

TERRITORIAL AND LAND-WATER CONFLICTS IN CENTRAL ASIA: A VIEW FROM TAJIKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the nature of the conflicts in present-day Central Asia (CA). It analyzes the main tangles in the border/territorial and land-energy disputes going on in CA against the background of the growing rivalry over regional resources.

It takes a look at the history leading up to the emergence of the conflicts in present-day CA and describes the main aspects of interstate relations among Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. It takes the Sokh events (January 2013) as an example to show the specific features of the border conflicts in CA, comprised of the complex border configuration, the existence of enclaves, the exclusively high population density, the acute shortage of land and water resources

(in the border zones), and the difficulties with forming a civil identity. Moreover, the unresolved nature of the border problems is giving rise to attempts at political manipulation.

Disputes over the use of transboundary river water are another unresolved issue that adds to the above-mentioned tension. An analysis of the sources of CA's hydropower industry helps to understand the nature of the water disputes in the region's countries and the consequences the Soviet irrigation traditions had for Tajikistan.

The different viewpoints on reviving construction of the Rogun hydropower plant, as well as the international experts' evaluation of its construction project supported by

the World Bank are examined. The analysis has shown that the matter does not in fact concern the potential dangers of the Rogun hydropower plant project. The problem is

rooted in the internal political contradictions inflicting CA: the rivaling elites are striving to privatize not only national, but also regional resources.

KEYWORDS: *Central Asia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, border conflicts, land-water disputes, energy problems.*

Introduction

For many centuries, ethnic relations in CA have been characterized by the existence of large Jewish, Indian, Gypsy, Persian, and other diasporas in Bukhara, Samarkand, Khujand, and Kokand, and special conditions caused by the absence of strong ethnic tension.

When czarist Russia conquered CA, it introduced a certain amount of confusion into the established lifestyle and ethnic relations in the region. This was expressed in the Russian system of administrative-territorial structure based on the military fiscal policy and the establishment of a Turkestan General Governorate.

Based on the tasks of colonial policy, the czarist administration began arbitrary demarcation of the borders of the traditional residential areas of the local peoples; in so doing, it relied on the support of the Uzbek officials. Tashkent, which was where the territory's governor lived, became a so-called throne city; later this fact played a negative role for the indigenous peoples of CA. The thing was that Lenin's nationalities policy declared by Soviet power was implemented in CA keeping in mind the experience of the territorial administration organization of the Turkestan territory.

In 1924, national and territorial demarcation in CA was carried out primarily in the interests of the Uzbeks, which was of detriment to the other indigenous peoples of the region. Almost all of the more or less large cities and well-appointed districts of the territory were transferred with the blessing of the red commissars to the newly formed Uzbek republic. In so doing, the historical borders where other peoples (apart from the Turkmen people) resided—Tajiks, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, and Karakal-paks—were not taken into account. The formation of new republics led to a change in the old borders, whereby one territory encroached on another, enclaves were formed, and so on.

This picture was aggravated even more by the new zoning and implementation of a corresponding agrarian policy. Soviet power deliberately encouraged the mixing of national groups and the absorption of numerically small peoples by larger ones; this was carried out on the basis of the ideological precepts of the time and had far-reaching consequences.

Now the sociopolitical situation in the CA countries is full of contradictions and uncertainty. The tension in society is caused by inadequate representation of the political elites in the power structures, as well as by corruption in all the echelons of the state mechanism, ethnic, parochial, and kinship preferences in selecting personnel, authoritarian administration methods, and so on. This tension is aggravated by internal defects such as all-out violation of human rights and freedom of conscience (preventing people from performing religious rituals, repression, and insulting people for their confessional preferences), interception of dissidence, the absence of conditions for realizing political rights and freedoms, and so on.

To this can be added the seizure and appropriation of state and public property by government officials of the upper echelons of power and their large entourage and relatives. On the other side of

the coin are social problems, the constant increase in the number of labor migrants moving to far and near countries to make a living, and the ensuing number of separated families and life dramas.

All of these problems are caused by the dependence of the CA states on other countries; they have still not become grounds for mass protests (with the exception of Kyrgyzstan), but no one knows how long it will go on and what this kind of situation will lead to.

