

The prospects for multilateral conflict prevention and regional cooperation in Central Asia

NIKLAS SWANSTRÖM

Central Asia re-emerged from the ruins of the USSR in 1991 as one of the new and challenging regions, especially when considering the potential of conflict prevention.¹ When the unifying power of the Soviet Union disappeared there were no mechanisms to deal with regional and internal disputes and the creation of such mechanisms have been slow and discouraging in many ways. The negative trend has been reinforced by the low economic development, lack of trust and high degree of intra- and inter-state conflicts. The Central Asian states also suffers from the perception that they do not share any, or few, security threats that could justify a regional security constellation that would *de facto* infringe on the sovereignty of the states.² Religious and political threats against the state, the threat of organised crime, and Afghanistan have however emerged as security threats that the Central Asian states could potentially agree about. The above-mentioned shared threats are unsurprisingly directly related to each other. Much of the drugs trade originates from Afghanistan and much of the domestic and regional military conflicts in Central Asia is founded by organised crime, and especially the drugs trade. The organised crime has through increased corruption and destabilisation of the states created political instability that has been reinforced by religious intolerance and conflicts. The fact that the Central Asian states share these problems to different degrees has however not helped to create effective conflict prevention mechanisms and regional cooperation to deal with these threats in an effective manner.

One of the major problems with regional conflict prevention is that it is dependent upon relatively strong states that can act with coordination and strength. It is clear that there is a lot to be wished for when using the terminology of strong states together with the Central Asian states. The political structures in Central Asia are still rather weak with battered economies that make the Central Asian states weak both politically and financially. Drug traders prefer to conduct their business in or through weak states and if possible take over crucial elements of the state apparatus, so-called 'narco states', and in Central Asia the drug trade has impacted the regional stability and national cohesion negatively. The weakness of the regional actors is at first sight one of the main obstacles to

Niklas Swanström is at the Program for Silk Road Studies (www.silkroadstudies.org), Uppsala University, Box 514, SE-75120, Uppsala, Sweden (Tel: +46-18-471-6386; Fax: +46-18-695102).

effective conflict prevention, but to what degree and why is less clear. The individual weakness of the Central Asian states and the internal and regional conflicts has created an inherent weakness in the region and any incident that would impact the security situation negatively could throw the region out in a full-fledged war.³

Crucial to note in a study of the Central Asian states is that the Soviet Union created the Central Asian republics in the last century to destroy the old identities that followed the trade routes and waterways, a practice continued by the Soviet Union. This was partly a failure since the old identities are still crucial in defining a Central Asian identity, but also a success since the new states determine any discussion between regional entities today. The combination of these factors have proven to be problematic as the Central Asian states are too weak to consolidate all the ethnic groups within their borders and the ethnic borders are so diffuse that they can not provide a base for a strong nation-state. This, even if Uzbekistan in particular but also the other Central Asian states, have argued that a strong national identity and homogeneity exists within the current state borders. The current states are weak and the national identities are not strong enough to create effective and solid states. The clans still have an important power position in the region at the expense of the national governments. For the region to integrate into regional organisations, this creates difficulties, because the states are neither strong nor confident enough to engage in regional cooperation and surrender parts of their national sovereignty to a regional organisation. The perception is that any limitation of national jurisdiction can initiate the division of the states in the region. It has also proven especially difficult to engage in multilateral cooperation without any external powers such as Russia or China. This provides little prospect for multilateral conflict prevention in Central Asia without any intervention from external actors. However there have been a few interesting attempts at conflict management and prevention in the region that are worth looking at more closely.

