

# CENTRAL ASIAN STATES AND CHINA: COOPERATION TODAY AND PROSPECTS FOR TOMORROW

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Relations with the PRC are a high foreign policy priority for the states of Central Asia. The contiguity of territory and the vast economic potential of their eastern neighbor plus its weight on the international arena, including in Asia, are a key factor in the interest that the region's sovereign republics have in a durable and friendly relationship with China, based on principles of equality, mutual consideration for the sides' interests, and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. The newly independent states of Central Asia see good neighborliness and all-round cooperation with the PRC as a key to accomplishing, above all, such tasks as ensuring their territorial integrity and security and providing a favorable external environment for economic advancement and internal political stability.

For its part, Central Asia is part of China's vital interests. Strengthening contacts with its republics is one of the PRC's foreign policy priorities. Today, amid the U.S. presence in close proximity to the PRC's western borders, the importance of the Central Asian sector in Beijing's foreign policy priorities has increased considerably.

Another significant factor in Beijing's course in Central Asia is its contiguity to the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region, China's restive province. Either side of the border between the PRC and three Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—which runs for 3,300 kilometers is populated by representatives of the same ethnic groups practicing Islam: Uighurs, Kazakhs, Dungans, Tajiks, and Uzbeks. Beijing feared a “demonstration,” knock-on effect that the sovereignization of the Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan could have on Xinjiang's indigenous population. Those concerns were caused by the fact that leaders of the Movement for the Independence of Eastern Turkestan (this is what the Uighurs call the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region) had banked on support from the newly independent states in the neighboring region, which, however, did not materialize. Amid an invigoration of radical Islamic forces in an area spanning North Africa to Xinjiang, China regards the Central Asian states as allies in the fight against religious extremism, especially given that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that on

15 June, 2001 adopted a convention on combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

In addition, China has weighty economic interests in Central Asia. When the relations with the sovereign republics in the region were still in the formative stages, Chinese diplomacy saw a consolidation of the PRC's positions on their markets as one of its top priorities, while PRC trade missions in these newly independent states were opened even before the embassies were.<sup>1</sup> A drop in the industrial output of the Central Asian states, a considerable decline in supplies from Russia, and the population's low effective demand created a favorable environment for an influx of cheap Chinese consumer goods to the republics' markets. As its economic advancement accelerates, the PRC gives higher priority to the region's raw materials, especially energy resources.

The PRC was among the world's first states to recognize the sovereignty of the Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan in the wake of the breakup of the Soviet Union. Thus, already on 3 January, 1992, the Chinese government announced the establishment of diplomatic relations with Kazakhstan and then, literally on the following day, and thus until 7 January, with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kirghizia, and Turkmenistan, respectively.

Resolution of the border problem was a key to strengthening their contacts. In its time, the PRC had serious territorial claims to the Soviet Union, directly affecting its three Central Asian republics bordering the PRC. That issue was mainly settled in the course of negotiations between a joint delegation of Russia and what are now three independent states in the region bordering China (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan), on the one hand, and a PRC delegation, on the other (the early and mid-1990s).

<sup>1</sup> See: V.S. Miasnikov, "Aziatskiye gosudarstva SNG v politike Kitaia i Yaponii", in: *Rossia i strany blizhnego zarubezhya. Vneshnepoliticheskiye orientiry*, Moscow, 1997, p. 160.

Among other Central Asian states Kazakhstan has the most advanced and diversified relations with the PRC. Contacts between top level statesmen have become regular practice in relations between the two countries. The Declaration on the Basic Principles of Friendly Relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the People's Republic of China, adopted in the course of N. Nazarbaev's official visit to China (October 1993), records Almaty and Beijing's aspiration to strengthen cooperation in the interest of ensuring peace and security in Central Asia. The sides' adherence to the generally recognized principles of interstate relations, including non-interference in each other's internal affairs, has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the countries' leaders; it is enshrined in the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the People's Republic of China, which was signed in December 2002.<sup>2</sup> Kazakhstan's top state and government officials have often said that they regard the island of Taiwan as an inalienable part of the PRC territory, while China supports the efforts by Kazakh diplomacy to carry out N. Nazarbaev's plan to hold a Conference for Cooperation and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CCCBMA). This position was reiterated, in particular, by PRC Chairman Jiang Zemin in the course of a meeting of CCCBMA heads of state in Almaty (June 2002) and then repeatedly reaffirmed by Chinese statesmen.