Border Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Expanse of CA

Territorial (border) and land-water problems are currently becoming an increasingly frequent topic of public discussion in Tajikistan. Due to its central location in CA, Uzbekistan has border disputes with almost all the countries of the region. Since it acquired its state independence, neighboring states have never made any official territorial claims against it. Nevertheless, after the beginning of the civil war in Tajikistan, which took place in its southern part, Uzbekistan mined all of the state border, which had still not been delimited, with this republic (including in the northern regions to which the civil war did not spread); two decades have passed since then.

The Tajikistan government and international organizations have frequently asked the Uzbekistan government to remove the mines from the borders. However, although they received a number of money installments from international organizations, the Uzbek authorities have still not finished carrying out mine clearance of the state border under the pretext of not having enough funding. Every year, hundreds of peaceful citizens are blown up and killed by mines.

Border demarcation in CA is still going on; it is taking so long to complete because of the many disputed sections, frequently extremely small. The land in the foothills is highly valued and sometimes sections of one hectare and less become the target of disputes.

So the only solution is gradual peaceful settlement of the border disputes, which depends on the goodwill of the heads of state and government of the neighboring countries, although in reality everything is not that simple. The countries of the region frequently make attempts to acquire unilateral benefits using illegal and at times forceful methods. For example, the Uzbek side allows the use of such methods toward its Kyrgyz and Tajik neighbors, although in so doing it piles the blame on neighboring states.

A typical example of an attempt to forcefully resolve border problems is the incident that happened in January 2013 near the Uzbek enclave of Sokh, located in the Kyrgyz part of the Ferghana Valley. As the press noted, "Sokh is the most enigmatic place in the Ferghana Valley. The Sokh district itself belongs to the Ferghana Region of Uzbekistan, but it is completely isolated from the rest of Uzbekistan by Kyrgyz territory. In so doing, 99% of the population of Sokh is comprised of Tajiks, many of whom have relatives and friends in the Sogd Region of Tajikistan."¹

The non-delimited border in this area passes between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek villages of Charbag and Khushiar, which causes small conflicts to periodically arise there. The thing is that the villages are essentially adjacent and it is not that easy to draw a clear line between them. Houses at one end of Charbag stand right next to houses where people from Khushiar live, so any incaution is fraught with infringing on the interests of the population of one or the other of the villages.²

According to eye-witnesses, this fact was the reason for an incident that occurred on 5 January, 2013. This is what happened: the Kyrgyz side, unbeknown to the local authorities, began to put up

¹ "Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan: desiat stolbov i shest metrov ot granitsy," *ASIA-Plus*, No. 3 (788), 10 January, 2013.

² See: Ibidem; Kh. Mursaidov, "Granitsy etnicheskogo kharaktera," *ASIA-Plus*, No. 7 (792), 24 January, 2013.

electricity poles along the road connecting both villages. It is precisely along this road that the disputed section of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border of around two kilometers runs. The Kyrgyz workers did not react when the residents of Khushiar told them they could not carry out work on the territory of a neighboring country. On the morning of 6 January, the residents of Khushiar began pulling down the poles (both the new and the old), while the people of Charbag tried to stop them. Fighting ensued and, taking advantages of their greater numbers, the residents of Khushiar detained a group of Kyrgyz; according to different sources, their number fluctuated between 30 and 40 people. By evening, the people of Khushiar had released the detained women, and in the morning on 7 January they released all the men. In turn, outside the conflict zone the Kyrgyz took a group of women—citizens of Uzbekistan (ethnic Tajiks)—hostage, and handed them over to the local police. Some time later, the law enforcers exchanged them for the Kyrgyz hostages.

These events stirred up the public of the states involved in these events. The residents of the conflict zone were of the opinion that “the tragedy that occurred is the work of the Uzbekistan authorities, ... it was targeted provocation to aggravate relations between the countries, it is big politics.”³

Meanwhile, the Uzbek authorities immediately closed their border stations and prohibited Kyrgyz citizens from crossing through the checkpoints of the Ferghana Region. The Kyrgyz authorities followed suit, closing the border with Uzbekistan. As a result, the situation of the residents of the Sokh region worsened and they inherited a mass of humanitarian problems. The Tajik residents of Sokh, blocked from all sides in their enclave, found themselves in isolation and were unable to go anywhere.⁴

Keeping in mind the difficulty of the situation in the incident zone, Acting Chairman of the OSCE, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Leonid Kozhar, called on Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to show restraint and enter a dialog. In turn, the Kyrgyz leadership efficiently interfered in the conflict. The Defense Council of Kyrgyzstan instructed the country’s president to take the situation under his direct control.⁵

After these events, Governor of the Batken Region of Kyrgyzstan Zhenish Razzakov said, “We are open to dialog and, according to international standards, are ready to open the roads, but unfortunately the Uzbek side is not forthcoming with proposals.”⁶ It was not until 1 February that the residents of the blocked enclave of Sokh were able to return home from Uzbekistan where they had spent almost a month.