With strong nationalistic tendencies from the governments, the states of Central Asia show a great reluctance in being treated as a homogenous region in all situations. Uzbekistan is probably the most reluctant of all states in the region owing to its multiethnic society and the need to distance itself from the other states in order to reinforce its Uzbek identity. Foreign Minister Kamilov of Uzbekistan has pointed out that the states in Central Asia would prefer not to be treated as a part of a Central Asian 'porridge' because Uzbekistan and all other Central Asian states want to protect their national characteristics. With such a high reluctance to cooperate, owing to the lack of trust between the parties and the many border disputes that destabilise the region, to attempt to establish a conflict prevention or management function is currently proving extremely difficult. The border issues have historical explanations that stretch over centuries and cultures, but these were accentuated by the unnatural creation of the current Central Asian states in the early 1900s. The region is markedly mixed and no ethnic group has a large or clearly defined area that they have controlled for any long continuous period of time, even if Uzbekistan is currently the most influential

state in the region through its dominant military force and large population. The groups are identified and divided by their clan, state region, religion and possibly the historical identity of the group.⁴

Regional attempts

There have been few regional attempts at multilateral military cooperation that have been successful. In 1996 some military cooperation occurred between Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan that focused on creating peacekeeping units based in Tajikistan.⁵ This was however unsuccessful owing to the differing agendas of the participating states and the lack of a common security threat. A similar proposition was made concerning Central Asian peace-keeping forces in Afghanistan, but so far the results has been less than satisfactory and the political risks of using such a unified force can not be overestimated as the cultural and ethnic division in Central Asia is accentuated in Afghanistan.⁶

Currently there are no multilateral attempts in Central Asia that focus exclusively on conflict prevention, but within some multilateral attempts there are preventive aspects. Discussions have been conducted both inside the region as well as including neighbouring countries, such as GUUAM—composed of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova—and Shanghai Cooperation Organizations (SCO). GUUAM is however of no importance for Central Asia since the membership of Uzbekistan was short (1999–2002). The Uzbek suspension of their membership is an indication of the importance that Uzbekistan attaches to bilateral security treaties and its reluctance of multilateral solutions.⁷

Despite Uzbekistan's suspicion of its neighbours, and partly because of this, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan proposed creating a Central Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (CANWFZ) at the 48th session of the UN assembly in 1993.⁸ This was further promoted at the Lisbon summit meeting of the OSCE in 1996.⁹ However, it was not until 27 September 2002 that the five Central Asian countries completed negotiations on the text of a treaty to establish a Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone,¹⁰ but there are few preventive effects on an operative level of CANWFZ. It has been limited to confidence building as the zone has had little real impact. One of the more important aspects for this failure is that CANWFZ consists of the five Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Central Asian states and they have been in practice put under the Russian nuclear umbrella following the 1992 Tashkent Collective Security Treaty (CST) and several bilateral agreements.¹¹ The Russian actions have limited the operational practicability of the CANWFZ as the nuclear weapons are still a reality in practical policy. Even if Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan views the CST with great scepticism the other Central Asian states still view the treaty as a cornerstone in their security policy, especially with regard to China, on which they border.

More important for the Central Asian conflict prevention capability is the Central Asian Economic Union (CAEU) (originally initiated as the Central Asian

Union in 1994 by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) that was established by Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in 1998 to function as an economic union and improve intra-regional trade. The CAEU quickly expanded into security and military cooperation, even if the results can be questioned. In 1995 it was decided that the CAEU should form a Joint Council of Defence Ministers to monitor security issues and coordinate military exercises, air defence and defence supplies.¹² The Council of Defence Ministers were also responsible for the cooperation with NATO partnership for peace initiative (pfp) that was initiated in 1996, even if the success can be disputed owing to a low level of engagement from Uzbekistan and very little substantial impact apart from joint training. The low impact from the CAEU is largely dependent on the internal weakness of the Central Asian states and the lack of a common security threat. The threat of Islamic opposition in 1999 provided a common security threat, even if the unity of the CAEU on this matter quickly evaporated into conflicts over how and who should act against the Muslim militants. In particular Uzbekistan criticised Tajikistan for tolerating the militants operating from Tajik territory. The failure for the Central Asian states to coordinate their security police increased in 2001 when the CAEU was transformed to the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO).

In 2003 an old threat was put on the agenda—the international drugs trade. The Central Asian states have begun to communicate about possible ways to prevent the influx of drugs from Afghanistan and how to prevent social and economic ruin of the Central Asian states. The problem has been the lack of coordination in these efforts between the Central Asian states. This is due to the great leverage the drug trade has over some national economies, especially Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, and the corruption that the drugs trade has created in the governments and the military. There seems to be few possibilities for a coordinated effort against the drugs trade, despite the negative effects it has on the Central Asian states. International cooperation appears to be one of the few ways out of the negative trend in Central Asia with regards to this situation, even if cooperation with Russian military forces is problematic because of their heavy involvement in this drugs trade.

