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The highly securitized insecurities of state borders in the Fergana Valley

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International organizations and Western NGOs consider that the existence of enclaves in the Fergana Valley presents a critical risk for Central Asian stability.¹ Vast border areas between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are still disputed, and the issue of enclaves, especially those located in Kyrgyzstan's Batken province, has not been successfully resolved yet either.

The Fergana Valley and its enclaves



Source: Google map

The collapse of the multinational socialist states—the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia—resulted in the appearance of nearly twenty additional enclaves on the world political map.² The current research identifies the following eight enclaves in the Fergana Valley, as listed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance.³ There are four Uzbek enclaves in Kyrgyzstan (Sokh, Shahimardan, Dzhangail/Jani-Ayil, and Qalacha/Chon-Qora/Chongara); two Tajik enclaves in Kyrgyzstan (Western Qal'acha/Kayragach, and Vorukh); one Tajik enclave in Uzbekistan (Sarvan/Sarvak/Sarvaksoi); and one Kyrgyz enclave in Uzbekistan (Barak).

These enclaves face a wide spectrum of issues, which go far beyond the delimitation of territorial borders. Enclave residents and people residing in areas close to the border experience huge problems in their ability to travel, trade, get access to water and land resources, as well as in participating in the weddings, burials, and other ceremonies of their relatives living across the border. On some sections of the border between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, were the borders to be concretely demarcated and fences built, some households would be split in half, with one half living in one country, and the other half in the other.

¹ International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Border Disputes and Conflict Potential*, April 4, 2004, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/central-asia/Central%20Asia%20Border%20Disputes%20and%20Conflict%20Potential.pdf>.

² Evgeny Vinokurov, *A Theory of Enclaves*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007, p.15, <http://www.vinokurov.info/enclaves.htm>.

³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Humanitarian Bulletin: South Caucasus and Central Asia*, "Border Incidents in Central Asian Enclaves," Issue 2, January 1- June 30, 2013, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HB_ROCCA_20130709%20EN.pdf.

A Brief Historical Sketch

It is important to make clear the terminological distinction between “enclaves” and “exclaves.” The term “exclave” describes a territory of a specific state that is surrounded by another country, or countries. “Enclave,” on the other hand, describes a part of a foreign territory that is embedded into a state’s own territory. Thus, Sokh is an exclave of Uzbekistan (Uzbekistan is its “mainland” state) and an enclave of Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyzstan is its “host,” or surrounding, state). Like the other enclaves in the Fergana Valley, Sokh is a “true enclave,” i.e., both an enclave in respect of its surrounding host state and an exclave in respect of its mainland state.⁴

The legal status of an enclave is usually defined on the basis of its history of emergence, which may be a subject of dispute itself. In this latter case, each state prefers to make use of the particular Soviet documents that benefit its own interests and positions on the matter (the documents referenced date from the 1920s and the 1950s).⁵ In the 1920s-1930s the Central Asian states were mapped out by the Soviet elites, in such a manner that resources between the upstream and downstream countries were highly integrated.⁶ Water was exchanged for natural gas, electricity for fruits and vegetables, and even the people, who now constitute “titular” nations in their nation-states, were intermixed. While Moscow could have had in mind the mechanism of “dividing and conquering” as the driving strategy for forming the new states, there is no doubt that local elites, formal and informal leaders, and influential people had interests of their own. As Nick Megoran has stated, “It is unlikely that the original cartographers ever thought that the borders they were creating would one day delimit independent states: rather, it was expected that national sentiment would eventually wither away.”⁷

The emergence of the Fergana enclaves is usually explained via the assumption that land units were allocated to a country based on the language spoken. For instance, since the majority of the people in Barak village spoke Kyrgyz, the land unit was given to the Kyrgyz SSR, despite the fact that this very land unit was located inside the Uzbek SSR. Since Shakhimardan was of cultural significance to the Uzbeks, it was given to the Uzbek administration. Sokh’s emergence is subject to debate, because the enclave is populated by ethnic Tajiks, though Tajik ASSR was part of the Uzbek SSR until October 16, 1929, when Tajikistan was granted the status of a Soviet Socialist Republic in its own right.⁸ There are claims that in those days Sokh was “rented” to the Uzbek SSR for agricultural purposes. Both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan try to legitimate their claims by referring to different documents signed under the USSR. The lack of consensual documentation puts Sokh’s status in jeopardy, leaving it subject to speculation and debate.

