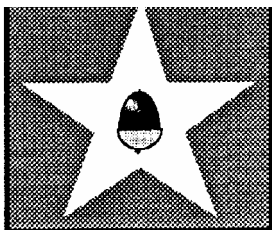


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**Russia in Central Asia:  
Third Invasion -  
An Uzbek View**

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# **Russia in Central Asia: Third Invasion**

## **An Uzbek View**

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*This paper highlights what is seen in Uzbekistan as Russian subversion of the democratic processes in Central Asia, and its manipulation of relationships between states in the region to encourage their dependence on Russia.*

After antiterrorist coalition forces were quartered in some of the Central Asian states, Russia's policy in respect of the region changed dramatically. Previously, Russia had not sought actively to restore its bygone influence in Central Asia, reckoning this to be an issue whose resolution might well be postponed. It is quite another story now. Preoccupied with the US' increasing presence in the region, Russia is now looking for any vacant niche to stake out its own presence in Central Asia and is ready to seize any opportunity that may present itself in order to re-establish parity.

Uzbekistan was the first country in Central Asia to openly announce its entry into strategic partnership with the United States. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have followed suit by offering their territories to America. Immediately after such a radical shift in the regional situation, Tajikistan also changed its orientation, embarking on the path of closer cooperation with the West within the framework of the antiterrorist coalition. The first practical step in this direction was undertaken by the Tajik government in September 2002, when it decided to significantly widen a military airfield in the settlement of Aini, 15 kilometres' distance from the capital, Dushanbe.

### **Tajikistan**

Tajikistan has always sought to get rid of Russia's control, which brought nothing positive to this Republic. Russian intervention in the political processes evolving in Tajikistan led to anarchy in both its policy and economy. Appealing to Russia for assistance, domestic groupings of every description contended for power. The Russian government, however, found it advantageous to maintain diarchy in Tajikistan, where official authorities, in essence, did not control the situation in the country. Playing the role of an arbitrator, in practice it was Russia that resolved all the problems in the region. Emomali Rakhmonov, who owed Russia his presidency, could not take any decision without Russian consent. Even Tajikistan's relationships with contiguous countries were heavily dependent on the state of affairs in Russia's political Olympus.

Capitalizing upon this situation, Russia forced Rakhmonov to meet the opposition halfway, although such reconciliation handicapped his own position. At the same

time, Russia made use of its influence as well as channels in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which, while trying to assist Tajikistan in implementing democratic reform, actually played into Russia's hands. After the OSCE-sponsored plan of national reconciliation between the Islamic opposition and the Republic's official temporal authorities was brought into being in 1997, the latter found it impossible to control the situation in the provinces. It was a period when only part of the Republic's enforcement authorities was controlled by Rakhmonov, the remainder being under the opposition's control. A wave of political assassinations that hit Tajikistan at the time testified to how fierce the struggle for power between regional elite groupings really was. As a result, Islamists, terrorists and drugs traffickers, closely connected with Russian business circles, felt at home in the Republic. According to some sources, the generals of Russia's frontier troops who were responsible for the Tajik border also, liaised closely with the drugs mafia, lobbying its interests in the region in any possible way. As a matter of fact, Russian policy in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan defended the interests of business circles, both Russian and Tajik, which enjoyed close ties with the drugs mafia and those trafficking in arms. They also maintained close contact with Afghani field commanders and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Some observers suggest that this explains the episodes of direct support lent by Russian frontier troops to IMU. Members of IMU fighting groups moved freely between Afghanistan and Tajikistan through the posts of the Russian 201<sup>st</sup> Division.

Tajikistan is well known as a transshipping base for both terrorists and drugs dealers. At the same time, its economy is ruined, and the bulk of the population poor. Supporting IMU enabled Russia to blackmail the government of Uzbekistan, which was beyond its control. Threatened with the danger of extremism, Uzbekistan had to buy arms and ammunition from Russia in order to fortify its frontiers and defend itself against the extremists' attacks. Needless to say, this served the interests of Russia's military and industrial complex. As an extremely unstable zone, Tajikistan was increasingly subject to sharp criticism by its neighbours.