The relations of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan with China also are based on mutual interest in good neighborliness and cooperation. Each of these states has a weighty package of agreements and other documents with the PRC, regulating the most important spheres of relations between the sides.

<sup>2</sup> The legal framework of Kazakh-Chinese relations comprises a total of 105 bilateral treaties, agreements, and other documents (see: *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 23 September, 2003).

## Economic Contacts: Cooperation and Contradictions

Kazakhstan is China's principal economic partner in the region: In particular, it supplies raw materials for the ferrous and non-ferrous metal industry and some other branches of China's economy<sup>3</sup> as well

<sup>3</sup> Thus, Kazakhstan, which has major bauxite reserves, ships a substantial part of ore to China. Thanks to their high quality and the relatively low freight costs, chromium ores extracted in Kazakhstan are in great demand with Chinese consumers. The

as oil and chemical products. Non-capital goods account for the bulk of Kazakhstan's import from the PRC.

The Chinese side shows a particular interest in Kazakhstan's oil and gas industry. Given the country's growing economic needs for energy resources, PRC state controlled oil companies are seeking control not only over Kazakhstan's hydrocarbon deposits that are being developed at present but also over reserve sources, hoping to use them in the future. Thus, in the summer of 1997, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) won international tenders organized by the Kazakhstan government, buying from the state controlling stakes in three oil fields in the Aktiubinsk Region and the Uzen field, on the Mangistau (Mangyshlak) peninsula. One important factor in the CNPC's successful bidding was that the company pledged to participate in building an oil pipeline from Kazakhstan to China (projected capacity, 20 million tonnes of oil a year).

As it became the principal shareholder in AktobeMunayGaz, the CNPC started shipping some raw materials in tanks by rail to oil refineries in the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region. At the same time, the company proved unable to implement the entire investment program, which was a precondition for the acquisition of a controlling stake in AO AktobeMunayGaz that owns the aforementioned deposits in the Aktiubinsk Region. The building of an oil pipeline from Western Kazakhstan to China has also been marking time. In the course of negotiations between the state owned company KazakhMunayGaz and the CNPC, in October 2003, the parties agreed that the Chinese side would begin building the second, and final, stage of the oil pipeline in mid-2004. Should this deadline be met, oil shipments could start in 2006.

In 2003, the CNPC bought from Chevron Texaco Overseas Company a company, Texaco Northern Buzachi, which accounted for 65 percent of proven reserves at the Severnyye Buzachi oil and gas deposit (the Mangistau Region).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Chinese companies took part in building the Zhanazhol gas processing plant, in the Aktiubinsk Region, which was put into operation in the fall of 2003. (In particular, the China Petroleum Engineering and Construction Corporation was the project's general contractor.<sup>5</sup>)

One distinguishing feature of Kazakhstan's trade and economic relations with the PRC (which also applies to other republics of Central Asia) is the intense activity by Chinese small and medium sized businesses that started penetrating the region in the 1980s-1990s. Thus, already in late 1992, there were more than 30 joint ventures with a share of Chinese capital in Kazakhstan, most of them operating in the non-production sector (commerce, trade, etc.). The number of such enterprises has since increased more than tenfold.

The smuggling of Chinese goods to Kazakhstan and the illegal export of raw materials from the republic (which is characteristic, in particular, also of Kyrgyzstan) has reached serious proportions.<sup>6</sup> Astana is now also concerned by the fact that some of the trade turnover with Beijing is based on barter and "shuttle" operations, while profits made by Chinese business as a result are used mainly to buy raw materials, especially scrap metal.

