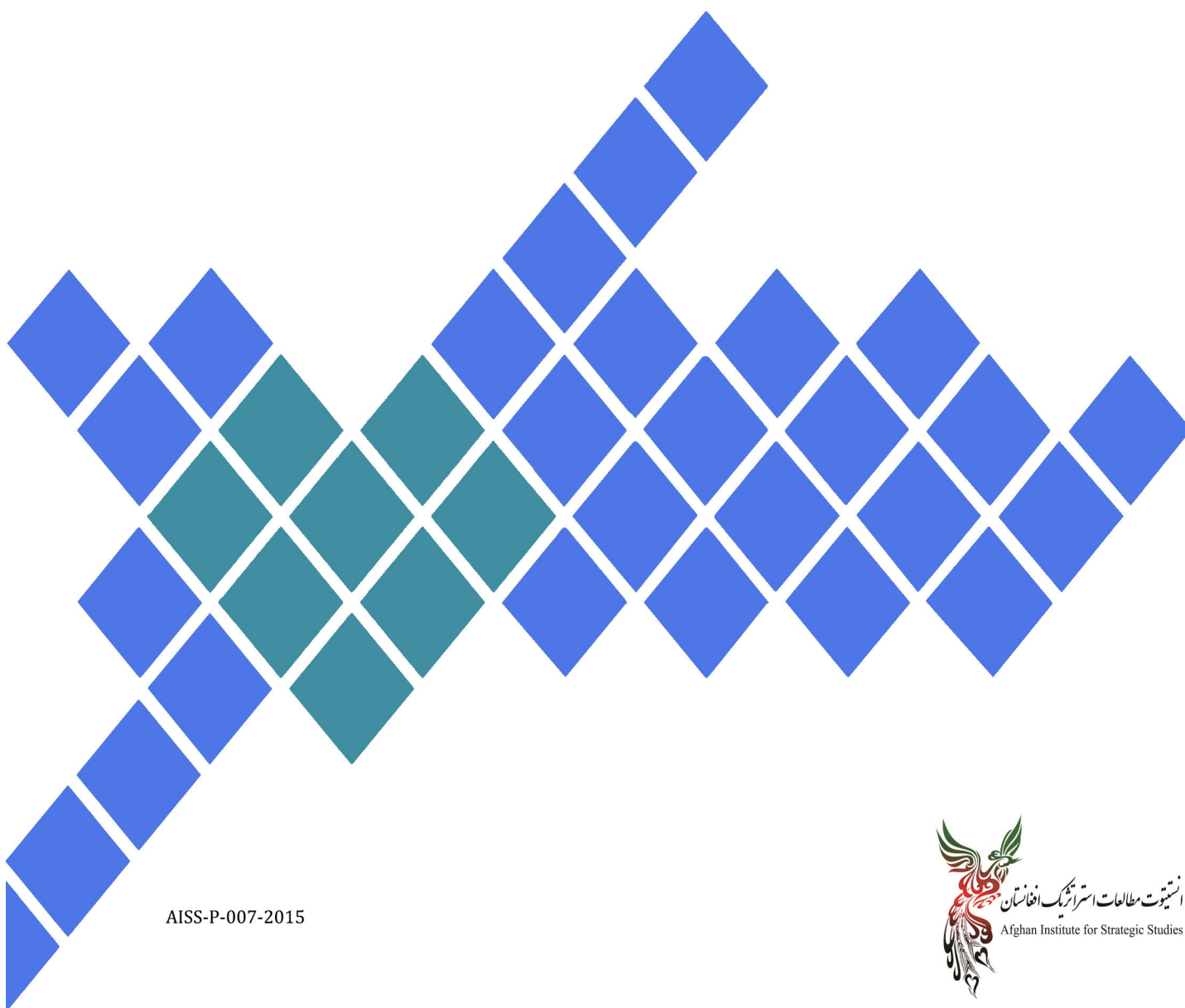


Strangers Across the Amu River: Community Perceptions Along the Tajik–Afghan Borders

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AND ABDUL AHAD MOHAMMADI



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Summary and recommendations

Securing a total of 2387 km river-border they share with Afghanistan is high on the national security agenda of the three Central Asian countries of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, concerned as they are about any potential trespassing of traffickers, extremists and terrorists. But borders are not only physical barriers, they also consist of spaces inhabited by people who once consisted of the same family or kin groups before nation states came into existence. They often have a different perception than do policy makers sitting in distant capitals of what the border represents in terms of threats and opportunities.

This study is a snapshot of the predicament, views and hopes of selected inhabitants of border communities living along the Amu Darya and the Panj rivers in nine districts of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Basing findings on a pilot fieldwork among these communities, the study tries to shed some light on how border populations assess the potential threats and opportunities of living around borders, how cross-border ethnic groups relate to their kin on other sides and what role can they play in reducing tensions related to borders. Ultimately, the study tries to understand whether border communities benefit from the potential of exchanges that borders created and whether the way in which governments securitize the border in Central Asia and Afghanistan correspond to the human security concerns of communities living in border areas.

I. Border communities' assessment of their human security concerns

The districts surrounding the Tajik/Afghan border are economically and environmentally insecure, poor and isolated from the centre.

While agriculture reigns, reliable water supply are lacking

The majority of people living in border areas are engaged in agricultural activities as their primary/main source of income, a sector that has not seen much investments and attention by governments, especially in Afghanistan. This makes their livelihoods dependent not only on adequate equipment, transport and access to markets, but also on the reliable availability of water, land and favorable climate, all factors beyond their control. While agriculture is a mainstay of the economy throughout the region, what makes the dependency of border communities particularly important and risky is the dependency on water in an environmentally insecure situation prone to natural disasters. People heavily depend on the Amu Darya River or its tributary Panj for irrigation of the fields. Yet, river flows are badly regulated, leading to frequent floods that destroy the land on both sides. The agricultural lands

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located in the banks of the river on the Afghan side are muddy and sandy, making them more difficult to cultivate than other parts of the country. On the Tajik side, the new lands have low crop yields and low production as a result of salinity given poor drainage of underground water.

People are poor or working multiple jobs with low salaries

On the Afghan side, the majority of respondents claimed that the quality of their lives had not improved much compared to recent transformations in the social, political and economic affairs of the rest of the country. In Tajikistan, although the majority said their lives had improved compared to 10 years ago, the interviews showed that people are engaged in multiple jobs to make ends meet. On both sides of the river, people complained of inadequate incomes.

People are isolated from the centre

Considerable parts of the border areas in Afghanistan are ringed by dry deserts. This makes it difficult for communities living in border regions to have access to the provincial centres and main economic centres of Afghanistan. On the Tajik side, border communities had more contacts with the provincial or district centre than the capital. In regions where there was more coming and going, people were more optimistic about changes in their lives and the possibility to escape from poverty and take advantage of opportunities.

Migration is considered a viable option for income

With few opportunities in these relegated poor border regions, migration seems to be the preferred solution for the low or unskilled youth labour force. A large number of families in Tajikistan live off of remittances from relatives working in Russia. On the Afghan side, the illiterate and unskilled youths seek to migrate to Iran and Pakistan, or to the provincial centres in search of decent jobs.

Quality social services are lacking

Isolation, distance from the centres and lack of attention to rural development have led to a dearth of decent social services and unsatisfactory state of health and education services on both sides of the rivers although more so in Afghanistan.

As a result geographic isolation, many people are also culturally conservative

Religious beliefs and conservative values thrive in border regions that are geographically isolated on the Afghan side. On the Tajik side, the populations of Kumsangir and Panj had been moved to work on the cotton fields of border regions from isolated and conservative mountain areas. Some had also become

conservative as a result of having spent time in camps in Afghanistan as refugees during the Tajik Civil War.

Physical safety has improved but it may not be sustainable

When it comes to security in terms of physical safety, the situation is much better today than it was ten years ago, when both sides were coming out of civil wars. In people's perception, security referred to physical safety and a situation where there was no fighting, no killings and no criminal group activities. However, question marks remain on people's minds as to how sustainable this physical security was in the long term. Worries remained in people's minds in terms of long term stability and threats from mafia groups, drug traffickers, extremists and terrorists. The deterioration of the situation on the southern shores in Afghanistan had sent ripples of worries to the northern shores across the Amu and Panj rivers.

Every day threats to human security trump concerns with physical safety

While border communities feel threats to their physical safety, when it comes to everyday life, their concerns lie on broader aspects of insecurity: jobs, livelihoods, health, education, regulation of water flows, adequate water for irrigation and so on.

II. Impressions about communities across borders

In the absence of much communication, impressions of people living on the other side of borders is formed on the basis of hearsay and the media

On both sides, assessments of people living on the other side were mainly based on the information they received through TV and social media or through hearsay, with only a minority basing information on visits or on relations with people on the other side, except in Darvoz where comings and goings were facilitated by bridges and markets. Lack of direct communication and hearsay and the media as the main sources of information inevitably led to the formation of stereotypes about the other. Afghan respondents claimed that although people living on the other side of borders had much better living conditions because of the absence of wars, they were not as religious as they were. Perceptions from the Tajik side were more negative, formed on the basis of the portrayal of Afghan society as violent and war ridden in the government controlled media outlets of Tajikistan. Yet, the few border communities, again mostly in Darvoz, that were able to catch Afghan TV channels, especially private ones, were exposed to a different side of Afghanistan that did not correspond to the images portrayed on their national screens.

Co-ethnicity is not necessarily a factor of closeness for Afghans but it is for Tajiks

Afghans appreciated the non-interference of Central Asian governments in their affairs. The sense of co-ethnicity was low, with people considering communities across borders as brothers and friends at best and otherwise as mere neighbors. Tajiks had a romantic vision of communities across rivers, despite their apprehension about a war weary community made up of what they consider ignorant/foolish people (*jahel*). They frequently expressed their kinship by calling them ‘our neighbors’ and ‘our Tajiks’, even though they were cognizant of the ethnic diversity of northern Afghanistan and the presence of Uzbeks, Turkmen etc. there.

Family/kin relations are few and relatively new

Contacts between people are based on trade rather than on kinship. In some regions, namely in Davaz, family relations went back a few generations but contact had been lost. There were also new, though few, family relations, either as a result of the new contacts made through the bridges and bazars of Badakhshan or shaped during the war years when Tajiks from Kumsangir and Panj took temporary refuge in Afghanistan.

The two communities consider each other as having different values

Afghans interviewed generally considered Central Asians as lacking religious values, being Muslims by name only. The general feeling among the Tajiks, on the other hand, was that while Afghans were certainly more religious, they had less education and less culture (*madaniyat*). These impressions had changed little from the ones made during the years of Jihad, when Afghans would call the Central Asians from across the river as Soviets or *Kafirs* (unbelievers), and Tajiks saw Afghans as intolerant, violent and often illiterate people, not making distinctions between different ethnic groups of Afghanistan. These impressions were slow in changing although exposure increased after independence came to Central Asian countries and Soviets left Afghanistan. Having the same religion did not automatically lead to religious groups in both countries having connections to each other.

Perceptions about the openness of borders throughout the years are colored by differences in experiences as separate nations rather than a single community

Discrepancies in perceptions about the openness of borders during different periods of history showed identification with their nation’s narrative. While communities deferred to the central government’s narrative about relations, their own experiences did not always trickle down from the centre. When relations were good at the national level, it did not automatically mean that they were also open at the local levels where border communities resided.

Border benefits are not always for border communities

Living close to borders did not present tangible benefits for communities, despite the new opportunities that bridges, bazaar and cross-overs were presenting. The survey showed that the number of people who had visited the other side or had any contacts was very small. Where there were regular visits, they were initiated by people living away from border areas: rich families or traders or people who went for holiday from other parts of the country, especially from cities. Border communities themselves were not able to take advantage of the new connections mostly given the lack of the necessary means to afford crossing. Throughout the years, border communities had become alienated for a number of reasons, among them: Vastly different socio-economic trajectory that had created alienation among them, historical dispersion of ethnic groups after borders were settled, geographic barrier in terms of a river, strict border controls, lack of economic pull factor, poverty of community borders, intimidation by criminal groups and lack of curiosity.

Living close to borders seemed to present more liability for communities rather than opportunity that had not been fully explored yet

Overall, borders as assets were more in the domain of possibility and wishes, while borders as liabilities were more the every day reality of communities. Living close to border was judged as an asset when it was related to trade opportunities, the existence of controlled cross-overs, use of common resources such as electricity and water, safety nets in case of the need for refuge, travel for medical purposes and for exchange of know how. The proximity of frontiers however had a number of negative influences, among them insecurity with the presence of mafia groups and environmental insecurity caused by a fickle river that frequently floods and destroys farmlands.

Cross border trade has been facilitated but trust is lacking and hurdles not easy to overcome

For Tajiks entrepreneurs, the possibility of trade with Afghanistan, where the private sector is booming, was considered potentially more attractive and lucrative than with neighboring Uzbekistan. Afghans saw the Central Asian territories as potential transit routes to Russia and Europe if not as markets per se. But for trade to take off, a number of prerequisites had to be established: Better infrastructure and transport routes, economic means for initial resources, connections, overcoming red tape, and, in the final analysis, trust.

III. Implications and recommendations

What do the answers reveal about the four main streams of query of this study, namely:

1. Does the securitization of borders in Central Asia and Afghanistan correspond to the human security concerns of communities living in border areas?
2. Do border communities benefit from the potential of exchanges and opportunities that borders provide?
3. How do communities across the borders assess the lives of their co-ethnic groups across borders and how much do they consider them as threats or opportunities?
4. An by extension, how can communities play a role in rapprochement between the two states and contribute to long term stability and development if their human security were addressed effectively?

Both in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, border regions are populated by rather isolated, poor people who need urgent attention. While border communities feel threats to their physical safety, when it comes to everyday life however, their concerns go to broader aspects of insecurity. Since external aggression is not the only danger menacing the countries and the people of the region, security should be broadened to centre on people and factors that affect their quality of life. The policy goal of the governments of all sides of the borders should be to bring people out of isolation and to address their human security needs, as part of, or at least in addition to, their border security agendas. When border communities are protected, provided for and empowered, they can become positive agents for stability and cooperation. If they remain isolated and neglected, they can become vulnerabilities that can threaten the security of border areas in general.

National security complemented by human security

While much is being done to secure borders in Central Asia, current approaches could exacerbate the insecurity of border communities when they over-focus on interdiction. Strict border controls and limitations put on the type of goods that can go through harm border communities in two ways: first they create incentives for the activity of traffickers and corruption in border regions which affect the every day life of native communities. Second, these practices naturally create disincentives for the free movement of people and goods in the region. Coupled with stalled development, conflict and neglect of rural areas, interdictions-based border strategies could exacerbate isolation and lead to lack of opportunities for economic growth and employment hence migration of the young able bodied population, lack of openness to the outside

world leading to conservative values and lack of exchanges and cross community contacts.

Instead, one of the most effective strategies to control the border areas is to involve the people living in those areas. Involving communities not only puts the focus on their needs, it can also engage them in helping secure the borders from trespassers, such as insurgents and smugglers, who usually hail from outside the region. Addressing the human security needs of border communities is therefore not just an ethical concern, but also an instrumental one as border communities could reject outsiders and spoilers and contribute to stability and peace once they feel empowered. If communities have access to the benefits of employment, cross border trade, quality education and healthcare and cross regional cultural contacts, chances of them being recruited by smugglers or extremists would also be lessened.

Elements of an enhanced human security border regime

An enhanced human security border regime does not bypass the need to provide security of borders, but it reimagines Central Asian border security in terms of a comprehensive and layered view of security based as much around developing secure and prosperous local communities across borders as on customs posts and electric fences. Sharing the focus with the concerns of communities requires going beyond security as traditionally defined in Central Asia as pertaining to the interest of the states with interdiction and closures (deterrence) as the main tools to guarantee it.

A human security approach instead requires a broader, two-pronged approach: 1) Investing in the needs of communities who inhabit borderlands at the national level to make them part and parcel of an enlarged security and preventive development approach, and 2) supporting cross-border cooperation and exchanges between communities as means to enhance confidence building measures.

Elements of such a human security border regime could include:

Boosting border development for the people and by the people

- Involving border communities in the selection of priorities and design of interventions at the national level, and, if possible, at the cross-border level. This implies a certain degree of decentralization of decision-making about development priorities and empowerment of local communities to allow for participation in local governance.
- Creation of livelihoods and economic development through public works projects, small enterprise development, private sector development, support to agriculture activities, and so on.

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In return, people will be encouraged to engage in legal activities.

- Building and maintaining quality social infrastructures, including the schools and medical clinics that communities need.
- Mitigating risks posed to farmers by the fickle movement of rivers. Solutions are needed to protect farmers and inhabitants from vulnerabilities created by environmental insecurity.
- Luring populations away from the consumption of drugs, both a health concern and a security one given that it creates demand for the activities of drug smugglers, through provision of healthcare facilities to cure and prevent addiction, and livelihood opportunities for former addicts.

