenges. For each security issue, this paper provides a brief overview of the issue, explains why or how it developed and looks at the issue's significance within the broader security environment. The paper then turns to Canada's role in Central Asia and addresses opportunities to expand engagement in the security realm.

## THE PIVOT OF THE WORLD

It is easy to attribute Central Asia's importance to its neighbourhood. The five countries of Central Asia — Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan — sit amid Russia to the north, China to the east, Afghanistan to the south, and Iran to the southwest (Figure 1). Equally important, the region is rich in key natural resources — including oil, gas, hydroelectric power, uranium, coal, gold, copper and aluminum — and only a fraction of these resources have been developed. Kazakhstan is the largest uranium producer in the world, producing 38 percent of the global supply in 2013 (World Nuclear Association 2015a). Turkmenistan has the world's fourth-largest natural gas reserves (British Petroleum 2014), and Tajikistan alone has four percent of the world's hydro power potential — the second-largest percentage in the world (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2013). The Kyrgyz Republic also has immense hydro power potential (Renner 2010), and Uzbekistan has over 1,800 known mineral deposits, contains extensive uranium reserves, and is a leading producer of gold, nitrogen, oil, gas, iodine and sulphur (Safirova 2011). The region also is heavily agrarian, with agriculture — primarily cotton and wheat — serving as one of the region's primary sectors and accounting for over 15 percent of the states' GDP on average (Central Intelligence Agency 2015).

Figure 1: Central Asia



Source: Shutterstock

Central Asia's geopolitical significance is not a new development. Starting in the second century BC, Central Asia formed a pivotal segment of the Silk Road trade network, which connected the East to the West and shaped global civilization as we know it today. In modern times, nineteenth-century Britain and Russia battled for influence over Central Asia in a struggle famously known as "The Great Game." Decades later, the founding father of geopolitics, Sir Halford Mackinder, argued that Central

Asia's geography made it the world's most important place, describing it as the "pivot region of the world's politics" and the "Heartland." He went on to assert that command of this "Heartland" inevitably leads to command of the entire world:

Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island;

Who rules the World-Island commands the world.  
(Mackinder 1919, 194)

Unfortunately, global powers for years have, arguably, treated Central Asia as collateral to what they considered more important policy objectives (see Blank 2012; Cornell and Swanström 2006; McCoy 2015; Nourzhanov 2009; Peyrouse, Boonstra and Laruelle 2012). For example, the US Department of State launched its "New Silk Road" Central Asia policy in 2011 to great fanfare, but a senior official testified before Congress the same year that its Central Asia policy revolved around the situation in Afghanistan (Blank 2012). In the East, China's approach to Central Asia serves as both a domestic and a foreign policy. China wants to lock up natural resources to support domestic economic growth, seeks to prevent terrorism from spilling across its borders and tries to hedge against US influence in its own backyard (McCoy 2015; Peyrouse, Boonstra and Laruelle 2012). Even the European Union's robust programs in Central Asia play second fiddle to its primary focus on European energy security and relations with its neighbouring countries, China and India (Blank 2012; Peyrouse, Boonstra and Laruelle 2012).

Nonetheless, the Central Asian regimes — 25 years after achieving independence — are emerging as self-determining and forceful players determined to plot their own trajectories. The regimes are growing adept at playing countries against each other and at driving their own terms for bilateral and multilateral engagement (Nourzhanov 2009; Peyrouse, Boonstra and Laruelle 2012; Saipov 2012). According to Central Asia expert Daniel Burghart, "for too long, Central Asia has been defined in terms of what others sought to gain there...what is different is that since 1991, the region has begun to define itself" (cited in Blank 2012).

Central Asian governments and scholars are taking the lead in determining their own security priorities, which span a range of transnational issues such as water resource management, energy security, terrorism, drug and human trafficking, nuclear security and border management. In 2013, Erlan Idrissov, Kazakhstan's minister of foreign affairs, told the OSCE Ministerial Council that it should give more attention to transnational issues in Central Asia, including the six topics mentioned above. He called for ongoing regional cooperation to "resolve long-standing conflicts [and to] prevent the build-up of tensions" (Idrissov 2013). In its official "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Tajikistan" (2015), Tajikistan's foreign affairs

ministry lists regional cooperation and the same six topics as fundamental priorities of its government. The website for Uzbekistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2015) includes regional cooperation, transboundary water management, and border delimitation and demarcation as policy priorities; the President of Uzbekistan also frequently discusses Islamic extremism in public statements. Likewise, the Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs lists regional cooperation, terrorism, narco-trafficking, and border delimitation as foundational elements of Kyrgyz foreign policy (Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2015).

Central Asia's security picture is complicated, because addressing one issue almost certainly impacts others and can spark controversy. Virpi Stucki et al. (2012) compare water security in Central Asia to a Rubik's cube, with six faces, nine stickers on each side and six different colours: "Moving one face can easily bring disorder to all the other faces; just when you thought you were getting one face in order, you discover another face in disorder. In the case of water and security in Central Asia, there are many 'faces', including not only the Central Asian states but also the neighbouring countries, the US, China, and the EU; 'stickers' such as policies, practices, causes and impacts; and 'colours' such as the different stakeholders."