CACO was established to form a single security zone and to draw up joint action on maintaining peace and stability in Central Asia. The results have been discouraging: the positive effects that derived from the CAEU were stalled as the Central Asian states were not ready for a formalised organisation with such a potentially strong influence over their security policies. Uzbekistan is, for example, viewed by the other Central Asian states as a potential hegemonic power and CACO is considered to be a tool for control over the region. Moreover CACO has not contributed to multilateral dialogue, but is more of an organisation that simplifies bilateral consultations rather than improves multilateral ones. From a preventive perspective the organisation has done very little and the primary consequences, even if limited, has been conflict and crisis management. The limitation to crisis and conflict management can be attributed to the suspicion between the states in the region and reluctance to let any one Central Asian state dominate the organisation.

The fear of regional hegemony has made it necessary to include external members to create a functional regional organisation. In the more successful cooperation's more than one external power is involved in order to prevent a single external state from dominating the region. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was initiated in 1996 as the Shanghai Five whose primary functions were to create confidence-building measures in the border areas and in the long run solve the border disputes.¹³ This was especially important because the border disputes between China and the Central Asian states have a long history, pre-USSR, and were a destabilizing factor in bilateral as well as multilateral relations. Despite a heavy critique from, primarily Western scholars and politicians the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has been very successful in creating confidence between the members of SCO and has explicitly worked for conflict prevention even though this has been not always effective.¹⁴

At the second summit meeting of SCO in 1997 the members agreed to reduce the military forces in the border areas, with the important exception of troops that were combating 'separatism and extremism' that had increased after the terrorist attacks in the USA.¹⁵ The confidence building effects of these measures were substantial and the successful resolution of the border disputes, except for a small area between China–Russia and China–Tajikistan were remarkable and impacted the regional stability positively. The military reductions in the border areas have had important preventive functions and the security situation between the members had never been so secure, despite the war against separatism and extremism having increased in intensity. There have however not been any significant multilateral military cooperation attempts in SCO either. This is primarily due to the lack of trust between the Central Asian states but also their distrust of China and Russia. The military cooperation has therefore been on a bilateral basis.

The initial success of the SCO could be attributed to three different reasons: shared norms, shared interest and a progressive approach. The progressive approach was especially important as it allowed the organisation to progress in pace with the political will of the states. The focus has been on a few key issues and as improvements were made the agenda has developed, such as border delimitations, social stability, economic development, decreasing the Russian influence on the region, and suppression of separatism and religious extremism. The system of shared norms has moreover been compatible as all states are relatively weak and fear external intervention that has led to a shared belief that international intervention is a violation against international law and the sovereign rights of the state. As the problems in Tajikistan have accentuated the neighbouring countries have increased their interest in acting preventively in this specific case, but the organisation at large has decreased in importance as the key issues can to a great extent be dealt with bilaterally with the US, China and Russia through crisis management. The lack of regional cohesion in security questions and the fear of being dominated have increased the reluctance from the Central Asian states to strengthen the powers of the SCO, especially so in the case of Uzbekistan.

The increased economic cooperation in 1998 and 1999 had some preventive effects as it increased the social stability, but this was a limited change. The years are characterised by increased conflicts and a struggle against militant organisations. The tension in the border areas did however lead to the establishment of a set of principles for multilateral interaction in the region, such as more formal rules for conflict management and conflict resolution.¹⁶ This was an unprecedented decision for China and the other members, even if the concretisation has been low. The increased cooperation was formalised at Dushanbe in 2000 where the members agreed to hold annual foreign ministers' meetings and establish a council for national coordinators to improve integration and cooperation. This was the result of the first enlargement since the organisations were established and with the admission of Uzbekistan the organisation took the name SCO. The expectations for the organisation rose quickly and several Chinese decision-makers have pointed out that the SCO is China's single most important regional partner.¹⁷ The reality is however that the SCO has decreased in importance after the US intervention in Afghanistan and the increased bilateral cooperation between the USA and the Central Asian states. It was in particular the Uzbek interest that declined, in essence very similar to the decreased Uzbek interest in CACO and GUUAM. Uzbekistan has shown a reluctance to be involved in multilateral cooperation and a preference for bilateral cooperation, which has, in particular, affected the preventive strategies of the region. The Central Asian states also fear possible Chinese or Russian intervention and rightly so for these two large economic and military powers could dominate the region.

