

SECURITY CHALLENGES IN CENTRAL ASIA RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE PUBLICATIONS CONTENTS DIGEST

We hereby present the fourteenth issue of the Russian and Persian language publication digest on security challenges in Central Asia. This issue focusses upon several important events and trends, which showcase the political and economic dynamism of the region.

These include: the ongoing process of rethinking the tenets of the previous Karimov's development model in Uzbekistan; expectations for the next stage of the political battle in Kyrgyzstan this autumn; the situation with the growth of labour migration to Russia; the internal challenges the SCO may face in the very near future; the likelihood of great power clashes in the region; Chinese financial policy towards Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan; and the negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban, including their impact on the peace process and stability of Afghanistan.

In the next issues of our digest we will continue reviewing the above-mentioned topics, as well as other regional challenges covered by targeted foreign media. The views and opinions of the authors do not necessarily reflect the position of the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation.

AUGUST/2019

THE UZBEK DEVELOPMENT MODEL WAS THE WRONG POLICY

Internet newspaper "Gazeta.Uz" (Uzbekistan)

The Uzbek political elites continue to reevaluate Islam Karimov's state construction and development tenets – the so-called "Uzbek model" – which has determined the country's domestic and foreign policy for the last thirty years. According to the First Deputy Chairperson of the Senate, Sadyk Safayev, the "Uzbek model" was wrong, and three years ago Uzbekistan was on the brink of disaster.

The inflexible financial system was one of the main obstacles for development, instead of being its driver. The previous model also paid little attention to labour productivity, which is ten times lower than in South Korea, which negatively affected the cost of production and of salaries, as well as causing an exodus of millions of labour migrants.

As per Safayev, the Uzbek government is currently scrambling to improve the economic situation, paying more attention to the country's sustainable development and to the channeling of investments into projects in the country's most remote regions. Safayev noted some positive changes, especially in the field of cotton production and processing. In his words, if a few years ago only 25 per cent of the cultivated cotton was processed in Uzbekistan and the country earned only 1 billion USD, now, the level of cotton processing is 80 per cent and

the textile export revenue reached 2 billion USD. In the coming years, textile export revenues are expected to reach 7 billion USD.

<https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/08/26/uzbek-model/>

KEY POLITICAL EVENTS MAY UNFOLD IN KYRGYZSTAN THIS AUTUMN

*Elena Ivanchenko,
Correspondent of
Moskovskiy Komsomolec-Asia
News portal (Kyrgyzstan)*

The internal conflict in Kyrgyzstan between the incumbent President Sooronbay Jeembekov and some opposition forces has resulted in the detainment of the latter's leader, former President Almazbek Atambayev, as well as in an upsurge of pressure against his supporters, media and even those who express an overly critical attitude towards official authorities. Andrey Mozolin, Director of "Analitik", a research centre, and independent research analyst, Konstantin Larionov (Ekaterinburg, Russia), both consider that this conflict is undermining the country's reputation.

At the same time, the experts opine that it is premature to speak of a failure of President Jeembekov and his team. Nonetheless, the situation remains shaky since there is a possibility that previously silent forces, such as religious leaders, will manifest themselves.

Larionov notes that although the conflict is suppressed, it is far from being resolved. The authorities are not ready for dialogue, and the opposition's activities are currently latent. This is a concerning situation. Another aggravation of the conflict can be expected in the lead-up to parliamentary elections.

<http://www.news-asia.ru/view/ru/topical/12724>

THE FSS REVEALED THE NUMBER OF FOREIGNERS WHO CAME TO WORK IN RUSSIA

*Russian Television channel "Current Times"
(Czech Republic)*

For the first time in twenty years, the Federal Security Service (FSS) of the Russian Federation has begun to officially publish its data on foreigners who entered Russia for work. As per its information, over 15 million foreigners arrived in Russia in the first half of 2019, of which 2.4 million entered for work. The vast majority were from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, such as Uzbekistan (918 thousand people), Tajikistan (523.9 thousand), Kyrgyzstan (265 thousand), Ukraine (164.6 thousand) and Kazakhstan (105.3 thousand).