During the month-long blockade, around two thousand residents of Sokh accumulated in the Ferghana Region of Uzbekistan, the number of whom constantly grew due to the guest workers arriving from Russia. The Kyrgyz and Uzbek sides pledged to ensure unhindered movement of the local residents through the Sokh and Shakhimardan enclaves. But on the way to Sokh, Kyrgyz residents threw stones at the convoy of vehicles at several places along the route it was following. In Sokh itself, during the blockade, difficult socioeconomic problems accumulated.⁷

There are many unclear aspects in this incident; for example, why did the relatively peaceful and tolerant Tajik residents of the village of Khushiar (and the Sokh district in general) suddenly resort to such an extreme measure as taking hostages? Who provoked them? What lies behind this event? Why did the states’ governments not rush to delimitate the stage border?

Pondering on the answers to these questions, a well-known Kyrgyz analyst in the sphere of regional political problems, Mars Sariev, said that there are political games behind the Sokh events. In other words, he thinks that the residents of Sokh were provoked to undertake their senseless actions by

³ Kh. Mirsaidov, op. cit.

⁴ See: “Uzbekistan: “Chtoby popast v anklav Sokh, nuzhno umeret,” *Ferghana.News*, 24 January, 2013.

⁵ See: *Millat*, 9 January, 2013; *ASIA-Plus*, 10 January, 2013.

⁶ Kh. Mirsaidov, op. cit.

⁷ See: “Kyrgyzstan zhestko otvetil Uzbekistanu po Kambaratinskoi GES,” *ASIA-Plus*, No. 11 (796), 7 February, 2013.

some power counting on the fact that the intrigue it strummed up would bring certain political fruits. According to Sariev, what happened in Sokh is a Big Game into which Tashkent has drawn the Tajiks; in so doing, the authorities of Uzbekistan are piling all the responsibility on the Kyrgyz border guards.

The analyst relates Uzbekistan's position regarding Sokh to energy problems. The active support Tajikistan is rendering the Rogun hydropower plant project goes against Uzbekistan's interests. So the latter intends to prevent Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan from mending their relations, which is so necessary for the energy problems to be resolved, and from creating an alliance by striving to push these countries into a conflict. It just so happened that during that time Uzbekistan closed its border checkpoints on the main roads leading to Kyrgyz towns and villages, and at the same time to its enclave of Sokh.⁸

At present, a little more than 1,000 km of border have been delimited between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan; its total length amounts to 1,400 km.

It should be noted that the matter was not restricted to the incident we examined. In addition to the roads leading to Sokh, on 17 January, on the instructions of the Uzbek authorities, the Dustlik pass leading to the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan was blocked. The Kyrgyz enclave of Barak (which belongs to the Karasuisk district of the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan) met the same fate.

The existing problems are aggravated by the shortage of land and water resources and the high rates of population growth, especially in the Ferghana Valley, which is situated at the intersection of the borders of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

In these conditions, the peaceful initiatives (both at the local and at the interstate level), taking into account the interests of all sides, as well as the tolerance and willingness for a constant dialog in order to find ways to peacefully solve the problems are extremely important. By the way, several years ago, on the initiative of two NGOs (Kyrgyz and Tajik) with the support of the American Kettering Foundation, continuous consultations and dialogs were carried out with Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek representatives on the problem of manifesting tolerance when resolving border issues. Well-known experts in conflict psychology, doctors G. Sonders and R. Slim, held several seminars and training sessions to organize such dialogs; however, some time later, this program ceased to function.

Clashes on the grounds of land and water shortages among the residents of the villages located on the border of the Isfara district of the Sogd Region of Tajikistan and the Batken Region of Kyrgyzstan occurred back in Soviet times (in 1982, 1988, and 1989); small conflicts have also been going on in recent years. They are mainly caused by the absence of a clearly demarcated border between the two contiguous states. Resolving this problem becomes more complicated with each passing year due to population growth which is causing enlargement and merging of the villages and districts on the borders of the mentioned regions. A bilateral parity commission officially functions, although mutual understanding has not been reached on many basic issues. As a result, only 567 km (59%) of the 970 km of the Tajik-Kyrgyz border have been defined at the level of working groups, 519 km of which have been approved.