Stucki's analogy applies far beyond water, aptly describing the difficulty of addressing most of Central Asia's security challenges. Potential policies on managing water resources, stemming narco-trafficking and preventing the spread of Islamic extremism inevitably lead to debates on border management. Addressing transboundary water resource management has implications for energy security, agriculture and the environment. Curtailing drug trafficking and creating stricter migration regulations could stymie terrorist funding but also might negatively impact the economy of those Central Asian countries that rely heavily on remittances and other grey economy sources.

## KEY SECURITY PRIORITIES

Central Asia's unique geopolitical situation, valuable resources and legacy from the former Soviet Union have resulted in a complex array of security problems common to all five countries. The following section provides an overview of each key security issue identified by the Central Asian governments, explains why or how each issue developed and explores the topic's significance within the broader security environment.

### Water Security

Water resources in Central Asia are a story of "have" and "have not," a dichotomy that has aggravated tensions among the individual republics since their independence. The region's major rivers are shared and transit multiple

## REGIONAL COOPERATION — A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Central Asian states belong to a number of regional organizations, including, but not limited to:

**The Commonwealth of Independent States** (formed in 1991): promotes economic and security cooperation among the former Soviet republics. Member states include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan — in line with its UN-recognized international neutrality — is an associate member, as is Ukraine.

**The Collective Security Treaty Organization** (formed in 1992): an intergovernmental military alliance — similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) — that includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia and Tajikistan.

**The International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea** (formed in 1993): facilitates regional cooperation on water resources and helps finance projects aimed at rehabilitating the Aral Sea and its surrounding areas. Members include Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

**Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** (formed in 1996): aims to strengthen regional cooperation, confidence, stability and economic growth. Members include China, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with India and Pakistan expected to join in 2016.

**Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation** (formed in 1997): an initiative, supported by the Asian Development Bank, that focuses on increasing development and reducing poverty. Members include Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

**Eurasian Development Bank** (formed in 2006): promotes economic growth and cooperation between member states, which include Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia and Tajikistan.

**Eurasian Economic Union** (established in 2015): a regional trading bloc; its members include Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Russia.

The Central Asian states also participate in or cooperate with a number of other international organizations and financial institutes, including the Asian Development Bank, the Economic Cooperation Organisation, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Monetary Fund, the Islamic Development Bank, the NATO Partnership for Peace, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank Group and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

countries. Upstream countries — Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic — are water controllers, with access to 90 percent of Central Asia’s water resources (Renner 2010). Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic use water resources to fuel their hydroelectric dams, which produce electricity for export and domestic use. Downstream countries — primarily Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan — are water consumers and depend on upstream countries to supply water for irrigation, as agriculture is a linchpin of their respective economies. Turkmenistan, for example, is 80 percent desert and depends almost entirely on irrigation for agriculture, which employs nearly 50 percent of its workforce (FAO 2012).

The Central Asian countries also have different priorities and perspectives regarding the role of water resources. One primary disagreement involves whether to prioritize downstream irrigation or upstream hydro power. Another difference involves timing. Downstream states need water most during the spring and summer growing seasons. Upstream states prefer to conserve water and build up their reservoirs in the summer, so that they have enough supply to generate hydro power in the winter, when domestic energy needs are at their peak. Adding to tensions, downstream countries are vulnerable to flooding during the winter months after upstream hydroelectric dams release water for energy production. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that water-rich countries view water as a commodity that can be sold — similar to oil and gas — while downstream countries, such as Uzbekistan, view it as a free public good and basic right (Kraak 2012; Pannier 2008).

Friction over access to water has its origins in a resource-sharing system devised by the former Soviet Union. Moscow created a centrally administered integrated water and energy exchange system for all of Central Asia. The Soviets prioritized cotton production, and they built one of the world’s most complex irrigation systems of dams, canals, reservoirs and pumps. Their goal was to transform Central Asia into the Soviet Union’s agricultural heartland, where upstream states provided irrigation water to downstream states in return for coal, gas and oil for energy.

Water resource management is directly tied to domestic and regional security. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, water is Central Asia’s “most precious resource and its use is the most conflict-prone” (Frenken 2013). Some scholars assess that the ouster of Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Saliyevich Bakiyev in 2010 was a “hydroelectric revolution” stemming from public discontent over mismanaged water resources, water shortages and two years of rolling blackouts (Wooden 2014). The five Central Asian states have signed several water-sharing agreements since their independence, but these have failed to fully resolve tensions (Abdolvand et al. 2014; Granit et al. 2010). In a thinly veiled threat directed to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Uzbek President

Islam Karimov in 2012 warned that water conflict could lead to serious confrontation and that “even wars could be the result” (Nurshayeva 2012). Uzbekistan continues to feud with the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan regarding the Kambarata-1 and Rogun dams (Frenken 2013).

In the coming years, management of water resources will become even more pivotal to regional security and stability. The Soviet-era canal systems that facilitate irrigation in downstream countries have reached the end of their lifespan and will only deteriorate further. The FAO reports that leaking and inefficient canals in some Central Asian countries already result in the loss of 65 percent of irrigation water before it even reaches the fields (*ibid.*). A review by the US Embassy Bishkek assessed that up to 30 percent of energy produced by hydro power is lost before it can get to market (Zozulinsky 2010). In addition, more and more water sources are being polluted or salinized through over-irrigation, excessive fertilization and improper handling of industrial, nuclear and human waste (Frenken 2013). As demand for clean, usable water rises, so will interstate tensions.

