

## CHANGES IN THE CONFIGURATION OF RUSSIA'S MILITARY PRESENCE IN TAJIKISTAN AND ITS INFLUENCE ON MAINTAINING SECURITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Russia's military presence in present-day Tajikistan began at the end of the 19th century. The first border units were created in the Pamirs 110 years ago, after the Russian Empire conquered Central Asia in the second half of the 19th century.

During the Soviet period, more Soviet army contingents were deployed in Tajikistan. In 1945, the Gatchina 201st motorized rifle division was repositioned on the southern borders of the Soviet Union by a decision of the Union's supreme leadership. Later, it became part of a limited contingent of Soviet troops in Afghanistan and, after its withdrawal, was deployed once more at its former bases in Tajikistan. In addition to the 201st motorized rifle division, there were also combat

units and contingents of the U.S.S.R. Central Asian Border District stationed in the republic. And in 1979, construction began of the Nurek high-altitude opto-electronic center of the Space Monitoring System.

It goes without saying that during the Cold War, such an impressive concentration of military might on the Soviet Union's southern borders fulfilled at least two functions: defense—in the form of moral-psychological restraint of any radical intentions of certain states in the opposing bloc, and preventive-deterrent—permanent control and the possibility of launching a preventive strike in the southern and southwestern directions.

A large number of scientific, analytical, and other works have been written today about the

consequences of the U.S.S.R.'s collapse, so I will limit myself to saying that the disappearance of the Soviet Union dramatically changed the planet's geopolitical configuration. When the U.S.S.R. disappeared from the political map of the world and the Commonwealth of Independent States formed in its place, the global strategic significance of a large military contingent, now the Russian Federation's, in Tajikistan was reduced. Today the question of a possibly earlier change in the configuration of the Russian military presence in the republic, and more precisely, of the withdrawal of regular units of the RF army from it as early as the beginning of the 1990s, is purely hypothetical. History has already dictated its needs. The civil war in Tajikistan and the permanent domestic political instability in neighboring Afghanistan posed real threats to the security of the Central Asian region and the Russian Federation. The common interest of Tajikistan and Russia in ensuring stability and retaining security in the two countries (taking into account the domestic situation in each of them), just as throughout the entire region, was the main driving force behind comprehensive rapprochement between these countries, primarily in the military-political sphere. Russian-Tajik cooperation, which grew into a strategic partnership, was reinforced by a mutual agreement on the creation of Russian military base in Tajikistan; and in addition, a large Russian border contingent was stationed there.

Right up until the beginning of the NATO-led antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan, Russia was the only guarantor of external security for most of the Central Asian states. In turn, Russia's interest in the region's security had three main motivations: to fight international terrorism and religious extremism, to oppose drug trafficking, and to assist in ensuring the domestic stability of the Central Asian states. Generally speaking, Russia wanted stability and security in the region in order to turn this territory into the Russian Federation's rear and thus prevent it from being controlled by other nations, which would pose a strategic threat for Moscow.

A little less than ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in September 2001, the world

geopolitical map underwent significant changes once more. There can be no doubt that the beginning of the NATO-led antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan dealt a blow to Russia's strategic position in Central Asia. The United States' penetration into this region shattered the prevailing idea that the Russian Federation was the only power with the right to deploy its troops and have a military presence in this region. This encroachment by the U.S. on Russia's sphere of influence indicates the immense changes that have occurred in Moscow's geopolitical position. Despite the fact that Washington has not assumed precise obligations with respect to Central Asian security, the U.S.'s military presence in this region has essentially become a security alternative for the region's states. This, in turn, has decreased the role of Russia and the CSTO, its military lever in Central Asia, even more.

Against the background of the U.S.'s greater significance in the region, the Tajik-Russian strategic alliance, which became a strategic partnership, prompted Tajikistan's political leadership to reconsider Russia's presence and participation in the country's affairs. The Tajik government's adjusted attitude toward Russia's military presence in the republic was expressed in delaying the talks on the status and conditions for the existence of the Russian military base in Tajikistan—hitherto an invariable guarantee of security for both countries and the region, as well as in the accelerated transfer of control over the Tajik state border to the Tajik border troops.