The Kazakhstan authorities, public circles and the population as a whole are seriously worried by illegal Chinese migration to the republic, which affects its economic interests and is a potential threat to internal political stability. Sovereign Kazakhstan is not in a position to ensure an effective protection of its fairly lengthy border with the eastern neighbor either from illegal migration or from rampant smuggling. The Kazakhstan leadership hoped that resolution of the border delimitation and demarcation problem would put an end to the "creeping" settlement of Chinese migrants on the republic's territory. Yet

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PRC is the third largest buyer of Kazakh copper. Kazakhstan exports up to 2.5 million tones of scrap ferrous metals to China a year through legal channels alone (see: *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 17 September, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> See: *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 22 October, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> See: *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 17 September, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Thus, according to Chinese customs, the volume of trade between the two countries in 1999 was worth more than \$1 billion. These data, which were presented by the PRC ambassador to Kazakhstan at a news conference in April 2000, are substantially higher than Kazakhstan official statistics.

neither a tightening of the border regime<sup>7</sup> nor the deportation of persons without residence permit by law enforcement agencies can stem the tide of illegal migrants. Industry, enterprise, and mutual support help them to obtain legal status (including through bogus marriage). No statistics are available on the issue, but experts believe that the number of Chinese migrants to Kazakhstan is now in terms of hundreds of thousands.

Astana is also concerned by Beijing's plan to build a canal that will divert water from the upper reaches of the Irtysh River to the city of Karamay (in the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region), where it is going to be used for pumping into oil wells. Kazakhstan specialists have repeatedly stated that implementation of this project could cause serious environmental problems in the basin of what is one of the republic's main water arteries. In connection with an increased intake of water by the Chinese side, Astana has a legitimate cause for concern about a shrinking outflow of the trans-border Ili River that originates in Xinjiang.

As far as Bishkek's trade relations with Beijing are concerned, they have basically the same characteristics as Kazakh-Chinese cooperation in this sphere. The PRC imports industrial semi-finished goods and raw materials from Kyrgyzstan, including rolled metal, non-ferrous metals, and mineral fertilizer. The Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region experiences a substantial shortage of hydro energy resources and is interested in the import of electricity from the republic. As of the mid-1990s, China has been among the top three countries in the number of joint ventures set up in Kyrgyzstan (mainly in the non-production sphere).

Giving a high priority to ensuring direct communication with China, back in the mid-1990s, the Kyrgyz authorities began modernization of a highway linking the country's capital with the city of Kashgar, the economic center of the southern Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region: Bishkek-Naryn-Torugart mountain pass (on the Kyrgyz-Chinese border)-Kashgar. Then the project was joined by Uzbekistan. In the fall of 2000, the Tashkent-Osh-Kashgar international highway went into operation (true, the intensity of traffic along it is still rather low).

According to Kyrgyz expert estimates, modernization of the Bishkek-Naryn-Torugart mountain pass-Kashgar and the Osh-Sary-Tash-Irkeshtam-Kashgar highways will enable the republic in future to become a key link in export and import shipments from Siberia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, the Caucasus, and Tajikistan to China, Pakistan (along the Karakorum highway), and India. China and Pakistan, for their part, are also deploying a lot of effort to intensify the use of the Karakorum highway. Back in March 1995, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, and Pakistan signed a mutual transit agreement. Nonetheless, it has not as yet been fully implemented, among other things because of an unsatisfactory condition of the Karakorum highway, which was closed in winter. In September 2003, representatives of the aforementioned four states agreed on measures to reanimate the agreement.

