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## 5. The emerging geopolitical balance in Central Asia: a Russian view

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### I. Introduction

The Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—have unexpectedly and vigorously entered the community of independent states. The world’s political elite was still taking the measure of these new recruits among the successor states of the USSR, about which little was known, at a time when they were already confidently demonstrating their own identity and each was upholding its right to choose its own path, distinct from the others. Neither Russian, Turkish, Iranian or Western models have been emulated. The condescending attitude of foreign analysts towards the conservatism of the Central Asian regimes, which were initially encouraged to separate themselves more firmly from the past, gradually gave way to more deliberate assessments and a focus on stability—something that has been seriously upset only in Tajikistan, where the outbreak of the civil war in 1992 ruled out the creation of a prospering civic society based on a market economy and democracy.

Russia’s gradual withdrawal from the region, the vacuum of influence there and the mineral resources discovered in a number of the states have heightened many global and regional players’ interest in them. Having become the centre-piece of the interests of rival powers which have been using the opportunities for action in Central Asia to assert themselves, settle scores, advance their own interests or form their spheres of influence, the Central Asian states have brought to life again the long-forgotten schemes of the ‘Great Game’ of the last century, which at present exists rather in the writings of experts and journalists than in real political life.

### II. The geopolitical forces in Central Asia

In the immediate future, the Central Asian states will scarcely be able to unravel the close ties linking them with Russia, even if the diversification of their external ties picks up speed. In the view of the US researcher Rajan Menon, ‘the dependence is asymmetric: Russia has far more scope for using trade as a means of political leverage than do governments of the southern Near Abroad’.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Menon, R., ‘After empire: Russia and the southern “near abroad”’, ed. M. Mandelbaum, *The New Russian Foreign Policy* (Council on Foreign Relations: New York, 1998), p. 115.

In the 1990s, the geopolitical balance in Central Asia has been undergoing a slow evolution, the main catalyst of which is the confrontation of the interests of different external forces. That balance can be imagined as a set of overlapping planes, at the junction of which the region is situated.

First there is the plane of the *Islamic world*, to which the Central Asian region entirely belongs. (Northern Kazakhstan extends beyond the Islamic area but is part of a state that is integrated into the Islamic world and perceives itself, through the titular ethnic group, as part of it.) The degree of involvement in the Islamic world at the civilizational level varies from a high level in traditional centres of religious influence, such as the Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan, to a low level in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. At the political level, affinity with the Islamic world is expressed in the membership of these states in the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The main limiting factor here is the policies of the Central Asian rulers who, while retaining Islam as an important component of the Central Asian identity and an instrument of external contact, are trying to prevent its becoming politicized or excessively influential. At the same time, within the framework of Islam the region is the target of expansion both from the outside and from the inside: many forces aspire to bring it or at least part of it into the orbit of influence of political Islam. This means primarily Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, whose governments regard Islamic extremism as one of the main threats to themselves.

There is also a general impression that Uzbekistan has been chosen by the USA to be used to counteract Islamism, which is forcing its way to the north from a broad band of countries—something which is increasingly perceived in Washington as a grave threat to US interests. In Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov is adroitly striking the anti-fundamentalist chord while not distancing himself too much from flirtings with Islam, which has been put under strict government control. (The USA equally sees in Uzbekistan a suitable force to counterbalance Russian influence in Central Asia and Moscow's imperial ambitions, in whose existence the West still believes.)

Second, there is the *Central Asian* plane proper. The region is an enclosed system clearly distinguished from the adjoining states and regions. This distinctiveness, however, is attenuated in the south by the presence in the neighbouring states of large groups of people belonging to the dominant ethnic groups in the Central Asian states (Tajiks and Uzbeks in Afghanistan, Turkmen in Iran) and by the presence in the Central Asian states themselves of people who belong to the basic ethnic groups of the neighbouring states but see themselves as native inhabitants with a historic title to the territory of their abode (such as Russians in Kazakhstan). It should be noted that the Tajiks, Turkmen and Uzbeks living in the Near and Middle Eastern states do not associate themselves with their counterparts from the Central Asian republics but possess an identity of their own.

The pattern of ethnic 'strip holding' and the novelty of these countries' present statehood favour regional solidarity: the Central Asian states cannot

separate themselves from each other with a 'Great Wall of China' because of the mismatch between the borders of settlement of ethnic groups and the state boundaries. This phenomenon is common to most regions of the world. In Central Asia it is combined with populations whose self-identification as citizens of a particular country is underdeveloped. Ethnic self-identification is often stronger. These factors work against solidarity, create problems and give rise to conflicts, so far latent but already rising to the surface of political life and even taking the form of armed confrontation.

At the civilizational level, the region exhibits a tendency towards unity. The basis for this is a common history, similar customs, a shared way of life and the very perception of belonging to a regional community shared by the ethnic groups such as the Central Asian Germans, Koreans or Russians. At the political level, regionalism is confronted by the particularism prevailing today. The keen desire of the Central Asian newly independent states to consolidate their independence can lead them to interpret any regional cooperation as a factor restricting that independence. However, to the extent that regional solidarity and cooperation can be an instrument to strengthen their independence or counterbalance cooperation with outside forces that are stronger and thus threaten to dominate, the governments of the region need them. The integration of the Central Asian states has already taken concrete organizational form in the Central Asian Union of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (and since 1999 Tajikistan).<sup>2</sup> Differences in levels of development, fears that Uzbekistan has hegemonic ambitions and a number of other factors will act as restraining factors.