A Complex Legal Framework

Generally, the process of border demarcation between the three Fergana republics lacks transparency and has been built on political fears and emotions. Unilateral attempts to install

⁴ “Enclaves of the world - Geographical oddities or sources of international tension?” <<http://enclaves.webs.com>>.

⁵ From the interview of Salamat Alamanov, “Border demarcation with Uzbekistan does not come easy - Kyrgyz official,” *Uzdaily*, December 17, 2007, <http://www.uzdaily.com/articles-id-2109.htm>.

⁶ For a complete account of the National Territorial Delimitation in Central Asia, see Madeleine Reeves, *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia*. Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2014, Ch.2, “Delimitations,” pp. 65-100.

⁷ Nick, Megoran, “The critical geopolitics of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley boundary dispute, 1999-2000,” in *Political Geography* 23, 2004, p.3.

⁸ Paul, Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and Origins of the Republic*. New York: I.B. Tauris and Co Ltd., 2007, p. 1.

border infrastructure, to move the physical border into the neighboring state's territory, to erect new block posts and close the existing ones, and to change the visa agreements⁹ make the situation regularly tense. Despite the collective dependency on infrastructure, the construction of new roads often provokes an aggressive reaction from the neighboring state, as was the case in the 2014 incident at the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, when the Tajik side was accused of using heavy weapons, such as mortar shells and rocket-propelled grenades, in response to the construction of a road in a disputed area near the Vorukh enclave.¹⁰

The decision-making process on the question of enclaves and on activities undertaken in the near-border areas is rarely a multilateral one. For instance, in early 2015 the President of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atambayev, made a statement about secret border-related documents signed between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan under President Bakiev's rule.¹¹ Such statements place border demarcation processes and the issue of enclaves even further under a veil of uncertainty. Furthermore, the opinions of local residents are not regarded as vital in the process. As a result, residents develop distrust toward "high politics," and take individual actions to protect their land.

Defined boundaries are an integral aspect of state sovereignty. However, the task of border demarcation can be troublesome, especially for newly emergent states. The current administrative design, which includes vaguely defined internal borders, was of little concern during Soviet times. Today, the process of border demarcation is no longer the duty of the "center" and has become a key element of nation building. Independence and sovereignty imply individual legal structures, currencies, laws, and regulations that do not necessarily cohere with those of neighboring states. Trade, movement of the people, and national security all become dependent on the "imaginary lines" of the nation; lines that are actually materialized in space, and highly securitized.

A Large Diversity of Situations

Enclaves can be large or small, with or without inhabitants, with or without resources. Some enclaves, such as Dzhangail or Western Qal'acha, are as small as one square kilometer in size. The legal status of some of them is unclear due to the lack of official documentation, which is the case for Dzhangail.¹² Some cause tremendous tensions to arise between states, while others are able to exist in peaceful surroundings. The Tajik exclave of Sarvan in Uzbekistan, for instance, is not a subject of tension or site of conflict, despite years of rough relations between, and difficult visa regulations in, the two states involved. The exclave was granted new border crossing privileges that help its residents avoid the procedure of obtaining an Uzbek visa.¹³ At the same time the Kyrgyz enclave in Uzbekistan—Barak—is now nearly uninhabited, since the residents

⁹ As of August 2012, Uzbekistan has required its citizens to obtain an "exit visa" (also referred to as an OVIR sticker), if the stay in Kyrgyzstan exceeds 60 days. The measure does not apply to citizens residing in the Russian Federation and was not widely announced to the citizens.

¹⁰ "Kyrgyz-Tajik Row After Border Clash," IWPR, January 15, 2014, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kyrgyz-tajik-row-after-border-clash>.