There are also conflicts on the border between the Tashkent and Samarkand regions of Uzbekistan and the Sogd Region of Tajikistan. One of them flared up in 2009 on the border of the Panjakent district of the Sogd Region and the Urgut district of the Samarkand Region of Uzbekistan. The conflict was caused by the residents of the border village of Turkshurnovo, who are ethnic Uzbeks, failing to choose their citizenship by the established deadline and stubbornly refusing to obtain Tajik passports. They continued to live with Uzbek passports outside Uzbekistan. At the proposal of the Uzbek side, Tajikistan extended the deadline for choosing citizenship. However, this new deadline came and went, while some residents still refused to determine their citizenship. When the local authorities of the Panjakent district began demanding observation of the law, the Uzbek authorities of the neighboring districts and regions

⁸ See: *Millat*, 23 January, 2013.

caused a ruckus. They claimed that the Tajik authorities had supposedly been driving Uzbeks out of the village. It went as far as a group of Uzbek soldiers forcing their way into the village of Turkshurnovo and the Tajik border guards having to call in assistance to help deport them.⁹

Border conflicts with Tajikistan's participation are attracting the attention of international organizations. In May 2012, on the initiative of the OSCE office in Tajikistan, a seminar was held at the Tajik National University on the topic "Border Conflicts: Ways to Manage Them and the Experience of the Republic of Tajikistan." Doctor of Political Science Helena Rytövuori-Apunen (from the Finnish University of Tampere) and Doctor of Social Sciences Joni Virkkunen (from the University of Eastern Finland), who participated in the seminar, set forth their vision for settling the border conflicts and made corresponding proposals on border problems between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.¹⁰

Demarcation of the Tajik state border with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan must be completed on the basis of documents of 1924-1929, which set forth answers and explanations on several disputed territorial issues.

According to Tajik Minister of Foreign Affairs Hamrokhon Zarifi, unsettled territorial issues with neighboring countries might be the reason for various conflicts. He said that Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have 1,400 km of common border, 80% of which has currently been demarcated. Moreover, an agreement must be reached on sections located in the southern and northern parts of the republic. These sections are located in Tursunzade, Shaartuz, Asht, Kanibadam, and the Spitamen district of the Sogd Region. These disputes cannot be settled without political will and incentive to achieve peace and consent among the residents of the region.¹¹

Land-Water Disputes as a Conflict-Prone Factor

Another ongoing problem in CA is related to the use of transboundary river water. There have been no disputes or misunderstandings relating to the use of water resources of the two largest regional rivers—the Amu Darya and Syr Darya—from time immemorial.

During the many-century history of the region, states have arisen, empires have formed, kingdoms have prospered and waned, conquerors have come and gone, while the rivers have flowed unperturbedly along their God-given routes. And they would have continued to do so had it not been for the struggle to ensure the Soviet Union's cotton independence.

The assimilation of new lands and using them for cotton production in ever growing volumes gained particular momentum in the 1960s-1970s. Despite the CA's limited land and water resources, the Soviet government raised the "white gold" delivery plans with each passing year. This was achieved both by assimilating new areas and by constantly increasing the cotton gathering plan from each hectare of land. Cotton gatherers, manifesting magnificent labor merit, cultivated high-quality types of cotton and raised the harvest yield to elevated levels. Nevertheless, the top Soviet party echelon demanded more and more cotton.

The highest level of cotton production, calculated at millions of tons, was reached in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which owned large areas of land and were two of the main water consumers in the region. Two other cotton-growing republics, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, located on the

⁹ See: *Millat*, 8 September, 2009.

¹⁰ See: *K vershinam znanii*, 26 May, 2012.

¹¹ See: *Millat*, 23 January, 2013.

upper reaches of the large rivers, had limited areas of land so were unable to ensure a high level of deliveries.

It was the amount of cotton produced that became the reason for Moscow's inequitable attitude toward the CA republics, which reported every year on the increase in cotton deliveries, trying to earn the Center's favor and obtain corresponding privileges.