Despite the contiguity of the countries' territories, at the initial stage of Tajikistan's independence, China, separated from it by high mountain ridges, was in the periphery of the economic interests of this newly independent state which, owing to internecine wars, did not particularly interest Chinese businessmen either. Today, in a bid to considerably expand bilateral economic relations, Dushanbe and Beijing are deploying a lot of effort to put in place reliable communication lines between the two countries (along the territory of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region and the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region). To carry out this project, the Tajik side had to build several sections of a highway (including along the 260-kilometer Kulob-Kalay-Khumb route and the Tokhtamysh-Kulma mountain pass route) and to repair and modernize the Khorog-Murgab highway. In the fall of 2001, the Khorog-Murgab (the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region)-Kulma mountain pass (on the Tajik-Chinese border) highway was put into operation. In the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region, the highway is linked with the city of Tashkurgan that is turn linked to the Karakorum highway.

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<sup>7</sup> In the 2001-2003 period alone, Kazakh border guards detained 70 times as many illegal migrants from China as in the entire Soviet period. Nonetheless, the illegal migration flow is not declining (see: "Chaynataun v Almaty," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 12 October, 2003).

Uzbekistan also shows interest in the trans-Pamir transportation corridor linking it to China. Yet because Tashkent gives priority to promoting contacts with the most advanced Western countries, China's share of trade with the republic declined from 6 percent (\$110 million) in 1992 to 1 percent today.

The generally low level of relations between Turkmenistan and China also affects their trade and economic contacts. Since Turkmenistan gained independence, President S. Niyazov has only twice been to the PRC on official visits (in 1992 and in 1998). In July 2000, S. Niyazov and PRC President Jiang Zemin signed, in Ashgabad, a memorandum on building a Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline (with a possible extension to Japan). The sides reaffirmed their interest in the project's implementation in the course of negotiations that Jiang Zemin and S. Niyazov had in Ashgabad in June 2002. (The PRC president visited Turkmenistan immediately after the CCCBMA summit in Almaty.) At the same time, preparation of this costly and technically challenging construction project is still far from completion.

## Regional Stability and Security

Contacts with China in the political sphere, above all cooperation in combating international terrorism and religious extremism, acquired a special topicality for the Central Asian states in the late 1990s, following a rise in Islamic activity in the region. The raids by militants from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the fall of 1999 and the summer of 2000 aroused serious concern also in other republics of Central Asia. Kazakhstan's defense minister was the first defense minister in Central Asia who held negotiations in Beijing on ways of countering the growing threat to regional stability (April 2000). At the end of the negotiations, an agreement was signed on 11 million yuan (approx. \$1.4 million) worth of gratuitous financial aid to Kazakhstan's armed forces from the PRC government. Implementation of the agreement was to begin immediately. Subsequently, Beijing's military-technical assistance to Astana increased to 30 million yuan.

Problems related to Kazakh-Chinese cooperation in combating terrorism and religious extremism were also addressed in the course of a visit to Kazakhstan by Col. Gen. Xiong Guangkai, deputy chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army of China, in March 2002. Judging by the rather scanty official information, along with the situation in Afghanistan, the sides also discussed the U.S. military presence in Central Asian countries.<sup>8</sup> All the indications are that this was one of the key objectives of Gen. Xiong Guangkai's visit to Astana. The fact is that by that time the PRC was seriously concerned by the prospect of enlarged U.S. military presence in the region. (The PRC's high-ranking military representative was received by President N. Nazarbaev.)

In August 2002, Washington and Astana signed a memorandum to the effect that in the event of an emergency situation, military aircraft of antiterrorist coalition member countries, above all of the United States, would get permission to land at the Almaty international airport. Soon after that a PRC Defense Ministry delegation visited Kazakhstan. Along with other issues, topical for both sides, including the situation in Afghanistan, the Astana negotiators, on the initiative of the Chinese delegation, discussed the aforementioned memorandum.

Cooperation in ensuring regional stability and security is one of the high priorities in China's relations with Kyrgyzstan. To Bishkek, this problem has been especially topical since the fall of 1999, when IMU militants made an incursion into the republic's territory, then planning to break through into the Ferghana Valley. By the time Kyrgyzstan had abandoned its original intention not to create its own army and so its armed forces, raised with Russian assistance, already had a numerical strength of

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<sup>8</sup> See: *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 13 March, 2002.

about 9,000 servicemen. In late 1999 and in subsequent years, Bishkek received additional weapon systems, ammunition, night vision devices, and other military equipment from Moscow. In addition, dozens of Kyrgyz army officers were sent to military training establishments in Russia to upgrade their skills and proficiency. Russian assistance in strengthening the republic's armed forces is a major contribution to the security system that member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organization are putting in place, including in Central Asia.