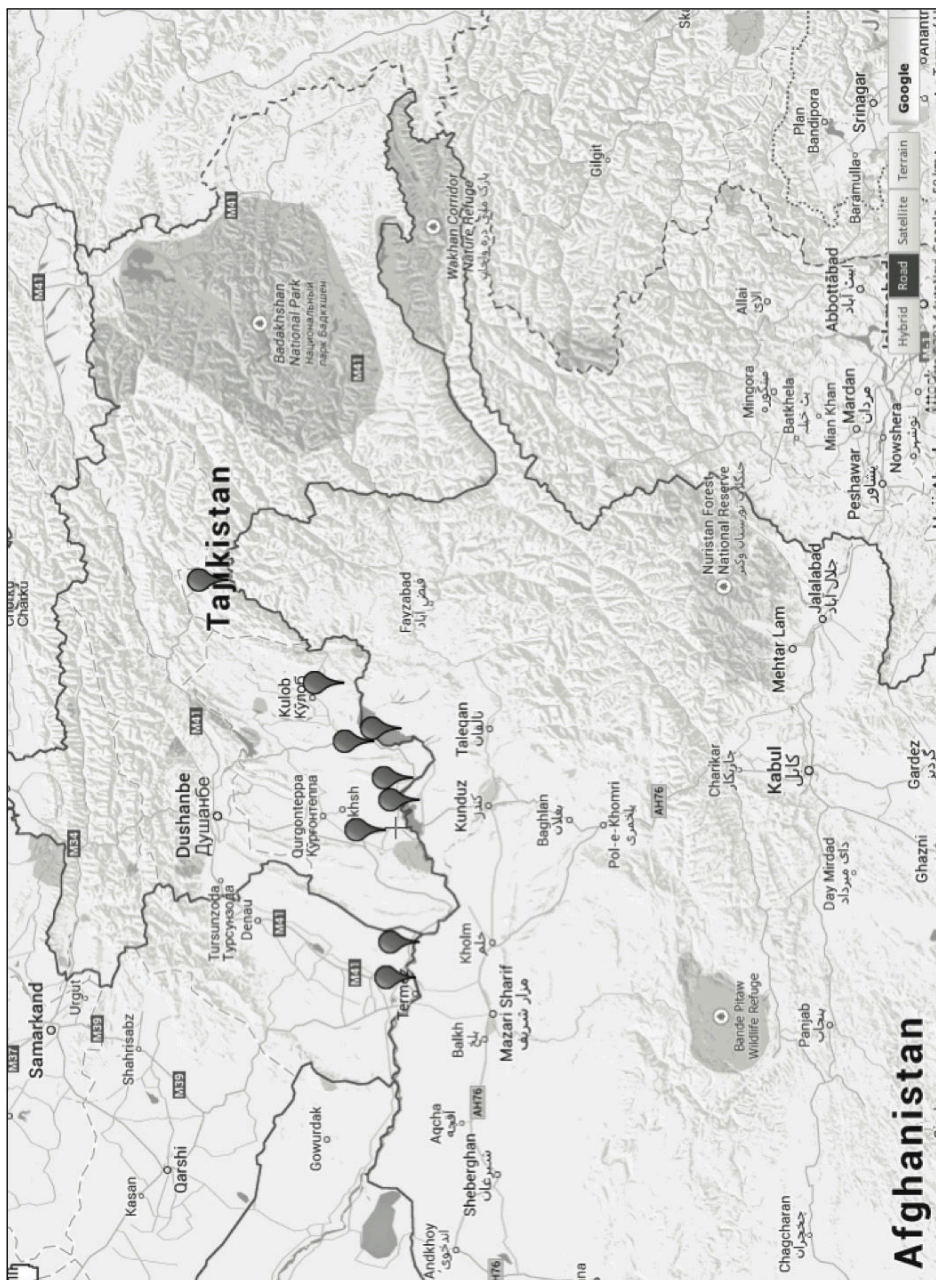
Investing in cross-border community projects

- Better cross border relations are means to build trust between communities—which itself can be a way of stabilizing the border region. People to people exchanges need to be put more forcefully on the agenda.
- Cross border councils could be drawn from the border communities that would also give them a political voice to advance proposals around shared interests
- Investing in joint sharing of natural resources (water, land and energy) is a way to build trust between communities and alleviate their environmental and economic insecurities at the same time.
- Fostering the development of border markets is an ideal vehicle for exchanges of ideas and information about commodities with different prices, qualities and brands, building trust and improving economic conditions of people on both sides of the borders. More investments are needed to boost the potential of border markets, pave roads leading to them, simplify procedures for movement of traders and goods, customs procedures, and creation of additional infrastructure for storage etc.
- In order to reduce the potential influence of extremist and radical groups, neighboring countries could invest jointly in developing curriculum for religious education and promote

official exchanges of Ulemas (religious scholars and authorities) to think together of ways to help prevent radicalization among the youth of the region.

The international community should also support this agenda by rethinking its involvement in an agenda of hard securitization through funding border strengthening projects through infrastructure, equipment, training of border guards etc,. In addition or as part of their support assistance to border security through infrastructure development, training for guards and equipment provisions, donors should contribute to improving the conditions of border communities by gearing their border assistance towards border communities, and involving them in the identification of projects to improve their livelihoods, health, education and governance needs. While such aid would most like be geared to national level, efforts should go towards supporting community projects mirroring on both sides of the Tajik-Afghan borders and, where bureaucratically, politically and logistically possible, launch cross-border projects that require cooperation between communities across the two countries.

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Map of towns surveyed, Afghanistan and Tajikistan

1. The context: borders security and the human factor

Given concerns with the potential trespassing of traffickers, extremists and terrorists, securing a total of 2387 kilometre river-border shared with Afghanistan is high on the national security agenda of the three Central Asian countries of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Borders, however, are not only physical barriers but also constitute physical spaces inhabited by people who once belonged to the same family or kin groups before nation states came into existence. Border populations often have a different perception of what the border represents in terms of threats and opportunities than do policy makers sitting in distant capitals.

This study provides a snapshot of the predicament, views and hopes of selected inhabitants of border communities living along the Amu Darya and Panj rivers in nine districts of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Based on a small pilot fieldwork survey among these communities, the study aims to shed some light on how border populations assess the potential threats and opportunities of living around borders, how cross-border ethnic groups relate to one another and what role they could play in reducing tensions related to borders. By gauging how people identify their needs and see themselves vis-à-vis others, the study overall examines whether the way in which governments securitize the border in Central Asia and Afghanistan correspond to the human security concerns of the border communities themselves.

I. Borders, states, nations, communities

Borders—the edge or boundary of something—can have both a physical, geographic meaning or be symbolic in character. Frontiers are not simply zigzag lines on a map, delineating and separating different political and administrative jurisdictions. They are institutions established through political acts and regulated by law and are, in essence, socio-territorial constructs as much as they are as physical entities. As such, they play specific roles for states and their citizens.

For states, borders are an instrument of state policy, with the function of the state depending on its ability to establish control over them. State power is characterized by the ability or lack of capacity to control the illegal trespassing of their borders. But borders also are constitutive of statehood, with states being defined by the sovereignty and control over forces they excise within a territory delimited by borders. States recognize each other's sovereign boundaries and their legitimate power over a demarcated territory. Borders, then, are both the state and an instrument of statecraft. In such a context, border control and border security become more than technical exercises. When borders have symbolic values for nation-building, state-building and

statecraft, establishing control over cross-boundary movements is a state practice that defines and contributes to national identity. According to Fjæstad and Kjærneta, Central Asian states ‘perform’ their statehood by exercising control of their international borders.¹ They argue that Afghanistan—or more precisely the threat it represents—is a constituent part of Central Asian statehood, allowing them to ‘perform’ as states, relying on borders to demarcate them from the ‘other’, the war-torn danger, and define their identity.²

While borders are used as instruments for states to project their sovereignty and their statehood, how do they affect the every day experiences of people living in proximity to them?³ In borderlands the sanctity of borders—as proxies for the strength of states—can be challenged by the activities of individuals, communities and market forces that cross them illegally or symbolically.⁴ While borders define the identity of citizens in a legal sense—given that nationality and rights of citizenship are delimited by them—they are also reminders of other types of identities which could be broader or narrower than state nationality driven by factors such as trans-national ethnicity, kinship, language, history and religion⁵ While modern nation-states of the twentieth century have created such strong identities based on divisions that citizens have often stopped imagining their larger community, borders serve as a reminder of both connections and limitations at the same time.

In a potential conflict between two states, borderland communities often become hostage to the imperatives of national security, regardless of historical ties. The Ferghana Valley where Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan meet is one region where communities sharing ethnicity, religion and kinship have fallen into the jurisdiction of distinct, potentially antagonistic nation-states. While states attempt to secure the borders through the fortification of posts and crossings, the intricacies of border communities’ densely intertwined lives are often neglected. Anthropologist Madeleine Reeves has followed traders, farmers, water engineers, conflict analysts and border guards as they negotiate the borders. Her findings demonstrate the effect of failing to take into account the context of social and economic inter-dependence when attempting to secure and control national borders to prevent conflicts: at best, establishing enduring peace is not achieved, and at worse new sources of insecurities are generated.

¹ Fjæstad, K. and Kjærneta, H., ‘Performing statehood: Afghanistan as an arena for Central Asian states’, *Central Asian Survey*, 29 July 2014, p. 316.

² Fjæstad and Kjærneta (note 1), pp. 313–14. For a similar case study on Uzbekistan, see Megoran, N., Raballand, G., and Bouyjou, J., ‘Performance, representation and the economics of border control in Uzbekistan’, *Geopolitics*, vol. 10, no. 4 (winter 2005), pp. 712–40.

³ Wilson, T. M., and Donnan, H., *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998), p. 5.

⁴ Brunet-Jailly E. and Dupeyron, B., ‘Introduction: borders, borderlands and porosity’, E. Brunet-Jailly (ed.), *Comparing Border Security in North America and Europe* (University of Ottawa Press: Ottawa, 2007), p. 4.

⁵ Fjæstad and Kjærneta (note 1), p. 319.

When it comes to the borderlands in Tajikistan and Afghanistan across the Amu Darya, are communities able to (re)imagine their kin across the rivers in ways that transcend their national identities and the jurisdiction of the modern states? Or, has the river managed to wash away memories and cement modern antagonistic relations created with the distinct modern states of Afghanistan and Tajikistan? Do populations perceive of their security in the same way as the states?

II. The Amu divide

The frontier between northern Afghanistan and southern Central Asia consists of a body of water. The Panj River originates in the eastern Pamirs and forms the longest part of the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. In merging with the Vakhsh River, it becomes the Amu Darya (also known as the Oxus and Jayhun) which forms the natural border between Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan on its right bank, and Afghanistan on its left. Securing this river border is high on the national security agenda of both Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. Preventing the illegal crossing of people, drugs, weapons, illicit goods and fundamentalist ideas across the 2387 km of borders between Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan remains one of the most critical concerns for border security for these states. For the border area communities of these states, however, concerns stem not just from the fear from terrorism, extremism and illegal trafficking, but about more tangible human needs such as durable livelihoods, environmental security, access to quality health and education services.

States are concerned with their own national security interest in preventing the movement of extremist groups and terrorists that are allegedly striving to replace the secular regimes with an Islamic order in the region. Rather than concentrating on the root causes that contribute to violent radicalization within Central Asian societies, such as the high rates of unemployment, social marginalization and exclusion and frequent violations of human rights, much of the official discourse on counter-terrorism centres on targeting terrorist groups using a law and order approach. Thus focus is placed primarily on limiting the presence of fundamentalist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the splinter group Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region of Pakistan and within Afghanistan, as well as countering the recruitment of Central Asians into the ranks of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Central Asian leaders also worry that a Taliban return could incite similar ambitions for religious and military destabilization within their societies. A second area of state concern is the trafficking and illicit flow of narcotics, arms, people (such as illegal migrants) and goods. This includes raw materials, vehicles and other consumer goods that cross the unchecked borders and could damage the national economy while potentially destabilizing the regimes. Central Asian countries also fear an influx of refugees to their territories in the event of a

civil war in Afghanistan, as was the case in 1997—a situation for which they may not be well prepared. The integration or return of former groups of Afghan refugees in Central Asian countries has not been completed, even though the case load is considerably smaller than that of Iran and Pakistan.⁶

The state response to these perceived threats is an emphasis on border control at the expense of softening borders to facilitate trade and transit. That Central Asian states view the issue of border security within the scope of national security spells difficulties at the political level in terms of contact between leadership, political will and mutual trust, and also at the technical level in terms of promoting cross border cooperation in joint operations, intelligence sharing and coordination between national law enforcement authorities. Cooperation between Central Asian states on border issues is extremely thorny, marred by factors such as strict visa regimes, mistrust in each other's competence and ability to prevent illegal trespassing, and frequent border disputes. The culprit as seen from the point of view of Central Asian states is not only the proximity to an unstable Afghanistan, but the mismanagement of porous borders within the region in particular. While they share the same types of challenges from internal and external threats, lack of cooperation between states is exacerbated by a fear of contagion of spill-over of violence, trafficking of arms, narcotics and extremism, and a lack of trust in each other's capacity and commitment to contain domestic problems.

Tajikistan shares 1344 km of border with the Afghan provinces of Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz and Balkh. Much of it is poorly guarded rough mountainous terrain and a challenge for border control, particularly when coupled with a shortage of funding for protection efforts and widespread corruption. As the Tajik-Afghan border forms part of a transport corridor into Kyrgyzstan and on to Kazakhstan and Russia, Tajikistan has a key role in fighting narcotics trafficking. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that in 2010, about 25 per cent of the heroin and 15 per cent of the opium produced in Afghanistan is smuggled through Central Asia, with 85 per cent of that amount passing through Tajikistan.⁷ Unofficial estimates of the percentage of the country's economy linked to drug trafficking range from 20 to 30 per cent.⁸ The country receives support from the international community to combat trafficking, with heavy investments into strengthening the capacity of border guards, customs officials and Tajikistan's Drug Control Agency, and establishing liaison officers to work with their Afghan counterparts. Russia, in response to the threat of an assault on Tajikistan by ISIL which could in turn threaten Russia, promised the country support during a meeting of the Collective Security Treaty

⁶ For a full analysis, see Tadjbakhsh, S., 'Insulation on the Silk Road between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia', PRIO Paper, Apr. 2012.

⁷ UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Opiate Flows Through Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia: A Threat Assessment* (UNODC: Vienna, May 2012), <https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Afghanistan_northern_route_2012_web.pdf>.

⁸ US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 'Country report: Tajikistan', *2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)*, vol. 1 (INCSR: Washington, DC, 2014), <<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2014/vol1/index.htm>>.

Organization in April 2015 including 70 billion rubles (\$1.5 billion) for weapons and to secure the border with Afghanistan.⁹ Tajik and Afghan security agency and border guards try to overcome hurdles of lack of trust and cooperation to engage in bilateral relations, but have so far been more successful in joint border patrol and closures (as exemplified by the closure of border crossings in response to the July 2012 fighting in Khorogh, the capital of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO)), and less successful in the timely exchange of data on persons of interest.

Despite these advantages Tajikistan is considerably more vulnerable than Uzbekistan which shares just 137 km with the Afghan province of Balkh. One of the most heavily guarded borders in the world, it is protected by two lines of barbed wire fences—one of them electrified—in addition to landmines and heavily-armed patrols. Nevertheless, this heavy fortification has not been able to stem the flow of narcotics into Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is also concerned over the potential entry of IMU through other borders of Central Asia in the Ferghana valley, or the general spread of extremist ideology that transcends physical borders. While Uzbekistan has largely mitigated the militant threat through strict security measures inside the country, it considers itself vulnerable to incursions from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, whose capacities to contain threats at their borders it does not trust.

The 744 km of border between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan did not seem to pose much of concern for Turkmenistan until 2014 when Taliban/IMU fighters began attacking members of the Turkmen State Border Services (border guards). In February 2014, armed fighters crossed into Turkmenistan from Badghis Province killing three border guards, and later in May an armed group entered from Faryab and tried to seize a water basin near the border killing a further three guards. These attacks made the borders of Turkmenistan the newest area of IMU expansion into Afghanistan.¹⁰ They also shook the Turkmenistan government's confidence in being able to protect its borders through strict visa regimes, its neutral relations with the legacy of peaceful coexistence with the Taliban in the past, and its reliance on ethnic Turkmen populations of Afghanistan inhabiting the border areas in the provinces of Herat, Faryab, Badghis and Jowzjan. In response Turkmenistan began modernizing its combat equipment, building ditches and installing electrified fences along most of its Afghan border.¹¹

The Turkmenistan incidents pointed to an important gap in the conception of border security of Central Asian and Afghan states: neglect of the human element. While electric fences have been erected, the Taliban, the IMU and, allegedly, ISIL affiliates have been exploiting the poverty and low level of literacy in Faryab and Badghis provinces where many ethnic Turkmens live. Evidence of ISIL in Syria drawing its membership from among poor Central

⁹ 'Russia ready to give Tajikistan \$1.2 billion military aid to fight ISIS', *the Moscow Times*, 3 Apr. 2015, <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/russia-ready-to-give-tajikistan-12-billion-military-aid-to-fight-isis/518583.html>>.

¹⁰ Panier, B., 'More Turkmen troops killed along Afghan border', *Radio Free Europe*, 27 May 2014.

¹¹ Panier, B., 'Turkmenistan's new Afghan border policy', *Radio Free Europe*, 10 Oct. 2014.

Asian migrant workers in Russia point to the linkages between socio-economic conditions and potential extremism. Along border regions where poverty and lack of education—including lack of knowledge about the correct tenants of Islam—is ripe, conditions are conducive to extremists potentially having more influence. Broader regional and bilateral co-operation in defeating the Taliban, terrorism and violent extremism needs to be accompanied with improving social conditions so that people can be better able to reject and fight extremism. Investing in the human factor should be a key security strategy, while being in itself paramount for providing human security of border communities.