There can be no doubt that due to the weak combat potential of the country's army, including the border troops, the decision to place protection of the state border under the control of the republic's forces aroused justified concern about how efficacious this protection would be and how well penetration of destructive groups (primarily into Central Asia) would be opposed. It also aroused fears that the volume of drugs being transported via the northern route through the region to Russia and Europe would increase.

What is more, the changes in configuration of Russia's military presence in Tajikistan should be viewed not only through the prism of ensuring Central Asia's security, but also in the

context of a geopolitical breakdown in the interests of the leading world players on the Central Asian arena, primarily Russia, the United States, and China (and to a lesser extent, the European Union).

The transformation that occurred in the structure of Russia's military presence in Tajikistan served as a new boost for discussing the

present-day realities of security in the Central Asian region, as well as Russia's role in Central Asia and in the global geopolitical picture. At the same time, it should be admitted that when carrying out this study, the author had to admit that, as of today, this discussion did not transpire into a full-fledged research study either by national, or Russian, or foreign experts.

## Military Aspects of Mutual Relations between Tajikistan and Russia

As we noted, Russia's military presence in Tajikistan has a long and special history. Its military presence as such in Central Asia began in the mid-19th century, when the Russian Empire started encroaching on the region and adjoining one local state formation after another. The historical chroniclers recorded the presence of separate military corps of the Russian Empire in the eastern part of the Bukhara emirate (the central region of present-day Tajikistan), Gorny Badakhshan, and some uyezds of the Kokand khanate (north of Tajikistan). The military forces of His Imperial Highness were launched into action to carry out the foreign policy tasks of the Russian authorities in the southern (or Asian) direction. Of course, I am referring here to the well-known Big Game, the struggle between the Russian and British empires for influence in a particular region of Central Asia during the second half of the 19th century.

With the advent of Soviet power, contingents of the Red, and then Soviet, Army were called upon to play the role of a stabilizing and restraining force in the Central Asian region. (We have already mentioned the 201st motorized rifle division and the situation that arose in Tajikistan after the Soviet Union's Afghan campaign of 1979-1989 ended.)

When evaluating the overall dynamics of the development of military-political cooperation between the Russian Federation and Tajikistan, it should be noted that their mutual rapprochement was an objective necessity that answered the interests of both countries, primarily in ensuring and preserving security in the region. Tajik President Emamoli Rakhmon stated: "For several reasons, the Russian Federation occupies a special place in the domestic and foreign policy of Tajikistan."<sup>1</sup> This is understandable—thanks to Russia's military presence, Emamoli Rakhmon has succeeded in stabilizing the situation in the republic and reinforcing his position in the country. The president's former press secretary, Z. Saidov, specified the Russian Federation's indubitable role in stabilizing the situation in Tajikistan: "It was Russia that took on the main responsibility, during the armed confrontation between the government forces and opposition contingents, for keeping the scale of the combat action to a minimum and for supporting the Group of Russian Border Troops in Tajikistan in protecting the Tajik-Afghan border."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. Rakhmonov, *Nasha tsel—natsionalnoye edinstvo*, Dushanbe, 1997, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> A. Saburov, Z. Saidov, *Tadzhikistan: vneshniaia politika i massovaia informatsiia (1993-1995)*, Sharki ozod, Dushanbe, 1997, p. 8.

In the geopolitical respect, Russia's special role in regulating the inter-Tajik conflict, in assisting the subsequent post-conflict rehabilitation, and in monitoring the execution of the General Agreement also ensured the Russian Federation a unique position among the undeniable foreign policy priorities of war-devastated Tajikistan. Tajikistan became part of Moscow's permanent sphere of interests and influence in the Central Asian vector of its foreign policy strategy.