Turkey is another actor that has attempted to create a regional organisation for the Turkic states to improve their own position in Central Asia since 1991. The Turkic states' grouping is, in contrast to the other regional organisations, not created to improve the security but rather an attempt to establish a 'gigantic Turkish World'.¹⁸ The Central Asian states have however been very reluctant to engage in any conflict prevention with Turkey, because of the perception in Central Asia that Turkey's aim is to dominate the region. Iran, Russia and China would also strongly resist any creation of a Turkish Commonwealth in the region.¹⁹ Despite an attempt in Baku in April 2000 to implement coordinated actions in the war against the 'drug trade, international terrorism, religious extremism and separatism' there have been very few preventive measures and even fewer effective crisis management mechanisms.²⁰ It is clear that Turkey has failed to penetrate the region despite its cultural roots in several of the Central Asian states and its attempts at pan-Turkish conflict prevention have been feeble.

One of the interesting attempts is the framework for Central Asian cooperation that goes under the name of '6 + 2 group of neighbours and friends of Afghanistan'. This grouping emerged from a proposal from Uzbekistan in August 1997 and consists of the six countries bordering Afghanistan—China, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan—with Russia and the USA.²¹ Despite the lack of success, with the arguable exception of a Regional Action Plan to hinder the drug trade from Afghanistan, there are interesting

confidence building effects and a possible structure to assist in trans-regional conflict prevention. This is however hindered by the reluctance of the Central Asian states to cooperate intra-regionally and the lack of a common security strategy.

International attempts

CIS, NATO (pfp) and OSCE have been involved in a few interesting international efforts concerning regional conflict prevention focused on Central Asia. Despite the fact that CIS is not a Central Asian organisation *per se* it has been engaged in Central Asia since its creation in December 1991.²² The preventive effects of the CIS focus on Central Asia has unfortunately been mediocre because of Russia's indecisiveness over formally engaging in multilateral security policies, and instead relying on bilateral security strategies. There is moreover no common view of security threats among the CIS members. The difference is especially apparent between the Central Asian states and the European oriented states. The Russian attempt to create a regional anti-terrorist centre within CIS is a good example of its current policies. The bulk of Russia's policies against terrorism in the region are bilateral, even if Russia has supported both CIS and SCO sponsored multilateral anti-terrorist centres. Examples of this are seen in Russia's cooperation with the Central Asian states, which with the exception of Tajikistan, to a large degree concern low level bilateral border protection. CIS policies are moreover very much directed at crisis management with very few long-term preventive policies and they are characterised by endemic fiscal problems.

One of the first and more explicit prevention attempts was the Central Asian peacekeeping battalion, Centrasbat, formed by the CAEC council of defence ministers and the explicit support from NATO (pfp) and the USA in 1996. The tasks were supposed to keep the fragile peace in Tajikistan and prevent the Afghan conflict from spreading into Central Asia as well as strengthening the military-to-military relationship and improving regional security in Central Asia.²³ Apart from a few exercises there were no lasting preventive effects of the cooperation. It has been argued that the Uzbek interest in this 'decorative' unit has decreased and currently it possesses no central position in the creation of multilateral security.²⁴ It would however not have been possible to initiate battalions like this without the explicit assistance from pfp.