## Energy Security and Pipeline Politics

Central Asia is rich in natural gas and oil reserves, but the individual states, as they do with water, exist in a dichotomous state of “have” and “have not.” The downstream countries of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are rich in hydrocarbon resources. Turkmenistan has the fourth-largest natural gas reserves in the world, while Kazakhstan has the twelfth-largest oil reserves, including the world’s single largest oil field outside of the Middle East (British Petroleum 2014; Energy Information Administration 2013). Both Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic, however, are dependent on oil and gas imports from the other Central Asian states to fill energy gaps, as their hydro power infrastructure is able to handle only a small fraction of their hydro power potential.

Soviet-era infrastructure complicates the energy picture. During the Soviet regime, all oil and gas pipelines in Central Asia ran north to Russia. After independence, these aging pipelines significantly limited Central Asia’s export potential and provided Russia with a *de facto* monopoly over the sector (Chow and Hendrix 2010). Energy inefficiency plays a key role in energy security, illuminating why energy supply often fails to meet domestic consumption needs. Decaying equipment, obsolete technology and gas flaring contribute to why the World Bank considers emerging Europe and Central Asia to be among the most energy-inefficient regions in the world, with over 60 percent of the region’s potential electricity lost in processing or delivery (World Bank 2013a; World Bank 2013c).

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states have explored new oil and gas pipeline routes to diversify

into new markets and increase exports. The primary obstacle for regional exporters is geographic: Central Asia is landlocked and there is no direct route to transport oil and gas to sea and shipping lanes. Going west is costly, as it requires circuiting the Caspian Sea or building an expensive underwater pipeline. Pipelines would have to stretch across all of China to reach the Pacific Ocean and access to the Arabian Sea requires transiting through volatile Afghanistan or controversial Iran (Fishelson 2007).

International and regional politics further complicate pipeline options. Pipelines provide significant economic and political benefits for the countries they transit: construction creates jobs and investment opportunities; countries can demand significant transit fees; countries can obtain oil and gas for domestic needs; and transit countries could even disrupt pipeline flow for political or economic leverage (Bahgat 2006; Fishelson 2007). The crux of the issue is that “whoever controls the pipelines controls the energy they contain” (ibid.), and as a result, proposed pipeline routes have played key roles in the Central Asian states’ foreign policies (Coburn 2010).

The Central Asian governments have faced immense pressure from external actors — Russia, China, the United States and the European Union — regarding the location and control of new pipelines. In pressing for their own preferred routes, Russia wants to preserve its monopoly on oil and gas in the region; China desires energy security to support sustained domestic economic growth; the European Union seeks new sources of gas; and the United States looks to hedge against Russia, China and Iran (ibid.). Despite these pressures, several new pipelines have been built since the Soviet Union dissolved, including the Kazakhstan–China oil pipeline (first stage completed in 2003); the Central Asia–China natural gas pipeline (2009), which connects Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to Chinese markets; and the Korpeje–Kordkuy (1997) and Dauletabad–Sarakhs–Khangiran (2010) natural gas pipelines, which connect Turkmenistan to Iran. Nonetheless, these new pipelines largely continue the practice of extremely high dependence on a single country or energy market — for example, several of the new pipelines substitute dependence on Russia for reliance on China.

## Terrorism

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) — and its offshoot, the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) — are perhaps the most infamous terrorist groups operating in Central Asia, although there are several other active groups. The IMU, founded in 1998, aims to overthrow the Uzbek government and establish an Islamic state governed by sharia. Despite its small size, the IMU is “tough and battle-hardened, having been engaged in military operations almost full-time since their creation” (Quinn-Judge 2010). IMU fighters spent many of the post-2001 years in North and South

Waziristan, Pakistan, gaining battlefield experience and developing close ties with al-Qaeda and the Taliban. As a result of this networking, the organization has diversified and now includes fighters from across Central Asia, the Caucasus and Russia, to include ethnic Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tatar, Dagestani and Chechen fighters. Reinfiltration of IMU forces has reached into almost all of the Central Asian states, including Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan (ibid.). The IMU and IJU have been responsible for a number of high-profile attacks in Central Asia, including suicide attacks and embassy bombings, as well as for attempted assassinations of political leaders in Pakistan and plots to attack the West (Balci and Chaudet 2014).

Since 2001, the threat of radicalization and terrorism in Central Asia has grown. Paul Quinn-Judge (2010, 59) of the International Crisis Group notes that Islamism in Central Asia “has a rich environment in which to develop further,” citing corruption by those in power, poverty, rising unemployment, and a large youth population as reasons why the traditionally moderate Muslims in Central Asia are starting to consider the appeal of conservative Islamic-based governments. Terrorist recruiters in Central Asia also are taking advantage of the economic situation. Groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) have seized the opportunity to lure unemployed workers with promises of large salaries, even if prospective fighters are not necessarily ideologically sympathetic to the cause. As one unemployed Tajik worker told *The Washington Post*, “Many people in this situation are very desperate.... They need money so badly that they could follow some groups that would offer them money” (Demirjian 2015).