¹¹ "Granitsa KR s RUz. Taynoe Stanovitsa Yavnim" (The Border of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan, secrets become unveiled), Radio Liberty, January 9, 2015, <http://rus.azattyk.mobi/a/26784103.html>.

¹² Dzhangail's status is unclear, although it appears in some scholarly articles and even in travel guides, see Eurasia Travel, http://eurasia.travel/kyrgyzstan/cities/southwestern_kyrgyzstan/batken/enclaves_and_exclaves/.

¹³ Tilav Rasul-Zade, "Zhizn Anklava" (Life of the Enclave), Asia-Plus News Agency, June 1, 2012, <http://news.tj/ru/newspaper/article/zhizn-anklava>.

have demanded relocation.¹⁴ Sokh and Vorukh, as far as they are concerned, are subject to regular outbursts of conflict and explosions of violence, with as many as 30-40 incidents per year.¹⁵

Sokh and Shahimardan are the largest of the four Uzbek exclaves in Kyrgyzstan. With a population of 5,000 inhabitants, comprising mostly ethnic Uzbeks,¹⁶ Shahimardan is accessible both to Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and foreign citizens, and is advertised as a tourist destination, although its attraction as a tourist spot is questionable due to the complexity of crossing the border and the lack of tourist infrastructure.¹⁷ The Sokh enclave—the largest true enclave in the world by size and the most populated enclave of the Fergana Valley—is isolated from the outside world, foreigners are not permitted to enter it, and residents themselves are limited in their ability to travel to mainland Uzbekistan as a result of actions by both the Uzbek and Kyrgyz sides.

Conflicts around enclave issues involve both civilians and border guards, and resonate in other enclaves and through the border-crossing points. In January 5-7, 2013, Sokh became the epicenter of a conflict between local dwellers, Kyrgyz border guards, and residents of neighboring Kyrgyz villages.¹⁸ As a result of the incident, border checkpoints and railroad communications were shutdown by Tashkent, while the Kyrgyz side promised to turn Sokh into a “reservation” by surrounding it with a concrete wall.¹⁹ As a matter of course, the Kyrgyz side blocked entry to Shakhimardan enclave, and the Uzbek side, entry to Barak enclave.²⁰

Having a territorial unit belonging to Uzbekistan right in the middle of the Kyrgyzstani province of Batken causes many problems. Until a detour road was upgraded from a dirt road into a highway,²¹ half of Kyrgyzstan’s Batken province was reachable only via travel through Uzbek’s Sokh enclave. Despite the signing in 1996 of a memorandum of eternal friendship between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the relationship between the two states has been challenging in the spheres of trade, water, gas supply, border demarcation, and even inter-ethnic relations. Attempts have been made to trade a land equivalent for a corridor that would connect mainland Uzbekistan with Sokh. The Kyrgyz side refused a 17 km long/1 km wide corridor, claiming that the land the Uzbek side was offering in the exchange was mountainous, non-arable, and of disproportionately low value.²² Negotiations over land exchanges and corridors for de-enclaving

¹⁴ “Kyrgyz Exodus from Tiny Exclave,” Bruce Pannier with contributions from Ulan Eshmatov of RFE/RL’s Kyrgyz Service, June 6, 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/qishloq-ovozi-kyrgyzstan-barak-exclave-exodus/25413373.html>.

¹⁵ Ekaterina Ivashenko, “Kyrgyzstan: granitsi kak istochnik problem I konfliktov” (Kyrgyzstan: the border as a source of conflicts), November 27, 2014, Fergana.ru News Agency, <http://www.fergananews.com/articles/8323>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Visit Uzbekistan, <<http://www.visituzbekistan.travel/sightseeing/ferghana/shakhimardan/>>.

¹⁸ Daisy Sindelar, “Sokh: In One Tiny Territory, A World of Problems,” Radio Free Europe, January 18, 2013, <<http://www.rferl.org/content/sokh-exclave-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan/24877127.html>>.

¹⁹ REX Information Agency, July 7, 2013 <<http://www.iarex.ru/news/38577.html>>.