Due to the continuous sowing of only cotton, the land gradually degenerated and its yield decreased. However, the regional Soviet party leaders, without realizing that there is a limit to everything, tried to assimilate more and more land. The one-crop system that developed in the CA republics increasingly turned them into a cotton appendage of the industrial centers; but no one took heed of this at that time.

Soon thereafter a simple and reliable solution was found—falsification of figures. The scope of figure falsification and distortions constantly grew; for example, Uzbekistan reported deliveries of 6 million tons of cotton. Soviet society gradually got accustomed to this phenomenon and soon it became an inherent part of the entire production cycle. The matter went as far as the driver of a cotton-gathering double-row harvester reporting that he had gathered 60-70 tons of cotton in one season, when this figure was in fact twice as low.

Taking advantage of the Kremlin's favor, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan began to abuse the water resources. Not only were water quotas per hectare of cotton field regularly ignored and agro-technical irrigation regulations violated, but also artificial lakes and reservoirs used to develop fishing were created.

At the peak of the cotton boom, hundreds of reservoirs of fresh spring water that flowed from the mountain lakes and glaciers of the Pamir Mountains and Zeravshan appeared in these republics. Such a negligent attitude toward water was due to the absence of control over its use and the irresponsibility of the regional leaders. This barbaric attitude resulted in the tragedy of the Aral Sea.

At this juncture, it should be noted that in recent years neither Tajikistan nor Kyrgyzstan have not taken a gram of water above the quota allotted to them. On the contrary, Tajikistan has been using only a small part of the water share it is assigned due to its limited land resources (it has still been unable to fully assimilate the quota allotted it).

As Minister of the Tajikistan Water Industry R. Bobokalonov stated, throughout the world water has been recognized as a commodity and has a net price, but Tajikistan is giving Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan its water resources for free.¹² In 2012, Tajikistan did not use 1 bcm of the water quota it was allotted.

The two republics situated on the lower reaches of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya have been sending almost all the water from these rivers into artificial channels and reservoirs. As a result, the water of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya has been disappearing into the Karakum and Jizak steppes.

The leadership of the Soviet Union was well aware that the tragedy of the Aral was man-made. But the Soviet leaders, reluctant to admit that this environmental disaster was due to their negligence and incorrect policy, began putting the blame elsewhere, beginning with nature and ending with the CA republics.

Today the dying Aral is a sight for sore eyes, but none of the steps being taken are yielding results. As for those who are destroying the Aral by creating fish farms and recreation and health resorts in the flood plains of the two rivers, they have absolutely no regrets about what they have done.

The time has come to develop a rational attitude toward the use of water resources. What it more, the UNDP Energy and Environment Program in Tajikistan is in favor of supporting a dialog and cooperation among the CA countries in transboundary water resource management; however, so far, these good intentions have not yielded any results.

¹² See: *Ibidem*.

Energy Resources— Target of Competition and Grounds for Conflicts

Border and water disputes in relations among the CA states are closely interrelated with the energy problem. The thing is that during Soviet power all the CA republics were equally supplied with energy, since they were hooked up to a single electricity transmission grid. After the Soviet Union fell apart, the electricity lines that united it were broken. Electricity generating facilities remained in the control of the states on the lower reaches of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan found themselves in impenetrable darkness. It turned out that natural hydrocarbon resources (oil, coal, and gas) discovered and developed during Soviet times were also in the territories of the states on the lower reaches of the mentioned rivers. This made the price of hydrocarbons and conditions for delivering them to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan levers of pressure on them.

In these extremely difficult conditions, the governments of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were left with no other choice but to look for their own sources of energy. They began to build small power plants, but the energy they manufactured proved insufficient. The shortage of electricity became particularly apparent in the fall and winter; residential buildings had no electricity, which greatly complicated people's lives.

Then the governments of the republics began reviving the construction of several hydropower plants planned in Soviet times (where a significant part of the work had already been carried out). Construction of the Rogun hydropower plant was revived in Tajikistan, while work began again on building the Kambarata hydropower plant in Kyrgyzstan.

As soon as restoration work began, open and latent opponents to finishing the construction of these facilities appeared. For example, the government of Uzbekistan complained that finishing construction of the hydropower plant would destroy the water distribution balance among the consumer states. It noted that the reservoirs to be created while building the hydropower plants would cause water shortages in the summer for the states situated on the lower reaches of the rivers. It also mentioned the reduced water intake in the Aral Sea and the disastrous consequences of building hydropower plants in seismic zones.