In a move to remedy the situation, the government of Tajikistan has started forging relations with the US and Europe. With antiterrorist coalition forces being quartered in the republic, a shift towards tangible improvement of the domestic situation is becoming more and more evident. Taking care for their military bases' security, the countries of the antiterrorist coalition have paid a great deal of attention to strengthening security within the republic. As a consequence, the flow of drugs has substantially decreased. In addition, IMU bases have been liquidated.

Trying its utmost to restore its former influence, Russia must resort to every possible means. The Tajik migrant workforce is deemed to be one of the most efficient mechanisms through which Russia can influence the official Tajik authorities. A recent demonstrative deportation from Russia of hundreds of Tajik migrants has been designed to compel the Republic's leaders to take account of Russia's interests in the region. The deportation, undertaken before winter, when Tajik migrant workers usually return home from their summer work in the Russian Federation, may, in Moscow's view, have far more adverse political and social repercussions for Tajikistan, if repeated, say, in spring. In this case, the departure of Tajiks desirous of working in Russia may be suspended, and this in turn, will provoke a sharply negative reaction by local society towards the Tajik government.

This measure, however, has backfired in terms of an increased gap between Tajikistan and Russia. In Tajikistan, the population's living standard is so low that

able-bodied inhabitants regularly go not only to Russia, but also to the neighbouring countries to earn their living. Deported from Russia, Tajiks find employment in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, etc. Therefore the mass deportation of Tajik migrant workers from Russia does not present a particular menace for the republic, although it gives rise to concern on the part of its authorities and the world community. The point is that jobless people may join the ranks of drugs couriers. At a time of economic dislocation and political instability, trafficking in drugs is practically the only possibility available to poor people to meet life's needs. That undoubtedly played into the hands of Russian drugs dealers. Virtually transparent frontiers between Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have made drugs trafficking easy and practically unimpeded. The only obstacle in its way is Uzbekistan, whose government has been constantly excoriated by the Russian mass media for the Republic's extreme "closeness".

Moscow has become seriously disquieted about the loss of its last springboard in Central Asia. Given the fact that Russia has not the necessary wherewithal to maintain sizable military contingents, the loss of Tajikistan, which remained loyal to Moscow only because of an enduring threat of opposition OTO attacks, is a serious blow to Russia. It is an open secret that a convenient transport route for contraband Russian arms and military equipment to Afghanistan runs through Tajikistan.

One of the reasons for locating a Russian military base in Kyrgyzstan was to provide justification for the import of arms and military equipment to this republic. Kyrgyzstan was expected to serve as a transshipment base for contraband arms intended for the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. Moscow planned to reinforce the military positions taken by its allies (under the leadership of Fahim), thus assisting them in the creation of a solid representation in the Afghan government. Simultaneously, with the help of its arms supplies, Moscow hoped to complicate the position of the antiterrorist coalition forces in Afghanistan, and thereby to draw their attention away from Central Asia. According to the Tajik Special Service's data, members of IMU fighting groups sheltering in the territory controlled by the Northern Alliance may well be used by Russia, whenever an opportunity presents itself, to destabilize the situation in Central Asia. Tajikistan, given its recent success in building closer relations with the United States, has started, unexpectedly for Moscow, hindering arms trafficking from Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan through its territory. With a wide network of agents in Tajikistan and its lobby in the Tajik government, Russia therefore tried to provoke disturbances in the Batken Province of Kyrgyzstan and the Sogd Province of Tajikistan. Those taking part in these actions protested against the introduction of a tougher procedure for crossing the border between the two republics. It is only owing to the firm stand taken by the Head of Frontier Troops of Tajikistan that those involved in arms trafficking were not given an easy time. Nevertheless, it needs to be remembered that Russia has a range of means to attain its objects. Moscow will continue to make attempts to provoke confusion in areas located along the frontier, with a view to obtaining an open passage for the delivery of its arms and military equipment to Afghanistan.

## **Kazakhstan**

Kazakhstan is regarded as the most successful country in Central Asia. The most efficient economic reforms having been accomplished by its President Nursultan

Nazarbayev, the Republic now leads the region in terms of the population's living standard. While inferior to Uzbekistan in industrial potential, Kazakhstan leaves the latter far behind in terms of oil and gas reserves as well as deposits of other natural resources. With the Kazakh-Russian border extending for a great distance, Kazakhstan geopolitically depends on Russia. The latter has always sought to retain this Central Asian country within its sphere of influence. Nazarbayev, however, has been doing his best to maintain the Republic's independence, with the right to choose its foreign political and economic partners being reserved for him.