Central Asia’s proximity to terrorist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan also plays a significant role in explaining the threat of terrorism in Central Asia (Nourzhanov 2009; Swanström 2010). One Kyrgyz diplomat blamed Afghanistan for the rise in the terrorist threat, deeming it one of the main “challenges of a new era” (cited in Nourzhanov 2009). Tajik officials also have warned of the threat from thousands of Islamic militants located just across the border in Afghanistan (Romin 2015).

The conflict in Syria and ascendance of ISIS has complicated the terrorist threat. The most visible symptom was the high-profile defection of the Tajik Special Forces commander Colonel Gulmurod Khalimov, who joined ISIS in June 2015 and filmed a video calling on thousands of Tajik workers to follow him (Demirjian 2015). IMU also has jumped on the ISIS bandwagon; IMU leader Usman Gazi in 2014 swore allegiance to ISIS and its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Agence France Press 2014). An estimated 500 to 1,000 Central Asian fighters operate in Syria, and ISIS has used Kazakh child fighters in propaganda videos (Snow 2015; Wyke and Boyle 2014). The primary fear is that those who leave to fight in Syria might eventually return home

to possibly conduct attacks or spread extremism within their communities.

## Narco-Trafficking

Central Asia is one of the world's primary narco-trafficking hubs. Neighbouring Afghanistan produces 90 percent of the global supply of opium and one-quarter of the heroin it produces transits through Central Asia (UNODC 2015; 2012). All five of the Central Asian countries are impacted: heroin enters Tajikistan from Afghanistan, after which it is trafficked into Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and then Kazakhstan (UNODC 2012). Porous borders, high levels of corruption and endemic poverty reinforce the industry.

Narco-trafficking plays a significant role in the economies of some Central Asian countries. The UNODC reports that drug traffickers in 2010 made a net profit of US\$1.4 billion from opiates that transited Central Asia — the equivalent of almost one-third of the Kyrgyz Republic's or Tajikistan's GDP (ibid.). Narco-trafficking is linked to widespread corruption or tacit approval by officials; alleged drug kingpins have been elected to the Kyrgyz Parliament (in 2000) and have served as senior law enforcement officials in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Cornell and Swanström 2005; Trofimov 2012). Efforts to boost legitimate trade — such as the US-funded bridge across the Panj River connecting Tajikistan and Afghanistan — have had the unintended consequence of facilitating drug trafficking. As one Tajik official told *The Wall Street Journal*, “Why take it on a donkey if you can drive it by the truckload?” (ibid.).

Drug trafficking severely undermines the political, economic and social stability of Central Asia. It enfeebles state institutions, allows corruption to flourish, stagnates the economy and facilitates the spread of disease, as well as terrorism and other forms of crime (Swanström 2010; UNODC 2015). Narco-trafficking literally can overturn governments — the instigators of the Kyrgyz revolution in 2005 likely were financed by drug money (Swanström 2010). Officials of all levels, from high-level government to low-paid bureaucrats and law enforcement officers, are lured by high profit margins (Cornell and Swanström 2006). Also, an increasing number of terrorist and insurgent groups rely on drug trafficking as a source of funding (Balci and Chaudet 2014, Cornell and Swanström 2006). Although the majority of drugs are destined for foreign markets, the number of Central Asian addicts is soaring, and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and hepatitis C epidemics directly correspond to narco-trafficking transit routes (Swanström 2010). Drug trafficking also impacts other security areas, because traffickers take advantage of established drug routes to transfer other contraband, including weapons, natural resources, nuclear waste and trafficked humans (UNODC 2015).

## Migration and Human Trafficking

A significant percentage of Central Asia's population work as migrant labourers abroad, and their remittances play a major role in the states' economies. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), an estimated 10 million people in Central Asia are on the move.<sup>1</sup> In Tajikistan alone, the World Bank estimates that half of its working-age males are employed abroad, as well as a significant percentage of Kyrgyz and Uzbek labourers (World Bank 2013b). Russia traditionally has been one of the primary destinations for Central Asian migrant workers, who in 2014 made up 40 percent of all foreign residents there (IOM 2015b). Many migrant labourers also stay within Central Asia and seek employment in Kazakhstan, where high economic growth has created demand for seasonal and skilled workers alike (ibid.). Remittances from migrant labourers are hugely important to the economy; in 2013, remittances comprised approximately 50 percent of Tajikistan's GDP and 30 percent of the Kyrgyz Republic's GDP, according to World Bank estimates.

The extent of migration has significant implications for the region's economic stability and security. Migration increases the threat of ideological radicalization, because migrant workers are isolated from their communities and often face hostile conditions abroad. This situation makes them vulnerable to hardline religious organizations, which are able to step into the void and provide community and spiritual support. Radicalized migrant workers have then returned home and attempted to spread extremist ideology (Mohapatra 2013). Terrorist groups also capitalize on migration trends. Russia's strict new migration laws and economic downturn have left thousands of migrant workers in the lurch. Badly needed remittances have declined, and terrorist recruiters have stepped in to lure newly unemployed workers with promises of large salaries (Demirjian 2015). There are also close links between migration and the spread of HIV/AIDS, particularly when migrant labourers become infected abroad, return home and infect their wives and families (Mohapatra 2013). Other male labourers stay abroad for extended periods of time, sometimes fully abandoning their wives and families. These women have few economic opportunities, making them vulnerable to exploitation and reinforcing the poverty cycle (ibid.).