The NATO attempts to impact the preventive capability have been limited, and the focus has been on military cooperation and crisis management. Moreover most of the NATO (USA) collaboration in the region has been bilateral and fixed on the terrorist threat against the USA. The NATO pfp programmes have focused on regional security through joint exercises between, primarily, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and bilateral exercises such as in Kyrgyzstan.²⁵ It is also unclear how motivated the USA and Turkey are to engage in multilateral cooperation. It seems more likely that they will intensify their bilateral engagements in the region at the expense of the pfp programmes. The NATO attempts suffer, as do many other organisations, from the Central Asian states' refusal to

see their security problems as a common problem despite clear overlaps in security threats. The Chinese and Russian reluctance to let the USA get a permanent foothold in the region decreases the chances that NATO will succeed in the long run. It seems unlikely that an external organisation with such strong military potential as NATO would be able to act preventively in the ‘backyard’ of both China and Russia without any military, political and economic implications.

The European Union (EU) has proclaimed that the OSCE will function as their primary organisation for conflict prevention in Central Asia. The OSCE is, in contrast to NATO, focused on conflict prevention, a division that is derived from the fact that the EU is militarily a weaker organisation than NATO, which has the capability to act forcefully in crisis. The powers of the OSCE are unique in the sense that it is the only organisation that has been given an explicit *carte blanche* to penetrate national sovereignty.²⁶ It is clear that the OSCE is equipped to function as a platform for conflict prevention in Central Asia.²⁷ The reality is however that the OSCE has certainly done more than NATO in the region to improve the preventive functions, but hardly enough to see the OSCE presence in the region as a success. The OSCE Academy in Bishkek might have an impact over time, but to date the OSCE initiative is small in comparison to the SCO. The problems of Central Asia in 1998 and the positive effects that the OSCE and pfp would have on the region have been pointed out, but to date (more than five years later) the problems still remain.²⁸ The OSCE aims partly to strengthen the democratic institutions as a preventive measure against extremism and breaches of human rights, but their impact has been low even if improvements have been seen in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The OSCE has, together with all other organisations, been primarily occupied with crisis management or grand schemes to change the government structures and so create democracy in the region. The absence of directed and applicable preventive multilateral measures in Central Asia has created a region in turmoil with a high dependence on international support in improving its bilateral security strategies.

Conflict prevention outside multilateral organisations

There have been very few measures to establish preventive procedures outside of the multilateral organisations. The focus of individual national strategies on security often clashes with the other states’ perception of national security. Bilaterally there are several agreements dealing with terrorism, security and economic cooperation that could impact the preventive capability in a positive manner, but unfortunately the focus is on crisis management and the blueprints have in many cases not been operationalised. It is however clear that bilateral approaches are preferred by the Central Asian states over the multilateral approach to cooperation in the region. This is due to the lack of trust between the Central Asian states and the reluctance of the strongest actor in the region—Uzbekistan—to decrease its own leverage over the lesser powers, but also the weaker states’ fear of being dominated. The implemented bilateral

cooperation between the Central Asian states has been focused on economic cooperation, even though there are a number of bilateral attempts that have not been fully implemented in the sphere of military and political cooperation.

The military cooperation between each individual state in Central Asia and the USA, China and Russia has created more tension than it has reduced between the Central Asian states and their neighbours. China and Russia have been particularly reluctant to allow a long-term US military presence in the region, as they consider this a threat to their security.²⁹ Both China and Russia would prefer multilateral cooperation under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and should external organisations establish themselves in the region, Russia has explicitly argued that the OSCE is a better alternative than NATO or US involvement. The more powerful states are both able and willing to hinder regional organisations that they do not control and thus stop them from becoming too powerful or from acquiring mechanisms for conflict prevention.

There are a number of NGOs that works in Central Asia to improve both the conflict prevention capability of the region and the individual governments.³⁰ The impact on the preventive capability has however been low and uncoordinated between organisations and states. The low impact is due to the lack of political will on the part of governments to be coordinated by foreign NGOs and the possible reduction of their sovereign rights. There are no states in the region that feel comfortable with fully independent NGOs in the region and in all states there are restrictions on the freedom of such organisations. It is crucial to strengthen the states and governments before the NGOs can have a positive impact on the conflict prevention capability in the region, as NGOs are today considered to be more of a threat than a positive force. This is because the primary actors in security issues and conflict prevention in Central Asia are states and governments, not individuals and NGOs, and their capability needs to be improved.