Third, there is the *US and European* plane. After the break-up of the USSR the newly independent states inherited membership of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) and a number of other European and transatlantic bodies, including (except for Tajikistan) the NATO Partnership for Peace (PFP). Particularly significant in the framework of the PFP was the formation of the Kazakh–Kyrgyz–Uzbek peacekeeping battalion in 1996 and the holding of manoeuvres jointly with NATO countries in September 1997.<sup>3</sup> Although for objective reasons the Central Asian states can hardly integrate with Europe, their keen interest in developing relations with Western states—a potential source of financial and investment backing, up-to-date technologies and consumer goods—is encouraging them to step up their activity in this direction. Of special importance for the Central Asian states here is the participation of Western companies in the development of oil and gas deposits and the pipeline projects.

<sup>2</sup> On the Central Asian Union, see appendix 1 in this volume. 'Almaty, Bishkek i Tashkent sblizhautsya' [Almaty, Bishkek and Tashkent come closer], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 9 July 1994, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> This gave a limited military perspective to the Central Asian Union. Muratov, Zh., 'Amerikanskiy soldat i geopolitika' [An American soldier and geopolitics], *Delovaya Nedelya* (Almaty), no. 37 (26 Sep. 1997), p. 2; and Kozlov, S., 'Tsentralnoaziatskiy soyuz: stupen k Evraziyskomu?' [Central Asian Union: a step towards Eurasian union?], *Sodruzhestvo NG* [supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*], no. 6 (27 May 1998), pp. 9, 14.

Fourth, there is the plane of the *Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)*. Whatever the questions as to the future viability of the CIS, the Central Asian states have so far retained and will probably continue to retain close ties with their CIS partners both on a bilateral and on a multilateral level.

The states of Central Asia hold different positions with respect to both the CIS and multilateral understandings. Turkmenistan is neutral and recognized as such by the United Nations. Uzbekistan, a major regional country, has a rather critical view of the CIS and of any initiatives intended to develop it in the direction of greater integration, and particularly of any ideas about the creation of supranational bodies. It even takes a negative view of such a body as the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, along with Belarus and Russia (and since February 1999 Tajikistan), are members of the CIS Customs Union,<sup>4</sup> which is marked by a somewhat higher level of integration and functions independently of the CIS. Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, a proponent of closer rapprochement between the newly independent states, is promoting his concept of a Eurasian Union. Tajikistan, riven by a bitter internal conflict, is receiving military assistance from the CIS states.<sup>5</sup>

The 1992 Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security<sup>6</sup> is one of the most significant multilateral arrangements in the CIS, but, like many other documents, it is inoperative.

Fifth, there is the *Turkic* plane. All the Central Asian states except Tajikistan identify themselves through the supra-ethnic category of Turkism. Some apologists of the Turkic identity are even inclined to include Tajikistan in the Turkic area of habitation as a country of which one part was historically part of Turkestan and of whose population a quarter are Turks (Uzbeks). The role of Turkism is enhanced by the importance of Turkey as one of the major partners of the Central Asian states; for Turkey, Turkism is a pivot of cooperation with them. Furthermore, Turkey is held up by the West as a development model for the Islamic newly independent states.

Sixth, there is the *Iranian* dimension. The only Persian-language country in Central Asia, Tajikistan, forms a cultural and civilizational continuum with Afghanistan and Iran, which suggests that it will gravitate naturally towards them, although this tendency is weakened by the contradictions between the Shi'ite Muslims dominant in Iran and the Sunnis prevalent in Tajikistan; by the hostile relations between the Pushtus and the Tajiks in Afghanistan; and by the differences between the Islamic-oriented regimes of Tajikistan's southern neighbours (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan). The greater part of Tajikistan's ruling elite has so far kept a secular orientation, although pressure from the

<sup>4</sup> Treaty on Deepening Integration in Economic and Humanitarian Sphere, 29 Mar. 1996. For the text of the treaty, see *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, no. 4 (1996), pp. 56–60.

<sup>5</sup> Formally until late 1998 troops were to be provided by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Uzbekistan. However, Russia plays the most prominent part: its 201st Motor Rifle Division, officially designed for peacekeeping functions but in fact to a greater extent engaged in guarding vital economic installations, is stationed on Tajikistan's territory, while its border with Afghanistan is guarded by Russian border guards (the majority of whom are local inhabitants). See also chapter 7 in this volume.

<sup>6</sup> For the text, see *Izvestiya*, 16 May 1992, p. 3.

Islamists, who by a whim of fate have found themselves in the same camp with the liberal democratic opposition to the regime, is becoming stronger. Gorno-Badakhshan, divided between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, is inhabited by the followers of a particular teaching of Islam, Ismailism, and the cross-border links between them, despite the gap in development levels, may increase as contradictions grow with the Sunnis surrounding them.

In spite of the frequently sharp political contradictions between the ruling regimes and suspicions of Iranian hegemonism, in the longer term the pull of solidarity inside the Persian-language area may intensify, since pressure from the Turkic world is tending to increase.

Seventh, there is the *Middle Eastern* plane. For the time being, talk of an expanded Middle East that may have absorbed or is gradually absorbing Central Asia is purely hypothetical; moreover, it is the idea of experts outside the region. The people of Central Asia do not feel that they belong to a Middle Eastern macro-region. However, the trend for links with the Middle East to grow is clearly evident. Not only has it become fashionable among the politicians of Middle Eastern states (particularly Arab states) to speak of Central Asia as part of the macro-region, but there is an evident inclination to treat the processes going on there as touching directly on the interests of the Near and Middle East. Saudi Arabia's interest in the Central Asian republics arises not only from a wish to support the Islamic renaissance there but also from the fact that many of its inhabitants originate from Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan, which as part of its fight against Islamic fundamentalism is sharply curbing Saudi influence and restricting contact.