At the same time, Kyrgyzstan is interested in material and technical assistance to its armed forces from other states, including China. Shortly after the incursion by Islamic militants into the republic's territory (1999), Beijing decided to help Bishkek in reinforcing its border checkpoints and outposts. In the course of Kyrgyzstan defense minister's visit to the PRC, in 2000, Beijing signed an agreement on granting military aid to Bishkek.

In October 2002, first joint Kyrgyz-Chinese military training exercises were held in Kyrgyzstan to practice interaction in combating terrorism. They became part of an array of measures implemented by both countries to counter the threat to the stability of Kyrgyzstan and the region as a whole. This initiative of the PRC, concerned by the deployment of U.S. air bases in Central Asia, pointed to an aspiration to assert its geopolitical interests in the region. In the course of Kyrgyz Foreign Minister A. Aytmatov's visit to Beijing, in December 2002, a bilateral agreement on cooperation in combating terrorism, extremism, and separatism was signed whereby China is to continue to render assistance to the republic's armed forces.

In the late 1990s, China began establishing contacts with Tajikistan on the issue of regional stability and security. According to some sources, in 1999 through 2002, the volume of military technical assistance to Dushanbe from Beijing was worth approximately \$3 million. Cooperation between the two countries' defense ministries also includes information sharing in combating international terrorism and extremism and as well as PRC assistance in training Tajik military personnel.

To Tashkent, cooperation with Beijing in combating the forces of religious extremism, which, according to Uzbek President I. Karimov, is an ideological cover for international terrorism, is highly topical owing to the ongoing rise in Islamic radicalism in the Ferghana Valley and some other parts of the republic. The problems of countering the threat of religious extremism, as embodied by the IMU, were in the focus of the sides' attention in the course of I. Karimov's visit to Beijing in November 1999, soon after the incursion by groups of armed militants into Uzbek territory. Following yet another IMU incursion—in the south of the republic, in the summer of 2000—the country's authorities appealed to the governments of a number of states for military-technical assistance. The PRC leadership promptly responded to the appeal. Already by late August, the Uzbek defense minister made an official visit to Beijing in the course of which an agreement on cooperation in the military and military-technical sphere was signed and immediately went into effect.<sup>9</sup> On the whole, however, their interaction in the military-political field did not make much progress (although the PRC was greatly interested in it), mainly because of Tashkent's orientation toward advancing its cooperation with Washington.

The growing threat to political stability in Uzbekistan (as well as in the region as a whole) on the part of religious extremism compelled Tashkent to join the Shanghai Group of Five.<sup>10</sup> In July 2000, I. Karimov, as head of an observer state, took part in the Dushanbe meeting of leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Russia, and Tajikistan, and in June 2001, together with those states, Uzbekistan became co-founder of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), built on the Shanghai Group of Five. The problem of countering the threats to global and regional security on the part of international terror-

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<sup>9</sup> The first shipment of sniper's rifles, bullet proof vests and other military equipment was delivered to Uzbekistan by air, which helped to quickly complete an operation to destroy the gunmen in the Surkhan Darya region. Subsequently, Uzbekistan received new shipments of Chinese made small arms and light weapons and spare parts for ground based and air weapon systems.