## **Transformation of Russia's Military Contingent in Tajikistan into a Military Base. Its Role in Ensuring Security in the Central Asian Region**

The reorganization of Russia's military contingent in Tajikistan into a full-fledged legally registered Russian military base took more than five years. There was a number of reasons for the delay in opening this facility and essentially legalizing the de facto existence of Russia's military presence in Tajikistan, just as there was a number of prerequisites for deciding to transform the 201st motorized rifle division into a military base.

A closer look at registration of the Russian military base in Tajikistan reveals a certain amount of ambiguity in the action of the sides during the last years of preparation for opening this facility. Bilateral talks on the issue passed through different phases, from controversy to active steps toward each other. On the whole, the process by which terms were reached on the status and conditions for the existence of a Russian military base in Tajikistan can be described as a military-economic tender, or to use the simpler language of arithmetical equations—investments in exchange for the base.

Despite the opinion of many experts that the Tajik leadership is ready to go to any lengths to establish close cooperation with the United States, this argument does not entirely correlate to the actual state of affairs. Opinions were expressed that Vladimir Putin's visit to Tajikistan in October 2004 and the documents signed as a result were merely Moscow's diplomatic achievement, and in no way geopolitical victory, and that the steps Emamoli Rakhmon took toward the Kremlin were more tactical concessions dictated by domestic policy than a strategic choice in favor of Russia. Today it is obvious that the results of the military-economic bargaining that took place between Tajikistan and Russia, in which the Tajik authorities skillfully used American assistance as an effective lever of pressure on the Russian leadership, were mutually acceptable and satisfactory to both sides.

The sides did not dispute the role of the military base in ensuring stability in the region, neither the Russian leadership, nor the Tajik authorities had any serious intentions of withdrawing Russia's 201st motorized rifle division from the republic. The Russian military base, being a land component of Russia's military presence in Central Asia, is capable of securing the southern region of the Commonwealth from terrorist and extremist attacks. The sides are unanimous about the fact that the presence of the Russian military contingent in the country meets the interests of both countries and is maintaining stability in Central Asia as a whole. In addition to this, Russia's military base in Tajikistan now has something to defend (in addition to carrying out the main tasks of mil-

itary security), and that is, energy and industrial facilities, in which there are plans to invest more than 1 billion dollars in the near future. The Russian Federation has reinforced its own position in the region slightly by legalizing the presence of the Russian contingent in Tajikistan. Dushanbe has already acquired Moscow's full support of its regime, as well as real (not potential) investments into the country's economy.

The Tajik leadership's particular affinity for its new Western partners can be seen if special attention is paid to the current domestic political mosaic of Tajikistan's neighbors. The shift in power that took place in Kyrgyzstan, as well as the Andijan events in Uzbekistan cannot help but have an effect on Tajikistan's attitude toward the West, the democratic reform support programs, and other Western values and attributes. Tajikistan is still the only country in Central Asia where there are no serious limitations on the activity of international nongovernmental organizations. It is obvious that Tajikistan's political leadership will be closely following the development of events in neighboring Uzbekistan. Depending on the consequences of the domestic trends, the Tajikistan authorities will possibly reconsider their attitude toward the widespread and in-depth activity of different international nongovernmental structures.

## **Withdrawal of Russia's Border Troops from Tajikistan. Changing the Configuration of Military Forces and its Influence on the Prospects for Security in the Central Asian Region**

The agreement on transferring protection of the Tajik state border with Afghanistan under the complete jurisdiction of the Tajik defense and law-enforcement structures is the most dubious and ambiguous item, with respect to Central Asia's security, in the entire bloc of military issues regulated between Russia and Tajikistan. As we noted, in light of the relative weakness of the technical and personnel potential of Tajikistan's border structures, the threat of an increase in drug, firearms, and ammunitions trafficking and the easier penetration of various kinds of destructive elements from neighboring Afghanistan could have the most negative consequences for security in the republic and in Central Asia as a whole. How justified is the Tajik authorities' decision to take protection of the state border under their control? What influence could the shuffling of military forces in Tajikistan have on security in the country and the region?