Conflict prevention or crisis management

Preventive work has been somewhat successfully conducted through the SCO and in the delimitation of the borders between China and Central Asia. The increased interactions between the leadership and officials in combination with the demilitarisation of the borders are other successful preventive strategies in the region. In the economic field both the SCO and CACO have initiated closer multilateral cooperation to create economic development that would structurally prevent conflicts by increasing social stability and employment opportunities in the region. This is especially important with regard to the drugs trade, for the increased support that extremist organisations get from the least fortunate in society will be diminished if these measures are successful. The most successful attempts at conflict prevention tend to come from regional organisations with strong international engagement. This reflects the weakness and the lack of trust between the Central Asian states, with the result that the organisations are prevented by their members from becoming strong nationally, because of the

fear of domination by stronger states, i.e. Russia, China, Turkey and the USA. To create truly regional initiatives for multilateral conflict prevention there is a need to strengthen the Central Asian states and their government functions. The current situation with the increased corruption, drugs trade and growing militant insurgencies has decreased the functionality and effectiveness of the individual state apparatus that was inherited from the Soviet Union in 1991.

The Central Asian states do not like to be seen as a grey mass of former USSR republics and there is external pressure on them to work multilaterally to improve this image, which has been brought about by their weak identities and lack of political cooperation for multilateral conflict prevention. There is a fear that cooperation would further weaken national identity to the benefit of a regional identity, or another national identity. It is apparent that the Central Asian states do not share a common security definition and the absence of such a definition makes it difficult to create preventive mechanisms. The smuggling of drugs and the water issue could potentially be two security threats that all states could agree on, but even so the reluctance of the Central Asian states to cooperate continues.

The main multilateral cooperation today is directed at crisis management and at bilateral joint exercises between China, Russia, or the USA and the Central Asian states. The bilateral cooperation has in most cases been more important in practice than the multilateral preventive measures. The SCO has been relatively more successful than the other organisations, without being successful in creating effective preventive mechanisms.

In order to create independent regional organisations with effective conflict prevention mechanisms there is a need to strengthen the national governments and states, and to increase confidence-building measures between the states in the region. It is moreover important to increase trust and self-confidence between states and to encourage regional cooperation. These are long-term measures that will need to be built on short-term measures. A short-term measure that needs to be implemented is to increase border security and open up the economies for regional trade. This has been relatively successful with regard to China and the Central Asian states but less so intra-regionally.³¹ The trade between China and the Central Asian states increased immensely after 2001, and in 2004 it is estimated that it could outperform most Western states in terms of monetary value.³² The intra-regional trade in Central Asia is characterised by closed borders and trade disputes. It is clear that Central Asia is in a need of an intra-regional mechanism to handle disputes, either a preventive mechanism and/or a management mechanism.

There have been suggestions from several Western states that the international community should pressure the SCO to expand its membership to include EU and US representatives.³³ This would be devastating with regard to improving the regional cooperation, confidence building and conflict prevention that the SCO has initiated and moreover it would be useless for the US and the EU, as the SCO poses no security threat to the USA or the EU. The inclusion of extra-regional actors will only create tension inside the organisation and it would

be in China's and Russia's interests to block the development of the conflict prevention and conflict management mechanisms in fear of a, primarily, US hijacking of the organisation. The same might be true about the inclusion of India and Pakistan.³⁴

The regional mechanisms in Central Asia are to a high degree directed at crisis management in the later stages of a conflict process. This is due to the lack of political willingness of the regional actors to surrender some of the national jurisdiction to a regional organisation. The sovereignty principle is so strong that the apparent benefits and long-term consequences of national strengthening are disregarded. National polices for conflict prevention are not only lacking, they would moreover be useless as the most threatening problems are of a regional character, such as drugs, economic development and military conflicts. There are currently problems with the coordination of existing management polices within all regional organisations and bilateral attempts at conflict management. It is a regional fear that if one regional organisation was given the mandate to prevent conflicts they would be given a mandate to intervene in internal affairs and this is not a political possibility today.