In the present geopolitical reality, strategic analysts are turning again to the theory of the 'Heartland', introduced by Sir Halford Mackinder in 1904.<sup>7</sup> He envisioned Russian control over the Eurasian land mass as the 'pivot of world politics'. Authors are to be found, in Russia, for example, who still apply this concept to Russia. There are also attempts to couple the idea of the 'Heartland' with that of the 'Great Game' which Iran and Turkey are believed to be pursuing, using the Turkic and Islamic bonds to attract certain Eurasian states. The old concept is also being tried on a new actor, China. 'Noticeably missing from many calculations is China, a country that constantly challenges the Heartland's principles because of its dual topography. China's western frontier (notably Xinjiang province) can technically be included within Mackinder's framework, but China's population and commercial resources are concentrated along the coast, giving the Chinese infrastructure a sea-oriented designation.'<sup>8</sup> However, some observers believe that in the not too distant future China will begin a dash into Eurasia because a gigantic population surplus will force it to expand.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Mackinder, H., 'The geographical pivot of history', *Geographical Journal*, vol. 20, no. 4 (Apr. 1904), p. 421.

<sup>8</sup> Robbins, G., 'The post-Soviet heartland: reconsidering Mackinder', *Eurasian Studies* (Ankara), vol. 1, no. 3 (fall 1994), p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Strausz-Hupe, R., 'NATO: to make the world safe for democracy', *Global Affairs*, vol. 7, no. 4 (fall 1992).

China may increase its consumption of oil and gas significantly in the first decade of the 21st century, relying on Eurasian supplies, mainly from Russia and the Central Asian states. China has signed an agreement with Kazakhstan on constructing a 3000 km-long oil pipeline to Xingiang Province, and Turkmenistan is considering the construction of a gas pipeline to Kazakhstan and further on to Xingiang Province.<sup>10</sup> Hundreds of thousands of Chinese illegal immigrants are already creating problems for Russia and Kazakhstan.

### III. Threats to security

#### Security for the exploitation of energy resources

Energy (oil and gas) resources and related questions of communications seem to be playing a decisive role in the Central Asian–Transcaucasian game. The idea of transforming the region into an international transport corridor, which is willingly supported abroad, has seized the imaginations of Central Asia's inhabitants so firmly that it is seen almost as a substitute for development. As expected in the region, the disadvantages of being landlocked will be overcome as soon as the new oil and gas pipelines, roads and other communications are built. Turkey is trying to instil in the minds of the Central Asian states the idea that only the new Caspian–Ceyhan line will make it possible to bring Azeri oil and gas from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to the West.<sup>11</sup> This Transcaucasian corridor is endorsed by Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and especially the USA. The dream of a trans-Asian corridor has also become a guiding motif for Pakistan, which has long been eager to penetrate into Central Asia and is planning to use the new transit network to bolster its influence in Afghanistan with a view to enhancing its regional role eventually. Pakistani support has been largely instrumental in the Taleban military victories in Afghanistan which have contributed to the changing regional geopolitical balance.

Turkish analysts note that 'the deposits of the Caucasus and Central Asia may be regarded as an independent source of oil production only to the extent that it can be brought to the world markets independently of the Middle Eastern and Russian oil pipeline networks'.<sup>12</sup> The question of the transport of gas from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to Europe is being posed in a similar fashion. For Kazakhstan two possible routes exist, one through Iran and one over the Caspian seabed and then through Azerbaijan. Turkey is the consumer for Turkmenistan's gas, which makes the Turkish option attractive. In Turkey it is assumed that the West's desire to establish a system of gas transit from the newly independent states independently of the Russian and Middle Eastern

<sup>10</sup> Dorian, J. P., Wigdortz, B. and Gladney, D., 'Central Asia and Xingiang, China: emerging energy, economic and ethnic relations', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 16, no. 4 (Dec. 1997), pp. 461–86.

<sup>11</sup> On the alternative routes, see Chufrin, G., 'The Caspian Sea region: the security dimensions', *SIPRI Yearbook 1999: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1999), pp. 217–23.

<sup>12</sup> Turan, I., 'Mediterranean security in the light of Turkish concerns', *Perceptions* (Ankara), vol. 3, no. 2 (June–Aug. 1998), p. 25.

networks will be to its advantage even if the US sanctions against Iran are lifted. However, far from all experts are convinced of the superiority of the Turkish option for transporting energy resources. The costs of laying the pipeline to Ceyhan will in all probability be extremely high and it would pass through conflict zones, especially Kurdish regions, with attendant risks for regularity of supply. Nonetheless, the USA's political backing for the Turkish route may be decisive.

Ensuring security for the production and transport of energy resources is an important task for the Caspian Sea states. How it is achieved will have a direct influence on the emerging geopolitical balance. In the view of a Turkish analyst, Ilter Turan, oil and gas shipments generate 'hard and soft security concerns' for the Central Asian and Transcaucasian oil producers, the consumers and those involved in delivery to international markets. Among the 'soft' threats he reckons the possibility of environmental disasters such as oil spills and major fires, since large oil tankers are accident-prone, pipelines are vulnerable to terrorist raids, there may be domestic and international instability in the territories through which the pipelines pass, and so on. As for the major 'hard' security concerns, 'sea lanes must be kept open and loading facilities must be protected against potential military aggression'.<sup>13</sup>

The protection of transit routes for energy supplies is seen by Turan as an integral part of the Mediterranean, not the Central Asian or Middle Eastern, security systems, since the Mediterranean countries are not only transporting agents but also consumers of Central Asian and Transcaucasian oil and gas. That part of the region where the energy resources are extracted is thus included in the zone of responsibility of the consumers. The participation of Western companies in developing the energy resources of the region and building transport routes also, naturally, creates the preconditions for Western countries to consider the security of the region and of oil supplies as having a direct bearing on their interests. The possibility of a Western military presence in the Caspian region to protect these interests in case need arises is a cause for concern for Russia as well as Iran.