Irregular migration is closely linked to human trafficking for labour (IOM 2015b). Over one million people in Central Asia are at risk for trafficking, and over 69 percent of trafficking victims are men (IOM 2015a). Many of the same factors that drive migration also contribute to human trafficking, including high unemployment, poverty, a growing youth population and corruption (IOM 2015b). The trafficking problem in Central Asia is threefold: the

1 Conversation with IOM officials, Astana, Kazakhstan, June 2015.

region is simultaneously the origin, the transit and the destination state for human trafficking. The US Department of State "Trafficking in Persons Report" (2015) indicates that adult male labour migrants working abroad are at greatest risk for trafficking, primarily in the agricultural, forestry, construction, domestic service and textile industries. The wives and families that migrant workers leave behind also are vulnerable to sexual trafficking; some women from Tajikistan have been forced into marriages or debt bondage in Afghanistan. Trafficked children are forced to beg, sell drugs or participate in other criminal behaviour. They are also forced to pick cotton or tobacco and sexually trafficked. Despite decreasing levels of forced child labour in Uzbekistan's cotton fields, compulsory adult labour is on the rise in both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Those who refuse to help with the cotton harvest face harassment or lose their jobs (*ibid.*).

### Nuclear Security

Central Asia has vast uranium resources and is a top supplier of uranium for nuclear energy. Kazakhstan is the world's leading uranium producer and as of 2013 provided 38 percent of the global supply (World Nuclear Association 2015a). Uzbekistan is the seventh-largest supplier and is increasing production (World Nuclear Association 2015c). Kyrgyzstan has signed agreements with foreign companies to explore uranium reserves and Tajik officials claim the country has huge uranium reserves, the size of which are classified as a state secret (Kassenova 2010; Nuclear Threat Initiative 2014; World Nuclear Association 2015b). Kazakhstan recently has moved beyond exporting raw material and built a plant to process raw material into nuclear fuel pellets, an endeavour that promises even greater economic return (Kassenova 2010; World Nuclear Association 2015a). Additionally, the government of Kazakhstan and the International Atomic Energy Agency agreed in April 2015 to establish a low-enriched uranium (LEU) fuel bank in Kazakhstan, which would ensure that nuclear power plants have a steady supply of LEU if the commercial market were somehow disrupted (World Nuclear Association 2015a).

Historically, Central Asia played a pivotal role in the Soviet Union's nuclear ambitions, but the region has since become one of the greatest success stories in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The Soviets mined and milled significant amounts of uranium ore across Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan inherited 1,410 nuclear warheads and repatriated all of them to Russia by 1995. Kazakhstan also worked closely with the US government in the mid-1990s to remove half a ton of highly enriched uranium from a poorly secured facility in a classified mission dubbed "Project Sapphire" (Hoffman 2009).

There is little to no risk that the Central Asian governments will attempt to proliferate or militarize their nuclear programs, given the states' strong commitment to non-proliferation. All five Central Asian countries signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. In a rare show of regional unity, in 2006 the five countries also signed the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone (CANWFZ) treaty, which prohibits developing, acquiring, testing or possessing nuclear weapons. The CANWFZ treaty was ground-breaking in that it created a denuclearized area in the middle of several powerful nuclear countries: Russia, China, Pakistan and India. The CANWFZ treaty could serve as a model for future efforts to increase regional cooperation, because the five Central Asian states successfully navigated and resolved significant disagreements during the treaty negotiations (Kassenova 2010).

Many of Central Asia's nuclear waste sites lack sufficient security measures, however, raising the prospect of terrorists drawing from the region's vast nuclear waste to obtain material for a "dirty bomb." International security agencies and experts repeatedly have warned of ISIS and al-Qaeda's interest in dirty bombs and efforts to use nuclear material in improvised explosive devices (Blake and Hope 2011; Withnall 2015). The late al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Ladin even advised the late Taliban leader Mullah Omar to look toward Central Asia for "non-conventional military industries" — a reference to nuclear expertise and resources (bin Ladin 2002). In Central Asia, there are significant amounts of uranium tailings or other nuclear waste stored in poorly secured sites or abandoned mining facilities (see Figure 2). The United Nations in 2012 warned that there was nearly 55 million tons of radioactive waste in Tajikistan that was stored in sites with inadequate security measures (Agence France Press 2012). Similarly, the Nuclear Threat Initiative in 2009 expressed concern that many sites in the Kyrgyz Republic "have no security measures, allowing the general population to scavenge for radioactive metals and other waste" (Humphrey and Sevcik 2009). Additionally, the proximity of nuclear waste sites to densely populated areas and the threat of natural disaster (such as earthquakes, floods and landslides) pose significant environmental and health risks (*ibid.*). The five Central Asian states are aware of these threats and take them seriously, but most still lack the necessary resources needed to mitigate all risks and ensure comprehensive nuclear safety and security programs (Kassenova 2010).