From the very beginning of the negotiation process, the prospect of losing relative control over the drug flows from Afghanistan to the Russian Federation could not help but worry the Russian side. Russia has repeatedly stated that its border presence in Tajikistan is seen as a guarantee of its own and regional security. Now the group of Russian border guards is remaining in the republic as military advisors. The Provision on the Operational Border Group of the Russian FSS defines the functions of this formation, which include, assisting the Tajik border troops to protect the state border; coordinating action to protect the Tajik state border with authorized bodies of Tajikistan; studying the state of its integrity; exchanging information with the Committee for Protection of the State Border (CPSB)

of Tajikistan on issues of mutual interest; drawing up proposals for protecting the Tajik state border; helping to organize and render material and technical support of authorized Russian and Tajik structures; and participating in the organization and carrying out of joint measures for protecting the state border of Tajikistan.<sup>3</sup>

In the Russian Federation and beyond it, different opinions were expressed about the consequences of transferring the Tajik-Afghan border to Tajikistan's control. In May 2004, First Deputy Head of the Russian Foreign Ministry V. Trubnikov described the withdrawal of Russian border guards in no uncertain terms: "We are withdrawing from Tajikistan and in so doing denuding the border, and this means that drugs will have free reign."<sup>4</sup> According to the evaluations of various experts, the withdrawal of the Russian border guards from the Tajik-Afghan border would essentially mean opening it up and could become the reason for new destabilization of the situation in Tajikistan and Central Asia. Various expert assessments confirmed that neither Tajikistan, nor Russia, nor the world community would benefit from the withdrawal of the Russian border troops from the Tajikistan border, and it may even be dangerous for them.<sup>5</sup> There are more than 150,000 drug addicts in Moscow alone, and so it would be much easier to close the main channel of drug trafficking in Tajikistan than look for large batches of heroin in Russia later.

The analytical report of the Center for Strategic Forecasting published in June 2004 said that the withdrawal of the Russian military contingent that helped to fight drug trafficking could lead to an extremely unfavorable situation on the border, which neither the Tajik border guards, nor even the American soldiers would be able to control.<sup>6</sup> The assessment given in the U.S. State Department's 2005 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report deserves special attention. It says in particular that "the withdrawal of Russian border troops by the end of 2005 may negatively impact Tajik drug interdiction efforts."<sup>7</sup> The possibilities of the Tajik leadership were also assessed: "...The Tajik Government's resources for counternarcotics efforts remain limited, however, and the Government itself is vulnerable to pressure from prominent traffickers, many of whom are in a position to threaten domestic stability if seriously challenged."<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, some high-ranking employees in Russia's defense and law-enforcement structures do not share the opinion that the flow of drugs to Russia will increase and do not see a big tragedy in yielding control of the border to Tajikistan, particularly since drugs from Afghanistan have been coming and continue to come to Russia not only through Tajikistan, but also via other republics of Central Asia. In this respect, the need for reinforcing Russia's own borders was emphasized.<sup>9</sup>

Head of the Russian FSS Border Service V. Pronichev believes the border should not have two landlords. He also talked about implementing measures for installing technical equipment on the common border with Kazakhstan, which has essentially been missing in the past.<sup>10</sup> V. Pronichev's deputy, A. Manilov, also pointed out how capital- and labor-intensive it is to install technical equipment on

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<sup>3</sup> See: *Provision on the Operational Border Group of the Russian Federal Security Service in Tajikistan—Appendix to the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan on Cooperation on Border Issues of 16 October, 2004.*

<sup>4</sup> M. Gavriushin, "Uiti nel'zia ostat'sia," *Rossiiskoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 7, 21 July, 2004, available at [[http://military.rian.ru/articleprintversion.html?art\\_id=25410](http://military.rian.ru/articleprintversion.html?art_id=25410)].

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>6</sup> See: M. Gavriushin, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> *Excerpts: International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2005*, Published by the U.S. State Department in March 2005, available at [<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=March&x=20050309200420xlrenneF0.4634363>].