Moscow did not have sufficient financial resources at its disposal to invest in Kazakhstan. Nonetheless, Russia was greatly interested in taking control of the Republic's transport corridors and oil pipelines. Thus every effort was made to prevent the construction of alternative communications channels and routes by which to transport Kazakh oil. In addition, Moscow cared a great deal for the Tengiz oil field. If at the end of the 1990s Russia yielded to the West in the fight for Kazakh oil, today it is having its revenge. To achieve this goal, a number of diverse mechanisms have been used, with the problem of Kazakhstan's northern territories being one of them. Besides, Moscow has made use of KGB archives to collect compromising documents endangering the reputation of the Republic's leaders. When Nazarbayev began to shift towards the US, a wide-ranging campaign aimed at discrediting him was triggered in the Russian mass media. Furthermore, episodes of corrupt practices and human rights abuses emerged, which were immediately taken up by the Kazakh opposition and, through it, filtered into the European press. Similarly, a series of articles discrediting the opposition were published in Russia's press after Nazarbayev resumed a closer dialogue with Moscow.

The 11 September 2001 events have radically changed the situation in Central Asia. Kazakhstan, like other countries of the region, has offered its territory to antiterrorist coalition forces. While Russia remained embarrassed, cooperation between the Central Asian states and the US has been developing at a brisk pace.

Once Moscow recovered from its embarrassment, however, it started looking for an opportunity to create its own base in the region to counterbalance this rapidly evolving collaboration. Initially, Russia intended to place its military base in Kazakhstan. With this in view, it began to put pressure upon the Kazakh President, using the Republic's numerous Russian community. Its members put forward separatist ideas, insisting on the separation of part of Kazakhstan's territory and its subsequent annexation to Russia.

Moscow also started taking measures designed to enhance the degree of radicalism of the Kazakh opposition, which was not strong enough to destabilize the situation domestically. One should take into consideration here the fact that the people's living standard in Kazakhstan is far higher than in the neighbouring republics, notably Kyrgyzstan. Nevertheless, Russia's pressure upon Kazakhstan caused a great deal of disquietude among the nation's political elite, and President Nazarbayev got down to scrutinizing Uzbekistan's experience of manoeuvring between the world's superpowers.

In recent years, Hezb ut-Tahrir, an illicit Islamic organization, has stirred up its activity in Kazakhstan. Partly influenced by the Russian Secret Services, it had not revealed itself in the Republic before 2002. In search of ways to resolve this problem, Nazarbayev turned his eyes on Uzbekistan. At the meeting of both Presidents in summer 2002, Nazarbayev articulated a proposal to establish a confederation of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, thinking that such a formation would

enable the two countries to withstand Russia's growing influence. However, Uzbekistan was not ready for such a sudden change of strategy, and the proposal was ignored. Russia, in turn, has managed to create all necessary conditions to dampen Kazakh-Uzbek relations. The Russian press highlighted Uzbekistan's alleged intention to transcend its landlocked position by seizing part of Kazakhstan, thereby acquiring a desired outlet to the Caspian Sea.

Moscow seemed to have succeeded in suggesting the idea to Nazarbayev that the threat really existed. Kazakhstan began to briskly fortify its border with Uzbekistan. Additionally, Kazakhstan had to buy several Russian helicopters to safeguard the frontier against the potential "Uzbek invasion". With Kazakhstan taking steps towards closer relations with Russia, the latter exerted every effort to make the republic economically attractive offers. The agreement on the utilization of the Baikonur Spaceport signed in 1999 was an obvious lever, as Russia pays a high rent for it. As it turned out, Russia had no money to meet its liabilities under the agreement. Its payment, instead, took the form of goods supplied to the republic. Russia has proved to be twice a winner in this case. On the one hand, its presence in Kazakhstan was reinforced, with the Republic's railway sector being now heavily dependent on Russian deliveries. On the other hand, Russia fosters its own industrial development, whereas Kazakhstan receives only delivery vans instead of the agreed hard currency.