<sup>10</sup> The Uzbek leadership did not rule out the possibility of new armed raids by IMU militants, funded by international terrorist centers and supported by the Taliban regime.

ism, religious extremism, aggressive separatism, and drug trafficking was a key note in I. Karimov's presentation at the summit.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the Uzbek leadership opposed Chinese attempts to get the SCO involved in activities designed to thwart the deployment of a U.S. missile defense system. Quite obviously, any attempts in future to give the SCO an anti-U.S. thrust will meet with opposition from Tashkent that is pursuing a course toward strengthening all-round cooperation with the United States. Creation of an international antiterrorism coalition with the U.S. leadership role, especially the strengthening of Uzbek-U.S. contacts in light of an antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, including cooperation between the two states in the military-political sphere, backed up by substantial U.S. assistance, moderated Tashkent's interest in the SCO. That said, the establishment in Tashkent of a SCO regional antiterrorism structure, designed, among other things, to combat international terrorism and organized crime, could help to invigorate Uzbekistan's efforts within the SCO framework.<sup>12</sup>

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan attach much greater importance to their participation in the SCO, which is to a very large extent predicated on the high level of their relations with China. At the same time, these countries' relations with the PRC, both on the bilateral level and within the SCO framework, are affected by the complex political situation in the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region, nearly one-half of whose 15-million population is constituted by ethnic Uighurs. There are ethnic Uighur communities also in Central Asian countries, the largest (more than 220,000 people) in Kazakhstan; in Kyrgyzstan, up to 30,000 and in Uzbekistan, approximately 40,000. Uighurs living in Central Asia are linked to their fellow tribesmen in the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region by common historical and cultural roots and sometimes by ties of blood. Furthermore, the ongoing developments on the other side of the border evoke a big response among them. There are also plenty of emigrants from Xinjiang who have now settled in Central Asian republics, mainly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the situation in the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region as China's internal affair, Kazakhstan's leadership does not support the Uighur opposition but neither does it obstruct its presence in the country. At the same time, political organizations affiliated with the Uighur opposition do not have license to engage in activities in the country's territory. The Justice Ministry only registered one structure operating in the sphere of culture—the United Uighur Association.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, in Kyrgyzstan, the ethnic Uighur community plays an active role in the country's public and political life and was once even represented in parliament. Compared to the policy of neighboring Central Asian countries (especially Uzbekistan), the republic's authorities traditionally took a more liberal view toward Uighur migrants, which aroused Beijing's discontent. Taking into account China's heightened sensitivity on the issue at hand, in late April 1997, shortly after a regular Shanghai Group of Five summit, Bishkek officialdom slapped restraints on the activity of the Uighur organization Ittipak (Unity) which was strongly influenced by Chinese emigrants. In the late 1990s, the republic's authorities cracked down on Uighur émigré groups purportedly linked to international terrorist centers. The shift in Bishkek's policy toward this part of the Uighur emigration was caused above all by pressure from Beijing. At the same time, the activity of extremist Uighur groups on Kyrgyzstan's territory (terrorist acts against Chinese citizens and their own fellow tribesmen, including local ethnic Uighurs who refused to render finan-

<sup>11</sup> See: I. Karimov, *Za protsvetaniye Rodiny—kazhdyy iz nas v otvete*, Tashkent, 2001, pp. 340-347.

<sup>12</sup> In 2004, the rotating SCO presidency is held by Uzbekistan.

<sup>13</sup> For more detail, see: K. Khafizova, "Separatism in China's Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region: Dynamics and Potential Impact on Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 1 (19), 2003.

<sup>14</sup> "Neither in Almaty nor in any other place in Kazakhstan has a single separatist organization claiming to represent the interests of supposedly oppressed minorities in the Xinjiang province been registered or is lawfully operating," a spokesman for the Kazakhstan embassy in the PRC said as the situation around the problem aggravated once again (see: *Izvestia*, 19 February, 1997). Only minor separatist leaders have found refuge in Kazakhstan: The movement for the independence of Eastern Turkestan is headquartered in Turkey. Some Western experts believe that problems of Islamic extremism in Central Asia, terrorist attacks in the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region, and actions under the slogan of creating an Islamic state in Xinjiang were little if at all related to the activity of Uighur emigration in Kazakhstan or in Kyrgyzstan (see: D. Reetz, "Islamic Activism in Central Asia and Middle Eastern Studies," *Villanova*, USA, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, Fall 1999, p. 7). According to Amnesty International, on some occasions, Kazakh authorities turned over Xinjiang Uighurs seeking asylum at the demand of the Chinese side (see: *Financial Times Survey*, Kazakhstan, 1 July, 1999, p. 4).