²⁰ Igor, Rotar, “Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan Heighten Tensions in Violent Local Border Dispute,” in *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 10, Issue 17, January 30, 2013, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=40390&cHash=268108bc1c955041c74eco7ac2f6d0b4#.VMmpHGJdXAk.

²¹ Launch of the National Road Rehabilitation (Osh-Batken-Isfana) Project and the World Bank Road Safety Report, The World Bank, February 18, 2010, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2010/02/18/launch-of-the-national-road-rehabilitation-osh-batken-isfana-project-and-the-world-bank-road-safety-report>.

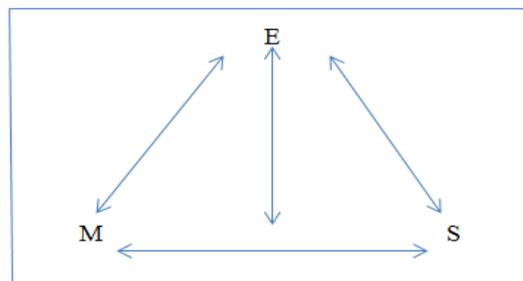
²² Arslan Koichiev, “Batken Residents Furious Over Secret Uzbek-Kyrgyz Deal,” *Eurasianet.org*, August 24, 2001, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav042501.shtml>.

Sokh has not born fruit, primarily because connecting Sokh to mainland Uzbekistan would end up enclaving Batken province itself.

A Theoretical Framework of State Interactions

Fergana Valley enclaves are part of a complex matrix of relations between all the neighboring states. The relationship between the states involved (mainland state and surrounding state) largely shapes their respective relationships with the enclave. The theory of enclaves introduced by Evgeni Vinokurov suggests a triangular relationship between the mother state, the enclave, and the host, or surrounding, state.²³

Figure 1.
Vinokurov's triangular relations between the enclave, the mother state and the surrounding country



The mainland state may harbor concerns about the exclave's secession and in this case may impose measures that are disproportionately strict relative to the enclave's size and population; such measures may include the suspension of local democracy. Vinokurov uses the notion of *negative stimuli* to refer to such actions. On the other hand, the mainland state may empower its exclave with economic privileges that are unthinkable in the mainland. Such actions he terms a *positive stimuli*, which is to say, actions taken by the mainland state in order to hold the enclave under its authority. The same scheme of positive and negative stimuli is exercised against the hosted enclaves by the surrounding states.

This triangular schema helps to put into perspective the complex relations between the three actors. However, sometimes a fourth player may also come into the picture, namely the "ethnic root state of the enclave." That is, due to their ethnic origins, enclave dwellers may identify with yet a third state, as is shown in the example of Sokh enclave, with its almost exclusively (99.4%) Tajik-speaking population²⁴ This fact, then, expands the phenomenon of enclaves, turning triangular relations into a trapezoid schema, with the ethnic root state of the enclave marked as "ERSE."

²³ Evgeny Vinokurov, *A Theory of Enclaves*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007, <http://www.vinokurov.info/enclaves.htm>.

²⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Humanitarian Bulletin: South Caucasus and Central Asia, "Border Incidents in Central Asian Enclaves," Issue 2, January 1- June 30, 2013, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HB_ROCCA_20130709%20EN.pdf.

Figure 2.
Trapezoid illustrating relations between the four actors

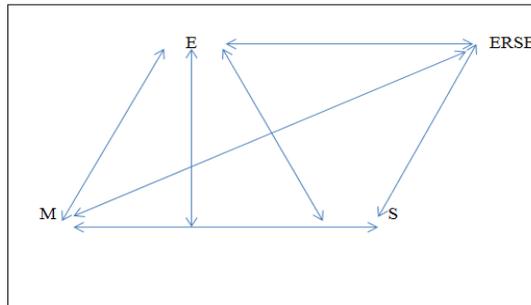
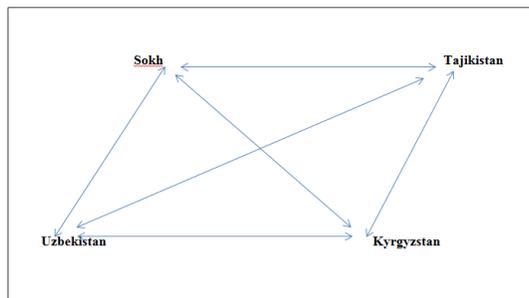