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>9</sup> See: V. Kulikov, "Pamirskie tainy," available at [<http://www.rg.ru/2004/11/17/granica.html>].

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem.*

the border with Kazakhstan. He claimed that a control system could certainly be installed with the help of technical means on the border with Afghanistan, but, in his words, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were not actively cooperating with the Russian border structure, as a result of which hardly anything is known about the situation on the external borders of these states.<sup>11</sup>

Tajik experts were asked the same question about how capable the Tajik border and other law-enforcement structures were of coping with the responsibility assumed, and the extent to which the statements about the country's willingness to protect the state border were realistic.

According to the information of competent sources, the situation in the border regions with Afghanistan has not improved, either with respect to material and technical support of the contingents of Tajik border guards, or with respect to maintaining security on the borders at the level of previous years.

Economic stratification is gradually intensifying, both among the residents of the border areas and among the personnel of the border troops on the state border with Afghanistan. Small retail trade networks and service outlets used to provide the poorest population of the border areas with more or less stable earnings, which was enough to at least feed itself. The high salaries by local standards of the soldiers of Russian border troops were an economic prerequisite for the functioning of the micro economy in the border areas and provided the main income in the families of border guards among Tajik citizens. Now, however, it is extremely likely that there will be more evidence of residents in the border areas becoming more involved in drug trafficking. This is already happening in the Moscow and Panj directions (the most popular narcotics transit routes), where in recent years the "complicity base" index has invariably increased. When Tajik citizens employed in the Russian border troops were recruited to serve in the Tajik border forces, they were told that former contract soldiers would receive a fringe benefit of \$100, which was in no way justified.<sup>12</sup>

The number of Tajik citizens kidnapped during attacks from the Afghan side as ransom for the payment of drug trafficking debts has increased in the Badakhshan area. In this sense, the example of the Kalaikhumb section is indicative: the border is poorly protected, the CPSB does not have enough funds to install the necessary equipment, and most of the food supplies and some other material means were sold illegally in order to receive profit before the end of the winter period.<sup>13</sup> In this respect, it is worth presenting an excerpt from an interview by the CPSB chairman on the results of the 2004-2005 winter in the Badakhshan area: "And, to be frank, it was frequently a question of survival and making it through the winter."<sup>14</sup>

The task force activity of the CPSB contingents in the Badakhshan area is relatively perfunctory. Border posts provide their own protection, and detachments are sent to the border irregularly. Fuel and lubricants, money, food, and commodities are often demanded of local citizens at the border checkpoints. This is arousing a negative reaction among the population of the border areas of the Gorno-Badashkhan Autonomous Region and threatening to provoke conflict situations on the border and in the regions where CPSB contingents are deployed.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to this, there is information that in some border areas, envoys from Afghanistan are already busy recruiting Tajik citizens—former border guards who are now unemployed.<sup>16</sup> It is impos-

<sup>11</sup> See: V. Kulikov, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Interview with source wishing to remain anonymous.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>14</sup> Interview by CPBS Chairman S. Zukhurov to Information Agency Azia-Plus, "Narkotrafik ne vozrastiot," 17 March, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with a source wishing to remain anonymous.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem.*

sible to say for sure what these people are being recruited for, but it should be emphasized that those who have Russian citizenship (and, consequently, a Russian passport) are the main targets, there being approximately 10,000 such people in the Gorno-Badashkhan Autonomous Region alone. As we know, if a person has a Russian passport he can move freely throughout the territory of several Commonwealth states (apart from Russia itself). In this sense, such mobile people can be used to great advantage, both in legal and in illegal activity.