### **External threats**

The Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests and Iran's test of an intermediate-range ballistic missile in 1998 changed the situation in the Central Asian region, which now finds itself almost surrounded by powers which possess nuclear weapons and missiles. The Central Asian states have nothing to counter this potential threat which, although not directed against them, may still some day confront them with the task of containment, all the more so as further relations with the countries concerned are unpredictable. Kazakhstan, for instance, taking account of both the tragic experience of the distant past and present realities, at

<sup>13</sup> Turan (note 12), p. 37.

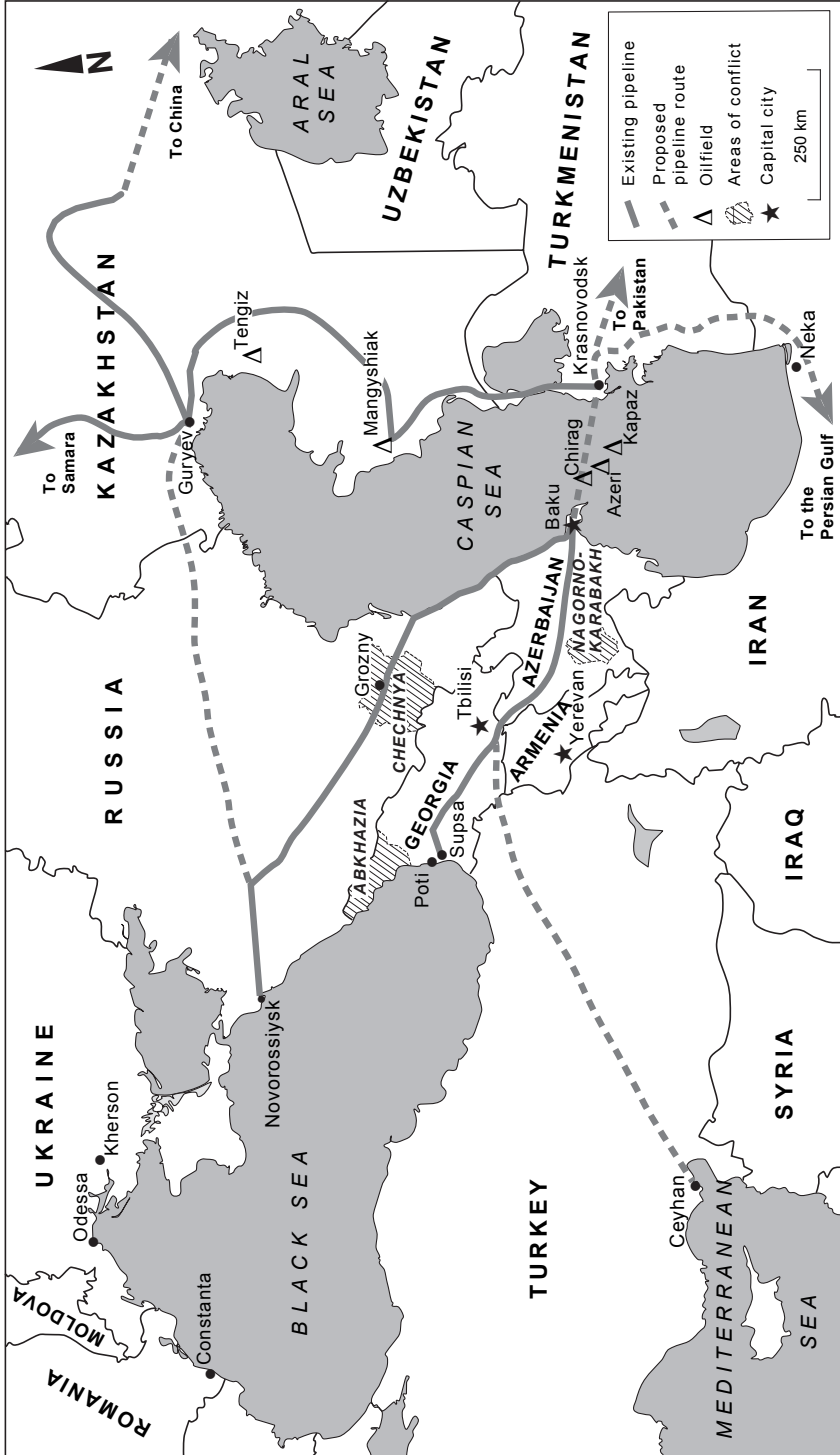


Figure 5.1. Existing and possible future oil routes from Central Asia



times feels a deep-seated mistrust of China's intentions. If they are to be able to counter threats, the Central Asian states can probably not do without the assistance of third parties. One question remains open: to what extent the Tashkent Treaty in the longer term can become an instrument of their defence and in what measure the emerging military-strategic cooperation with the West can be an alternative to cooperation with Russia and other CIS states. In the near term the Central Asian states will probably avoid taking steps that might be construed by Russia as hostile to its interests. In the view of Rajan Menon, 'the continuing heavy economic and military dependence of these countries on Russia and the instabilities that have shaken some of them, together with Russian proximity and preponderant power, account for Russia's influence'.<sup>14</sup>

The newly independent Central Asian states can hardly fear serious threats to their security from the outside. At present there are no territorial disputes between them and their neighbours, they are making no claims or demands of any kind on each other and there is no serious cause for conflict. The possibility of direct military aggression against them is therefore remote. However, since 1997 they have been facing a grave challenge in the shape of the Taleban movement, whose approach to their borders after a series of impressive victories in Afghanistan has made the Central Asian strategists ponder if an expansion of the Taleban further north, over those borders, is to be expected.