Currently the regional organisations are in a need of external powers to create increased confidence and trust between the regional powers, but in the long run it is necessary for the region to create a functional Central Asian organisation. The fear of being dominated by stronger external powers still prevents further development. The Central Asian states are more likely to find common security issues and structures of cooperation that do not allow one state to dominate the others, as could be the case with states such as the USA, China or Russia.

The formalisation of the cooperation is also an obstacle to more effective conflict prevention; in contrast to what could be believed is a highly formalised cooperation never likely to succeed as the Central Asian states are not ready for this. Not surprisingly the USA and Europe are more eager to formalise the cooperation through their legalistic view of cooperation while the Central Asian states, China and to certain extent Russia are more inclined to work by a step-by-step approach and through informal mechanisms.³⁵ If the US and Europe want to be more effective in cooperating with the Central Asian states they need to be more sensitive to Central Asian needs and perceptions.

In sum, the present prospects for effective conflict prevention in Central Asia look rather grim and the improvements need to come from within the states before truly regional and effective mechanisms can be established. This is not to say that there have not been any positive signs, but most cooperation today is on a bilateral basis and focused on crisis management rather than long-term oriented conflict prevention strategies.

Notes and references

1. Conflict prevention is defined as measures taken before a conflict has emerged. Conflict management refers to measures that have been taken after a conflict has emerged, but before the conflict has developed into a crisis where crisis management takes place. The assumption in this article is that conflict prevention is to be preferred over conflict and crisis management.

2. States voluntarily agree to decrease their sovereign rights to some extent when entering a multilateral cooperation; this could be more far reaching as in the case of the EU or to a lesser extent as in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The fact remains that states need to agree to open up borders, cooperate on certain issues and follow specified rules when cooperation is initiated and this is perceived, correctly, as surrendering some sovereign rights to the regional organisation. The idea behind regional cooperation is that a limited infringement of the sovereign rights will create increased security or economic benefits, but in the case of weak states even the smallest infringement on the sovereignty could be perceived to be large. For more information see N. Swanström, *Regional Cooperation and Conflict Management: Lessons from the Pacific Rim* (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 2002).
3. ICG (International Crisis Group), *Afghanistan and Central Asia: Priorities for Reconstruction and Development* (Brussels: Asia Report No. 26, 2001).
4. G. Curtis, *Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan* (Washington D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1996).
5. R. Kangas, 'With an eye on Russia, Central Asian military practice cooperation', *Transition*, Vol 2, No 16, 1996. Regional attempts in this article are defined as any attempt that focuses on the Central Asian region and consists of a majority of Central Asian states. This would for example exclude the United Nations that surely focuses on Central Asia, but is global in its mandate and membership.
6. The problem dates back to ancient times, but has gained in importance as the Taliban were largely from the majority group in Afghanistan (Pashtuns) and the current leadership is drawn from the Northern Alliance. The ethnic composition of the Northern Alliance is based on Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen minority groups in Afghanistan. The Central Asian states were to a great extent supporting the Northern Alliance against the Taliban movement and the Pashtuns would have no reason to trust that the Central Asian forces would be neutral as peacekeepers even if they could agree among themselves.
7. R. Allison, 'Regional threats and prospects for multilateral defence cooperation', in *Caspian Sea Basin Security Conference*, Seattle, April 2003, p 44.
8. C. Kucia, 'Central Asian states negotiate nuclear-weapon-free-zone', Arms Control Association, November 2002.
9. Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, 'Lisbon document from the Lisbon summit', December 1996, <http://www.osce.org/docs/english/1990-1999/summits/lisbo96e.htm>.
10. A. Khan, 'Nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZ) at a glance', Arms Control Association, July 2003.
11. R. Allison, 'Policy Cooperation in Central Asia', in Roy Allison and Lena Jonson, eds, *Central Asian Security* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001), p 224. At present CIS consists of: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine.
12. Allison, op cit, Ref 7, p 45.
13. The Shanghai Five composed of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan joined in 2001 and the organisation was renamed to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Q. Jia, 'The success of the Shanghai Five: interest, norms and pragmatism', www.ndu.edu/inss/symposia/pacific2001/jiafinal.htm, 23 April 2002.
14. The impact of SCO should be viewed in the light of the overall failure of other regional organisations to act preventively. Several scholars have noted the inability of the SCO to act in certain cases, such as S. Blank, 'The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its future', *Analyst*, 22 May 2002. My interpretation of SCO is however brighter than Blank's and many Western scholars.
15. M. Jarbussynova, 'Measures to eliminate international terrorism', United Nations, 56th United Nations General Assembly, 3 October 2001.
16. Ibid; *Declaration of Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (Beijing: Chinese Foreign Ministry, 1999).
17. N. Swanström, 'Hu supports the Shanghai Cooperation Organization?', *The Times of Central Asia*, 19 June 2003.
18. B. Winrow, 'Turkey and Central Asia', in Allison and Jonson, op cit, Ref 11, p 201.
19. Allison, op cit, Ref 11, pp 236–237.
20. Ibid, p 236.
21. Tang Jiaxuan, 'Speech by Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan of China at high-level meeting of the Group of "6 + 2" on Afghanistan', United Nations, 12 November 2001.
22. Commonwealth of Independent States, <http://www.cisstat.com/eng/cis.htm>, 5 August 2003.
23. Global Security, 'Centrasbat', www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/centrasbat.htm, 26 June 2003.
24. Allison, op cit, Ref 7, p 46.
25. B. Adbrisaev, 'U.S.–Kyrgyz strategic cooperation', The Heritage Foundation, 18 June 2002; *Pravda*, 'U.S.A builds up military presence in Central Asia', 22 November 2001.
26. The OSCE experience is very interesting and differs widely from other regional organisations in depth function and mandate. For a more in-depth study of the OSCE, see Möttölä for the constitutional and