Figure 3.
The ERSE system applied to the Sokh enclave



Governance Issues

Enclaves are tough to govern. The mother state or the surrounding state may be suspicious of its enclaves and exclaves. After the terrorist attacks in Tashkent in February 1999,²⁵ and the incursions of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan across the porous border and into enclaves in Batken during the summer of the same year, the Uzbek government took a proactive stance in strengthening, defining, demarcating, and materializing its border, with security being uppermost on the list of the country's priorities. The border was even land-mined by the Uzbek side until a gradual de-mining took place starting in 2004.²⁶

The Fergana Valley enclaves have had varying experiences both with their surrounding states and with their mother countries. Two smaller enclaves, Tajik Sarvan and Kyrgyz Barak in Uzbekistan, have had different fates. Sarvan's population has been essentially absorbed by Uzbekistan, while the residents of Barak have demanded their relocation to Kyrgyzstan's

²⁵ IFRC, "Uzbekistan: Explosions in Tashkent," *Information Bulletin #1*, February 25, 1999, <http://www.ifrc.org/docs/appeals/rpts99/infouz99.pdf>.

²⁶ IRIN Humanitarian News and analysis, Uzbekistan: Tashkent moves to de-mine borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, June 24, 2004, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/24400/uzbekistan-tashkent-moves-to-de-mine-borders-with-kyrgyzstan-and-tajikistan>.

Karasuu district in Osh province, as life inside the enclave and restrictions on movement and access to mainland Kyrgyzstan were considered too burdensome.²⁷

Population pressures, resources, land, rivers, and roads are considered the major causes of tension. Sokh itself is deprived of any independent territorial decision-making ability: it falls under the administration of the Republic of Uzbekistan and is a simple administrative district of Fergana province. Economic life in the enclave is centered on agriculture, which includes rice and potato growing. Industry is limited, as both its canned goods factory and its shoe factory were shut down due to the lack of a corridor to the mainland; the majority of its young people seek economic opportunities in Russia.²⁸ The quasi-totality of Sokh residents speak Tajik, and education is carried out in the Tajik language, although it is not an official language of Uzbekistan.²⁹ The local newspaper, *Sadoi Sokh* (The Voice of Sokh), is printed in Tajik.³⁰ According to the Uzbek government, there are 28 schools that serve 11,654 students, along with three professional colleges that serve 2,233 students.³¹ The general relationship of the Sokh administration with mainland Uzbekistan is passive. Outbursts of conflict display the hostile attitude of Sokh inhabitants towards their Kyrgyz neighbors, and their lack of belief in the system imposed upon them by Uzbekistan since Tashkent closed and mined the border.³² Sokh's communications with Tajikistan have been limited due to the tense relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, their strict visa regimes, and their lack of transport communications.

Sokh is thus an extreme example of almost complete landlockedness. What applies generally for any enclave, applies all the more in the case of Sokh: the frequent closure of border-crossing points makes it difficult for people to cross the border legally in order to visit relatives, or conduct trade. In most cases, then, restrictions and regulations cause trade to become "contraband" and the people involved in it to be viewed as smugglers. Burials and wedding are hard to attend, which further isolates people, and causes them to be alienated on account of their ethnicity.

When the residents of Sokh violently reacted to the five-meter violation³³ of their border by the Kyrgyz side in January 2013, the events inevitably affected both states and required a solution at the interstate and international levels. Although it can be assumed that the incident did not carry any ethnic character and was centered primarily on the issue of access to resources—water, land and roads—residents of Sokh feared further isolation from the rest of the world. Resources are indeed at the root cause of the problems in the enclaves and near-border settlements, but it is alarming how quickly the "ethnic" component takes on a central role in matters. Vorukh, the Tajik exclave in Kyrgyzstan, is also subject to frequent explosions of violence. The construction of roads that bypass the enclave lead to "...hostage-taking, physical attacks on authorities, and car

²⁷ "Kyrgyz Exodus from Tiny Exclave," Bruce Pannier with contributions from Ulan Eshmatov of RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, June 6, 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/qishloq-ovozi-kyrgyzstan-barak-exclave-exodus/25413373.html>.