Such false assessments stand to reason; nevertheless, the leaders of several states and heads of international organizations (particularly the World Bank) are officially or unofficially supporting Uzbekistan.

In this light, let me set forth several arguments in favor of completing construction of the Rogun hydropower plant.

It is known that the Nurek hydropower plant, which is a little lower in capacity, has been operating efficiently since the 1970s not far from the Rogun construction site located on the Vakhsh River. In all the years of its operation, neither Uzbekistan nor Turkmenistan have complained that it is detrimental to normal water runoff. On the contrary, during the spring floods, its reservoir is filled, while in the hottest part of the summer, it ensures an even supply of water to the fields of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

The dam of the Nurek hydropower plant has already withstood the water pressure, which is higher in the full-water season, and constant earthquake shocks of 6-7 points on the Richter scale over more than 40 years. Moreover, according to specialists, during these years the subsoil on which the dam was built has settled and become more firmly packed and the dam itself is stronger. Operation of the Nurek hydropower plant provides the states located downstream with a stable supply of water for the entire annual cycle.

Since Tajikistan cannot invest independently in construction of such a large-scale project as the Rogun hydropower plant, it asked other governments and private investors to participate in implementing this project on advantageous terms.

One of the first to respond was the Pakistan government, which as early as 1994 and 1996 expressed its willingness to take part in finishing the construction of the Rogun hydropower plant; it promised to allot the first installment of \$600 million for this purpose and invest in further construction. According to the author, the conditions of this offer were the most beneficial and timely for Tajikistan.

While Tajikistan was thinking about it, the Russian government, which had kept quiet until now, officially announced its great interest in finishing construction of the Rogun hydropower plant. Russia reminded Tajikistan that the project had been developed with the participation of its specialists and now it was ready to invest in it.

Unfortunately, upon further investigation, it turned out that all of Russia's assurances were given under false pretenses. The government of Tajikistan, overjoyed by the consent of its strategic ally to participate in finishing the construction of the hydropower plant, began asking Russia about investments. However, it did not receive a response to any of its inquiries. The thing was that Russia was playing a double game in resolving the problem of finishing construction of the Rogun hydropower plant; as soon as an investor announced its intention to participate in implementing this project, it announced its "exclusive rights" to it. At the same time, the Russian leaders were negotiating with Uzbekistan about Rogun; however, their decisions concerning this project changed depending on Uzbekistan's attitude toward Russia.

With each passing year, Uzbekistan toughens its attitude toward finishing construction of the Rogun hydropower plant, which is the only way Tajikistan can supply itself with electricity.

Uzbekistan is using every possible and impossible lever of pressure on Tajikistan. For example, as soon as Tajikistan, after losing hope of receiving foreign investments, declared Rogun a national building site and began gathering of donations from the country's population and engaging in preparatory work to close off the Vakhsh River, Uzbekistan set up a transport blockade. Under farfetched excuses, the only railroad through Uzbekistan linking Tajikistan with the rest of the world was blocked and carriages supposedly carrying strategic materials (which were actually carrying building supplies) were not permitted passage.

What is more, in 2011, Uzbekistan entirely closed the railway line from the Uzbek station of Amuzang to the Tajik station of Khatlon; it is still not functioning to this day. Since the mid-1990s, Uzbekistan has also introduced a visa regime and began raising obstacles to humanitarian communication among the citizens of both states. And this is despite the fact that more than one million Tajiks who are its indigenous residents live in Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan has a long list of unfriendly acts toward Tajikistan. They include obstacles to entry into the country, restrictions of movements of Tajikistan's transit transportation means, gas cutoffs during the peak of winter (usually during the second half of December), and so on.

Uzbekistan has many contrived claims against Tajikistan. For example, some time ago, lawsuits about eliminating violations in the activity of the Tursunzade aluminum plant that went into operation in Soviet times have been added to the discontent over continuing implementation of the Rogun hydropower plant project. But this is not all: Uzbekistan is constantly addressing international organizations, as well as the heads of state and government of various countries, regarding the impossibility of implementing the Rogun project and putting restrictions on the operation of the Tursunzade aluminum plant.