While states reinforce borders in their mistrust of the ability of other states to prevent illegal border crossings, how do cross-border communities relate to their kin on other sides? What role can they play in reducing tensions related to borders? How do border populations assess the potential threats and opportunities of living around borders? Ultimately, does the securitization of borders in Central Asia and Afghanistan correspond to the human security concerns of communities living in border areas?

Our hypothesis going into this project to study cross-border ties between people living on both sides of the borders in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, was that while border communities share ethnicity, culture, language and religion, their modern twentieth century trajectory of rule under different political regimes had led to significantly different political, social and economic identities. The Panj and Amu rivers are not only physical barriers but foremost psychological ones as well, with a great divide among kin who were once family. The closure of borders has long disrupted ties, interactions and movements.

This study examines policy making and problem solving from the grassroots level: from the experience of people living around borders going about their everyday lives with their everyday security concerns at the micro-level, far from political declaration.

The study was a pilot qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with approximately 200 people (Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen) from communities living in nine districts along the borders of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. It was hoped that it would generate enough interest to expand it to other countries (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). In Tajikistan, the fieldwork was conducted between May and June 2014 in five districts within two provinces bordering Afghanistan, both at the district level and surrounding villages: Qumsangir, Panj, Farkhor and Hamadoni in the Khatlon Province, and the district of Darvoz in the Province of Badakhshan. In Afghanistan, the fieldwork was conducted between May and July 2014 in three districts of three different provinces: Khwaja Bahauddin (Takhar Province), Imam Sahib (Kunduz Province), Kaldar (Balkh Province) and the port town of Hairatan.

The study sought to answer four sets of questions:

1. Does the securitization of borders in Central Asia and Afghanistan correspond to the human security concerns of communities living in border areas?
2. Do border communities benefit from the potential of exchanges and opportunities that borders provide?
3. How do communities across the borders assess the lives of their co-ethnic groups across borders and how much do they consider them as threats or opportunities?
4. An by extension, how can communities play a role in rapprochement between the two states and contribute to long term stability and development if their human security were addressed effectively?

2. The findings

I. Border communities' assessment of their human security concerns

The districts surrounding the Tajik/Afghan border are economically and environmentally insecure, impoverished and isolated from the centre.

While agriculture dominates, reliable water supplies are lacking

The majority of people living in border areas are engaged in agricultural activities as their primary/main source of economy. It is a sector that has not seen much investments and attention by governments, especially in Afghanistan. This makes their livelihoods dependent not only on adequate equipment, transport and access to markets, but also on the reliable availability of water, land and favourable climate—all factors beyond their control.

Agriculture is the primary source of livelihoods in the three districts visited in Afghanistan. Even in the Imam Sahib District in the northern province of Kunduz—considered to be one of the most developed in Afghanistan—the majority of people living in border areas are dependent on agriculture and livestock. While the majority of residents of the major port town of Hairatan rely on various small scale businesses, salary and income from the trade between two countries as their primary income, 40 per cent of those interviewed considered agricultural and livestock as their main source of their income. Most people on the Afghan side used simple traditional techniques in agriculture, and many complained about the lack of quality fertilizers to maintain and cultivate their lands.

On the Tajik side, working the land (cotton, cereals, horticulture) is the main source of livelihood. Arable agriculture relies heavily on irrigation, which is consistently a problem as poor regulation of river flows creates water shortages. In Farkhor, for example, people complained about the lack of access to adequate water for proper irrigation despite the presence of the river, in addition to a lack of new technologies, difficulty in reaching markets and the increase in wild pigs that destroy the crops. In Qumsangir, concerns were also expressed over the high price of petrol and the inability to return the credit taken from banks for farming purposes.

On both sides of the border families heavily rely on their farms and gardens to develop small and micro-scale private initiatives, such as developing, selling or bartering milk and milk products, meat, sheep wool, and other goods. On the Tajik side, farmers work on the cotton and cereal plantations of midsized *dehqon* farms (peasant farms, in Tajik *Khojagii dehqoni, fermeri*) as well as on their household plots for their livestock.¹²

¹² While land and natural resources are state owned, farmers ('dehqons') have long-term land use rights. In 1992, the government adopted its first version of the law on *dehqon* farms gradually turning

While agriculture is a mainstay of the economy throughout the region, what makes the dependency of border communities particularly important and risky is the dependency on water in an environmentally insecure situation prone to natural disasters. People heavily depend on the Amu Darya River or its tributary Panj for irrigation of the fields, yet, river flows are badly regulated, leading to frequent floods that destroy the land on both sides.

The agricultural lands located in the banks of the river on the Afghan side are muddy and sandy, making them more difficult to cultivate than other parts of the country. Frequent seasonal flooding of the Amu Darya also has a negative impact on the economy of the people living in these border areas. Every year a large portion of agricultural land is destroyed by flooding on the Afghan side in the districts of Kaldar, Qarqeen and Kham Ab. The destruction is often massive and most families have to evacuate the villages when flooding occurs. The floodwaters take vast amounts of fertile soil and deposit it on the other side of the border. The continuous erosion of fertile soil from the Afghan side is taking a significant toll on agricultural practices and the overall economy of the Afghan people in affected border areas. In the district of Kaldar, with agriculture being the main source of income, the rising water level of the Amu River periodically destroys the fertile agricultural land, causing serious concerns among the affected population regarding their economic security. A small number of people in Hairatan also mentioned seasonal floods as their main problem.

On the Tajik side the new lands have low crop yields and low production as a result of high salinity from poor drainage of underground water. Water shortages were the main cause of worry among those interviewed, both for drinking and irrigation purposes. In Farkhor a large number of people identified lack of access to clean water as one of their main concerns, in addition to lack of adequate water for proper irrigation. A 39-year old female medical worker claimed that people were sick with waterborne diseases as a result of drinking impure water. Lack of clean water was also mentioned by those interviewed in Qumsangir, as were concerns with drought. The problem has become acute in Qumsangir in places where the soil has become saline because of too much groundwater water in some places, while in other areas there is too little water. In the district of Panj, complaints were heard over the lack of sufficient water for irrigation of farmlands.

People are poor or working multiple jobs with low salaries

On the Afghan side respondents considered that there has not been any considerable change in the overall development of the border areas in the past decade. The majority of those surveyed claimed that the quality of life had not much improved compared to recent transformations in social, political and economic affairs across the rest of the country, and that the government had

state farms into *dehqon* farms, smallholdings (on average 0.2 hectares) leased from the state by individual families for periods of 10 to 50 years.

not done enough to improve education and healthcare. According to the Head of Village Affairs department in the District of Kaldar, there is not a single person in the entire village sufficiently educated or skilled to work in the governor's office. For this reason, almost all the district government employees are from Mazar-e-Sharif and commute on a daily basis.

Even in the relatively more developed district of Khwaja Bahauddin, people complained of not having enough earnings to make ends meet and to buy such daily staples as tea and oil etc especially given the considerable decrease in their earnings since last year. Benefitting from trade with Uzbekistan, the situation in Hairatan is markedly different: in contrast to other regions visited the majority of respondents claimed they did not have very serious concerns about their income and financial expenditures.

In Tajikistan the problem was not so much poverty as lack of adequate income. Although the majority of people interviewed said their lives had improved compared with 10 years ago, the interviews showed that people were engaged in multiple jobs to the point that they were unable to identify which was their primary source of income. For example, in Farkhor, a 55-year old teacher mentioned that after 30 years as a teacher, he was earning only 800 somonis (about \$160 USD) per month, forcing him to earn additional money by cultivating his garden plot and working on a rented plot nearby. Only one third of respondents admitted their source of income as salary, pensions or assistance/welfare. Half lived off remittances or by selling products from their farms and gardens. A quarter of people lived off formal private sector initiatives in Farkhor and most identified low salaries and low purchasing power as major concerns.

In Qumsangir more than half of respondents mentioned pensions as their main source of income, although they admitted to be earning additional income through working on their lands and through remittances sent by family members. The same was the case in Panj district, although it benefits from more private sector activity. Almost three quarters of respondents admitted to living off remittances in addition to their incomes and less than a quarter said they lived with one income. This multi-tasking places additional stress on people who concerned about too much work in general. The complaints of interviewees in Panj concerned the low level of salary forcing necessitating multiple jobs; lack of permanent, decent jobs; lack of housing, and lack of gas and electricity, especially in winter. In Darvoz, with its lack of farmland, 70 per cent of respondents said they gained income through salaries, 20 per cent through small private businesses, 5 per cent through remittances from abroad and 5 per cent from various savings. Most respondents wanted to have better opportunities to develop the private sector.

On both sides of the river, people complained of inadequate incomes. Afghans interviewed in the study were trying to make ends meet by being entrepreneurial. The majority of Tajiks interviewed relied on government salaries and especially on remittances from family members working in Russia. Overall, however, both populations across borders are generally

impoverished, unless they live in a port area and benefit directly from trade activities.

Migration to other countries is a viable option for income

With little opportunities in these relegated poor border regions, migration seems to be the preferred solution for the low or unskilled youth labour force. People are not heading to national capitals for work, but via networks to countries where large communities of their compatriots have already settled as migrant workers. The inhabitants of the northern shores in Central Asia have already fully exploited this option, with most families being connected to at least one member who is working abroad, most often in Russia.

There is no pull factor rendering these countries attractive as options for labour migration for either side of the river. When it comes to looking for economic opportunities, kin sympathies play no role. The relatively economically better Central Asian republics do not represent viable opportunities for Afghan unskilled youths, given the red tape, strict controls and the inability to retain their own blue-collar workers. Rather, Afghans prefer to use their existing networks and test their luck in Iran and Pakistan where millions of their compatriots had settled during the wars and where they share a common language. While Afghan traders explore opportunities for business in Central Asia, blue-collar workers find a more favourable market in Iran and Pakistan.

The booming construction sector and aid industry in the main cities of Afghanistan are also not pull factors for Tajiks, who prefer to head north to Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, especially cognizant of the fact that Afghans themselves—especially those with similar blue-collar experience—don't have enough jobs. The pull towards the north for Central Asians is a legacy of the former-Soviet Union where people circulated with little difficulties, sharing language and culture. Russia, a huge country with no visa regime, represents an attractive country for Tajik labourers.

On the Tajik side of the border, a decade of operation of human migrant networks were now helping their friends and families and meant that remittances played a major role in all the regions studied. In Hamadoni more than a third of respondents admitted to living off of remittances from a family member working mostly in Russia. In Farkhor and Qumsangir the respondents were more open about this phenomenon: most families interviewed had at least one family worker sending money from abroad, and remittances play an important role in household incomes. In Panj almost three quarters admitted to living off of remittances. The male labour migration, lack of hope for the unemployed youth, and brain drain were deemed as the most important worries for caregivers, such as a 37-year old housewife, a 70-year old pensioner and a 65-year old doctor in Hamadoni. Respondents across all areas surveyed recounted stories of fathers living abroad for long years and not having seen their children, and of husbands sending money back home but

starting a new family in Russia. 'Life is hard', lamented a 48-year old housewife in Panj, 'if the children were not in Russia, we could not survive.'

People are isolated from the centre

Considerable parts of the border areas in Afghanistan are ringed by dry deserts. This makes it difficult for communities living in border regions to have access to the provincial centres and main economic centres of Afghanistan. Lack of access to the centre and geographical barriers demotivate people to venture outside of their districts to learn new knowledge and techniques, including in agriculture. This problem is applicable to the three districts studied but also other border districts in Afghanistan, such as those in Jawzjan on the border with Turkmenistan.

Anecdotally, a vegetable seller from the centre of the Kaldar district told the survey team that the lack of import and export services mean that people in this district did not even know the names of different fruits which do not grow in Kaldar. Those who were familiar with imported fruits could not afford to buy them. While border communities do not go to the centre, the centre comes to the borders: People involved in cross-border trade, import and export tended to be from outside of the districts. Seldom did border communities themselves have the sufficient funds to be able to overcome the hurdles required for engaging in trade. This is markedly different from the situation on the Pakistan/Afghanistan borders and relates to the degree of control of the northern borders with Central Asia. Isolated border communities seem like an oxymoron: borders after all open to new possibilities. But for the population of northern Afghanistan not connected to the ports and bridges, isolation best describes their situation, trapped by strongly controlled borders on the one hand, and desert, insecure roads and lack of means to get to the centres on the other.

On the Tajik side border communities had more contacts with the provincial or district centre than the capital. By contrast, in regions where there was more travel, people were more optimistic about changes in their lives and the possibility to grow out of poverty and take advantage of opportunities. For example, all respondents in Darvoz mentioned that their lives had improved from 10 years ago, and many associated this with the opportunities created through the border market on Saturdays in addition to government attention to the region.

Social services are lacking

The perception of those interviewed is that isolation, distance from the economic centres and lack of attention to rural development, have led to a dearth of decent social services and unsatisfactory health and education services on both sides of the rivers, although more so in Afghanistan.

Those interviewed in Kaldar complained of the lack of adequate hospitals and good schools in the district. The low quality of education has led to a

preference to send children to religious schools (madrasas). The Head of Village Affairs Department rated the district of Kaldar as one of the worst in the country when it comes to education opportunities. Girls are allowed to study up to the third grade and boys to the ninth grade only. The only female teacher of the district was killed in her house in 2013. The Head of Village Affairs also claimed that there were no hospitals in the district, while people could not take their sick patients to the provincial centre due to their poverty let alone access proper treatment outside the country. Those who get sick usually had to go to the nearest town, Hairatan, for medical treatment if they could afford it. A rickshaw driver stated that people were dying from very common and easily treatable diseases because the district had no doctor or medicine and most people could not afford to take their sick relatives to the provincial centre.

In contrast to Kaldar the people in Imam Sahib were relatively happy with the health and education facilities available to them, although they admitted that improvements could be seen mostly in the district centre and that rich people were the ones that benefitted the most. A hospital with 40 beds, some private pharmacies and doctors were available, but only in the centre of Imam Sahib district. Respondents were also conscious of the advantage of their district vis-à-vis others in Afghanistan. One student commented, 'At least as far as the centre of the Imam Sahib district is concerned, the situation has improved a lot, we have electricity, good schools, good hospital and also teacher training, facilities which I am sure most of the districts in the country don't have.' In the Khwaja Bahauddin district, interviewees mentioned that education opportunities were better compared to health services. In addition to the availability of decent public schools, Iran and Turkey had opened some schools where both boys and girls could receive a fair education. By contrast, people claimed that there is only one clinic in the centre of the district. Where infrastructure is available, the quality of services is lagging. Respondents from Hairatan raised concerns about the lack of qualified doctors, the insufficiency of textbooks and the low qualification of teachers.

Across the border in Tajikistan, most respondents admitted to having witnessed improvements in social infrastructure in the past decade, especially in the education sector. Nonetheless some shortcomings were noted. In Hamadoni a farmer stated that his children had to walk 5 km to school every day because of the distance from his home to the school village. In Hamadoni respondents were concerned about the low salary of teachers, lack of qualified teachers, weak operation of libraries or theatres, and lack of new books. In Farkhor a little less than half of respondents highlighted the lack of qualified personnel for social services such as teachers and doctors. Their concerns centred mostly around the cultural sector (including libraries and social centres) that had been forgotten. In Qumsangir the problem was the lack of qualified teachers as they pursued work in Russia or changed their profession to more lucrative labour. The privatization of medical services was also a concern for the majority who did not have enough income. In Panj half of

respondents commented on the poor state of social services, especially in the education sector, despite attention paid to this sector in the past decade. Here, too, low salaries had forced teachers to abandon their profession. More than half of respondents also complained about the unsatisfactory state of health services. In Darvoz half of respondents were concerned about the lack of qualification of teachers and doctors.

As a result of geographic isolation, people tend to be culturally conservative

Religious beliefs and conservative values thrived in border regions that were isolated. On the Afghan side, the majority of those interviewed strongly believed in God's will and used it as an excuse to justify their current situation. A large segment of those interviewed held the belief that God, who has brought humans and other living creatures to this world, is also responsible for providing food and shelter to all. The Principal Instructor of the central madrasa in Kaldar for example claimed that there was no need to worry about the economic issues because God would provide for him and for those who believed in him. A shopkeeper similarly claimed that God who will give him food and there is no reason to worry about economic problems. If people were relatively satisfied with the current situation, it was mainly because of their firm belief in God, a force to rely on when they were isolated and not well connected to the main centres of the country.

The implications of this correlation between conservatism and isolation runs deep. As the Head of Village Affairs in Kaldar warned, when people are least exposed to the outside world, they become simple and religious and can be easily exploited in the name of religion. Such kinds of people can easily fall prey to the Taliban and support their activities thinking it a religious obligation.

In the Khatlon area of Tajikistan, the population of Kumsangir and Panj—who had historically originated from the isolated mountain areas of Rasht, Nurobod and Tavildara and had been moved to the border region to work on the cotton fields—are traditionally more religious than the native populations. During the Tajik Civil War they had mostly taken sides with the Islamic/democratic opposition, casting them in opposition to the inhabitants of the other districts of Farkhor and Hamadoni visited in the Khatlon Province. Consequently, some people had become more conservative as a result of having spent time in camps in Afghanistan as refugees during the Civil War.