cial assistance and support to the armed underground movement, internecine struggles within the extremist ranks, and so on) undermines political stability in the republic. Kyrgyzstan leadership has signed all documents on combating terrorism, extremism, and separatism that were adopted within the framework of the Shanghai Group of Five—the SCO.

## *C o n c l u s i o n s*

The relations of good neighborliness and cooperation between the regional states and the PRC that have evolved over the past decade are a key factor in ensuring stability in the southeast of Central Asia.

As their contacts advanced, a multilateral interaction mechanism, designed to counter challenges and threats to national and regional security, was put in place and is being constantly upgraded. One such mechanism is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that is at present comprised of four Central Asian states. The key aspects of trade and economic contacts with China were also identified. All five republics in the region are interested in them, albeit to different degrees.

At the same time, the evolution of relations with the PRC, based on the principles of equality and mutual respect for the sides' interests, proved to be a difficult task for the newly independent states of Central Asia. Seeing these friendly relations as an important factor in strengthening national and regional security that, furthermore, facilitates their integration into the world economy, these republics, nonetheless, are afraid of getting drawn into the Chinese zone of influence as the PRC is rapidly gaining weight on the international arena. For some historical reasons, these concerns are especially strong in the public and political circles in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The ruling elites of the newly independent states are especially sensitive to problems of ensuring the sides' sovereign equality. Just as in the course of negotiations on the settlement of the border problem with China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan acted as part of a single delegation, at the present stage close interaction with Russia within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has become for the Central Asian republics a factor limiting the PRC's domination in the region, in particular also within this structure.

China is given a different level of foreign policy priority by individual states of Central Asia. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have the closest contacts with their eastern neighbor. The PRC to them is a leading trading partner with Chinese business being very active in both republics. Peace on Kazakhstan's and Kyrgyzstan's southeastern borders as well as resolution of other complex bilateral problems (say, illegal Chinese migration, the use of the water resources of transborder rivers, and so forth) directly hinges on the development of relations with their powerful neighbor.

Astana, Bishkek, and Beijing have accumulated extensive experience in cooperation on topical problems of regional security. The good neighborly relations and cooperation with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan enabled the PRC to address what it saw as one of the most urgent problems in Central Asia—i.e., stopping support for the forces favoring the independence of "Eastern Turkestan" given by the ethnic Uighur communities based in regional states. Even so, the understanding that Astana and Bishkek show for Beijing's interests is not always matched by a similar response of the Chinese side that firmly upholds its positions on contentious issues. Say, one form in which it exerts pressure on its Central Asian partners is dragging its feet on the resolution of "local" problems affecting the interests of states in the region.<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Kazakhstan's political leadership and sociopolitical circles are greatly concerned by the proportions of illegal Chinese migration, especially considering the PRC's huge migration

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<sup>15</sup> Indicative in this respect is Beijing's position on the plan to divert some water resources from the Irtysh and the Ili rivers to oil fields in the Karamay region. Thus the Chinese rejected Astana's attempts to invite Russian representatives for consultations on the issue as Russian interests are affected by the project's implementation (see: D. Trofimov, "Shanghai Process: From the "Five" to the Cooperation Organization. Summing Up the 1990s and Looking Ahead," *Central Asian and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (14), 2002, pp. 91-92.) Discussion of this problem was entrusted to a joint Chinese-Kazakh working group of experts whose conclusions radically differed from those made by independent experts.



potential, estimated by some Kazakh experts at tens of millions of people. Of course, Astana is trying to stem this uncontrolled tide, but its efforts are not bringing the desired results, especially with a visa-free entry and exit regime that exists between the two countries. For its part, Beijing is concerned by the fact that Kazakhstan sees China as a source of threat to its national security.