As of the end of April 2005, the number of narcotics confiscated by the Russian border guards in the Moscow and Panj vectors amounted to approximately 300 kg, almost half of which was heroin.<sup>17</sup> From the beginning of 2005, CPSB contingents confiscated 193 kg of narcotics.<sup>18</sup> What is more, according to the information of Chief of Staff of the Narcotics Control Agency (NCA) of Tajikistan U. Toshmatov, recently an increase has been noted in the volume of drug transit from Afghanistan. In the first quarter of 2005, NCA employees intercepted 34 attempts at illicit drugs circulation and confiscated more than 200 kg of narcotics (2.3-fold more than in 2004). In addition, since the beginning of 2005, in the border Afghan provinces of Kunduz (across from the section of the Panj border contingent), Takhor (across from the section of the Moscow border contingent), and Badakhshan (across from the Pamirs), additional laboratories are being set up for processing heroin.

Specialists (and I mean specialists, and not officials) from the border structures of both the Russian and the Tajik sides are unanimous in their opinion that transferring the Tajik-Afghan section of the state border under the control of the Tajik Committee for Protection of the State Border was premature. The question of transferring the border under the control of the Tajik side was not disputed; however, there was always disagreement about the deadlines and conditions of the procedure. It is commonly believed that the process should have been carried out gradually, slowly replacing the border patrols under the jurisdiction of the Russian servicemen with Tajik border guards. The transfer of the real and personal property of the border posts to the Tajik colleagues did not do much to preserve the existing infrastructure; on the contrary, with respect to logistics support, the Tajik servicemen have to begin from the mid-1990s level. The objective shortcomings and weak technical, material, as well as personnel potential of the Tajik border troops cannot help but have an effect on how well the state border is protected, how efficiently drug trafficking is controlled, and how well the penetration of various kinds of destructive elements both into Tajikistan and into the region as a whole is prevented.

The NATO armed contingent in Afghanistan, which is mainly busy ensuring its own safety, does not have much influence on the cultivation, processing and sale of narcotics. As we know, since formation of the new Afghan government, Great Britain has taken on the responsibility for narcotics control in Afghanistan. The British placed their stakes on two vectors—training local national security employees in ways to fight illicit drug circulation and developing alternative farming. But today, it has to be admitted that their efforts have been a complete fiasco.

It should also be kept in mind that representatives of the Northern Alliance found themselves essentially detached from power on Afghanistan's domestic political arena. This Alliance, despite its friendly attitude toward Tajikistan and Russia, is a traditional supplier of heroin via the northern route through Central Asia to the Russian Federation and Europe. It stands to reason that in order to reinforce its position and try to restore its previous power niches, the Alliance leaders are trying to build up their military power, apparently by increasing heroin deliveries. As early as 2004, in Alliance-

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> See: L. Kenjaeva, "S. Zuhurov: 'My v sostoianii okhraniat' rubezhi gosudarstva!'" *Azia-Plus*, No. 21(279), 26 May, 2005.



controlled Badakhshan, a significant increase in land for growing opium poppy was seen. Taking into account the dramatically increased areas of drug cultivation in the northern provinces of Afghanistan and the transfer of control over the protection of the Tajik-Afghan border to the national armed forces of Tajikistan, Russia and Europe are justifiably concerned about the prospect of an increase in narcotics transit through Central Asia to corresponding terminals.

### *In Lieu of a Conclusion*

After the beginning of the NATO-led antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan and the changes in configuration of Russia's military presence in the region, the situation in most Central Asian states looks rather complicated from the viewpoint of ensuring security and stability in these countries.

The overall development of the sociopolitical situation in Central Asia is defined not so much by the presence of foreign troops in its states, as by the weaker role of the *Afghan factor* in the political decision-making system in the region's countries. The leaders and the elite used to place the priority on preventing various Afghan groups from influencing the domestic political situation using force. This particularly applies to the decision-making procedure in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and partially in Kyrgyzstan. The power-related requirements of corresponding states and the foreign relations system were made part of this task. At the same time, the following should be noted: *the Afghan factor* revealed the fact that the main threat to the security of the Central Asian countries came and comes not so much from the outside, as from within.