Physical safety has improved but it may not be sustainable

When it comes to people's perception of their physical safety, the responses were mixed. The situation was much better today than ten years ago, when both sides were coming out of civil wars. However, questions remained in people's minds as to how sustainable this security was in the long term. The

deterioration of the situation on the southern shores in Afghanistan has sent ripples of worries to the northern shores across the Amu and Panj rivers.

Since 2001 the northern provinces of Afghanistan have been considered to be much more secure compared with the southern parts of the country. Life cannot compare to what it was 10 years ago when civil war ravaged the country. During the summer of 2014 when the research took place in Afghanistan, districts were relatively peaceful although respondents mentioned the presence of the Taliban, mafias, and drug traffickers, especially in Kunduz. The situation deteriorated markedly afterwards when government forces in Kunduz and Badkshshan came under intense attack from the Taliban, the IMU and, allegedly, groups having pledged allegiance to ISIL. Central Asian insurgent groups, the IMU, but also Jundallah, Junad al-Khalifa, Jamaat Ansarullah and the IJU began settling in northern Afghanistan after being driven out of the North Waziristan tribal region where they were based after a May 2014 Pakistani military operation.

Back in the early summer of 2014 did the respondents feel this insecurity in their every day lives? In some villages people complained about the emergence of insurgent groups and noted that this had increased particularly after the 2009 presidential elections in Afghanistan. Recruitment by the Taliban was noted along border areas especially in areas with majority Pashtun tribes. Rumours of Taliban resurgence in Imam Sahib led people to consider their district 'as one of the least secure areas in the entire country.' Conspiracy theories were also high in these districts, as was mistrust of the centre. More than a few interviewees in the district of Kaldar blamed the government of Afghanistan for deliberately creating insecurity for its own self-interests. In Imam Sahib people alleged that the government, together with the United States (US) military, supported the Taliban insurgents as they claimed to have seen government helicopters providing food and weapons to insurgents in border areas of Tajikistan.

Yet insurgents were not the only, nor even the main, threats to the respondents of the study. In the Imam Sahib district insecurity was prevalent in areas close to borders but much of it, interviewees claimed, was caused by warlords in villages who still wielded significant power and influence among the people. In Khwaja Bahauddin the focal point of insecurity was not only the Taliban, which people claimed to have been on the rise for the past two years, but also the local power holders and warlords who were said to have gained ground once again since 2009 and have influence and links with drug mafia and other criminal groups. According to local officials these people created a sense of permanent fear and insecurity which went beyond the question of support for the Taliban ideology. Everyday crime (bribery, theft, extortion) was seen as a more pressing problem. The majority of the people interviewed in Kaldar categorically judged the district centre as relatively safe but the remote areas of the district as extremely insecure, including major roads such as the one between Mazar and Kaldar. People in Imam Sahib also were concerned about insecurity while travelling.

On the Tajik side, criticism of the government was more subdued. All respondents tended to associate security with the internal order created by the government and insecurity with external threats, mostly coming from Afghanistan. ‘The Afghan problem is complicated and it affects our personal security too. When there is instability in your neighbour’s house, you can’t not have worries’, was the general feeling expressed by a 35-year old male teacher in Qumsangir. In Farkhor, for example, when asked to evaluate the security situation, people expressed their satisfaction that things were calm in society, as there was no more conflict between Tajiks. Yet a third of respondents living in border regions in Farkhor expressed worry over the existence of criminal groups around borders and instability in Afghanistan as threats to their own security and that of their region. The same was noted in Qumsangir. One third of respondents expressed concern for instability and insecurity from Afghanistan. In Panj, most respondents mentioned instability in Afghanistan and narco-traffickers posing threats to their security. As a male finance official stated, ‘It is the narco-traffickers that disrupt the security situation to gain benefits.’ Worries remained over long term stability and threats from mafia groups, drug traffickers, extremists and terrorists.

Notably, in Darvoz, where connections with communities on the other side of the river are more expansive and people are better informed of how the other side lives through family and other networks, no mention was made about the problem of insecurity from Afghanistan overspilling into their region.

Everyday threats to human security trump concerns with physical safety

There is no doubt that border communities feel threats to their physical safety. When it comes to everyday life however, their concerns lie on broader aspects of insecurity: jobs, health, education, livelihoods, freedom from environmental threats and so on. This requires a rethink of the question of border security from a traditional perspective.

On the Afghan side of the border the majority of respondents were uncertain about the future peace and stability of Afghanistan and worried about making ends meet today. As a vegetable seller in the Kaldar district bemoaned, people earn only as much as they spend daily and in case of any emergency or security problems in the country, people living in border areas will experience significant difficulties. His main concern was that if anyone in his family falls sick, he would not be able to afford the treatment. People’s main preoccupation in Kaldar were the continuous destruction of their agricultural lands due to floods and drought. In Imam Sahib district, despite the advanced state of social infrastructure compared to the rest of the country, interviewees were mainly concerned about problems such as the high costs of education, lack of quality jobs and inflation.

On the Tajik side, despite the fact that a large majority (more than two thirds) of respondents admitted marked improvements in their economic situation over the past decade, the main insecurities they identified were

related to economic security: low level of salaries, high prices, lack of hope for improvement of their living standards, lack of permanent, decent jobs and low pensions. In Qumsangir and Hamadoni people were mostly concerned about losing young men to migration; in Panj, a lack of hope for better opportunities and lack of decent jobs were identified as insecurities about the future and what motivated young people to migrate. In Hamadoni environmental insecurity preoccupied people: fear of natural resources (flooding, drought, earthquakes). In Darvoz respondents raised the problem of food security as opportunities for keeping livestock are scant in mountainous areas.

II. Impressions about communities across borders

In the absence of much communication, impressions of people living on the other side of borders is formed on the basis of hearsay and the media

On both sides, assessments of people living on the other side were mainly based on the information they received through TV and social media or through hearsay, with only a minority informed through visits or relations with people on the other side. Darvoz was an exception where travel is facilitated by bridges and markets. Lack of direct communication, hearsay and the media as the main sources of information has inevitably led to the formation of stereotypes about the other.

The majority of Afghans interviewed believed that the main difference between Afghanistan and its neighbouring Central Asian countries was that living conditions were better ‘over there’ because the security situation was deemed to be much better. Most did not even know that there had been a civil war in Tajikistan in the 1990s. They were under the impression that because Tajikistan’s citizens have been able to live at peace for a long time, they have been able to concentrate on development of their country. In Kaldar for example, the interviewees thought there is much more freedom of speech and better education on the other side of borders in Tajikistan and in Uzbekistan. The government on the other side is seen as more proactive and more developed. In Imam Sahib people envied what they thought were better public facilities across the border. Even in Hairatan where people’s lives were considerably better, more than 85 per cent said that the lives of people on the other side were more comfortable and better than on the Afghan side of the border, because, as they perceived it, people across the border had good education, were more secure, and had access to public amenities.

The few who judged living conditions on the other side as worse or the same as in Afghanistan had themselves travelled to the other side or had friends or relatives who had. As a former employee of an international organization in Imam Sahib mentioned, ‘I think in some aspects we are better than the people of the other side of the border. We have huge agricultural land, while they don’t have the same. One of my friends who visited Tajikistan said that we have better electricity than most of their areas, even though they give us

electricity.’ In Imam Sahib people thought their agriculture lands to be much better. Due to the availability of jobs created through the Shir Khan Bandar port in Imam Sahib, only a little more than half of those interviewed believed that people living across the border had slightly better living conditions than them. A teacher in Hairatan had a more nuanced vision of life on the other sides of the rivers: ‘They have good security, good amenities and better jobs, but they lack free expression and their governments are dictatorships.’

One area where there was consensus on how people on the other side fared worse was on the question of religiosity (adherence to religious values). A general opinion shared among many respondents was that as Central Asians were very liberal, they did not give much importance to religion, hence were not very devout Muslims, and that, of course, was a negative factor. In contrast in the border areas of Afghanistan the level of religiosity is higher than the provincial centres and central parts of Afghanistan. In Kaldar respondents claimed that although people living on the other side of borders had much better living conditions, they were not as religious. In the port town of Hairatan people believed that those on the other side of borders were better off in every aspect except for the fact that they were not pure Muslims and did not care about Islamic values. As a madrasa teacher from Hairatan commented, ‘Personally I have not been there, but I heard this from one of the villagers who was arrested by Uzbek border guards for collecting liquorice root (*shirin boya*) from the Uzbek side. He was kept in one of their prisons and told me that during the course of his stay in Uzbekistan, he never once heard the call to prayer (*azan*) which shows they are not religious at all.’

Despite the certainty in their judgment of people’s lives on the other side of the borders, most Afghans interviewed did not have valid sources of information upon which to base their judgment. Only a minority based their information on visits or relations with people on the other side. A Village Head in Kaldar claimed ‘I am sure that in the last seven or eight years, no ordinary person has spoken to people on the other side of the border.’ The Head of the District Development Assembly (part of the National Solidarity Programme) in Khwaja Bahauddin and a Provincial Council Candidate put it bluntly: ‘I only know Islam Karimov, the president of Uzbekistan. About the rest I don’t have even basic information.’¹³ Nevertheless, respondents overall seemed to have more accurate information regarding Tajikistan which some traders had visited (while no one had been to Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan) because of the similarity of culture and language and the more openness of the Tajik political system which allowed for exchanges.

On the Afghan side assessments of people living on the other side was mainly based on the limited information they received through TV and social media. Local TV channels of Tajikistan were beamed directly in Khwaja

¹³ The National Solidarity Programme (NSP) was created by the Afghan Government to develop the ability of Afghan communities to identify, plan, manage and monitor their own development projects and set up community development councils (CDCs) as local governance institutions.

Bahauddin district without the need to go through satellite, while Uzbek TV channels were watched by Afghan Turkmen and Uzbeks in Hairatan.

Perceptions from the Tajik side were more negative, formed on the basis of the portrayal of Afghan society as violent and war-ridden in the government controlled media outlets of Tajikistan. The negative perceptions were exacerbated by the lack of transit and international news about the conflict in Afghanistan which damaged the reputation of a stable neighbouring state. In Hamadoni, for example, the majority of respondents believed their lives were better than those living in Afghanistan because of the war, lack of hope in the future, psychological trauma stemming from four decades of war, lack of roads and electricity, and lower living standards. While assessment of how communities across the river lived was negative, empathy was easier to come by on the Tajik side for the harsh life of Afghans. A 65-year old doctor from Hamadoni for example expressed a common feeling: 'Even if they are more backwards than we are, they are still part of our nation', while a 30-year old female bank worker in Darvoz summed up sentiments as 'they spend their time earning their livelihoods, just like us, but they are just poorer than us, that's all.'

On the Tajik side people claimed that information about people from the other side is mostly gathered through newspapers, magazines, radio and television, including satellite TV and radio and TV broadcasts of Afghanistan. In Hamadoni region the Afghan TV network 'Arezu' was being easily captured, forming opinions through its broadcasts. The border communities that were able to catch Afghan TV channels, especially private ones, were exposed to a different side of Afghanistan that did not correspond to the images portrayed on their national screens. Ironically, the Tajik state TV captured on the other side tends to broadcast conservative shows, dry news and Tajik or Russian music videos. These broadcasts are generally much less creative and more conservative than Afghan private TV channels like Tolo TV and Arezu which are generally more free and independent. While Afghans on the other side of rivers are thought to be living difficult lives, steeped in poverty and conflict, as the narrative goes, their private media outlets portrays a more vivid, lively society than that portrayed by the state media of the more stable Tajikistan.

Respondents on the Tajik side based their opinions on the media, on conversations with people who had travelled there or with border guards, but mostly on general hearsay. In Panj, in addition to the media and hearsay, people had talked to Tajiks who had taken refuge in Afghanistan during the first year of the 1992-1993 Tajik civil war. Officials interviewed claimed to base their information on discussions with people who had been arrested from crossing the borders illegally. In Qumsangir, a region with exposure to international routes in and out of Afghanistan, 85 per cent of respondents claimed to form their opinion on the basis of personal communication with Tajik or Afghan traders who had been to both sides. In Darvoz 70 per cent formed their opinion on the basis of the exchanges they were able to have

through the Saturday border market in the village of Ruzvai, as well as through conversations with family members and acquaintances by phone, a relatively easy task given that Afghans living in border areas often procured Tajik SIM cards. A 26-year old said, 'We see them every day across the river and we meet on Saturdays at the market.'

Co-ethnicity is not necessarily a factor of closeness for Afghans but it is for Tajiks

Overall, Afghans viewed communities across borders from a positive to a neutral point of view, with no one expressing animosity towards people of the other side, which was markedly different from the perceptions they had of Pakistanis and Iranians, accusing these of interfering in their domestic affairs. While they knew little about communities, they praised the Central Asian governments for not interfering in the affairs of Afghanistan, unlike their other neighbours. The sense of co-ethnicity was low, but people considered communities across borders as brothers and friends at best and otherwise mere neighbours.

The Uzbeks of Hairatan interviewed claimed not to have any family or kinship relations with co-ethnic groups (Uzbeks mainly) on the other side because the Uzbek government was thought to deliberately ban people from having relations with the people living on the Afghan side. The Turkmen of Kaldar had no kin relations with the Uzbeks and Tajiks of the other sides of their borders. Beyond ethnicity, Afghans saw class as the uniting factor with one person in Imam Sahib summing up the feeling that there is not much difference between the people living on the two sides, as there are rich, middle class and poor people living on both sides.

Respondents from Tajikistan had a more favourable view of the imagined communities across rivers but more distrust of the Afghan government's capacity to maintain peace. Tajiks had a romantic vision of communities across rivers, with which they shared ethnicity. Despite their apprehension about a war weary community, and their lack of first-hand knowledge, they frequently expressed their kinship by calling them 'our Tajiks' (*tojikoni mo*), or *hamzabon* (people sharing the same language), *hamdin* (having the same religion), *hamfarhang* (having the same culture), and *hamqawm* (belonging to the same clan or kin). In Farkhor a 36-year old woman proudly stated that 'In reality, people of both sides of the river are one people,' even though they were cognizant of the ethnic diversity of northern Afghanistan and the presence of Uzbeks, Turkmen and others residing there.

In Hamadoni almost all respondents called Afghans hardworking people who shared the same language and in Panj, all celebrated their co-ethnic kins '*hamqawm*' as brothers. In Qumsangir a 38-year old male policeman characterized Afghans as 'aggressive, warriors, traffickers and ignorant,' while a 64-year old bank accountant added 'but with dignity and honor (*bo nomus*)' to this list.

Family/kin relations are few and relatively new except in Badakhshan

Except for the Darvoz region in Badakhshan, contacts between people are based on trade rather than on kinship. If there are family relations, they are mostly new, shaped during the war years when immigration, or, more accurately, temporary flight, took place. Marriages, when do they happen, are between the same ethnic groups. For example, none of the Turkmens interviewed in Kaldar knew of any marriages having taken place with people across borders. In Hairatan which is mostly populated with people coming in from other parts of Afghanistan to take advantage of the port, only one person claimed to have relatives living in Uzbekistan. In Imam Sahib, by contrast, some marriages had taken place when Afghans had moved to Tajikistan during the civil war, or among traders who travelled frequently to Tajikistan and kept a family there. The practice was not alien to traders taking advantage of the relative freedoms to mingle with women in Tajikistan. As a horse cart driver put it, 'Around a week ago, one of my friends said that one of his neighbours, who has even gone to Haj for pilgrimage, had travelled over to Tajikistan some months ago and had married a Tajik girl.' More often than not, Afghan men would not bring their Tajik brides home, many having already another family on the Afghan side of the border. Instead they would 'keep' them in their town or village of origin, paying for their food and lodging in exchange for marital fidelity vows.

In Tajikistan, more people admitted to having family across borders, perhaps because of the location of the villages where interviews took place and the fact that both sides were inhabited by co-ethnic groups. Some of these relations were not new but dated to the times when Tajiks had fled to Afghanistan during their civil war or from before the Bolshevik Revolution when there had been free movement across borders prior to their closing. In Panj about 10 per cent of respondents, all of them Uzbek, said they had been told by their families that their ancestors lived on the other side. It was the local Uzbeks who had ancestors on the other side of the river, the Tajiks of Panj forcibly relocated in the 1950s from the region of Tavildara in the Pamir Mountains. In Farkhor five people claimed to have had family on the other side, though they had no relations with them. A 42-year old housewife in Farkhor said she had a sister who had married on the other side 10 years ago, was working as a doctor on the Afghan side, had respect and good standing in society but had some problems with the customary practice of wearing in veil in public. There were also new family relations as a result of the new contacts made through the bridges and bazaars of Badakhshan or shaped during the war years when Tajiks from Kumsangir and Panj took temporary refuge in Afghanistan.

The two communities consider each other as having different values

While rumours about the relative freedoms (including opportunities for shopping, drinking, and free association with members of the opposite sex) in

Tajikistan tend to attract some Afghans, what is perceived as lack of religious values also puts some people off, giving them an excuse for not wanting to visit the Central Asian countries. People in Kaldar—the most conservative of the groups studied—believed that they were the true Muslims, while Central Asians were Muslims by name only. Kaldar, according to the Head of Village Affairs, is the most religious district of Balkh province and the Islam followed there follows the deobandi tradition¹⁴ taught in madrasas in Pakistan: most of those having received religious education had done so in Pakistan before returning to work in madrasas or mosques of the districts.