Though Russia failed to obtain the republic's consent to place its military base in its territory, it has successfully managed to impair Kazakh-Uzbek relationships. Simultaneously, the pro-Russian press blamed the Uzbek government for the state of affairs, shaping public opinion against any measure taken by Uzbekistan. In Russia, the year 2003 has been proclaimed as "the Year of Kazakhstan". Everything indicates that Kazakhstan is assigned a special place in Russia's Central Asian policy. Unlike politically and economically weak Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan is well positioned to appear in the role of a serious counterbalance to Uzbekistan in the region. Having chosen Uzbekistan, the United States gained a foothold in the key country of Central Asia. However, if Russia manages to fully realize its influence on Kazakhstan, its position in the region will not be the weaker. At the same time, one should not overlook the fact that Nazarbayev does strive for independence and is now well versed in the art of manoeuvring. His decision to allow an American military base in Chimkent has been taken as an attempt to counterbalance Russia's influence on Kazakhstan.

## **Turkmenistan**

Russia's policy regarding Turkmenistan lacked consistency. Not long ago Russia levelled criticism against the Republic's unpredictable leader. Latterly, however, Russia has started perceiving the Turkmen President as an advantageous economic and political partner. The entire export of Turkmen gas is routed via the Russian Federation. The plan has recently matured in Russia to establish an oil consortium of Caspian states as a counterbalance to OPEC. This is expected to enable Russia to gain more from the development and export of oil. What's more, using its political influence on Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, Russia will be able to take the leading place in the consortium and, therefore, to dictate terms to other members.

However, the Turkmen leader, notable for his unpredictability, prevented Russia from carrying out its plan in full. What worried Russia most of all was Turkmenbashi's intention to participate in the construction of an alternative oil

pipeline through Afghanistan. To consolidate its position in Turkmenistan, Russia used Boris Shikhmuradov, who, according to some sources, had been collaborating with the Russian Special Services prior to his appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan. His nomination to this post had also been lobbied by the Russian Special Services. After his resignation in 2001, Shikhmuradov joined the opposition. The Russian Special Services assisted him in selecting reliable supporters in Turkmenistan. As a member of the opposition, Shikhmuradov made contact with American and Western diplomats, who did not suspect him of cooperating with Russia. What Russia sought for was either to change the leadership in Turkmenistan or to force Turkmenbashi to pursue policies on its behalf.

Having organized an attempt upon his life now blamed on Shikhmuradov, on 25 November 2002, the Russian Special Services did not aim at the physical removal of the Turkmen President. By doing so, they tried to provoke mass disturbances in the country, which, in turn, could lead to a change of leadership, with Shikhmuradov coming to power. In case of failure, Russia would win all the same. Being well aware of Turkmenbashi's panic fear of the opposition, Russia planned to deliver up all Turkmen opposition figures in return for imputing the attempt on his life to Uzbekistan and the US. In this case, Russia would have a fair chance to hope that the US would boycott the construction of an alternative oil pipeline via Afghanistan. Furthermore, there was an opportunity to induce an Uzbek-Turkmen conflict, which could be expected to weaken the position of Uzbekistan in the region and, as a result, to ruin its reputation in the international arena. This would also compel the US to revise its relations with Uzbekistan and even to remove its base from Khanabad, with the latter scenario suiting Russia most of all. (It should be mentioned that the American military base in Uzbekistan is located not far from the Uzbek-Turkmen border.) It was not very difficult for Turkmenistan's Office of Public Prosecutor to deduce the involvement of Russia in the attempt upon the President's life. The Turkmen authorities sharply accused Russia of the incident, but after a telephone conversation between Putin and Niyazov, the tone of the accusations changed. This time all the blame was lumped onto the Uzbek Ambassador to Turkmenistan. Consequently, the Russian plan worked only partially. Uzbekistan was charged with being privy to the attempt. Relations between the two republics deteriorated. That the situation did not develop into a conflict was very much due to the well thought-out stand taken by the Uzbek leadership. Besides, Turkmenistan did not dare to accuse the United States directly. In return, Russia helped the Turkmen leader make short work of the opposition, giving away all of its members who were seeking shelter in both Russia and Turkmenistan at the time. Turkmenbashi, for his part, not only severed the republic's relations with Uzbekistan, but also accepted Russia's terms concerning Caspian oil. Nevertheless, Moscow underestimated the extent of his unpredictability, in the firm belief that the situation was completely under its control. Once Turkmenbashi realized that he was the master of the situation, he started blackmailing Putin, making one demand after another. For instance, he insisted on the abolition by the Russian Parliament of double citizenship. Additionally, he thought that an opportunity presented itself to square accounts with Russian journalists, whose articles excoriated the current regime in Turkmenistan. In particular, the Turkmen President brought an accusation against Arkady Dubnov, known for his anti-Niyazov publications. Thus, Russian citizens were again accused of the attempt upon the life of Turkmenbashi.



## Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan has proved to be the only state in the region that steered a course of national independence. Uzbekistan was ready to cooperate with Russia, and with other countries, but only on terms of equality. There is not a shadow of doubt that this could hardly suit Russia. Attempts to override the Uzbek leaders, forcing them to make concessions to Moscow, were made on a regular basis during the 1990s. At first, Moscow tried to intimidate Karimov by rendering support to the Uzbek democratic opposition and prompting it to undertake radical steps against the authorities. As a result, leaders of the republic's democratic opposition were subject to repression and had to emigrate.

Intensification of Uzbek-Japanese collaboration during that period caused particular concern to the Russian industrial circles. Japan assisted Uzbekistan in developing its own textile and cotton-processing industries. Russia's textile factories were heavily dependent on the supplies of Uzbek raw material and cotton. Its attempts to find alternative partners met with limited success, because the equipment installed at its factories had been tailored to process Uzbek cotton. Purchasing raw material in other countries required complete re-equipment of Russia's textile enterprises. Russian manufacturers even approached the government, requesting it to take tough measures in respect of Uzbekistan, forcing it to sell its cotton only to Russia. Meanwhile, the republic's textile industry was rapidly developing thanks to Japanese investments. A Khoresm-based textile factory started exporting its finished product to Russia. The latter erected tax and tariff barriers in the way of Uzbek textile exports, while at the same time reproaching the republic for its reluctance to cooperate with Russia. Uzbekistan's motor car construction sector, which was gathering pace day by day, was another thorn in Russia's side. Uzbek motor vehicles were cheaper than Russian ones and, therefore, more competitive in the Russian market. Russia introduced high import tariffs for Uzbekistan-manufactured cars, thus practically closing the market to the republic.

Seeking to restore the former state of affairs, when Uzbekistan had simply played the role of a raw material source, Moscow undertook to ruin its economy. Attempts were made to destabilize the situation in the republic. Uzbekistan's reputation as the most stable state in the region lured foreign investors. Russia could not reconcile itself to such an order of things. Encouraging all sorts of radical and extremist groupings and kindling anti-Uzbek sentiments, Moscow forced Tashkent to spend more on strengthening its military and enforcement bodies and frontiers. Uzbekistan was, in effect, turned into a market for Russian arms and military equipment. In an attempt to break away from Russia's iron grip and to preserve its independence, the republic looked for alternative arms suppliers. Uzbekistan managed to forge cooperative linkages in the military domain with countries as diverse as Israel, Poland, the US and China.

After the US called Uzbekistan its strategic partner, Russia launched an information war against both countries. Taking advantage of certain policy differences between Europe and the United States, Moscow succeeded in discrediting the latter's policy in Central Asia as well as the government of Uzbekistan. Russian parliamentarians even put forward threats directed against the Uzbek government. For instance, a representative of the group of communists in the Russian Parliament announced that Russia would be able to find the means needed to rouse interstate conflicts in Central Asia and to oust Americans from the region.

The forthcoming economic reform that the government of Uzbekistan intends to implement will temporarily weaken the nation's position. Given a tough information war waged by the Russian mass media against Uzbekistan, any change for the worse in the people's living standard that the initial stage of economic reform tends to involve, will be highlighted by the Russian press as a big failure of the Uzbek authorities, thus contributing to the increase of antigovernment sentiments in the republic. What complicates the situation all the more is that Uzbekistan's neighbouring countries have already undergone the so-called "shock therapy" stage of economic reform. Against such a background, any drop in living standards in the Republic will be interpreted as another economic failure by its leadership. It is very likely then that its population, heavily influenced by Russian propaganda, will see both the government's policy and Western policy, particularly that of the United States, at the bottom of the republic's economic plight.