When analyzing Uzbekistan's claims against Tajikistan, it can be concluded that they are based on political ambitions. We should not forget that the Rogun hydropower plant and Tursunzade aluminum plant projects were drawn up in Soviet times with the consent and participation of representatives of Uzbek scientific establishments. They were developed during the time when Uzbekistan had a privileged position both in CA and in the Soviet Union. Without the consent and approval of Mem-

ber of the C.P.S.U. Central Committee Politburo Sh. Rashidov, the Kremlin could not endorse a single major project of socioeconomic significance in Central Asia at that time.

It bears noting that the Nukus declaration signed by Uzbekistan as early as 1995 declared that “continuation of construction work at the Rogun hydropower plant is legal and does not infringe on the rights of other Central Asian states.” According to the current water-sharing regulations set forth by a decision of the Scientific-Technical Council of the Ministry of the Water Industry of the former Soviet Union, Tajikistan has the right to the following amounts of water consumption: 7% of the runoff from the Syr Darya (record No. 413 of 07.02.1984) and 15.17% of the runoff from the Amu Darya (record No. 566 of 12.03.1987). A total of 37.14 cubic km of water flows through the Syr Darya and 78.46 cubic km through the Amu Darya. So Tajikistan’s share of the Syr Darya amounts to 0.07×37.14 cubic km = 2.6 cubic km and 0.1517×78.46 cubic km = 11.9 cubic km from the Amu Darya, making a total of 14.5 cubic km. Tajikistan takes less than 20% (18%) of the runoff that forms in the country’s territory for its own needs (64 cubic km), or 11.52 cubic km of water, which is equal to 10% of the average annual runoff of the rivers of the Aral Sea Basin (115.6 cubic km). So Tajikistan does not use 14.5 cubic km – 11.5 cubic km = 3 cubic km of water from its quota, and it has the legal right to send it to fill the Rogun reservoir.¹³

According to specialists, these 3 cubic km amount to only 14.7% of the runoff of the Vakhsh River. It will take 10.2 years to fill the reservoir of the Rogun hydropower plant, which has a volume of 13.3 cubic km. The volume of water taken annually for this purpose comprises only 6.5% of the annual runoff of the Vakhsh.

Specialists think that the Rogun hydropower plant reservoir could make the following positive contributions:

- (1) increase the area of new irrigable land by 350,000 hectares (mainly in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan);
- (2) ensure intensive multi-year regulation of the runoff. This along with the Nurek (10.5 cubic km), Tuiamuiun (5.3 cubic km), and Zeid reservoirs in the Karakum Canal (2.2 cubic km) will make it possible to ensure guaranteed water supply to a total of more than 3 million hectares of Uzbekistan’s and Turkmenistan’s irrigable land in the lowest-water years;
- (3) ensure a 15% improvement in water quality (in terms of mineralization) in the Turkmenabad and Tuiamuiun dam location;
- (4) prevent a huge amount of toxic wastes and greenhouse gases (200-400 million tons) from being discharged into the atmosphere;
- (5) increase the total electricity generation by the hydropower plant cascade on the Vakhsh River to 14 billion kW/h. This will generate not only summer energy, but also the basic energy, of which there is a greater shortage in the region; what is more, it will cover peak loads and normalize electric frequency.

All of the above gives reason to believe that construction of the Rogun hydropower plant along with its reservoir will ensure the sustainable development of both Tajikistan and the countries on the lower reaches of the Amu Darya.¹⁴

Tajikistan, which is actively supporting the Rogun hydropower plant construction project, is keeping in mind that all the hydropower facilities (built or planned) have a complex irrigation-energy designation and serve the interests of the upstream countries and water-consuming states.

¹³ “Tadzhikistan obiazan zavershit stroitelstvo Rogunskoi GES,” *Avesta.tj*, 12 July, 2011.

¹⁴ See: A. Karimov, U. Murtazaev, “Tadzhikistan obiazan zavershit stroitelstvo Roguna,” *ASIA-Plus*, No. 92 (681), 7 December, 2011.

As mentioned above, Uzbekistan is also casting disgruntled looks at the Tursunzade aluminum plant, which has been operating for more than thirty years now. It is claiming that its operation is supposedly detrimental to the environment of the adjacent regions. Dozens of different national and international commissions have been carrying out inspections for many years now to see how the operations of this enterprise are impacting the environment but have not found any proof of their detrimental effect. What is more, experts are pointing out that dozens of energy, industrial, mining, and other facilities in Uzbekistan operating adjacent to the Sogd Region of Tajikistan are much more dangerous to the environment than the Tursunzade aluminum plant.