People living in Kaldar, similar to those in Khwaja Bahauddin and Imam Sahib, believed the people in Tajikistan to be more liberal and less religious. According to a madrasa teacher living in Kaldar, people across the border are only nominally Muslims because they don't follow the fundamental Islamic rules and obligations. But in the Kaldar district 'most of the people are, Alhamdulillah, true Muslims. Most of the Mullahs of the district have graduated from Pakistani madrasas.' A teacher in Imam Sahib high school also claimed that 'most of the local mullahs come from Pakistan or graduated from Afghan religious madrasas. I am sure, no mullah come from Tajikistan to teach our people.'

But did Afghan mullahs go over to teach Tajiks? Not according to the responses received. Although some mention was made of the fact that Afghanistan was an opening to Islam and a gateway of knowledge from Muslim countries, the general feeling among the Tajiks was that while Afghans were certainly more religious, they had less education and less culture (*madaniyat*), hence were less sophisticated. They were wary of a possible extremist religious influence coming from Afghanistan. In Darvoz respondents mentioned that having the same religion did not automatically lead to religious groups in both countries having connections to each other.

These impressions had changed little from the ones made during the years of Jihad, when Afghans would call the Central Asians from across the river as Soviets or *Kafirs* (unbelievers), and Tajiks saw Afghans as intolerant, violent and often illiterate people, without making distinctions between different ethnic groups of Afghanistan. These impressions were slow in changing although exposure increased after independence came to Central Asian countries and Soviets left Afghanistan.

Perceptions about the openness of borders throughout the years are coloured by differences in experiences as separate nations rather than a single community

Respondents were asked about their knowledge of historical ties between communities on the two sides of the rivers and the degree to which borders existed and were open. The purpose was to see how much they perceived the

¹⁴ The Deobandi tradition is a revivalist movement within Hanafi Islam founded in 1867 by Ulemas (religious scholars) of the Dar al- Ulum (religious school) of Deoband in northern India.

separation as a historical factor or a more recent practice. We also wanted to gauge and compare memories and perceptions of key different historical/political periods: the time of the Emirate of Bukhara (1785-1920) and the Emirate of Afghanistan (1823-1926), the years of the Soviet occupation (1979-1989), the Taliban rule (1996-2001) and post-2001. Discrepancies in perceptions regarding the openness of borders during different periods of history showed identification with their nation's narrative. Answers recalled that border communities, despite the possibility of kinship, families and historical ties, could still not operate outside of the historical, political trajectories of their host countries. Yet while communities deferred to the central government's narrative about relations, their own experiences did not always match those of the centre. When relations were good at the national level, it did not automatically mean that they were also open at the local levels where border communities resided.

The vast majority of respondents from Afghanistan had no information about relations across borders during the Emirates of Bukhara and Afghanistan. The very few who had heard of historical ties claiming that they were the same territory, but just with different names, while a few claimed that Samarqand, and especially Bukhara were a part of Khorasan, which consists of modern day Afghanistan. In any case, during those empires there were no borders and people from both sides of the Amu River were the same group, sharing common language, culture and ethnicity. Respondents in Tajikistan drew the same image of free movement of kin groups across non-existent borders. As one person in Hamadoni stated, 'At that time, relations existed but Tajikistan did not.' More people claimed to have heard about relations during the Emirates than their Afghan counterparts, presumably because of a higher rate of schooling.

When it came to knowledge or perception about relations during the Soviet occupation, the general impression on both sides of the river was that exchanges across borders were easier, more frequent and often state (more accurately, Soviet-) sponsored. In Kaldar the general perception was that the borders were open and it was easy to cross over. In Imam Sahib and Khwaja Bahauddin districts, people recalled open borders and more opportunities, for example to go study in the Soviet Union. According to a technical staff member of the Imam Sahib Hospital, the Soviet presence in Afghanistan was the golden period of economic and developmental activities in his district. There were many firms actively functioning and import and export services were at an all-time high. In Khwaja Bahauddin district, respondents recalled with nostalgia the 'good old days' when there were some informal ties between Turkmen and Uzbek traders of this side with those on the other side of the border, ties that have since become weak and controlled. This perception of open borders were based on two seemingly contradictory assumptions: that the Soviets deliberately kept borders open in order to encourage Afghans to become communists (Principle Instructor of the district madrasa in Kaldar); and, finding the rationale in the nature of de facto

decentralization that the resistance had generated: 'When there was no one national government in Afghanistan, it was easier to have relations with others,' (Oil official, Hairatan).

For Tajik respondents the Communist party's and Soviet government's controls of the borders was more of a reality. The general recollection of this period was that of a marked separation between themselves and the 'others' across the river as a result of two factors: first, relations with other countries were managed by Moscow and not locally; and second, the fact that many young men from Tajikistan had served in the Soviet army in Afghanistan (often as interpreters) reinforced the estrangement. It is with these experiences in mind that the vast majority of respondents from the Tajikistan side claimed that relations across rivers were not good during the Soviet times. A 70-year old man from Hamadoni recalled how borders were reinforced and closely monitored, and that 'all relations disappeared and people were even persecuted for seeking such relations.' A minority pointed to the increase in relations that military and government officials had, but not ordinary people. Even in Darvoz respondents maintained that relations were not good and that even some had witnessed shooting across the river, while the ones who had relations with their family on the other side kept it hidden.

For Afghans interviewed in Imam Sahib, Kaldar and Khwaja Bahauddin, it was during the Taliban rule that borders were the most closed, forbidding all political or economic relations with neighbouring countries. According to respondents in Imam Sahib, this closure was due to the fact that the Taliban firmly believed in Islam and did not want to have relations with people who were not strictly following Islamic principles. The Deputy Head of the Oil Department in Hairatan recalled how the Friendship Bridge to Termez was completely blocked off with no official or even informal relations.

This impression was corroborated among Tajik respondents with border closure justified as necessary to prevent instability spreading to Tajikistan. While there were no relations with the Taliban, a number of respondents recalled that Tajikistan had become a base for fighting the Taliban and supporting President Burhaniddin Rabbani and his Jamiat Islamiy faction. A 60-year old teacher in Hamadoni claimed that people from areas around border regions had come down to the border areas to help the Rabbani government from the Tajikistan side without being able to go into more details. In Farkhor support for those fighting the Taliban had gone through the port of Kokul. Despite the fact that the Taliban had not reached the shared borders of Badakhshan, borders were not 'calm', people in Darvoz said.

Almost all respondents in Afghanistan and Tajikistan rejoiced that relationships had dramatically improved since 2001 in terms of both formal trade and economic relationships, and informal linkages between communities. Order in Afghanistan had put a stop to illegal trespassing claimed some Afghans in Imam Sahib, and now people wishing to travel to other countries had to follow legal procedures. With trade improving,

interactions between the two communities living on the opposite sides of borders had also improved.

More moderate optimism ruled among answers from Tajikistan. In Farkhor interviewees were under the impression that changes had happened for the better, drawing the two countries closer, but that at the regional level they were weak. Answers from Panj were also vague, with caution about the situation still not being completely calm. In Hamadoni, respondents believed that relations had been restored but very weakly and were still not clear or transparent. People of Darvoz were the most optimistic that the situation had improved after 2001. The overall view was that even though relations were restored at the national level, they were not strong at the regional and local level where border communities resided and for whom alienation had become engrained through decades of separation.

As far as the post-2014 scenarios were concerned, most respondents from Afghanistan had mixed views: some were optimistic believing that conditions had been laid for an improvement in the overall security in the country; others were pessimistic over the withdrawal of US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces from the country. In Imam Sahib, however, people were concerned about the situation after 2014, having heard about the arrival of Taliban insurgents in border areas.

Respondents from Tajikistan were even more cautious. In Farkhor respondents did not want to project and create scenarios, arguing that it did not depend on them but on how the governments maneuvered to decrease threats and dangers coming from Afghanistan. A 30-year old man summed it up: ‘predicting is very hard.’ In Panj half said they could not respond, and the other half that it depended on Afghanistan. In Hamadoni and Qumsangir communities also claimed it was hard to predict but perhaps security problems at the border region would become much worse. They believed that the presence of foreign troupes on both side of the river would impact relations. A 64-year old accountant in Qumsangir correlated an improvement of the situation on whether or not the Taliban would progress northwards. Most respondents from Darvoz thought—or hoped—that relations with Afghanistan would improve after 2014 in order to continue their market relations and family visits.

**People living on both sides of borders do not generally know each other:
Border benefits are not for always for border communities**

History, geography and politics have all conspired to prevent the communities on both sides to freely engage in exchanges with their co-ethnic groups across borders.

Survey among Afghans showed that the number of people who had visited any of the Central Asian countries or had any contacts with people on the other side was very small. Where there were regular visits, they were initiated by people living away from border areas: rich families or traders or people who go for holiday from other parts of the country, especially from major

cities. Living close to borders did not present tangible benefits for communities, despite the new opportunities that bridges and bazaars were presenting.

More Tajiks mentioned having been to Afghanistan, or knowing people who had, for three specific reasons: firstly, some had served in the Soviet army that had occupied Afghanistan in the 1980s. Secondly, a large number of Tajiks (by unofficial account approximately 50 000 people) had crossed over during the Tajik Civil War in 1992 and had lived as refugees in northern areas before returning home. One quarter of people interviewed in Panj for example claimed to have been to Afghanistan, many of them during 1992-1994. These, however, allegedly had no more contact with people on the other side, which is plausible as they had been kept in camps with little contact except with officials. Finally, the third group of people with frequent visits hailed from Badakhshan, where borders were demarcated only at the end of the 19th century and remained open until World War II. After the Bukharan Revolution in 1918 and the entrance of Bolsheviks, thousands had moved to the other side of the river as escapees, and present day people in Darvoz claimed that from each extended family, half is here and half there. However, relations have been kept secret out of the habit inherited from the Soviet period when having relations on the other side of the borders was considered a crime. Since the 1990s, much of the connections had been reestablished with the help of the Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN).

The Badakhshanis aside, while communities across borders share kinship, ethnicity, language and religion, connections are not as strong and border communities do not have many ties—a situation not necessarily due to strict central control. A number of other factors have led to a solid separation:

Alienation

Perhaps one of the most salient reasons why people don't cross the rivers is because they have nowhere to go. The fortification of borders in the early twentieth century was accompanied by a Socialist revolution in Central Asia which led to profound changes in the socio-economic character of communities there. Seventy years of Soviet rule not only led to the isolation of Central Asians, but also to comparatively high levels of socio-economic development and literacy, while four decades of wars continued to weaken and impoverish Afghan communities below the river. As a result kin across borders have had a diverse trajectory which has severed traditional ties. Turkmen, Tajiks and Uzbeks of Central Asia became more modernized, urbanized and adopted loyalty to the nation states, while their kinsmen in Afghanistan mostly preserved their old nomadic lifestyle and tribal traditions. The Soviet experience also created cultural separatism. Despite the fact that communities speak the same languages (Dari/Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen), the populations of Central Asia began adopting the Cyrillic script during the Soviet times, and (in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) the Latin alphabet since independence, setting them apart from the Arabic script of the language of

their kinsmen. Furthermore, Afghans continued to be deeply religious, while Soviet societies saw a separation with religion and forced secularization as part of their modernization/socialization process. A Tajik from Afghanistan and a Tajik from Tajikistan would not have much to share, even if they understood each other's language.

Historical dispersion

Not all ethnic groups or families find their kin directly across borders. The communities found during the survey in Kaldar across from the Tajik and Uzbek borders consisted of Turkmen. On the Tajik side, families had also been moved around, breaking any historical ties that may have existed centuries past. The Soviet Socialist Government of Tajikistan had created new district centres in present day Khatlon region, populating the border regions with communities from the mountainous regions, settling them on the plains to work on cotton plantations. As new migrants, they had no historical ties with communities across borders.

Geography

The borders are mostly demarcated by a river. The waters are rapid even in the shallows which discourages trespassing by makeshift boats. Unlike the Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan (which is not recognized by Pashtun groups on both sides) and the relatively porous Baluch border with Iran, Afghanistan's northern borders are heavily fortified and regulated, mostly from Central Asian sides. The 210 km Uzbek-Afghan border is considered to be the most heavily guarded borders in the world, consisting of barbed or electrified wire fences heavily guarded Uzbek soldiers. The Tajik-Afghan border has the highest number of checkpoints, located on bridges as the border is demarcated by the Pyanj River. The Shirkhan Bandar-Panj-i Poyon-Dusti (Friendship) bridge financed by the US connects Kunduz and Dushanbe; the Ishkashim bridge supported by the AKDN connects the Wakhan Corridor with the GBAO province of Tajikistan; and, the Tem-Demogan bridge ties Khorog with Shognan transportation routes. Other new bridges have been set up at Langar and Darvoz with the help of the AKDN, some with the collaboration of the US and Norwegian governments. While the bridges and passes in Badakhshan are heavily controlled, the rest of them pass through rugged terrain in the Khatlon province of southern Tajikistan and are poorly protected. The Turkmen-Afghan 744 km long border—the longest of the three—has two checkpoints: Torghundi (Tawraghudi)—Serkhatabat (Kushka) linking Turkmenistan to Herat, and Imam Nazar-Aqina—a remote crossing close to Andkhoy which is a sparsely populated region consisting of unpaved mud roads.

Strict border controls

Border controls have been an important part of statehood for Central Asian states. During the Soviet era the border was that of the Soviet Union, prompting not Moscow to insist on the separation rather than the local authority in Tajikistan. Following independence restrictions on travel and visa related issues continued to severely limit the movement of people across borders. The degree of border controls on the Central Asian borders, especially as compared to the relatively more open and easily crossed borders of Iran and Pakistan (legally or otherwise) certainly hampers cross-border movement. Due to the open borders of Pakistan and Iran, millions of Afghans migrated there during the various phases of Afghan civil war whereas the Central Asian states have strongly prevented Afghans entering their territories, cautious about letting in massive migration, extremism, and terrorism. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have a stronger policy towards controlling their borders compared to Tajikistan. Communities from Imam Sahib sharing borders in Tajikistan could more easily imagine themselves crossing to Tajikistan than the people from Kaldar sharing the major portion of their border with Uzbekistan. People of Qarqeen in Faryab province and Kham Ab in Jowzjan, sharing borders with Turkmenistan, had even a more formidable challenge crossing over to Turkmenistan. In Farkhor, a 60-year old teacher summed up the difficulties of the border communities when he said that even if there were many bridges—which there are not—a visa would still need to be obtained from the Embassy of Afghanistan in Dushanbe which is difficult.

Poverty

Crossing the border is a highly expensive exercise, not the least of because of the high price of visas: in Tajikistan, tourist visas cost \$70 and it can cost up to \$150 for a commercial visa. Given the widespread poverty among border communities, very few people have the financial ability to pay such amounts. Overall low living conditions of people in the border districts make it difficult for them to travel to the neighbouring countries on both sides. If there are Tajiks visiting Afghanistan and vice versa for business (other than local trade), tourism or official visits (other than family visits), they most likely come from capitals and use air travel rather than cross land borders. Poverty and lack of skills diminish the chances of border communities to engage in large-scale trade or organized business. On both sides of the river their activities are limited to subsistence agriculture, livestock and poultry, with the scale of their crops too small to allow them to get into the export market. Only people living in Imam Sahib district in Afghanistan mentioned visits to Tajikistan for tourism with a bit of personal trade on the side (purchase of small amounts of good to resell them). Where communities across borders have limited ties, it boils down to connections between a small group of traders who have connections with local authorities on both sides, or are involved in trafficking and smuggling using their kin networks. In other words ordinary communities

have limited contacts and opportunity for cross-border trade. The border markets supported by the AKDN and others have been able to facilitate connections in Badakhshan area and are lauded as having made a difference in communities' lives.

Lack of pull factor for labour in Central Asian economies

The Central Asian labour market is not strong enough to attract Afghan workers, and Tajikistan has massive labour migration. Border communities on the Afghan side don't cross the border to seek jobs because they are not skilled workers and the strong border controls prevent large-scale migration of unskilled workers. Most Afghan youths seeking jobs prefer Iran or Pakistan over the central Asian market with Iran proving particularly attractive for low or unskilled workers. Central Asian formal economies tend to attract traders or skilled people who work in the service sectors, such as nurses and doctors, but the requests go through central government or international channels.

The domain of criminals

Another factor that hampers cross-border relations is intimidation and capture of the illegal trespassing by criminals. While border crossings are not attractive for low skilled labourers that could work in the formal or informal economy, they do draw in criminal groups from other parts of Afghanistan with the opportunity they present for lucrative trafficking in guns, narcotics, semi-precious stones, tobacco products and humans. Criminals, some respondents noted, are often helped by locals in border areas who earn a living as 'fixers', such as for example by operating small boats for hire to cross the river during the nighttime. Respondents suspected that without protection (for instance by border guards and by mafia groups), small-scale traffickers would not be able to engage in this lucrative trade individually. In the respondents' narrative, mafia groups in the area were very influential and had solid links with the police of both sides of borders, being able to free their people swiftly if they were arrested. Where there were no traffickers people had the impression that the Taliban controlled or took sanctuaries around borders, threatening the long-term stability of the area and preventing normal cross-border relations from flourishing.