## **Kyrgyzstan**

After a military base for the antiterrorist coalition forces was set up in Manas, the government of Kyrgyzstan, which had always been characterized by its loyalty to Russia, was subject to criticism by the Russian mass media. Furthermore, there was reported a sharp increase in the activity of the republic's opposition, provoked by pro-Russian politicians, parliamentarians and the press. Such destabilising activity surfaced when Akayev went to the US in September 2002. After his overseas visit, he made a number of serious statements concerning the republic's strategic partnership with Russia. Russia insisted that more decisive steps be undertaken. Small wonder then that, simultaneously, the Kyrgyz opposition intensified its activity. The situation became extremely precarious for President Akayev. The opposition's attacks and political mass-meetings, taking place at a time when extremists and Islamists could organize provocations and provoke armed conflicts between the opposition and the enforcement authorities, jeopardized not only the government itself, but could well grow into a civil war. Fearing such a scenario, Akayev started talks with Putin. At first sight, he undertook a step that could hardly be called rational. They met in October 2002 in Sochi, where Putin was on holiday. After this meeting, Kyrgyzstan took a hasty and unexpected decision - to allow a Russian military base on its territory. However, if one goes into all the ins and outs of the events, it is obvious that Akayev's position at the time was disastrous. Although the Kyrgyz opposition had neither a comprehensive economic and political programme nor the ghost of a chance of winning the elections, it was disposed to undertake radical actions and could provoke unrest among the population, thus compelling the government to resort to force. This, in turn, could generate another wave of criticism and intensify the ongoing political crisis in the republic.

Putin promised to settle all the problems associated with the radical opposition, requesting, in exchange, Akayev's permission to place a Russian military base in Kyrgyzstan. Akayev yielded to Russia's pressure. The installation in the republic of a Russian military base strangely coincided with the termination of the opposition's activity.

The activity of the illicit extremist organization, Hezb ut-Tahrir, continues to gather pace. It was largely owing to the efforts of pro-Russian human rights organizations that the group acquired the image of martyrs struggling for freedom of worship. In reality, leaders of this organization, according to a source in the Special Service of Kyrgyzstan, are financed by the Russian drugs mafia, which is closely connected

with the Russian Special Services. According to some accounts, the latter permits some of its agents in extremist organizations to freely run the drugs business as a means of stimulating their activity. In addition, according to a source in the National Security Service of Uzbekistan, leaflets and religious extremist literature are printed in the Omsk Province of the Russian Federation. One may therefore suppose that the Russian Special Services use their agents in OTO, IMU and Hezb ut-Tahrir to intimidate the leaders of the Central Asian republics as well as to increase tension in the region in its interests.

Kyrgyzstan is head over heels in debt to Russia, with arrears totaling US\$171 million. The republic has been granted a 5-year delay in debt payment in return for the permission to quarter a Russian military base on its territory. Moreover, Moscow promised to confer labour migrant status on Kyrgyz citizens working in Russia.

The provision of Russian aid to Kyrgyzstan is viewed by independent Russian mass media as an irrational step, taking into account the fact that this Central Asian republic is hardly a strong and long-term partner for Russia. Here is just one figure to illustrate this statement: in 2000, Russian-Kyrgyz trade turnover dropped by 25 per cent, with such a trend also being seen in 2001. The republic's indebtedness to Russia continues to be one of the most painful issues in bilateral relations between the two countries. According to Moscow's estimates, Kyrgyzstan now owes Russia some half a billion US dollars.

What is more, as some of Russia's independent mass media have pointed out, a handful of Russian aircraft available at the military base in Kyrgyzstan can hardly serve as an indicator of Russian influence in the region. The military potential of the Russian Volga-Urals Military District, turned in the direction of Central Asia, would make it possible to exercise control over the entire region. Placing a Russian military base in Kyrgyzstan has therefore no role to play in ensuring the political and military interests of Russia in Central Asia, especially as some of the aircraft for this base have been transferred from Tajikistan.