Initially, the Taleban's lightning advance to the north of Afghanistan in August 1998 excited a feeling that in the face of a possible expansion of militant Islam the Central Asian states would be forced to pool efforts with the other CIS states. It seems that the understanding reached shortly before, on 6 May 1998, by the presidents of Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on joint action to counter Islamic extremism<sup>15</sup> provided reason enough. Leonid Ivashov, Head of the Chief Directorate for International Military Cooperation of the Russian Defence Ministry, went on record as saying that 'closer cooperation is being organized between the states involved in order to infuse the Collective Security Treaty with real content'.<sup>16</sup> However, even integration-oriented Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan did not warm to this cooperation, while neutral Turkmenistan not only avoided expressing an attitude towards the events, but also demonstrated its neutrally benevolent, if not amicable, attitude towards the Taleban.

Uzbekistan, which, it had seemed, would be more concerned with the state of affairs evolving near its southern borders than any other state, had no wish at all to step up military cooperation with Russia and other CIS partners. Its defence minister took no part in the meeting of the CIS ministers of defence in Moscow in early September 1998. Uzbekistan was displaying calm. It looked as if even

<sup>14</sup> Menon (note 1), p. 148.

<sup>15</sup> 'Reformirovat SNG nachali s yuga: Rossiya, Uzbekistan i Tadzhikistan obedinyautsya v politicheskuyu "troiku"' [The reform of the CIS started from the south: Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan unite in a political 'troika'], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 7 May 1998, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Nikitin, A., 'Den telefonnoy diplomatii' [A day of telephone diplomacy], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 15 Aug. 1998, p. 1.

the threat of the Taleban, who had captured the stronghold of Uzbekistan's ally, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, was not upsetting the cool, cautious attitude of President Karimov to the development of integration within the CIS framework. It was no accident that a message from Russian President Boris Yeltsin, passed on during a visit to Uzbekistan by then Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, said, in part: '[we] are concerned about the position of the Uzbeki side on the issues of integration within the CIS framework and its approach to the function of the bodies and institutions of the Commonwealth. We regard any attempt of our partners to accuse us of imperial ambitions or of intervening in the internal affairs of our friends with sincere pain'.<sup>17</sup> In February 1999 Uzbekistan decided to discontinue its participation in the Tashkent Treaty.

### **Internal conflicts**

The leaders of the Central Asian states perceive a greater threat to their security in internal conflict situations than in external ones. The example of Tajikistan, as they have all admitted, has taught them a great deal. Attempts are being made in the region to pool efforts to create its own collective security system. Initiatives have been put forward by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. President Karimov's initiative for setting up a nuclear weapon-free zone in the region is worthy of note.<sup>18</sup> It is interpreted by a number of political figures in the region as an attempt by Uzbekistan to uphold its status of a regional power under whose auspices alone work in that direction can proceed. Karimov's second book was entitled 'Uzbekistan at the threshold of the 21st century: threats to security and the conditions and guarantees of progress'.<sup>19</sup>

### **Non-traditional threats to security**

#### *Drug traffic*

Besides traditional threats to the security of the Central Asian states, there are many new menaces, challenges and risks, prominent among which is the traffic in drugs. The Central Asian and Transcaucasian states are increasingly involved in the illicit production and transport of drugs. Government bodies are incapable of keeping the situation under control, especially where a country is plagued by conflicts or suffers from internal instability, as in Tajikistan. The situation is made still worse by the fact that drug dealing is often used to achieve particular political aims: the money received is used to finance illegal political and military activities, first of all to purchase arms, fund armed groups or support extremist groups working for the destabilization of society. According to Russian experts, 'drug dealing in the CIS countries has very close links

<sup>17</sup> 'Poslaniye prezidentu' [Letter to the president], *Pravda Vostoka* (Tashkent), 31 Dec. 1997, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> The initiative was put forward in Sep. 1995.

<sup>19</sup> Karimov, I., *Uzbekistan na Poroge XXI Veka: Ugrozy Bezopasnosti, Usloviya i Garantii Progressa* (Uzbekistan Publishing House: Tashkent, 1997).

**Table 5.1.** Quantities of drugs seized by the Tajik Ministry of the Interior, 1991–95  
 Figures are in kg.

| 1991 | 1992 | 1993  | 1994  | 1995   |
|------|------|-------|-------|--------|
| 10.9 | 21.4 | 113.2 | 321.5 | 1750.0 |

Source: *Segodnya*, 14 Aug. 1996.

with the criminal world and organized criminal groups on the one hand, and with separatist and extremist movements and their leaders on the other'.<sup>20</sup>

Tajikistan is the best example of the tight connections between drug dealing and political struggle. It is one of the Central Asian centres for the production of drugs and for their transport from Afghanistan. Opium poppy and Indian hemp grow in areas which are basically out of government control. As might be expected, the civil and clan conflict in Tajikistan and the resulting emigration of many thousand Tajiks to Afghanistan have stimulated a radical growth in drugs circulation in and via Tajikistan.<sup>21</sup> According to the Ministry of the Interior, about 200 tons of various narcotic substances were being transported annually in the mid-1990s through the territory of Tajikistan to Europe, equivalent to about 40 per cent of the illegal turnover in Russia. The law enforcement institutions are able to stop only a small part of the traffic (see table 5.1).<sup>22</sup>

From Tajikistan, drugs flow to Kyrgyzstan, where the authorities are unable to maintain control of the borders and transport routes and where there are also plantations of Indian hemp and opium poppy. (In the Soviet period some farms in Kyrgyzstan grew opium poppy for medical purposes; for many years about 16 per cent of the world's morphine was produced from poppies grown there.) There is also wild ephedra, from which ephedrine is produced in clandestine laboratories. From Kyrgyzstan, narcotic substances are sent as semi-processed or end-products to other countries of Central Asia as well as to Russia and thence to Europe.