In the meantime, the transit of narcotics from these border districts has also led to an increase in local demand. In Kaldar, the Head of Village Affairs claimed that in each village there were about 30 drug addicts, who often gathered in special houses. As a number of respondents on both sides of rivers claimed, drug trafficking allegedly takes place with the institutional support of border guards of both sides, which explained its persistence despite the high degrees of control. An official in the port of Hairatan explained that if opium cultivation takes place in the district it is used by locals, due to the tight border controls by the Uzbek government to prevent narcotics trafficking,

presumably unlike Pakistan and Iran. Overall, however, traffickers and mafia groups did not originate from the border districts.

On the Tajik side, respondents in Farkhor and Darvoz claimed that criminal mafia groups, including drug traffickers, were not related to each other by kin across borders. There were no ethnic or family ties in the criminal world. While there were traffickers, they were not necessarily from the region.

Lack of curiosity, apathy and secrecy

Confronted with multiple difficulties, communities themselves have not been proactive in overcoming challenges. On the Afghan side, the problem has been preoccupation with decades of occupation and civil war and the poverty that those induced. On the Tajik side, the apathy and lack of curiosity is a result of the negative image of Afghanistan as a war-torn country not many would want to visit. Three-quarters of people interviewed in Tajikistan did not have any desire to go to Afghanistan. As a 36-year old female nurse from Farkhor put it, ‘May God never bring that day!’ (*Khudo nishon nadehad!*) Among respondents from Tajikistan, hesitation was also noted in answers regarding border crossings with a number of respondents reminding the survey team that disclosure of such information was ‘not necessary.’ This attitude was a the legacy of the Soviet prohibition of maintaining relations across rivers but also for other new reasons such as for protection of the wealth, political reasons and the mere fact that crossings were illegal.

Borders are seen as potential assets but present liabilities

Overall, borders as assets were more in the domain of possibility and wishes, while borders as liabilities were more the everyday reality of communities. Living close to border was judged as an asset when it was related to trade opportunities, the existence of controlled border-crossings, use of common resources such as electricity and water, safety nets in case of the need for refuge, travel for medical purposes and for exchange of know how. The proximity of frontiers however had a number of negative influences, among them insecurity due to the presence of mafia groups, and environmental insecurity caused by a fickle river that frequently floods and destroys farmlands.

Most Afghans interviewed were of a neutral opinion as to the impact of the proximity of borders on them. They did not have much interaction beyond the border and what affected them on the other side rarely affected them. As a truck driver from Kaldar stated, ‘I have not seen any benefit from the borders. First, because there is very high level control, and second, because people don’t know each other anyway, they have no relations with people living on the other sides, even though we can see the other side of the border with our bare eyes.’ The Executive Head of the Governor’s Office in Kaldar sarcastically said that the only good thing about living near international borders is that Taliban won’t enter his district from there.

Responds from Tajikistan were even more skeptical about the benefits of borders. A 42-year old female teacher from Panj summarized the general feeling as: ‘Until there is no peace in our neighbouring country, no benefits can be drawn from living around borders.’ A 55-year old teacher from Farkhor remarked, ‘Afghanistan is a backwards country that cannot be a good model for positive experiences for us. If we shared border with Russia it would have been better.’

Those who had a positive view had directly witnessed the potential benefits in the following areas:

Trade opportunities

Living close to the two ports of Hairatan and Shir Khan Bandar was seen as a huge advantage as these are the hubs of import and export businesses. Local people can buy things at wholesale price, which is much cheaper than what can be found in the main provincial centres. Trade and transportation had increased access to goods, mostly in areas that hosted the routes, with neighbouring regions also benefiting mildly from trickle-downs. More than half of the people interviewed in Hairatan, for example, were very happy about the opportunity of living near the border area for the jobs they or their families had been able to find around trade and the port. In the district of Kaldar, some people were also indirectly benefitting from access to different commodities via the Hairatan port. For them, opportunities included the fact that oil and gas were available at cheaper prices for ordinary people while traders also benefit from the increased traffic. The same responses came from those living in Imam Sahib who benefitted from activities through the port of nearby Shir Khan Bandar. The potential for trade, especially small-scale cross-border trade, was also highly rated among Tajik respondents. In Hamadoni a 52-year old journalist mentioned ‘We have more potential to develop trade with Afghanistan than with Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan’. On the Tajikistan side, the existence of a bridge in Qumsangir similarly created conditions for trade, employment, transit and so on. A 54-year old driver was happy that the existence of the international road going through Qumsangir had made products less expensive, mindsets of people broader, and their knowledge of cultures and traditions of others deeper.

Benefits of border crossing facilities

On the Tajik side, respondents from Darvoz overwhelmingly rated living near the border as a positive asset, primarily thanks to the existence of a bridge crossing which facilitated trade relations and frequent visits of family members. The Saturday border market, which has been set up by the AKDN at the village of Ruzvai, also likely improves exchanges and impressions. The bridge and the bazaar together have improved interactions, allowing relatives to find each from the other side and establish friendships. They have also led to the growth of trade, agriculture and private sector development. In

Qumsangir, 80 per cent of respondents rated living next to borders as positive—most likely because of the existence of the bridge—which created conditions to open to the world and for Afghans to buy local agriculture products. Positive examples of physical connections facilitated by bridges and cross points prompted respondents from Panj to express their wish for bridges to be constructed in their districts to facilitate exchanges, as it had in Panj-i Poyon.

Use of common resources—electricity and water

Sharing of natural resources was cherished by both sides. The majority of Afghans interviewed were very happy with the electricity they received from Tajikistan. While the electricity imported from Tajikistan is not sufficient to reach all northern provinces, a good number of villages have access, and this was one of the few direct benefits which people living border areas enjoyed. The Imam Sahib inhabitants were also importing electricity from Tajikistan, while people of Kaldar received their electricity and gas from Uzbekistan. When it came to sharing other natural resources such as water, the Panj River and the Amu Darya waters are used by both sides. While Afghans complained about the Amu River floods destroying their crops, as described below, the Tajik side was happy to get more support for irrigation. In Darvoz the survey team came across an example of cooperation, facilitated by the AKDN, where a simple pipe had been drawn over the main river carrying water from the mountainous rivers of the Afghan side to the plains of the Tajik side. A 55-year old man from the village of Sangevn (Sangovy) claimed that ‘160 hectares of water have been irrigated with the water that was brought from Afghanistan’. On sharing of forests, the people in Kaldar district talked about an area of around 5 km² called Jangal-e Sultan which belongs to Uzbekistan but is also shared by the people of Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Respondents from Panj similarly talked of a forest called Jangal-e Kakol in Tajikistan from where the Afghan side would collect firewood. Afghans also collect wild liquorice roots (*shirin buyo*, known for its medical benefits) and sell them to the other side, to the mainland and through networks abroad. However, this practice had recently been made illegal by governments on both sides to stop the uncontrolled collection of a plant listed in the Red List of endangered species put out by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and an important part of the ecosystem of the Amu Darya River basin. If conditions could be made more favourable, people on both sides of the rivers had many suggestions on how they could jointly use natural resources such as water, land, forests, plants, salt mines and electricity. Currently, water sharing is conducted in Darvoz on an ad hoc basis through a small water pipe constructed from one shore to the other. The potential of transmission of electricity from Tajikistan to Afghanistan has been explored in recent years. For instance, the United States Agency for International Development in cooperation with the AKDF and the company Pamir Energy have signed an agreement to expand the electrical network PamirEnergy across the border

from Tajikistan to Afghanistan. The joint use of land in the Khatlon region could also be explored further. Large parts of land today are leased to the Chinese and Iranian companies that could employ Afghans to work on these lands.

Borders as safety nets

Some respondents in Imam Sahib and Khwaja Bahauddin saw living close to borders as a 'safety net'. They believed that if the country were to enter into civil war once again as it had several times in the past, they would cross over to the neighbouring country and take refuge there, in the same way that the Tajiks and Afghans had fled from past civil wars to each others' shores. Both Tajikistan and Afghanistan were engaged in bloody civil wars during the 1990s and saw a massive movement of people back and forth. During the Afghan civil wars, a number of people from the district of Imam Sahib migrated to the neighbouring countries with the help of local smugglers. Tajiks from Qumsangir and Panj also recounted how they had crossed to Kunduz during the Tajik civil war and had been treated well. As one respondent remarked, the war made Afghans known to the Tajiks and vice versa. A 50-year old private sector worker in Panj said that the Afghans had been hospitable in taking in and taking care of their people who had escaped Tajikistan during the 1990s and 'saved them from death'.

Travel, including for medical purposes

Much like the probability of having a refuge in case civil war breaks out, Afghan respondents considered the possibilities of going abroad for small jobs, holidays and to seek treatment in considerably more advanced medical facilities. For purposes described above, especially those related to financial resources and visas needed, these were mostly aspirations rather than reality. Nonetheless, respondents from Tajikistan, especially from Hamadoni and Darvoz, corroborated that they knew of Afghans who had come for medical reasons.

Exchanges of know how

If exchanges would be facilitated, there could be a number of areas where border communities could collaborate to learn from each other's experience such as the joint use of agriculture lands, trade, joint use of water and energy resources, joint companies, tourism development and interactions with the wider Muslim world. In Hamadoni a 70-year old pensioner mentioned that living close to borders had positive impacts in so far as the youth could learn something from Afghans, national customs and traditions, experience with trade, and that Tajik groups could work in Afghanistan. In Darvoz respondents also claimed that borders facilitated cultural exchanges, and the potential of Tajiks to provide illiterate Afghans with education. This appears unlikely

given the differences in script between Dari and Tajik and the lack of high quality education, including teachers and teaching facilities in Tajikistan itself.

If living close to borders had some potential opportunities, the proximity of frontiers also had a number of negative influences, among them insecurity and natural calamity.

Insecurity

While Afghans could not complain about instability reaching them from across the river, they were unsettled by the growth of criminality around frontiers. Respondents from the Khwaja Bahauddin district, for example, saw the proximity of the border as a liability because it attracted trouble-makers and mafia groups. For Tajik respondents borders attract all sorts of criminal elements but left nothing for locals. Their major concern with security was first with narco-trafficking followed by arms trafficking, extremism and terrorism crossing borders. An Imam Khatib (religious leader) from Panj mentioned that 'Afghanistan for Tajikistan is the doorway to Islam, but it also has negative influences', referring to the extremism that, in his view, breeds on the other side and could spread. Tajiks had an additional fear of kidnapping which they had heard was taking place in other border regions such as Shurobod for ransom purposes or to pay off drug trafficking debts.

Natural calamity

Not only the physical security but also the economic and environmental security of border populations are decidedly threatened by borders when these consist of a fickle river such as the Amu Darya. In the Kaldar district people complained about the seasonal floods that completely destroyed their fertile agricultural lands and their livelihoods. With the seasonal floods, the soil is eroded from the Afghan side and deposited on the other side of the border onto Tajik shores. Even though flood is a natural disaster, Afghans believe that states have a responsibility to take measures to control seasonal floods that were affecting other countries sharing the river bank. The action of the river created animosity towards people living across it who would take hold of 'their' soil. This grievance was different from that of the population of Faryab and Jawzjan who complained about the river shifting south into their territory, de facto moving the frontier with Turkmenistan. The river was not just a natural asset but a tangible and symbolic barrier, and a formidable one at that.

Cross border trade has been facilitated but trust is lacking and hurdles not easy to overcome

The potential for trade was raised repeatedly by communities in both countries. For respondents from Tajikistan trade with Afghanistan where the private sector was booming was potentially easier and more lucrative than

with neighbouring Uzbekistan. Afghans saw the Central Asian territories as potential transit routes to Russia and Europe if not as markets per se.

But for trade to take off a number of prerequisites had to be established: the first is infrastructure and transport routes. The new bridges built in the past decade were certainly facilitating cross-border trade: the bridge in Qumsangir, the port facilities at Kokul in Farkhor and Shir Khan Bandar in Kunduz, the Afghanistan-Uzbekistan Friendship bridge and railroad linking Termez to Hairatan making the latter one of the major transporting, shipping, and receiving location for Afghanistan and with the linking of the railway.

But roads are not enough. Trade requires economic means (initial resources), connections, overcoming red tape, and, in the final analysis, trust. Yet trust was still very minimal among communities who fundamentally did not know—or perhaps even understand—each other. Different customs procedures and red tape also slow down improvements considerably. Afghan traders in Hairatan complained about the strict checks on goods imported from Russia transiting Uzbek territory disrupting the flow of trade, while Tajik traders in Qumsangir talked of ‘business risks’ they were taking with too frequent visits to Afghanistan related to, inter alia, having to rely on the availability of credit, open routes, honest partners, the possibility of overcoming red tape and avoiding extortion.

Where cross border trade seemed smooth and immediately beneficial were the border markets of Badakhshan. Along the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan the few border markets have proven successful in improving the lives communities on both sides.¹⁵ The border markets were set up with the support of the international community (including AKDN, the United Nations Development Programme, and the European Union (EU)) and facilitated by a Tajik government decree of October 2002 to improve and facilitate cross border trade. By late 2014, four were operational in Badakhshan (Tem, Ruzvai, Ishkoshim and Khorog) and more were in the pipeline including one in Qumsangir. Special programmes have been set up around these markets to develop the skills of traders.

At the border market visited in the village of Ruzvai, Darvoz, the volume of trade had increased five times since it was opened in 2004. Turnover in the market according to official data was more than 30 thousand Somoni per day. With between 500-700 people visiting it on Saturdays, it was a true place of exchanges where populations on both sides met to conduct trade and barter, exchange news, and visit with families etc. People interviewed for the project were very satisfied with the opening of the market. The market had two dining rooms/restaurants, bakeries, separate pavilions for the sale of the beverages, in addition to space for the cooked food that traders brought from home to sell. Local people brought a variety of goods: fruits, vegetables, construction materials, shoes, food material, cattle, including some brought all the way

¹⁵ See e.g. a UN Development Programme factsheet with interviews from Afghans and Tajiks at <http://www.undp.org/content/tajikistan/en/home/ourwork/democraticgovernance/success-stories/market-without-borders.html>.

from Khatlon. Afghans brought agricultural products as well as items such as small electronic devices and food stuffs from Pakistan, China and other areas of Afghanistan. Goods were also bartered (for example, a bag of potatoes exchanged for a bag of flour) in addition to being sold.

In the market near to the provincial capital Khorog, up to 1000 people were engaged in trade during the summers. These connections had a marked impact on the quality of life of neighbouring villages. For the Tajik side the construction of bridges facilitate access to a range of goods at lower prices to be delivered from China, Iran and Pakistan by Afghan traders. Local tea prices in the bordering Tajik side fell by one-third, and commodities such as salt, cement, household goods and fabrics were now more accessible to people in remote areas than ever before. Border markets were rated very favourably by respondents as opportunities for better linkages between communities, the development of trust and amicable relations, the creation of jobs around storage and transfer of goods and for the decrease of the prices of goods.

Nonetheless, border trade through these markets—which currently only happens in the GBAO part of Tajikistan—is not at its optimal potential. The hurdles identified by respondents are related to the following factors:

- Lack of funds for the completion of construction of border trade points;
- Lack of simplified procedures for entry and exit of foreign nationals, customs control and the movement of goods;
- Lack of means of transport for residents of border areas to points for cross-border trade;
- Limitation on the list and the number of products intended for cross-border trade;
- Lack of adequate storage; and
- Limited days of operation with only one day a week.

3. Implications for reconceptualizing Central Asian border security

What do the answers reveal about the four main streams of query of this study, namely: do border communities benefit from the potential of exchanges and opportunities that borders provide? Does the securitization of borders in Central Asia and Afghanistan correspond to the human security concerns of communities living in border areas? Can communities play a role in rapprochement between the two states and contribute to long-term stability and development? And by extension, how would these communities become positive agents if their human security were addressed effectively?

Hearing it directly from the people concerned, borders are not mere geopolitical lines that decide the fate of nations. They are vivid reminders that people a few kilometers apart lead vastly different lives as a result of systems instituted by their country's political order. Political choices, nature and geography conspire to hamper choices and agency. Isolated border communities seem like an oxymoron: borders, after all, potentially open to new possibilities. But for the population of northern Afghanistan who are not connected to the ports and bridges, isolation best describes their predicament, trapped by strongly controlled borders on the one hand, and desert, insecure roads and lack of means to get to the centres on the other. While the population on the Tajik side is less isolated than that on the Afghan side, they, too, can fall into neglect as communities far from centres in an already economically vulnerable country. They are currently relying primarily on remittances from their youth working in Russia and elsewhere, but irregular labour migration has its own set of insecurities besides not being sustainable. The contracting Russian economy brought on by a sudden fall of oil prices and Western sanctions have already resulted in a fall in remittances in Tajikistan. The Russian Central Bank reported a decline of 27 per cent of remittances in US dollar terms to Tajikistan during the fourth quarter of 2014.¹⁶

While much focus is being put on the necessity to close borders to prevent insecurity, what is being missed is the human insecurity of border communities. In both Tajikistan and Afghanistan, these regions are populated by relatively isolated poor people requiring attention. When they are protected, provided for and empowered they can become positive agents for stability and cooperation. There is no doubt that border communities feel threats to their physical safety. When it comes to everyday life, however, their concerns turn to broader aspects of insecurity. This requires a departure from the traditional view of border security.