The decision of the Kyrgyz government to allow a Russian military base on the republic's territory, especially at a time when all the major perils were already far behind, puzzled its neighbours and led to a significant alienation between Kyrgyzstan and other countries of the region. In 1999, during the events in Batken, Kyrgyzstan coped, without any assistance from outside, with members of IMU fighting groups invading the district. Today, with a base of antiterrorist coalition forces at Manas Airport in Kyrgyzstan, it would be ridiculous to speak about the danger of any such invasion. The republic's democratic opposition has levelled criticism against the decision to allow a Russian military base on its territory.

The Russian press put forward its own versions. First, it is a mere promotional trick undertaken on the threshold of presidential and parliamentary elections in Russia. Second, the town of Kand, where this base is located, is in the Chui Province, populated primarily by Russian-speaking people. It is here that the republic's largest military and industrial enterprises are based. Moscow's concern is to reserve these enterprises for Russia. Third, the Russian military base is the first step towards supplanting Americans in the region. This is expected to result in drawing all, or the majority of countries bordering upon Uzbekistan, into the sphere of Russian influence. Thus, Uzbekistan would find itself surrounded by pro-Russian states. All these versions are well-grounded to a certain extent, but they cover only part of the objectives Moscow has set itself.

To cement its position in Kyrgyzstan, Moscow needs to weaken the position of its president, making Akayev completely dependent on Russian assistance. With this in view, Russia is making the necessary arrangements to achieve a slightly modified "Tajik version" of power debilitation in Kyrgyzstan. The same scenario is being used: Moscow forces Akayev to reconcile with the radical opposition, which, however, does not terminate its activity. The post of Ombudsman is filled by a person known for his sympathy for and connections with Islamic extremists, and is, therefore, criticized by Uzbekistan. With his assistance the prosecution of many representatives of Hezb ut-Tahrir and IMU will be stopped. Persecution of Islamic separatists in Kyrgyzstan will be terminated and, as a result, their position strengthened. This will be conducive to weakening Akayev's power even further, making him more and more tractable to Russia. On the other hand, Russia is trying to turn Kyrgyzstan into a new base for the anti-Uzbek Islamic opposition. To complicate this state of affairs, the Russian Secret Service is currently destabilizing the situation in the republic's southern areas, bordering upon Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Conflicts between ethnic groups and nations are being stirred up on fictitious grounds. Instability witnessed in the south will be used to justify the spread of Islamic extremism in the districts contiguous with Uzbekistan. Under conditions of ongoing inter-ethnic discords, it will be difficult to control the development of Islamic extremism. Consequently, instability in the region will grow. Russian arms and military equipment will again be in demand in the Central Asian market. This time, both governments and extremists will need them. Supplying arms to both sides, Moscow will contribute to the escalation of tension and instability in the region. As well as that, the development of its military-industrial complex, which is presently in deep recession, will be given a quantum boost. The Central Asian market for Russian arms will become practically inexhaustible. With the situation being sharply destabilized, the US and its allies will have to leave the region. Such a gloomy scenario may well materialize.

Yielding to Russia's pressure and trying to find a consensus between the West and Russia, the leadership of Kyrgyzstan exposes itself to the danger of destabilization. If transformed into a jumping-off place for the spread of Russian influence in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan will become a "transshipping point" for contraband arms and drugs as well as Islamic extremism and radicalism. More and more frequently, the republic is used as a target by Chechen terrorists, who are currently facing difficulties in carrying out their activity in Russia because of the more drastic measures taken by the Russian enforcement authorities. In Kyrgyzstan, Chechens may well bring about anti-Russian terrorist acts, taking advantage of the domestic muddle. Explosions that occurred in one of Bishkek's marketplaces in December 2002 were organized, according to the republic's National Security Service, by Chechen terrorists. Trying to sit on two chairs simultaneously, Akayev therefore finds himself in a complex situation. Finally, it needs only be stated that as a result of its poorly thought-out foreign policy, Kyrgyzstan is in a desperate situation, extraction from which will require time and effort.