- functional aspects and Bloed and Petikäinen for conflict prevention. K. Möttölä, 'The OSCE: institutional and functional developments in an evolving European security order', in B. Michael, N. Ronzitti and A. Rosas, eds, *The OSCE in the Maintenance of Peace and Security* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1997). A. Bloed, 'The OSCE main political bodies and their role in conflict prevention and crisis management', in Michael et al, *ibid.* M. Pentikäinen, 'The role of the human dimension of the OSCE in conflict prevention and crisis management', in Michael et al, *ibid.*
27. W. Zellner, 'The OSCE: uniquely qualified for a conflict-prevention role', in P. Tongeren et al, eds, *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2002). A. Tabyshalieva, 'Policy recommendations', in Tongeren et al, *ibid.*
 28. B. George, 'NATO, OSCE, and regional security issues in Central Asia and the Caucasus', *Perceptions*, February 1998.
 29. G. Xing, 'China and Central Asia', in Allison and Jonson, *op cit*, Ref 11, p 167. *Pravda*, *op cit*, Ref 25.
 30. 'Directory', in P Tongeren et al, *op cit*, Ref 27.
 31. N. Swanström, 'China conquers Central Asia through trade', *Analyst*, 11 April 2001. N. Swanström, 'Kina och Centralasien: Det Stora Spelet' ('China and Central Asia: the Great Game'), *Internationella Studier*, No 2, 2001.
 32. Swanström, *op cit*, Ref 17.
 33. ICG, *op cit*, Ref 3.
 34. Several countries have indicated an interest to become members of SCO, such as Pakistan, Mongolia, India and Turkmenistan (J. Daly, 'Shanghai Five expands to combat Islamic radicals', *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, 19 July 2001). The charter has also pointed out that the organisation is open for any applicant that fulfils the criteria (Declaration of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, *op cit*, Ref 15). The inclusion of Pakistan and India would stretch the organisation far outside what is considered appropriate. The border disputes between India and Pakistan could impact the SCO in similar fashion as it has done in the South Asian Regional Cooperation Organization, i.e. stalemates the organisation and renders it useless. The stability and independence of the SCO is still weak and it is not in the interest of the organisation to engage in any conflict resolution or mediation in the rivalry between India and Pakistan that only could hurt the development of conflict prevention, economic development and mechanisms for social stability, especially as the large size of both India and Pakistan would even further decrease the influence of the Central Asian states.
 35. Swanström, *op cit*, Ref. 2, pp 247–248.