As for Uzbekistan, it is clearly reluctant to advance its relations with China. In addition, in so far as concerns the struggle against international terrorism and separatism, Tashkent prefers to orient itself toward Washington. Nonetheless, neither Uzbekistan nor China is interested to aggravate their bilateral relations.

The protracted internal political conflict in Tajikistan impeded the republic's contacts with China. At the same time, today there are some opportunities for an invigoration of their trade and economic relations. Thus, huge funds are needed to develop the rich mineral resources of Gorny Badakhshan that is effectively cut off from the country's "mainland" territory by mountains—something that the republic does not have. Setting up a direct road link between Tajikistan and China across the territory of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region would, according to Dushanbe (and the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region authorities agree with it), help to attract foreign, including Chinese, investment in the region's economy and facilitate the advancement of trade relations between the two countries. Yet this is not going to happen in the foreseeable future.

Talking about Turkmenistan, it should be noted that Beijing is in the periphery of Ashghabad's geopolitical and geo-economic interests and so the realization of plans to build a pipeline from Turkmenistan (via Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) to the PRC is also, rather, a remote prospect. In this case, just as in its relations with Astana, Beijing employs the tactics of setting aside hydrocarbon sources for their subsequent use in the future. This also benefits Ashghabad. Because under the existing agreements, it ships natural gas to Russia and Iran, the arrangement with Beijing on building yet another high capacity pipeline reaffirms Turkmenistan's official statements about the vast natural gas reserves in the country.

Thus, based on the aforementioned, the following conclusions can be made.

1. The course by the Central Asian republics toward developing long-term good-neighborly relations and all-round contacts with China responds to the interests of all of these countries. The PRC is the only state bordering the Central Asian republics (outside the CIS) cooperation with which can make a real contribution to their struggle against religious extremist forces relying on the assistance and support of international terrorist centers. These states give high priority to interaction with China in this sphere both on a bilateral and a multilateral basis (within the SCO framework). Without underestimating the importance of the long-term program of strengthening multilateral trade and economic relations spanning a period until 2020, which was adopted in September 2003 by the SCO heads of government, it should be noted that the core element of SCO activity is cooperation in strengthening regional security. That said, the efforts by the SCO member states will presumably be focused on the Central Asian region.
2. The potential for deepening economic cooperation between the regional states and the PRC is relatively small since the opportunities for expanding trade contacts have to a very large extent already been used up, while China's investment resources, in which its Central Asian partners are greatly interested, are rather limited. As a result, implementation of already approved projects, in particular in the telecoms sphere, is being delayed. At the same time, considering China's growing needs for raw materials and energy resources, it is quite possible that the PRC's state controlled companies will increase their investment activity in Kazakhstan's oil and gas sector, and also participate in developing Kyrgyzstan's hydroelectric power engineering (to supply electricity above all to the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region). As far as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan are concerned, apparently they will stay in the fringe of China's economic interests.
3. The regional states' cooperation with the PRC is not aimed against Russian interests: Quite the contrary, they are interested in long-term and close interaction with Russia within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

4. Beijing officialdom sees the U.S. military presence in Central Asia, which is, in effect, the PRC's "hinterland," as a serious threat to China's security. Yet it is not in a position to impede cooperation between the regional states and the United States or other NATO member countries in the military-political sphere, including their military presence. In this context, one important task for the PRC is to prevent the drawing of Central Asian states into the orbit of U.S.-Chinese confrontation (preventing their participation in possible anti-Chinese coalitions and so forth).<sup>16</sup>
5. As far as the Central Asian republics are concerned, a scaling down of their relations with China under U.S. pressure would be in conflict with their national interests. Regional leaders are very well aware of this.

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<sup>16</sup> See: A. Klimenko, "K voprosu ob evoliutsii voennoy politiki i strategii Kitaia," *Problemy Dalnego Vostoka*, No. 2, 2004, p. 64.