Turkmenistan is another important link in the drug traffic from Asia to Europe. It also has a long-standing tradition of drug consumption. The drugs used there are either indigenous or imported from Afghanistan and Iran. A worrying development is the dramatic increase in the area of opium poppy plantations on irrigated land in the Karakum area. Until recently, Turkmenistan was only a purveyor of semi-processed narcotics, but local processing is now on the increase.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Chufrin, G. (ed.), *Narkobiznes: Novaya Ugroza Rossii s Vostoka* [Drug dealing: a new threat to Russia from the East] (Institute of Oriental Studies: Moscow, 1996), p. 59; translated as 'The drug trade: a new security threat to Russia from the East', Paper presented at the Third Meeting of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) Working Group on Transnational Crime, Manila, 23–24 May 1998.

<sup>21</sup> 'O narkobiznese v Tadjikistane' [On drug dealing in Tajikistan], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 5 Apr. 1996, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Information provided to the author by officials of the Ministry of the Interior of Tajikistan.

<sup>23</sup> Information provided to the author by former Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan Avdy Kuliev.

Like all the the other countries of Central Asia, Kazakhstan has large-scale drug production, processing and transport. Mostly in the south of the country the opium poppy grows wild over extensive areas; Indian hemp and ephedra are also to be found. The pharmaceutical factory in the city of Shimkent is the largest facility in a CIS country producing narcotic substances. According to one source, illegal production of drugs goes on there.<sup>24</sup> The territory of Kazakhstan, like that of the Russian far east, is used for drug traffic from China. According to the Russian Ministry of the Interior, 93 per cent of marijuana arriving on the Russian drugs market comes from Kazakhstan, as does 85 per cent of the hashish and 73 per cent of the opium (either grown in Kazakhstan or delivered across its territory). The Kazakh–Russian border, 7000 km long, remains almost totally transparent, so that the drug traffickers operating there basically have no serious difficulty.<sup>25</sup>

### *Environmental degradation*

Environmental risks in the region are another threat. There are fears that future offshore oil production in the Caspian Sea may damage its biological resources, the stock of sturgeon in particular. There has already been a sharp fall in the number of sturgeon fit for commercial use. Thus, while 530 000 tons of fish were caught in 1970, over the five years 1992–96 the total ranged from 190 000 tons to 250 000 tons per year. The weight of the sturgeon caught fell over the same period from 23 000 tons to 6000–11 000 tons per year in 1992–96.<sup>26</sup> ‘The wholesale value of one ton of black caviar depends on the type of sturgeon, in the world market from US\$ 180 000 to US\$ 600 000, and the oil \$80 to 110.’<sup>27</sup>

The unique Caspian ecosystem is being destroyed by the discharge of sewage and pollutants: in 1996, their discharge into the Caspian Sea, mainly from the Volga Basin, amounted to 1993 million m<sup>3</sup>.<sup>28</sup>

The rise in the level of the Caspian Sea is of most serious concern for all the littoral states and calls for urgent joint effort on their part. Even now more than 650 000 hectares of land on the territory of Kazakhstan adjoining the Caspian have been flooded. ‘The projected rise of the sea to the 25-m mark (the Caspian is situated below sea level) will flood three million hectares of pasture, towns and cities, and industrial complexes.’<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Information provided to the author by an official of the Ministry of the Interior; and information from the Committee for State Security of Kazakhstan at a press conference in Almaty, 3 Nov. 1997.

<sup>25</sup> Chufrin, G. (ed.), *Narkobiznes na Yuge Rossii* [Drug dealing in the South of Russia] (Institute of Oriental Studies: Moscow, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Blandy, C., *The Caspian: A Catastrophe in the Making. The Destruction of a Unique Ecosystem*, S32 (Conflict Studies Research Centre, Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst: Camberley, Sep. 1997), pp. 10, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Blandy (note 26), p. 10, citing Zilanov, V., ‘Kaspiyskoye more: ryba ili nef’ [The Caspian Sea: fish or oil], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 12 Aug. 1997, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Rosgidromet [Russian State Hydrological and Meteorological Service], ‘On the state of the environment in the Russian Federation in 1996’ (Moscow, 1997) p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> UN Development Programme, ‘The shrinking state: governance and human development in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. A UNDP regional report’, UNDP, New York, July 1997, p. 121.

In the view of German experts, the region could not cope with a new ecological disaster, given the inevitable dangers of a continued rise in the water level (by a possible 14 cm between 1998 and 2010 or 2020) and the deterioration of rusting drill structures. '[The region] still has no answer either to the drying up and poisoning of the Aral Sea due to the cotton monoculture of its two most important tributaries, the Amu-Darya and the Syr-Darya, nor for the area around Semipalatinsk, a former nuclear testing ground of the Soviet Union, which should be brought under control.'<sup>30</sup>

The Aral Sea is the worst environmental problem for Kazakhstan—the drying up of the sea, the salination of the soil and the emergence of a dead zone, which in addition has been poisoned by pesticides in the past. Life expectancy in the regions adjoining the Aral Sea, where about 10 per cent of the population of Kazakhstan lives, is at present no more than 60 years. Although the disaster in the Aral zone is one of the most serious ecological catastrophes in the world and has drawn international attention, the measures taken have so far brought no improvement.

Radioactive waste disposal is also fraught with risk. The disposal sites in Kyrgyzstan near the border with Uzbekistan are a menace to the health of the population of Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbek experts have repeatedly expressed fears that during the spring flooding the overflowing waters can carry these wastes to Uzbekistan. Dangerous levels of radiation have also developed in Kazakhstan in the area near Semipalatinsk.

At present, because of falling industrial output in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus and the closure of factories, emissions of poisonous substances into the atmosphere have decreased; however, this is a temporary phenomenon and in no way the result of successful action by environmental ministries.

It is characteristic of ecological risks that measures to curb them are expensive and tend to go against the strategy of economic development: they may mean the abandonment of harmful industries or habitual ways of farming based on the use of plenty of pesticides, or the production of new kinds of energy raw material—one of the most serious global problems. Taking into account the obvious inability of the post-Soviet states to check environmental degradation, it can be concluded that in the foreseeable future environmental non-traditional risks will inevitably be increasingly important.