²⁸ Radio Liberty, "Sokh Enclaves: Two Decades of Simmering Tension," January 7, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/sokh-exclave-two-decades-of-simmering-tension/24817411.html>.

²⁹ Bahodir Musaev, "Anklav Sokh. Poiski Vihoda iz tupikovoy situatsii," *ZonaKz Online Newspaper* (Kazakhstan), July 19, 2001, <http://www.zonakz.net/articles/13555>.

³⁰ Farangiz Nadgibula, "*Uzbekskiy Anklav Sokh v Kirgizstane naseleennyi Tadjikami*," *Radio Liberty*, June 14, 2010, <http://rus.azattyq.org/content/Sokh/2068831.html>.

³¹ Official website of the Fergana City Administration, <http://ru.ferghana.uz/soh>.

³² Daisy Sindelar, "Sokh: In Once Tiny Territory, A World of Problems," *Radio Free Europe*, January 18, 2013, <<http://www.rferl.org/content/sokh-exclave-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan/24877127.html>>.

³³ Radio Liberty, "Uzbekistan's Sokh Exclave Remains Sealed After Clashes," January 9, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-sokh-exclave-tensions/24819071.html>.

burnings.”³⁴ Yet again, these incidents carry a non-ethnic character, although ethnic intolerance may be seen as a result of such tensions.

Conclusion

The Fergana Valley enclaves are a reflection of the complex processes that the Central Asian states have faced since independence. These include: ensuring their newly acquired sovereignty, securing borders, symbolizing the nation through territorial markers, addressing a system of interdependency around natural resources between the water-rich upstream and fossil-fuel rich downstream countries, and managing often difficult relations with neighboring states. The case of the enclaves reveals the lack of interstate cooperation and the refusal to make compromises to improve the lives of inhabitants. Lack of access to justice, to educational institutions, and to medical facilities, as well as overpopulation, economic deprivation, and difficulties in accessing resources often force enclave dwellers to take matters into their own hands in order to secure their well-being. These actions are often of a violent nature, further deepening the alienation of people on the ground and political confrontation at the top, which generally devolves into a blame game.

Recommendations to the governments of Central Asia

Despite the fact that enclaves are often viewed as problematic land units, they can serve as triggers for cooperation as they require the involvement of all three states that share the Fergana Valley.

Agree to make the border demarcation process transparent. Cooperation and compromise could make it easier to agree on disputed sections of the border and define the legal boundaries of each state.

Recognize the legal status of the enclaves and the need for building mutually beneficial road infrastructure.

Include local residents (elders, informal leaders) and self-government authorities in the process of negotiation, as this will shape the first-hand perception of these local dwellers. Taking into account the demands and needs of local residents would help reduce cases of localized violence in near-border areas.

³⁴ “Border Incidents in Central Asian Enclaves,” Humanitarian Bulletin South Caucasus and Central Asia, OCHA, Issue 2, January 1 – June 30, 2013, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HB_ROCCA_20130709%20EN.pdf.

The Central Asia Fellowship Program

Central Asia has a chronic and acute lack of public policy experts. Opportunities for young professionals to hone their analytical skills are few and far between. These deficiencies, compounded by the entrenched ideological divide existing between civil society and academia, has had a detrimental effect on the transparency and vigor of policy debate in Central Asia.

The CAP-SIPRI North America Central Asia Fellowship Program is intended for young professionals—scholars, government officials, policy experts, human rights and democracy activists—who want to enhance their research and analytical skills and seek to become public policy leaders in their respective countries. More generally, the fellowship program seeks to provide a platform for the exchange of ideas and build lasting intellectual networks between the scholarly and policy communities in Central Asia and in the US.

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