### **Levers Of Influence: General Conclusion**

Russia has insufficient financial resources to attach Central Asia to itself in economic terms. That is why other mechanisms are used. The mechanisms whereby Russia exerts its influence on Central Asia, with Kyrgyzstan being used as an example, are as follows:

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- The Russian Special Services have at their disposal compromising information about all the leaders. Compiled in Soviet times, such information is used to recruit agents of influence in the government.
- The Russian Special Services have a network of agents, dating from Soviet times. Perfectly adjusted to local conditions, this network may be used whenever it is necessary to organize any action.
- Russia makes use of its lobby in the regional governments and parliaments in order to obtain its objects, in particular the necessary pre-requisites for Russia's control over the region's economy.
- Russia has recently passed legislation regulating migration. According to its provisions, some 3 million citizens of Central Asia presently working in the Russian Federation have found themselves under the threat of deportation. Given a tense economic situation in the region as it is, the return of 3 million migrant workers to their native countries means the replenishment of the ranks of the unemployed and, automatically, the ranks of the opposition.
- In pursuit of its interests, Moscow is actively cooperating with citizens of the Central Asian republics.

Western charitable foundations have underestimated the professionalism of the Russian Special Services, which used the grants they provided to increase Russia's influence in the region. To put this another way, Western grants were practically placed at the service of Russia. If one analyzes the activities of large-scale NGOs and public organizations in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, as well as some human rights organizations operating in Uzbekistan, it will become clear that most of them not so much criticize their governments as advocate and lobby the Russian interests in their countries and carry on anti-Uzbek propaganda. Using its NGOs and independent mass media, Russia has managed to set the democratic public opinion of the West against high-ranking politicians who do not suit Russia. Virtually all the regimes in Central Asia are assessed according to the extent of their loyalty to Moscow. Only pro-Russian leaders are considered to be the most influential opposition activists and democrats in the region. Take, for example, Bakir Ulu, a representative of the Kyrgyz opposition, who criticised the US' presence in Central Asia and lobbied the interests of Russian industrialists in Kyrgyzstan. Known for his linkages with IMU and Hezb ut-Tahrir, he is the most influential opposition politicians in the republic and enjoys the support of all democratic countries. The Kyrgyz democratic opposition, which really upholds the principles of democracy and criticizes the government of Kyrgyzstan, still remains in the shadow, receiving less assistance from Western sponsors. The Uzbek opposition, both democratic and liberal, has always been ignored in the West. It is presented by the Russian press as being pro-government. It is largely owing to Russia that, in the West's opinion, only radicals, Islamists and extremists may be viewed as the opposition. Until recently, a radical anti-Uzbek Islamic opposition group, financially backed by Russia and designed to destabilize the situation in Uzbekistan, was at the centre of attention of all democratic countries.

## Conclusions

In Central Asia, neither civil society nor statehood has yet taken a consummate shape, to say nothing of democratic culture. Virtually all the political regimes in the region are not democratic, to a greater or lesser degree. When characterizing them, one can only speak about things such as stability or instability, consistent or inconsistent policy, full dependence on or independence from Russia. The standards accepted in the civilized world are inapplicable to Central Asia to date. Each country of the region has its own problems. As long as Central Asia remains the object of political games, any attempt to bring about democratic reform in the spheres of the economy or politics is doomed to fail. A real way out of the current situation will be economic integration of all Central Asian countries, irrespective of their foreign policy priorities. Large-scale integration will enable them not only to join forces in tackling political and economic issues, but also successfully resist the influence of external agents, whatever guise these may take. In addition, the region's countries will be afforded the opportunity to cooperate with democratic states, implementing democratic reforms after their example. For the time being, the only country whose participation in the integration process remains problematic, is Kyrgyzstan, since its government, completely controlled by Moscow, cannot decide independently. As a result of Russia's political and military intrigues Uzbekistan, which tried to play a crucial role in the integration process, has found itself practically in isolation. It is no longer a pivot of the integration process. The Dushanbe meeting of the leaders of four Central Asian republics was expected to boost the successful development of integration. However, Bishkek's ill-considered policy and the placement of a Russian military base in the region contributed to the slowing-down of integration processes in Central Asia. Today, Russia plays the role of the most ardent opponent of integration in the region. One need not be a genius to see that, with integration of the Central Asian states gathering pace, they will become really independent and inaccessible for Russia's imperial ambitions.

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