### Border Management and Security

Twenty years after independence, none of the five Central Asian states have fully demarcated all of their borders. The borders are porous and difficult to monitor and span a wide variety of difficult terrain, from the Eurasian steppes to isolated mountain passes. The dissolution of

Figure 2: Radioactive, Chemical and Biological Hazards in Central Asia (2006)



Source: Philippe Rekacewicz, UNEP/GRID-Arendal. www.grida.no.

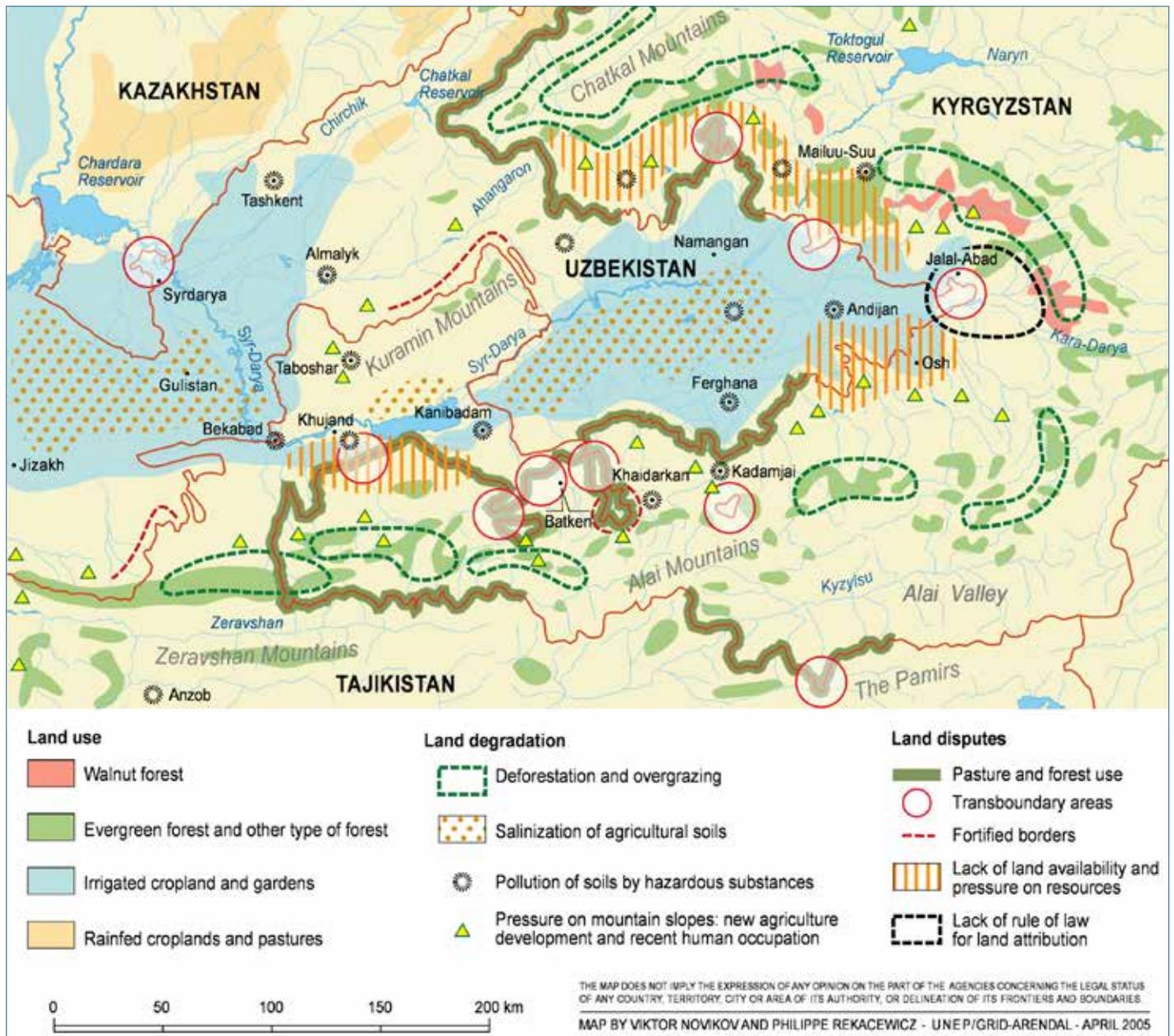
the Soviet Union in 1991 forced the Central Asian states to patch together border authorities from the remnants of Soviet bureaucracy, a task complicated by the fact that several borders of the individual republics were unclear (Gavrilis 2012). Contested areas remain, and delimitation proceedings have devolved into heated political battles in which Central Asian leaders have accused “one another of deliberately mismanaging their borders” (ibid.).

Border security in Central Asia is complicated by Soviet historical legacy. Moscow deliberately created borders that were administrative in nature — rather than following natural geographic features or ethnic lines — to forestall potential separatist sentiments. Soviet planners also

created multiple “enclaves” — small territorial islands belonging to one state that are completely encircled by another — as well as a complex system of land leases in which one republic leased a parcel of land or natural resource from another. As the International Crisis Group (2002) explains, these factors “combined to create a complex stew of territorial claims and counterclaims once the Central Asian republics became independent states.”