### *Population change*

Changes in the ethnic structure of the population are among the non-traditional risks that are having their impact on the new geopolitical balance. The Central Asian states are witnessing a substantial change in this structure as a result of the emigration of Russians and some other ethnic groups (Germans and Jews). By the end of 1996, 2.4 million people had emigrated to Russia from the CIS

<sup>30</sup> Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), 'Zukunftsregion: Kaspisches Meer. Positionspapier der SPD-Bundestagsfraktion' [Region of the future: the Caspian Sea. Position paper of the SPD members of the Bundestag], SPD, Bonn, June 1998, pp. 26–27.

**Table 5.2.** Immigration to the Russian Federation from Central Asia, 1996

| Country      | Total number | Russians | Share of Russians in total (%) |
|--------------|--------------|----------|--------------------------------|
| Kazakhstan   | 172 860      | 123 627  | 71.5                           |
| Kyrgyzstan   | 18 886       | 13 301   | 70.4                           |
| Tajikistan   | 32 508       | 16 413   | 50.4                           |
| Turkmenistan | 22 840       | 14 689   | 64.3                           |
| Uzbekistan   | 49 970       | 30 653   | 61.3                           |

*Source:* Russian State Committee on Statistics, *Chislennost i Migratsiya Naseleniya Rossiyskoy Federatsii v 1996 g.* [Numbers and migration of the population of the Russian Federation, 1996] (Goskomstat: Moscow, 1997), pp. 33, 42.

member states, of whom almost 70 per cent had come from Central Asia.<sup>31</sup> The major motives for the mass departure from the Central Asian states were loss of status, the domination of the titular ethnic groups, ethnic discomfort and ethnic conflicts.

The appearance of nationalistic and Islamic parties on the political arena in Tajikistan on the eve of the civil war and, more especially, the war itself sharply strained inter-ethnic relations. According to the Russian Federal Migration Service, of the 388 000 Russians living in Tajikistan in 1989, 300 000 had left the country by the end of April 1993.<sup>32</sup> This has to a certain extent complicated the situation in the public services, education and industry, although the sharp decline in production has been the inevitable outcome of the war and persisting instability. The outflow of the population not belonging to the titular nation, as well as a considerable proportion of the Tajik intelligentsia nurtured on Russian culture, has deprived the country of an important stabilizing factor which was especially significant in the fragmented Tajik society with its regional, rather than national, self-identification and has led to a deterioration of relations with the local Uzbeks, who make up about 25 per cent of the population.

In Turkmenistan, ethnic Russian inhabitants were few; nevertheless, being employed in the oil and gas industry, they had provided 95 per cent of the national budget revenue.<sup>33</sup> Their attempts to leave Turkmenistan are mostly to be attributed to difficult socio-economic conditions. The rationing system, shortage of foodstuffs, low wages and lack of contacts in the countryside, where additional food can be had, put the Russians in a difficult position, unequal with the Turkmen. In every way possible the rigid authoritarian regime prevents the departure of Russian specialists, who still dominate the high-

<sup>31</sup> Fedorov, Yu., *Doklad o Razvitií Chelovecheskogo Potentsiala v Rossiyskoy Federatsii: God 1997* [Report on the development of the human potential of the Russian Federation, 1997] (Interreklama Design: Moscow, 1997), p. 35.

<sup>32</sup> Tishkov, V. A. (ed.), *Migratsii i Novye Diaspori v Postsovetikh Gosudarstvakh* [Migration and new diasporas in the post-Soviet states] (Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology: Moscow, 1996), p. 194.

<sup>33</sup> Tishkov (note 32), p. 184.

technology branches. A ban on the sale of dwellings and restrictions on the export of property have been imposed.

In Uzbekistan, despite the stability maintained by Karimov, the emigration of the Russian population has been high. Between August 1992 and April 1995, 102 666 persons left the country for Russia, constituting 13.1 per cent of the forced resettlers and refugees in Russia during that period.<sup>34</sup> In Uzbek society, the most Islamized and traditional in Central Asia and ethnically comparatively homogeneous, Russians felt more acutely than in other former Soviet republics that they were aliens after independence. One of the leading factors in their departure from the country was their ignorance of the Uzbek language. The government, while promoting ethnic Uzbeks to key posts in the administration, is at the same time trying to retain Russian specialists. It may be expected that an active growth in the numbers of local skilled personnel and the policy of training specialists abroad will become an additional factor leading Russian-speakers to emigrate.

The main reasons for the exodus of Russians from Kyrgyzstan differed little from those common to Central Asia—the introduction of the Kyrgyz language as the only official language, pressure on the labour market from the growing native population, the active flow of rural people into the towns and the rapid and dangerous marginalization of the Russians. Anti-Russian actions by Kyrgyz young people in 1991, which did not meet a proper rebuff from the government, were an important factor. The bloody conflict in Osh between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in 1990 showed the administration's inability to prevent destabilization of the situation and ensure the security of its citizens. From 1989 to 1993, over 460 000 people—Kazakhs, Russians, Tajiks, Tatars and Uzbeks—left the country. In 1993 alone, between 100 000 and 120 000 Russian-speakers emigrated from Kyrgyzstan.<sup>35</sup>

Kazakhstan holds a special place in the system of Russian geopolitical interests in the CIS. It has the longest border with Russia (7000 km) and the largest Russian population. In 1989, Kazakhs made up 39.7 per cent of the population of Kazakhstan. The Russian population in Kazakhstan, in contrast to the other Central Asian states, is concentrated in the northern and north-eastern regions, where it has until recently constituted an overwhelming majority. Russians in Kazakhstan have been under growing and acute pressure since the collapse of the USSR, expressed in the constitution and legislative base of the Republic of Kazakhstan and in the practical policies of its leaders, who were forced to take into account the nationalistic approaches of inhabitants of the southern areas. Hence the recognition of the Kazakh language as the only official language (at the time of the break-up of the USSR only 1 per cent of the Russian-speaking population knew it), the proclamation in the constitution of Kazakhstan of the

<sup>34</sup> Tishkov (note 32), p. 37.