Almost everyone interviewed through the project agreed that border security needs to be strengthened to prevent trespassing of undesirable elements, and

¹⁶ World Bank, 'Migration and remittances: recent developments and outlook', *Migration and Development Brief*, no. 24, 13 Apr. 2015.

that this should be done through monitoring, reinforcing the presence of law and order forces and curbing corruption. As one respondent from Hairatan stated: ‘Strengthening the legal control of borders would lead to transparent cooperation.’ Containment and cooperation was the answer to reinforcing border security. However, from the point of view of communities, border security was not enough: addressing the human insecurities of border communities would be a sure way to improve the quality of life in border areas. The goal of improving human security could be aided by facilitating cooperation and exchanges between communities across the borders. In other words, better relations are not only good for their own sake, but also for improving human security.

The policy goal of the governments of all sides of the borders should be to bring people out of isolation and to address their human security needs, as part of, or at least in addition to, their border security agendas.

I. National security complemented by human security

The Central Asian governments tend to see the state in its narrow territorial embodiment of an organized political community under one rule. The state is seen as a sovereign entity recognized as such by other states in the region and by the international community. Central Asian states are thus sovereign entities that gained independence following the break-up of the Soviet Union in the last century, and as separate modern entities carved out of the common historical territory of Khurasan with Afghanistan in the centuries before that. From such a conception of the state stems a narrow focus on national security as the protection of the territory from external threats and the regime from threats to its survival. As conceptualized by the regimes, threats to national, regional and even international security and stability stem from factors such as terrorism, narcotics trafficking and extremism.

However, the state is also the sum of the people within it and should have legitimacy as such from the point of view of its population. The state is not only the entity that has the prerogative of the use of force, but has the responsibility to protect and provide for its citizens. The current conception of national security may, therefore, be too narrow. Sustainable, long-term state security can only be ensured through human security, in its largest conception defined as freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from indignities.¹⁷ Since external aggression is not the only danger faced by the countries and people of the region, security should also be broadened to centre on people and the threats that affect their quality of life. These are not only traditional security threats, but also problems associated with deficits in human development and human rights. This perspective recognizes the multi-dimensional threats to the quality of life of people within a state as well as their interactions for a comprehensive approach to peace, not only in its

¹⁷ See Tadjbakhsh, S. and Chenoy, A., *Human Security: Concepts and Implications* (Routledge: London, 2007).

negative peace form as the cessation of violence, but also in its broader meaning that includes sustainable development, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. The responsibility of the state is, as the Human Security Commission stated, to ‘protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment.’¹⁸

The idea of a vital core is of key importance for border communities who live between two countries and two completely different government systems, even if they share the same culture. They have to deal not only with the potential insecurity created by insurgents and mafia groups attracted to borders for exporting their goods, ideas or guns. They also have to face the challenge of geographic isolation, lack of adequate social infrastructure for education and healthcare and poverty, in addition to environmental threats from the Panj and Amu rivers that sometimes flood and destroy their lands and cultivations, as well as from droughts and earthquakes. They are faced with everyday complex insecurities such as health, the economy, the environment, food, personal issues and so on that require integrated responses.

Border security in Central Asian countries are based on a paradigm of national security in a hostile geopolitical context of wider regional instability and heavily based on infrastructure development for control. Security and stability at the border are seen as the security of the countries. During Soviet times, 25 000 Soviet border guards monitored the Afghan-Tajikistan border as part of the southern borders of the Soviet Union. Since 2005, the monitoring of borders has gone under Tajik command and deploys 16 000 border guards. In Afghanistan, the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) is the responsible body for internal security forces, and includes several attached departments and autonomous bodies that deal with illicit trafficking/smuggling and border management. The Afghan Border Police (ABP) is responsible for securing Afghanistan’s 5529 km border and international airports and for administering the country’s immigration process and customs regulations. The ABP falls under the command of the Afghan National Police (ANP) which is under the administrative control of the MOI. For the past decade, most of the Afghan government’s attempts with regards to border management have focused on hard security policies and strategies such as the establishment of the ABP.

Tajikistan is implementing an integrated system of security and protection of state borders in accordance with the ‘State programme on development of border troops for 2005-2014’ and the ‘National Strategy for Border Management’. Elements of this system include the usual tools for border control and border management: modernization of infrastructure, upgrading of management standards and harmonizing regulatory frameworks, refurbishing border posts, boosting technical and human resources of law enforcement bodies, seeking specialized equipment, vehicles, communications and monitoring technologies, etc.. The country receives assistance in implementing these programmes from the Commonwealth of Independent

¹⁸ United Nations Human Security Commission, *Human Security Now* (United Nations: New York, 2001).

States (CIS), the US Embassy in Tajikistan, the Ministry of Public Security of China, United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the EU through its Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) project. Assistance is provided in the form of vehicles, technical equipment, computer equipment, communications equipment, special equipment and furniture, and the repair of checkpoints.

Current border approaches to border security however are not enough and can even exacerbate their insecurities when they over-focus on interdiction. Strict border controls and limitations put on the type of goods that can be imported or exported harm border communities in two ways: first, they create incentives for the activity of traffickers and corruption in border regions which affects the everyday life of native communities. Second, these practices naturally create disincentives for the free movement of people and goods in the region. Coupled with stalled development, conflict and neglect of rural areas, interdictions-based border strategies could exacerbate isolation and lead to a lack of opportunities for economic growth and employment hence migration of the young, able-bodied population, lack of openness to the outside world leading to conservative values and the lack of exchanges and cross-community contacts. More open, softer borders and cross-border privileges would allow for more transit routes but also eventually for more connections and cross-border movements due to kin connections.

At a minimum, countering terrorism and illegal trafficking through the control of borders should not be a cover to maintain or intensify repressive practices. Curbing smuggling, drug trafficking and the trespassing of transnational organized criminals, extremists and terrorists requires political will, specialized infrastructure and equipment, capable structure and institutions, qualified trained personnel, effective intelligence and cooperation with neighbouring countries. This capacity should also be coupled with providing economic opportunities for border communities so that they do not become recruited as petty smugglers or vulnerable to extremist ideologies. The answer would be to provide basic social services, skills training in alternative livelihoods, reduction and prevention of community tensions and developing the resilience of border communities.

The study does not conclude that there is a contradiction between the security of communities and that of the nation. After all, providing physical protection from extremist, smugglers and narco-traffickers leads to the freedom from fear that, together with freedom from want and from indignity, partly defines the concept of human security. The responsibility of the state to provide physical (or traditional) security was also identified as an imperative by almost all respondents. However, if border security entails interdictions in such ways as to hamper the legal movement of people, goods and ideas, then national security and human security could be in potential contradiction.

One of the most effective strategies to control the border areas is to involve the people living in those areas to secure it from the insurgents and smugglers. However, non-state and non-security factors in the border areas and

community policing have been mostly neglected by both governments. Control, reinforcement and securitization of borders may prevent trespassing and provide political legitimacy of control over the territory by rulers. However, as the interviews have shown, these approaches have not been able to address the everyday critical and pervasive human security concerns of border communities. Interdictions-based border strategies and neglect of rural areas have combined to exacerbate human insecurity.

Leaving populations isolated and impoverished makes them prone to despair and superstition, which in turn can produce conditions conducive to recruitment by extremists. Isolationist policies exacerbate the poor socio-economic situations of border populations and can lead to increasing tensions and competition over resources. It can also provide a breeding ground for extremism and engagement with smugglers that are the main concerns of regimes and limits state effectiveness.

A more comprehensive approach to border security would create a different border environment that could promote stability, development and cooperation. Instead, one of the most effective strategies to control the border areas is to involve the people living in those areas. Involving communities not only puts the focus on their needs, it can also engage them in helping secure the borders from trespassers, such as insurgents and smugglers, who usually originate from outside the region. Addressing the human security needs of border communities is not an ethical concern, but it can be instrumental as border communities could reject outsiders and criminal groups and contribute to stability and peace once they feel empowered. If communities have access to the benefits of employment, cross-border trade, quality education and healthcare and cross-regional cultural contacts, chances of them being recruited by smugglers or extremists would also be lessened.

II. Elements of an enhanced human security border regime

There is no tension between a hard security approach and a human security approach. One is constitutive of the other. An enhanced human security border regime would see borders not as liabilities that require strict control and closure but as assets—openings to new opportunities. Softer borders should not be threats to be met by hard security, but as social, economic and cultural opportunities

A human security approach instead requires a broader, two-pronged approach: 1) Investing in the needs of communities who inhabit borderlands at the national level to make them part and parcel of an enlarged security and preventive development approach, and 2) supporting cross-border cooperation and exchanges between communities as means to enhance confidence building measures.

Boosting border development for the people and by the people

At the national level, governments should ensure that border communities are taken out of isolation and that their needs, fears and aspirations are provided for. This would require enhancing accountability to the local communities. It would also require ensuring that national development projects are geared towards border areas and special incentives are created for projects that advance the economic, health, food and environmental security of border communities. When care is provided through development and empowerment, investment in people can be the best prevention strategy. Balance should therefore be sought in gearing state resources more towards development priorities than traditional security and military spheres.

First of all, to put border communities at the centre of an integrated and comprehensive approach to borders requires involving them in the selection of priorities and design of interventions at the national level, and if possible, eventually at the cross-border level. Communities need to be empowered through broader participation in local governance, so that they engage positively in development projects that prevent insecurities and eschew illicit activities. In the northern borders of Afghanistan communities live in a particular tribal context and social system prevalent in border areas, where strong informal power holders play an important role in both improving and worsening conditions along borders. If the Afghan government involved the local informal power holders in some social welfare programmes, public works and advocacy campaigns about the importance of borders as benefits, it would get much more positive results than merely relying on strong security policies. On the Tajik side, communities also have their leaders who can organize them to cooperate with the government on improving conditions. Interviews on both sides showed that communities did not lack ideas on what needs to be done. What they need are opportunities to get them involved in the solutions. The direct involvement of communities motivates people to help the government and makes it difficult for the anti-governmental elements to infiltrate the border areas. This implies a certain degree of decentralization of decision-making about development priorities.

Economic development is a key part of such a human security strategy. Investment in job creation in border communities would reduce pressure for irregular migration, reduce the strength of trafficking networks, and prevent vulnerability to potential recruitment. Socio-economic development is a tool of prevention of terrorism. This study has shown that border communities in both Tajikistan and Afghanistan are deprived economically, socially and culturally, rendering them vulnerable to recruitment by malefactors. Perceptions of unfairness and injustice, a feeling of neglect and isolation, combined with a geography that by virtue of being an opening to other worlds attracts all sorts of people interested in profit making. Extremists, traffickers and terrorists, who tend to be better off than local populations, can exploit grievances and project control and manipulation over such communities. Neglected people can also develop a political culture that is tolerant towards

terror and violence. Economic development opportunities need to be created initiatives such as public works projects and small enterprise development. Since most of the border areas are good places for agriculture, both the Afghan and the Tajik governments should help the local population improve and increase their agricultural activity. In return people will be encouraged to engage in legal activities.

Investments are necessary in social infrastructure for medical and educational opportunities, which were identified as missing or in poor quality by the vast majority of people on both sides. The preponderance of diseases, lack of opportunities for quality education and lack of adequate medical facilities add to grievances, lead to migration, decrease quality of life and keep people ignorant. Urgent attention should be paid to investments that build such infrastructure and populate them with qualified personnel, including by creative incentives for teachers and medical personnel from district centres and major towns to move to the border regions.

A human security border strategy would also take into consideration the impact of natural disasters, given that the border consists of a fickle river. When droughts and floods occur on the shore of the Amu Darya on either side of the river, natural hazard becomes a disaster with large areas of farmland wiped out, livelihoods destroyed and food and health security compromised. Cycles of recurring droughts and floods result in soil erosion, which could then increase competition over scarce resources and, in turn, lead to conflicts and lawlessness. These insecurities are compounded with the lack of access to adequate water, sanitation and hygiene. Thus border regions are said to be vulnerable to a 'climate change-migration-conflict' nexus. Solutions are needed to protect farmers and inhabitants from vulnerabilities created by environmental insecurity.

Furthermore, the very important problem of drug addiction should not be neglected as it is both a health and a security concern, creating a demand for the activities of drug smugglers. While drug addiction is of concern on both sides, it is especially prevalent in the most impoverished Afghan districts of Kaldar, Qarqen, and Khamyam which are increasingly areas of infiltration of insurgents in the north. Domestic consumption in Tajikistan is officially relatively low with only 7470 officially registered addicts accounting for 0.09 per cent of the population, according to 2013 statistics of the Ministry of Health. Estimates, however, are much higher. UNODC and the Red Cross estimated in 2011 that as many as 100 000 people in Tajikistan regularly used opiates, accounting for 1.2 per cent of the population.¹⁹ In a survey conducted in 2009 the Ministry of Counter Narcotics of Afghanistan estimated the prevalence of drug use to be highest in Northern Afghanistan with 8.7 per cent with an estimated 204 000 drug users.²⁰ The demand for drugs in border districts provides a good opportunity for drug smugglers to conduct illegal

¹⁹ US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (note 8).

²⁰ UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Impact of Drug Use on Users and Their Families in Afghanistan* (UNODC: Vienna, Apr. 2014), <https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Impacts_Study_2014_web.pdf>.

trade across the border among a population that supports their activities. This is another area where investment in people's welfare and health would improve security and control in the border areas without needing an increase in the presence of security personnel. Healthcare facilities to cure and prevent addiction and livelihood opportunities for former addicts should be set up to provide alternatives to drug use.

Investing in cross-border community projects

Better cross border relations are a means to build trust between communities which itself can be a way of stabilizing the border region. The majority of people interviewed on both sides believed that an improvement of relations at the political level between the countries would trickle down into benefits for border communities. They were, in essence, waiting for cues from the centre. At the same time, they also advocated for a bottom up approach, based on the belief that instigating more interaction between people living across borders would help bring peace and prosperity to both sides and improve relations among states. While the political rapprochement needs to set the tone and allow for cooperation to happen and be intensified, people to people exchanges need to be put more forcefully on the agenda. For law and order professionals cooperation is necessary for security cooperation, prevention of crime, terrorism and drug trafficking. For ordinary people, people to people exchanges, joint use of natural resources and support for their everyday livelihoods (through trade, use of agriculture lands, construction of roads) and access to improved social services (such as educational and medical exchanges) were the areas where they sought opportunities in cross-border cooperation. Some respondents in Tajikistan also mentioned cooperation in the area of culture (teaching of language, exchanges of culture) and religion (opening to the Muslim world) although such cooperation would not be realistic at this point given differences in alphabet, level of culture and literacy and restrictions on religious education that is not controlled by the states. People on both sides could however be encouraged to join joint cultural celebrations, such as Nowruz, on the occasion of the New Year on 20-21 March.

Cross border councils could be drawn from the border communities that would also give them a political voice to advance proposals around shared interests. These would in essence contribute to building trust among communities and among their states as well as the decentralization of funding decisions to local communities.

Investing in joint sharing of natural resources (water, land and energy) would be a way to build trust between communities and alleviate their environmental and economic insecurities at the same time. The natural destruction of the agricultural land by the Amu River has already led to a trust deficit for border communities. Every year thousands of acres of land is destroyed on the Afghan side and erodes the soil to the other part of the border. Many people on the Afghan side of the border are of the view that the

Afghan government is not able to prevent the destruction of land by the river and neighbouring countries deliberately do not help the Afghan government to stop this destruction because the floods help increase the fertility of their own agricultural lands. The solution in this case would be for cooperation with the Afghan government to build strong protective berms for agricultural lands, as a gesture for showing care for their concerns and increasing trust among the people living across the borders of Amu River. Furthermore, the sharing of natural resources (water, land, energy) were highly valued by border communities whose ideas for joint projects are outlined below.

Fostering the development of border markets is an ideal vehicle for exchanges of ideas and information about commodities with different prices, qualities and brands, of building trust and improving the economic situation of border communities. Markets pave the way for further trade and business in both countries even though they may also be magnets for organized crime and smuggling. The benefit of creating such markets by far surpasses the costs and risks. If legal trade is increased, criminals would find more competition for their illicit activities. Difficulties, however, are compounded by the fact that there is a lack of infrastructure in the border areas where these markets can be established and border areas, especially on the Afghan side, have poor and unpaved roads. In order to be more efficient they require the construction of more roads and railroads to reach larger communities and be connected to larger markets in provincial centres. More investment is needed to inter alia boost the potential of border markets, simplify procedures for movement of traders and goods and customs procedures, and create additional infrastructure for storage.

In order to reduce the potential influence of extremist and radical groups, the two countries could invest jointly in developing a curriculum for religious education and promote official exchanges of Ulemas (religious scholars and authorities) to think together of ways to help prevent radicalization among the youth of the region.

III. What role for international donors?

A number of organizations are currently involved in supporting border management and border security although the impact of border assistance projects by international donors is rather limited and sometimes contradictory.²¹ The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is involved in training border guards, including Afghan guards, through its Border Management Staff College located in Dushanbe. The EU has been financing the BOMCA project since 2003, which supports capacity for Integrated Border Management (IBM) methods and improve regional cooperation. In its previous eight phases BOMCA has been indirectly contributing to counter-terrorism through working on anti-corruption,

²¹ Gavrilis, G., 'Central Asia's border woes and the impact of international assistance', *Occasional Paper Series No. 6*. (Open Society Foundations: New York, May 2012).

strengthening the capacity of border crossing points, infrastructure renovation, and provision of equipment for border guards which can help screen for weapons. The programme is now entering a phase which is more about capacity building, training and enhancing the professional skills of law enforcement. Similar EU initiatives have taken place on the other side of the border in Afghanistan through the completed Border Management in Badakhshan province (BOMBAF) and its on-going successor, Border Management Northern Afghanistan (BOMNAF). UNODC is engaged in strengthening border controls for interdicting narcotics trafficking. The International Organization on Migration (IOM) has focused on improving border management information systems, checking travel documents and introducing new passport systems in the region. Tajikistan also receives support from Russia under the auspices of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in training and advice, and from China under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The United States provides equipment and training on border security..