There is little chance that border disputes will erupt into full-blown war, but local clashes are frequent. One of the most fiercely disputed regions is the Ferghana Valley, the “agricultural heartland” of Central Asia and a historically important staging point on the Silk Road (Figure 3). The

Figure 3: Land Issues in the Ferghana Valley (2012)



Source: Philippe Rekacewicz, UNEP/GRID-Arendal. www.grida.no.

valley is shared by Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic, and all three have long-standing historic, economic and ethnic claims to the area. The European Union calls the Ferghana Valley “one of the most curious border patterns in the world” because of its dense population, mix of ethnic groups, and history of “disastrous gerrymandering by Soviet planners” (EU 2009). Various ethnic groups compete among each other for pastures, water rights, territory and economic opportunities, and chafe against the closed borders that inhibit their access to these. In the Ferghana Valley, as well as other areas, border crossings have been indiscriminately closed, bribery and corruption are rampant, and the situation has devolved

into occasional small firefights with counterparts on the other side (Gavriliš 2012).

Most border authorities in Central Asia require capacity building. Although multiple international assistance programs are addressing these issues, many border officials in Central Asia are poorly paid, insufficiently trained and under-equipped; work in substandard facilities; and suffer from low morale and high corruption levels, according to the European Union Border Management Programme (EU 2009). In some of the more remote border post locations, guards must resort to harsh subsistence living, including growing their own crops and hunting their own food. The

mental strain is intense, and some guards are unable to cope and turn to suicide or homicide (Gavrilis 2012).

Border management and security is intrinsically linked to almost all other security areas. The International Crisis Group (2002) labels border security as the “fundamental stumbling block to wider regional cooperation in economics, security and ethnic relations.” Murky border lines complicate efforts to improve cooperation on water resource management and energy security. Poorly monitored borders allow for illegal migration and trafficking in drugs, people, contraband and nuclear waste. Terrorist groups take advantage of weak border security to conduct cross-border activity, recruit new fighters or set up safe havens. Despite all of these risks, there must be a balance between secure borders and those open enough for trade and economic development. According to the European Union Border Management Programme, “increased levels of cross-border trade are...vital to the economic development of the landlocked countries of Central Asia” (EU 2009).

## CANADA’S ROLE IN CENTRAL ASIA

Central Asia’s security challenges closely align with Canada’s national security and foreign policy priorities, providing natural pathways for Canada to expand engagement in the region. Canada’s Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD)<sup>2</sup> lists expanding economic and political engagement in Asia, supporting effective governance globally and improving Canadian investment opportunities in developing countries as some of its 2015–2016 foreign policy priorities. Central Asia’s advantageous geopolitical position makes it a natural partner in this endeavour. Central Asia’s security challenges also correspond to other DFATD and Public Safety Canada priorities,<sup>3</sup> including tackling the threat of terrorism, preventing nuclear proliferation, promoting the peaceful use of nuclear energy, addressing human smuggling and stemming transnational crime, including the global drug trade.

Canada can deepen collaboration with Central Asia in the security realm because it has extensive experience navigating many of the same security issues as Central Asia, including managing extensive uranium and hydrocarbon resources; nuclear security, waste management and inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency; managing transboundary and transprovincial waterways; working multilaterally to address contested international borders; and managing its own lengthy terrestrial border, as just a few examples. The entangled nature of these

security issues suggests that a cooperative regional arrangement would benefit all attempting to address them. Canada’s capacity and expertise in this realm makes for a natural partnership, one in which Canada could play an important role in leading a multilateral dialogue with the Central Asian states.

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2 As articulated in the DFATD’s (2015) webpage on “Priorities for 2015–2016.”

3 As laid out in Public Safety Canada’s webpage “National Security” (2015) and DFATD’s (2015) webpage on “Priorities for 2015–2016.”

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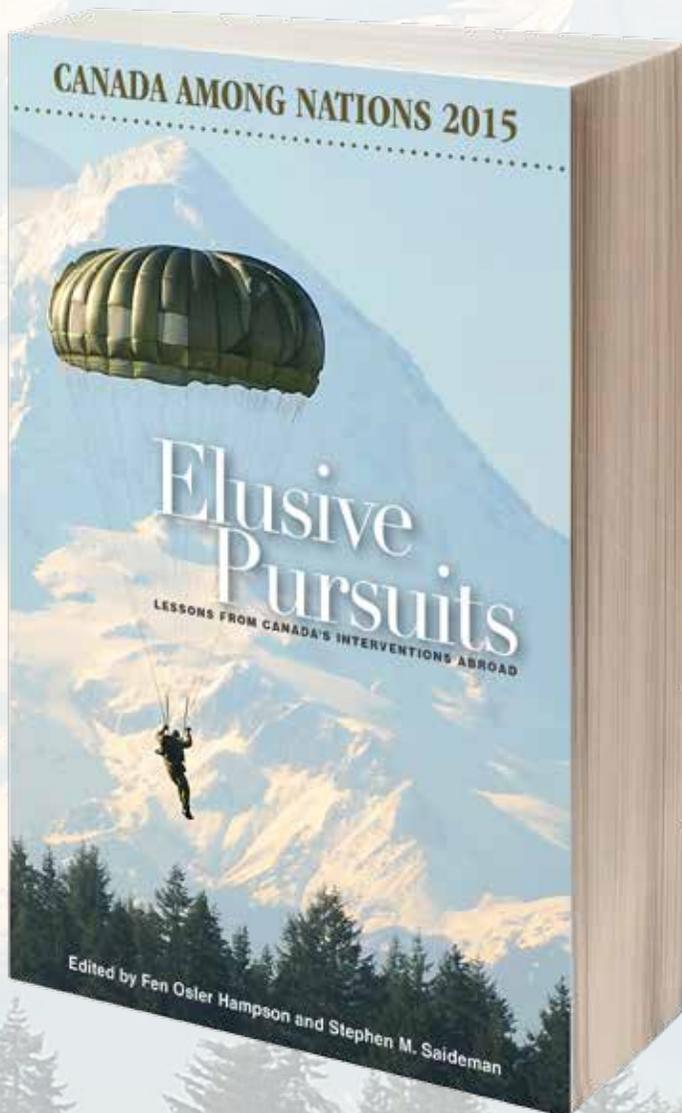
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**Canada Among Nations 2015**