<sup>35</sup> Subbotina, I. A., *Russkaya Diaspora: Chislennost, Rasseleniye, Migratsiya. Russkiye v Novom Zarubezhe: Kirgiziya* [The Russian diaspora: numbers, distribution and migration. Russians in the new abroad: Kyrgyzstan] (Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology: Moscow, 1995), pp. 64–65.

**Table 5.3.** Immigration of Kazakhs to Kazakhstan, 1991–94

| From:         | Number of persons |
|---------------|-------------------|
| CIS countries | 56 900            |
| Iran          | 3 700             |
| Mongolia      | 21 000            |
| Turkey        | 1 900             |
| Others        | 38 500            |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>122 000</b>    |

Source: *Analiz Sotsialno-Ekonomicheskoy i Politicheskoy Obstanovki v Respublike Kazakhstan v 1994 godu. Informatsionno-analiticheskii Byulleten* [Analysis of socio-political conditions in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1994], no. 7 (Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation: Moscow, 1995), p. 55.

state of the ‘self-determining Kazakh nation’, and so on. For Kazakhstan, the goal of changing its ethnic composition in favour of the titular nation has come to be of paramount importance. The leadership associates it with the entire future of the country as a unitary state and fears the rise of separatism in the areas populated by Russians. The ‘Kazakhization’ of the Russian areas is proceeding apace, including the appointment of Kazakhs to administrative and executive posts and the renaming of towns. ‘Recent years have seen an active process of repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs from Mongolia and China, who are being settled precisely in the northern regions and provided with housing vacated by Russians or Germans emigrating in large numbers (200 000 annually) to the Federal Republic of Germany or Russia.’<sup>36</sup>

The destabilization of the situation in Kazakhstan would be a very grave challenge for both Kazakhstan and Russia. ‘The internal de-stabilization of Kazakhstan is likely to entail inter-ethnic conflicts between ethnic Kazakhs and Russians and would pose a severe political, security and economic challenge to the Russian government. It would have few choices other than to intervene, as both a measure to protect expatriate Russians and to extinguish a potentially major regional conflict at its doorstep, in lands still considered by many Russians to be traditionally Russian.’<sup>37</sup>

### *Economic security*

The financial crisis in Asia has barely affected the states of Central Asia, whose monetary and financial markets are not as closely tied to the world market as Russia’s, although falls in the exchange rates of the East Asian currencies

<sup>36</sup> Yazkova, A. A., *Rossiyskaya Diaspora v Stranakh Novogo Zarubezhya: Kazakhstan, Latviya, Gruzija. Problemy i Vozmozhnye Puti ikh Resheniya* [The Russian diaspora in the new abroad: Kazakhstan, Latvia, Georgia. The problems and possible solutions] (Institut mezhdunarodnykh ekonomicheskikh i politicheskikh issledovaniy RAN: Moscow, 1996), pp. 11–12.

<sup>37</sup> Rumer, E. B., ‘Russia and Central Asia after the Soviet collapse’, ed. J. C. Snyder, *After Empire: The Emerging Geopolitics of Central Asia* (National Defense University Press: Washington, DC, 1995), p. 59.



affected them to the extent that capital from Indonesia, Japan, South Korea and other countries shaken by the crisis was invested in Central Asia and trade with them was carried on. The financial crisis in Russia at the end of the summer of 1998 hit them more painfully, since the Russian rouble was still circulating in Central Asia and was often used not only for payments but also for accumulation. The Russian financial and ensuing government crisis produced a sharp reaction in the Central Asian capitals and was used by certain leaders as an added argument in favour of a path of development distinct from that of Russia.

There is hardly any doubt that the Uzbek President, for instance, understands the need for and the inevitability of reform of the Uzbek economy, but for him both 'shock therapy' and the introduction of political liberties on the Russian model seem equally destructive for Uzbek society, which preserves its age-old traditions. One of the key theses of Karimov's philosophy is keeping the leading role of the state in a development model that is still called transitional to the market economy. 'At a period of transition to market relationships', Karimov writes, 'the main reformer should be the state, whose duty is to work out and consistently implement the transformation of all spheres of the economy and social life'. Further on he adds: 'The modern socially-oriented market is a market regulated by the state'.<sup>38</sup> The leaders of other Central Asian states such as Tajikistan and Turkmenistan share his view. Without entering into details of this Uzbek concept of development, it is worth noting that it is the Chinese, not the Russian, experience that serves as the inspiring example.

#### IV. Conclusions

The emerging geopolitical balance in Central Asia will apparently depend for the foreseeable future on the precarious nature of the internal and external factors influencing the slow evolution of the region. Relative stability backed up by authoritarian means involving substantial restrictions of rights and freedoms, including the rights of non-titular ethnic groups, will not endure. However, the stability of a number of Central Asian economies, if it continues, will help to consolidate the ruling regimes by helping them to avoid disturbances, which the poorest and most fragmented states of the region, Tajikistan in particular, seem to be doomed to suffer. The rivalries of the global and regional powers, above all China, Iran, Russia, Turkey and the USA, in this region may grow more acute if the countries of the region really do turn into major suppliers of energy resources to the world market, but in the short run there can be no sharp change in the balance between them. Despite the obvious wish of the Central Asian states to preserve their identity and the path of their choice, increasing globalization will most probably force some dramatic developments on them.

<sup>38</sup> Karimov, I., *Stabilnost i Reformy: Statyi i Vystupleniya* [Stability and reforms: articles and speeches] (Paleya: Moscow, 1996), p. 115.