Despite differences in approaches and methods, these organizations are all motivated by supporting open borders as a principle of democratic reforms. International organizations have been stressing the concept of IBM as a comprehensive approach for combined objectives such as narcotics control, trade facilitation (soft borders) or counter terrorism. Most border security/control/management assistance, however, has focused inter alia on training of border personnel, infrastructure building of border posts, provision of equipment and infrastructure for surveillance, and countering smuggling. Gavrilis' 2012 study of the impact of international assistance on borders in Central Asia highlights the problems citing a mismatch between what donors hope to get and what Central Asians use the money and assistance for, inadequate training, and lack of oversight among other issues. Ultimately, Gavrilis argues, Central Asian recipients of assistance have no intention to move away from closed border policies, despite absorbing the aid that is conditional on it.²²

Despite the large amount of assistance and its lack of effectiveness, Central Asia countries are adamant in wanting to have access to more resources, technical assistance and modern equipment for border related support. Yet while there is a need for better coordination between donors and governments, between governments on both sides of borders, and between law enforcement bodies within each country, the main recommendation of this paper is to also gear some of the assistance towards border communities. Donors could do their share by assessing the conditions of such communities, as this paper has started to do, and involve them in the identification of projects to improve their livelihoods, health, education and governance needs. The border markets are a positive step in that direction. More needs to be done in focusing some of the assistance directly to communities. This is not to say that donors should replace the states in providing good governance, goods and services at the

²² US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (note 8).

local level, or that they should stop supporting border management and border security projects, but by setting the right example through pilot projects and earmarking some of their assistance to socio-economic needs of border communities, donors can help pave the way to the need for special focus by local and central governments on the situation faced by border populations.

In his study, Gavrilis recommends that border management sponsors should go beyond the quantitative measuring of success in terms of barracks built, number of seminars, projects completed and border guards trained: they should also involve local non-governmental organizations to see the impact of open and secure borders. This study goes further and suggests that local communities also be the recipients of border support projects in terms of access to livelihoods, education, medical services and participation in local governance, including in the choices of projects.

The international community should also support this agenda by rethinking its involvement in an agenda of hard securitization through funding border-strengthening projects focused on activities such as infrastructure, equipment, and training of border guards. In addition to, or as part of, their support assistance to border security, donors should contribute to improving the conditions of border communities by refocusing their assistance towards border communities and involving them in the identification of projects to improve their quality of life. While such aid would most likely be given at the national level, efforts should go towards supporting community projects mirroring on both sides of the Tajik-Afghan borders and, where bureaucratically, politically and logistically possible, launch cross-border projects that require cooperation between communities across the two countries.

4. Voices from the borders: recommendations from communities

Border communities know best what would be good for them. Through this project, some voiced their solutions and aspirations as follows:

What prevents cooperation between border communities?

The question was whether hurdles to cooperation involved local problems (infrastructure, trust and so on) or national political ones. The answers, overwhelmingly focused on insecurity, were not surprising. The problem was mostly located at the local level:

- Insecurity, Taliban extremists, criminal groups and warlords operating in border areas scaring potential contacts (Imam Sahib, Khwaja Bahauddin, Hairatan, Hamadoni, Qumsangir)
- Potential continuation/intensification of the war in Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban or start of ethnic wars (Qumsangir, Hamadoni)
- Trafficking (Darvoz, Kumsangir)
- Corruption and bad behavior among border guards (Darvoz)
- Trust deficit between governments and people (Kaldar)
- Lack of knowledge and interactions that prevent good relations (Kaldar, Hamadoni)
- Lack of infrastructure that connects the two shores: routes and bridges
- Interference by foreign countries (Hamadoni)

On people- to-people interactions

- Relations depend on the policy of the government. At the same time, the government should not limit interaction between people (Qumsangir)
- Any peace deal (with the Taliban) should not be against the interests of ordinary Afghans. (Hamadoni)
- Being of the same language and culture can help (Hamadoni)
- More connections should be established taking advantage of same ethnicity and the existence of the same families across the river (Darvoz)
- More connections and cross-border movement are needed because ‘care comes from seeing’ (*‘Mehr dar dida ast.’*) (Qumsangir)
- Trust building is needed on both sides (Hairatan, Qumsangir)
The Tajik government and people should render support to the Tajiks on the other side (Hamadoni)
- Afghans need humanitarian support (Darvoz)

On improving economic security

- The governments need to facilitate opportunities for people to work freely on both sides if they want to (Kaldar).
- The governments should set up employment opportunities for both sides, and provide space for the private sector to grow in both countries (Hairatan).
- Private firms in Tajikistan should invest on the Afghan side to increase employment opportunities. Small factories could be created.

On establishing more opportunities for trade

- Visa procedures should be simplified and made cheaper to increase movement and trade on both sides (Kaldar, Imam Sahib, Qumsangir).
- More ports need to be established to act as hub for transportation in the region (Kaldar).
- Illegal trade needs to be curbed by the governments (Hairatan).
- More bridges and bazaars are necessary (Hamadoni).
- The possibility of establishing free economic zones, same currency and more joint bazaars should be seriously considered (Qumsangir).

On improving general security

- The government is responsible for curbing the power of non-state actors (Khwaja Bahauddin).
- Create employment so the youth are not tempted to join radical or extremist groups. (Khwaja Bahauddin).

On reinforcing border security

- The experience of Pakistan and Durand line (Khwaja Bahauddin) demonstrates the importance of strict border controls.
- On the Tajik side, almost 100 per cent of respondents wanted more border control, due to the insecurity in Afghanistan and it was the responsibility of the state to control and protect its territory.
- Borders should be secured from drug traffickers (Kaldar).
- Borders should be secured from armed insurgents on both sides (Imam Sahib).
- Borders should be tightened but legal procedures put in place to facilitate cross-border visits (Kaldar).
- Governments should increase their army presence at border areas (Hairatan, Hamadoni).
- Increase the rule of law on border areas and curb corruption among border guards and customs officials (Darvoz, Hairatan).
- The government needs to reinforce borders, punish those that trespass it (Darvoz).

On cooperation to curb the trafficking of narcotics

- In some parts of the border areas, narcotic plants are being planted and used by local people such as in Kaldar, Qarqen and Kham Ab. Demand for narcotics in the area provides a good opportunity for smugglers to use border areas for trafficking purposes. The Afghan government should develop measures to reduce the consumption of drugs by local populations which would decrease the vulnerability of such areas from the harm of national smuggling rings.
- The Afghan government should consider engaging local mullahs in the fight against drug addiction and trafficking in their position as the most influential people in the border areas.
- Corruption needs to be curbed. According to respondents in both countries, most of the illegal trade or drug trafficking is done with some coordination with border security forces of both sides. There should be mutual collaboration between both the Afghan state and other Central Asian states to be effective.
- All respondents agreed that curbing illegal trafficking should be done in coordination and cooperation between governments and law enforcements bodies of both sides.

On social/humanitarian cooperation

- Central Asian countries need to provide education opportunities for the youth of border areas so that they become cultural ambassadors for those countries and encourage better relations. While some central Asian countries provide scholarship for students through the Afghan Government, young adults living in border areas cannot compete with candidates from Kabul or other provinces due to the low quality of education in these areas. Special quotas need to be raised for students from border regions (Kaldar, Imam Sahib).
- More cultural exchanges are necessary (Hairatan, Hamadoni).

On sharing of natural resources

- The joint use of water resources should be exploited as should other resources such as electricity and salt mines (Qumsangir). Conditions must be created to make joint projects for farm irrigation (Hamadoni, Darvoz).
- Better regulation is necessary to allow the efficient use of the waters of Amu Darya, especially in regions where the river is shifting borders.
- Methods need to be found to stop the seasonal floods that destroy crops, and governments on both sides need to invest in mitigating the risks of natural disasters (Kaldar).
- Governments on both sides should legalize the cultivation and export of liquorice.

5. Appendix

I. Methodology

In Tajikistan the fieldwork was conducted between May–June 2014 in five districts within two provinces bordering Afghanistan, both at the district level and surrounding villages: of Qumsangir, Panj, Farkhor and Hamadoni districts in Khatlon Province, and the district of Darvoz in the Province of Badakhshan. Interviews were held with a wide spectrum of people, including: representatives of the Jamaat (local self-governing bodies), Mahalla leaders, representatives of the local executive body, national security representatives at the local level, law enforcement officials, representatives of the clergy, medical workers, bank workers, businessmen, farmers, drivers, construction workers, teachers, students, journalist, housewives, the unemployed and pensioners.

- Hamadoni: 16 people (14 men and 2 women: 15 Tajiks and 1 Uzbek)
- Farkhor: 19 people (14 men and 5 women: all Tajiks)
- Panj: 20 people (14 men and 6 women: 18 Tajiks and 2 Uzbeks)
- Qumsangir: 18 people (16 men and 2 women: 17 Tajiks and 1 Uzbek)
- Darvoz: 20 people (17 men and 3 women: All Tajiks)

Fieldwork in Afghanistan was conducted between May–July 2014 in three districts of three different provinces: Khwaja Bahauddin district (Takhar Province), Imam Sahib district (Kunduz Province), Kaldar district (Balkh Province) and the port town of Hairatan. Additional interviews took place among specialists and informants in Kabul. Interviews were held with village heads (Malik/Arbab or Qaryadar), heads of Community Development Councils (CDC), heads of the District Development Assembly (DDA) set up as part of the National Solidarity Programme, heads of districts' People Council (belonging to the Independent Directorates of Local Governance), representatives of UNODC in districts, representatives of Border Police as well as key informants from ordinary people.

- District of Kaldar: 13 people (13 men: 11 Turkmen, 1 Tajik, 1 Sayed (Arab))
- Hairatan Port (District of Kaldar): 29 people (21 men and 8 women: 7 Turkmen, 7 Uzbeks, 15 Tajiks)
- Khwaja Bahauddin: 11 people: (7 men and 4 women: 5 Uzbeks, 4 Tajiks, 1 Hazara, 1 Sayed (Arab))
- Imam Sahib: 11 people (7 men and 4 women: 5 Uzbeks, 4 Tajiks, 1 Hazara and 1 Sayed)

II. Brief characteristics of the communities where fieldwork was conducted

The northern region has acquired a new strategic importance in recent years as a supply route for international troops in Afghanistan. Aside from electricity exports, trade exchanges between

Tajikistan and Afghanistan are developing on a small scale. Five cross-border bridges have been created between Tajikistan and Afghanistan and three cross-border markets are operational to facilitate cooperation between communities and trade, although crossings and visas are strictly controlled. The border post of Panji Poyon—rebuilt with international aid in particular from the US—was designed to cater to the majority of the freight between both countries although traffic is limited. The deteriorating of security situation in Kunduz province has isolating the crossings.

Afghanistan

The district of Khwaja Bahauddin in the province of Takhar, bordering Tajikistan, has been a major artery connecting Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Takhar was a strong base for the Northern Alliance, with some of its commanders originating from this province. Commander Shah Massoud was killed at his military base in this district on 9 September 2011. The district of Khwaja Bahauddin was an important base first for Soviet forces and then for the American when they launched operation Enduring Freedom in 2001. The district has been relatively secure in recent years although illegal armed groups do pose a security threat and have been involved in incidents of extortion and robberies. The main source of income is agriculture with other avenues such as carpet weaving, horticulture, and other small-scale businesses.

The district of Kaldar is a small district in the northern parts of Balkh Province, 130 km from Mazar City. It has a population of 23,000 people, mostly of Turkmen ethnicity. The district is divided into 14 villages, with 21 Community Development Councils (CDS) and 1 DDA. The district borders the Amu Darya River, with Uzbekistan to its north and Tajikistan on its eastern border. In 2012, the high levels of water in Amu Darya River resulted in riverbank erosion and the displacement of 145 families in the Kaldar district, forcing humanitarian organizations to provide emergency shelter, food and non-food assistance. The main source of income comes from agriculture, livestock, carpet weaving and poultry. A number of people from this district work in different parts of Afghanistan and in other neighbouring countries (especially Iran), and send their earnings back to their families living in the district. Others are mainly engaged in work as daily wage workers to make their ends meet. Every family keeps around a dozen sheep and a few cows, and engages in small-scale trading or bartering of milk, meat and wool.

The district of Kaldar is home to the port town of Hairatan which is linked to the Uzbek town of Termez through the Afghanistan-Uzbekistan Friendship

bridge built by the Soviet Union. Hairatan has been one of the major transporting and shipping hubs for Afghanistan since the 1990s. Over the past decade, the NATO-trained Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have established bases there. The Afghan Border Police is responsible for protecting the border while the Afghan National Customs regulate and monitor all trade activities. In 2010, the Hairatan Rail line was opened linking Hairatan to Termez through 10 km of track, with plans to link it to Mazar-i Sharif, Herat in the West and to Shir Khan Bandar in the northeast. Hairatan attracts people from different parts of Afghanistan given the opportunities for trade.

The district of Imam Sahib is located in the northern part of the Kunduz Province and borders Tajikistan along the Panj River. It consists of 25 per cent Pashtun, 25 per cent Tajik, 45 per cent Uzbek and 5 per cent Turkmen.²³ It is one of the richest and most developed districts of Afghanistan. The land is very fertile and well irrigated and hasn't suffered drought. Agricultural tools are readily available in the bazaar. The majority of people living in border areas are dependent on agriculture and livestock. While some small businesses thrive in the centre of the district with people engaged in small-scale businesses such as shopkeepers, fruit sellers, tailors, public and private employees, village populations are almost entirely dependent upon agriculture, livestock and poultry. Medical and educational facilities are better than in other districts. The area is home to a large number of the Taliban. The district of Imam Sahib has fallen in and out of control of the Taliban regional commander Mullah Salam, also known as 'Mullah Rocketi'. The district remained highly volatile with the Taliban and the IMU taking over Imam Sahib in April 2015 and consolidated their forces in Kunduz.

Tajikistan

The Hamadoni district, part of Khatlon Province, is located in south east Tajikistan. The economy consists mostly of agriculture with the fields being irrigated through canals from the waters of the Panj River, a tributary of the Amu Darya. Settlement and the creation of the district started in the 1950 when the populations settled there from the mountainous regions of Dashtijum, Shuroobod and Baljuvon. The population is mostly engaged in the cultivation of cotton and cereals, animal husbandry and horticulture. Most people earn a living from working on cooperative farms or receiving government salary to produce on their farms.

The Farkhor district was created in 1930 and populated from the 1950 onwards with settlers from Baljuvon, Khovaling, Sari Hisor and other mountainous regions who helped cultivate the region. The population mostly engages in farming and animal husbandry.

²³ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'UNHCR Sub-Office Mazar-i-Sharif district profile: Imam Sahib', , 12 Sep. 2002, <http://www.aims.org.af/afg/dist_profiles/unhcr_district_profiles/northern/kunduz/imam_sahib/imam_sahib.pdf>.

Panj was created as a separate district in 1930 and also populated in the 1950s with settlers who migrated from Vakhio, Darvoz and Rasht. It borders the provinces of Kunduz and Takhar in Afghanistan. The main occupations are cotton plantations, cereal plantations, animal husbandry and gardening/horticulture.

Qumsangir is a region in southern Tajikistan bordering Afghanistan, created in 1965 and populated with settlers from the mountainous regions of Vakhio, Darvoz and Rasht. The population is mostly engaged in cotton plantation, cereal plantation, animal husbandry and gardening. In 2007, a 670 metre bridge was built there by the US Army Corps of Engineers linking the two countries across the Panj River. Up until then people and goods relied on ferries through the ports of Panjbi Poyon on the Tajik side and Shir Khan Bandar on the Afghan side. The 2007 bridge boosted trade and became part of the Northern Distribution Network route with up to as many as 400 shipping trucks coming to Shir Khan Bandar everyday. Customs revenue from civilian cross-border trade soared to \$24 million on the Afghan side in 2012. The traffic has also had positive influence on increasing the wealth of people on the Tajik side. Truck drivers—most of them from Tajikistan, with others from Kyrgyzstan and further afield—usually spend three to four days in Shir Khan Bandar as they clear border formalities and pick up their return cargo that includes Pakistani cement, potatoes and vegetables.

Darvoz is a district in eastern Tajikistan, part of the Mountainous (Gorno) Badakhshan Autonomous Province created in 1930. People's main livelihoods encompass farming, animal husbandry and gardening. Darvoz shares approximately 200 km of borders of the Panj River with Afghanistan. In some parts, the distance between villages on both sides is very small and communities living in the two countries have frequent contact with each other. People on both sides of the river refer to themselves as 'Darvozis'. The opening of a border bazaar in the village of Ruzvai has made people even closer to each other, facilitating cross-border trade and barter on Saturdays and positively impacting the lives of people living on both sides. The border market is very well frequented by people coming from Nusai and Moimayu Shkai.

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