The existence of the *Afghan factor* stimulated the need for an outside guarantor of security. Russia provided this guarantee for a long time, although in reality it could not perform the functions of a universal power-related and sociopolitical stabilizer. Russia's military presence in the region, particularly the large group of troops in Tajikistan, was called upon to morally and psychologically deter possible invasions into Afghanistan. The destructive groups of the latter were forced to proceed from the relative indefiniteness of a potential Russian response to their harsh actions, for example, the beginning of widespread penetration into the territory of Tajikistan. To what extent could the Russian Federation carry out operations in Tajikistan using force? Tajikistan's importance was defined by the fact that it was the central point in the regional *domino system* for a certain time, and, most important, it was the key to the ultimate defeat of the Northern Alliance, without which the Taliban movement could not count on solving its future political and power-related tasks.

But a military-political guarantee system on the part of Russia under relatively virtual conditions did not provide a sufficient basis for the existing regimes in Central Asia to survive, particularly considering the fact that the policy of the new Russian leadership aimed at reinforcing Russia's position as the main military-political partner of the Central Asian countries was essentially not reinforced by any significant economic enlargement of Russian capital. In this sense, the appearance of new foreign forces (primarily the NATO states) as unofficial guarantors of security in the countries in question was perceived with traditional Central Asian hospitality, particularly since Russia had earlier broke the taboo on internationalization of security issues in the region and transferred (although theoretically) the resolution of a whole series of vital problems to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

After this, the Russian Federation was forced to play, at most, an equal role with the PRC, while more likely act as a junior partner for Beijing, which possessed incomparably greater and qualitative-

ly broader levers of influence on the situation in Central Asia as a whole, as well as in the individual republics of the region. All the more so since, in contrast to Moscow, which designated the priority of the western vector in its foreign policy, the enlargement of Beijing's presence in Central Asia, precisely at the end of the 1990s, became a significant state priority. In this way, it was unrealistic to count on Central Asia remaining in the sphere of Russia's exclusive influence, even before the question was raised of the West's enlarged presence in Central Asia in light of the antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan.

Today, it is becoming obvious that the leaders of the Central Asian countries are not perceiving the American and Western presence as a whole in their states as a factor of military stabilization. The matter more likely concerns the fact that a new financial and political resource has appeared for the local elites, which has significantly expanded the possibilities of political maneuver. Judging from how the conditions of the existence of foreign military contingents in the Central Asian countries were discussed, our elites did not count on the Western states, at least in latent form, assuming responsibility for ensuring security and, particularly, domestic stability in these countries. At the same time, it should be noted that the political elites of several Central Asian states, particularly the leadership of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, maintained rather active contacts with Western politicians regarding the patronage of certain countries in building the new statehood. However, these relations did not lead to any serious breakthrough in state-building. On the contrary, they gave rise to serious problems for the ruling elites due to the appearance of political groups in the Central Asian countries that were democratic in form and pro-Western in essence. This cast aspersions on the legality of the existence of authoritarian regimes. At present, the relatively more stable regimes of the Central Asian republics (Turkmenistan and Tajikistan) are much less inclined to agree with the appearance of politically alternative groups, particularly those enjoying the West's patronage and receiving its political and economic support to one extent or another.

It is obvious that the main goals of the Central Asian regimes' political game involving the foreign military presence related to the antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan were to obtain an additional lever of pressure on Russia, as well as form a new source of extra-budgetary income. To a certain extent, Tajikistan's political leadership succeeded in making use of this lever and was able to bargain certain political and economic advantages from the Russian Federation. Confirmation of this are the legally registered contracts and agreements between Russia and Tajikistan on an entire series of economic and military-political issues.

In this situation, a specific context is formed: the ruling elites in the countries in question are not interested in Russia's withdrawal from the region, for the Russian political and military presence makes it possible to avoid discussing with the West such problems as the election system, human rights, and the fight against corruption, particularly at a time when some states are about to enter the difficult period of a power transfer to the younger political generation. The Central Asian leaders will still need Russia for a long time to come as a real counterbalance to the West.