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**LESSONS FROM CANADA'S INTERVENTIONS ABROAD**

**Edited by Fen Osler Hampson and  
Stephen M. Saideman**



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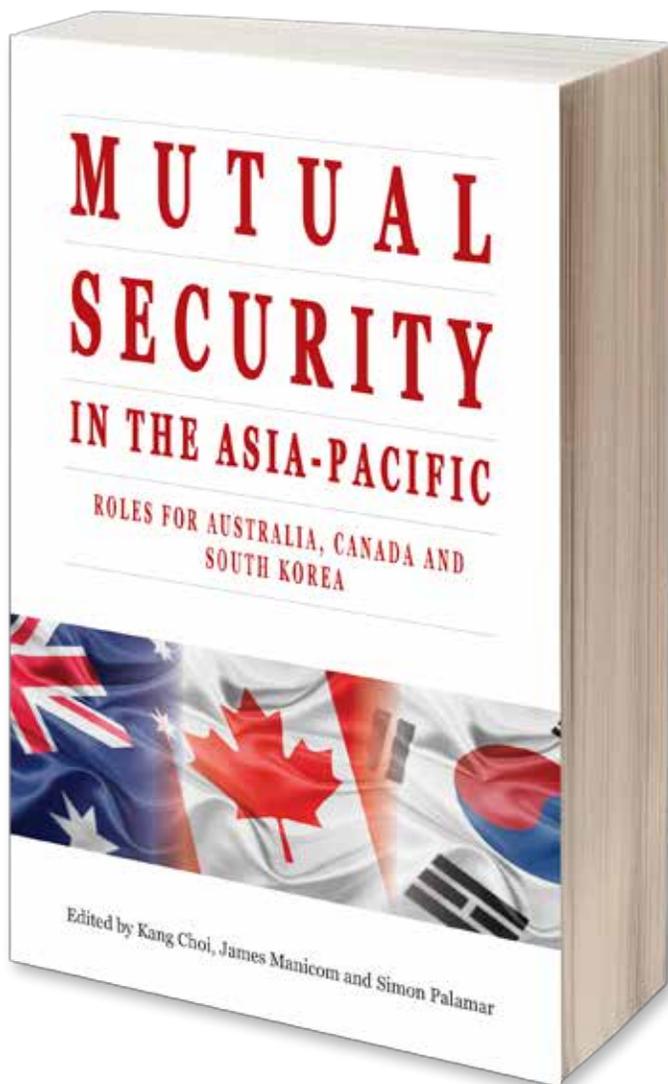
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# MUTUAL SECURITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

Roles for Australia, Canada and South Korea



**Edited by Kang Choi, James Manicom  
and Simon Palamar**

If the twenty-first century is to be “Asia’s century,” what are the roadblocks that Asia-Pacific nations must overcome? And what role can countries such as Australia, Canada and South Korea play in the region’s rise?

Myriad challenges to regional stability and security threaten East Asia’s burgeoning growth and prosperity: territorial and maritime boundary disputes, political relations strained by unresolved historical legacies and seemingly intractable disagreements about national sovereignty. Some security threats cannot be mitigated or solved by military force. Climate change driven natural disasters, declining fish stocks, volatile crop yields and food prices, and the rapid pace of urbanization could each slow the region’s remarkable upward trajectory.

Canada, Australia and South Korea are united by a shared awareness that their futures are intimately tied to East Asia’s. How will these “constructive powers” — countries of significant size and influence that seek to protect their own interests while taking into account their effect on other countries — address the economic and security challenges that loom in the Asia-Pacific? Which parts of the governance system that has served so well since World War II should be preserved. And which should be changed to recognize East Asia’s hard-won political and economic influence, while helping to ensure a stable, predictable political environment?

*Mutual Security in the Asia-Pacific* offers responses to these questions, presenting a number of policy-relevant ideas, with a particular emphasis on the potential for Australia, Canada and South Korea to take an active role in the region.

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