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia also published its own data on migrants, according to which, in 2018, approximately 15 million migrants lived and worked in Russia. Uzbekistan was also the primary

country of origin for these migrants – over 4 million of its citizens were permanently established in Russia last year. Tajikistan, with 2 million citizens, and Kyrgyzstan with 900 thousand, took the second and third places, respectively.

<https://www.currenttime.tv/a/migrants-russia-asia-uzbekistan-stats/30112978.htm>

PROSPECTS FOR SCO DEVELOPMENT AFTER SUMMIT IN BISHKEK

“Stan Radar” analytical Internet portal (Kyrgyzstan)

The Bishkek SCO summit held in June 2019 clearly illustrates that expanding an organisation does not always mean increasing its effectiveness. The prioritisation of bilateral over multilateral cooperation continues despite this increase. As such, China and Kyrgyzstan announced bilateral agreements worth about 7 billion USD on the margins of the summit, but no similar documents were signed in the multilateral format.

Some experts spotted a slight decrease in China's attention to the SCO, perhaps due to its disappointment in the pace of progress of the organisation and to a shift of China's policy focus to promoting the Belt and Road initiative (BRI). The experts noted that for Beijing, the SCO will increasingly play the role of a deterrence tool to hinder and control cooperation between India and the Central Asian countries.

In turn, Delhi has concerns over the BRI infrastructure projects in the immediate vicinity of its territory, which Indian strategists believe may be used not only for economic, but also for military purposes. These concerns can also cause problems for the SCO's further development.

The decline of Chinese interest in the SCO may push Russia to try to increase its influence within the organisation, thereby giving it the character of a geopolitical anti-Western alliance. This potential transformation of the Russian objectives towards the SCO constitutes another challenge.

In addition, it is possible that among the SCO member countries there may be contradicting views and positions on the issue of Iran's entry into the organisation, given the complex geopolitical processes unfolding around this country today.

<http://www.stanradar.com/news/full/35946-shos-dvizhenie-vglub-posle-dvizhenija-vshir.html>

IS THE U.S GEARING UP FOR THE SCRAMBLE FOR CENTRAL ASIA WITH RUSSIA AND CHINA?

International News Agency RIA “Novosti” (Russia)

David Hale, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, recently stated that Washington wants to give a new impetus to the cooperation format “Central Asia plus the U.S.” (C5+1), so as to revive the cooperation with the regional countries. Russian and Central Asian

experts are trying to understand the U.S. objectives behind this statement.

As Vadim Kozyulin, Project Director on Central Asia and Russia security at PIR-Centre (Russia) deems that Washington doesn't currently have enough funds for advancing large-scale projects such as the Silk Road. So Americans decided to focus upon low-cost projects like the "C5+1" format. Through this, they want to assure the Central Asian states that the U.S. is not going to leave the region at the mercy of Russia and China.

Daniyar Kosnazarov, independent analyst (Kazakhstan), doesn't subscribe to the opinion that the C5+1 is Washington's attempt to create a counterbalance to the growing clout of China and Russia in Central Asia. He further opines that even if Washington aims at diminishing Chinese and Russian influence, it will be extremely hard for it to carry out its plans. In his view, China's economic and resource potential in Central Asia is currently far higher than that of the U.S., and it is, as such, impossible to stem its further growth. Other actors will have to either adapt to Chinese interests or step aside.

As for the Russian positions in Central Asia, Kosnazarov views them as strong and considers Moscow to be the most influential external political and military power in the region. In his opinion, the Russian clout largely rests on the personal authority of Vladimir Putin.