There can be no doubt that the destruction by America and its allied troops of most of the infrastructure of the Taliban movement and al-Qa'eda network in Afghanistan has significantly changed the military-political picture in the region. We can primarily say that the *Afghan factor*—as the prevailing basis for political and military planning—has ceased to exist. At present, the Central Asian countries do not consider that the situation in Afghanistan will rapidly destabilize and spread beyond the boundaries of the country. The process is perceived as relatively flaccid, in which military-political tension and religious, as well as ethnic, contradictions will be played out within the framework of the inter-clan struggle, which is traditional for Afghanistan. This neutralizes the possibility of an external upsurge even of those forces that might be inclined to pose the most serious tasks. In this sense, it should be admitted that the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan

had a significant stabilizing effect on the region and excluded the likelihood of a major conflict emerging.

At the same time, several opinions should be expressed.

- First, potential threats to Central Asian security, directly or indirectly related to Afghanistan, essentially boil down today to the possible increase in narcotics deliveries from this country and the penetration of small bands of various destructive groups into the region. In the first case, the danger of increasing drug transit, in light of transferring the Tajik-Afghan border under the control of the national border forces of Tajikistan, is more global in scope, which was discussed in the previous section of the study. Second, it is entirely clear that the small bands mentioned are ultimately headed for the Ferghana Valley, which is arousing the concern of the states in question.
- Second, alleviating the influence of the external Afghan factor of instability on the situation in the Central Asian countries brought to the foreground those in which internal contradictions are most manifest, that is, where the building of the new state systems is progressing with significant defects or has not been completed. In this respect, it is entirely natural that Kyrgyzstan was the country in which serious political instability was designated after neutralization of the Taliban and most of the radical Afghan groups. In this state, building of the power system was extremely inconsistent, which aggravated the traditionally existing contradictions between the southern and northern clans. In addition, the leadership of this republic was distinguished by significant maneuvering in the choice of the system of foreign guarantees. Akaev's desire to uphold, as much as possible under the region's conditions, the U.S.'s demands on democratic states, went hand in hand with the attempts to draw Russia into implementing stabilizing measures not only in the power-related, but also in the political sphere. For example, the question of the Russian language as the second state language did not have and could not have any consequences for power-related relations, but it significantly stabilized social relations. In the final analysis, in Kyrgyzstan, where domestic contradictions were regarded as less aggravated compared with Uzbekistan, events developed in a more negative vein, although it is still too early to say that Kyrgyzstan can become a central point in the *domino system* in Central Asia.
- Third, the appearance of new sources of financing and the decrease in urgency of the external force threat are leading to very ambiguous results with respect to the development of the domestic political situation in several countries of Central Asia. On the one hand, polarization is occurring in the region's states between those in the elite who have access to distribution of unplanned revenue from the foreign military presence, and those who are removed from this. This in itself cannot pose a direct threat to the stability of the existing regimes, but under certain conditions, by way of self-identification of those who found themselves outside the new system, the regional or religious factor could be chosen. On the other hand, it is obvious that the degree of consolidation of the elite in the face of a common enemy has significantly declined, and this could have very specific consequences in the form of aggravating the inter-clan struggle within the ruling stratum of "the chosen." The events in Kyrgyzstan, which cannot fully be classified as examples of such conflicts, nevertheless demonstrate a model of the possible development of the situation in the event that significant and influential segments of the elite continue to be deprived of direct levers of political and economic power.

The main conclusion to be drawn on the basis of an analysis of the current situation is that instability in the Central Asian countries and in the region as a whole has not been eliminated by the

American-led operation in Afghanistan, or as a result of the change in configuration of Russia's military presence there. On the contrary, in the mid term, conditions have been designated for restoring the political standoff in the context of state-building, and to be more precise, completing the formation of the independent states of Central Asia. There is a feeling in the region's political circles that those forces now curbing completion of the state-building process, as well as the integration of the U.S. and several Western countries into the system of relations developing in the states in question, will form the political elite in the post-transition period.

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