Rafael Sattarov, Expert on Central Asia with Bilig Brains analytical project (U.S.), views the future of the C5+1 format through the lenses of the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. He surmises that as troops withdraw, Washington's interest in Central Asia and the development of various cooperation formats will concomitantly wane. This will occur because most of the U.S.'s programmes were, from the very onset, created not so much for Central Asia, but rather for Afghanistan and for the improvement of the situation in this country. Sattarov is sure that today, Americans are ready to support anyone who will take responsibility for Afghanistan, including Beijing and Moscow.

<https://ria.ru/20190826/1557842003.html>

CHINESE CURRENCY COMES TO CENTRAL ASIA

*News Agency "Podrobno.Uz" (Uzbekistan),
Business newspaper "Kursiv.Kz" (Kazakhstan)*

China continues to strengthen its financial and economic positions in Central Asia through increased cooperation with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Among the recent breakthroughs is the creation of an Uzbek-Chinese investment fund with an authorised capital of 1 billion USD. This fund will finance the construction of export-oriented industrial enterprises in Uzbekistan. In addition, the National Bank of Uzbekistan (NBU) – for the first time in the history of Uzbek-Chinese relations – signed a loan agreement with the State Development Bank of China (CDB) to attract the first credit line in Renminbi (RMB). The total loan amount was of 500 million Yuan (approximately 70 million USD).

Prior to this, in July 2019, the China Construction Bank opened its representative office in the Astana International Financial Centre, which will be responsible for the creation of the RMB clearing centre in Kazakhstan, and for operations in Mongolia and Central Asia, as well as for supporting the implementation of fifty-five projects as part of the production cooperation between China and Kazakhstan.

<https://podrobno.uz/cat/uzbekistan-i-kitay-klyuchi-ot-budushchego/uzbekistan-i-kitay-sozdali-sovmestnyy-investitsionnyy/>

<https://podrobno.uz/cat/uzbekistan-i-kitay-klyuchi-ot-budushchego/uzbekistan-i-kitay-perekhodyat-na-raschety/>

<https://kursiv.kz/news/finansy/2019-07/kitayskiy-bank-nameren-stimulirovat-regionalnye-raschety-v-yuanyakh-iz-nur>

THE AFGHAN CONFLICT: WHAT FOLLOWS THE END OF THE WAR

"Hasht Sobh" newspaper (Afghanistan)

Afghan media and experts continue to discuss the likelihood of the signing of an agreement on U.S. troop withdrawal between Washington and the Taliban, and what its impact would be on the future situation in Afghanistan.

The authors of Hasht Sobh's editorial believe that concluding such an agreement would put the Taliban in a winning position and enable it to espouse the narrative that the movement, having defeated NATO, was thus a natural heir to the key historical victories of the Afghan people over the British Raj (British India) in the 19th century, and the Soviet Union in the 20th century.

According to the article's authors, it is obvious that the agreement will allow the Taliban to begin negotiations with Kabul from a position of strength. However, to which degree can the Taliban in fact afford to speak from a position of strength? As the history of Afghanistan shows, the rebels always successfully opposed foreign troops, but immediately after foreign troop withdrawal they never managed to overthrow the local governments, which relied on external military-technical and financial assistance. Even the government of Dr. Najibullah was able to effectively protect most of Afghanistan from the Mujahideen while military, food and financial assistance came from Moscow. It fell only after Russian aid was discontinued.

Given this point, if Washington makes a rational withdrawal of its troops and continues to provide military and financial assistance to Kabul, then the collapse of the current political system will likely not occur. Under this condition, the military victory of the Taliban is impossible. Nevertheless, Kabul should be prepared for the worst-case scenario, in which aid may be discontinued.

As the editorial's authors believe, to prevent a negative scenario, it is necessary to conclude a comprehensive agreement on the end of the war and the great powers must be its guarantors. In addition, the domestic parties to the Afghan conflict will have to determine the criteria for political legitimacy, which should primarily be elections and a

republican form of government. It is these criteria that will create the basis for the coexistence of all Afghan political forces.

<https://8am.af/pay-the-cost-of-ending-the-war-on-both-sides/>