As a supporter of and participant in introducing the principles of integrated water management and the Johannesburg plan, Tajikistan, in order to shed light on the problem and defend its right to implement the Rogun hydropower plant project, has asked all interested parties and international organizations to take part in an experts' evaluation of its construction. In particular, with respect to carrying out the relevant experts' evaluations of this project, the Tajik side is acting in collaboration with the World Bank, which, in turn, has been financing two key research studies on the Rogun hydropower plant—a feasibility study and an assessment of the environmental and social impact of the project. The tender for carrying out the experts' evaluation was won by a consortium headed by Coyne & Bellier, which has been engaged in the feasibility study (a contract was signed on 8 February, 2011), and a Swiss company, Pöyry, which has been responsible for the assessment of the environmental and social impact of the project (a contract was signed on 25 March, 2011).

As early as December 2011, during the International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan H. Zarifi discussed several issues, including those concerning the implementation of hydropower project in the republic, at a meeting with World Bank Vice President for the South Asia Region Isabel Guerrero, President of the Islamic Development Bank al-Madani, and Prince Karim Aga-khan IV. The minister focused attention on the need to carry out an experts' evaluation of the Rogun hydropower plant project by the designated deadline and particularly emphasized the importance of building this and other facilities for supplying the country with energy.

In turn, the World Bank declared that it was inexpedient to begin building the first line of the power plant before completion of the international experts' evaluation. Moreover, WB representative T. Alers suggested revising the deadline for completing it. He also stated that the World Bank was preparing to study ways to supply energy in Tajikistan; essentially he alluded to the fact that there was no need to hope for a positive outcome of the experts' evaluation.¹⁵

In 2010, in order to attract foreign investors, Tajikistan began restoration work at Rogun hydropower plant; funds were gathered by means of voluntary contributions and donations from the population.

This initiative greatly aggravated Tajik-Uzbek relations. Uzbekistan made numerous protests; thanks to a powerful propaganda campaign, the republic's authorities were able to publish distorted information on the Rogun hydropower plant project in the media of several countries.

As for official Dushanbe, its statement noted that "Tajikistan's position remains unchanged: implementation of hydropower projects and primarily completion of the Rogun hydropower plant are being carried out keeping in mind national and regional interests, and Tajikistan is willing to cooperate closely with neighbors on this issue."

It comes as no surprise that the viewpoints of the World Bank and the U.S. usually coincide; this "unanimity" was also manifested in the building of the Rogun hydropower plant. In October 2011, during her visit to Dushanbe, former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that Tajikistan should look at alternative sources of electricity and that it was not necessary to build Rogun only to take revenge on a neighbor opposed to this project. So it follows from her words that all of Tajiki-

¹⁵ See: S.M. Ikramov, "Razmyshlenie nakanune prazdnika, ili Gotovy li my k energeticheskoi nezavisimosti," *ASIA-Plus*, No. 84 (683), 14 December, 2011.

stan's efforts to complete this extremely important project for the people are nothing more than "revenge on a neighbor"¹⁶; no comment, as they say... Analysts believe that the true position of the American authorities, which support Uzbekistan on implementation of the Rogun project, is hidden behind the diplomatic formulations.¹⁷

Meanwhile, in February 2011 a U.S. Senate report was published on the Rogun hydropower plant construction project. It said that the American Senate is in favor of efficient use in CA of water resources and believes that the construction and operation of the Rogun hydropower plant could solve many economic problems in the country, as well as ensure the export of electricity to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The report expressed the hope that Tajikistan and Uzbekistan would find areas of common interest in this project and begin constructive cooperation.¹⁸ However, things got no further than these "sophistications."

On 15-19 May, 2011, following the recommendations of international organizations, representatives of the CA countries gathered in Almaty (the World Bank initiated the meeting); they discussed questions concerning the disputes over the Rogun hydropower plant project and set forth their positions.

On 7 November, 2012, a second sitting was held in the World Bank's regional representative office in Almaty, at which the Tajik representative said that building a 335-meter dam at the Rogun hydropower plant is the only way out of the tough energy crisis in which the republic's population has found itself. The Uzbek representative spoke against the construction of Rogun, expressing anxiety about the dam breaking as the result of a possible earthquake.¹⁹ But these anxieties were dispelled by international experts.

On 11-12 February, 2013, the third round of sittings was held in Almaty to exchange information and discuss assessments of the Rogun hydropower plant project. The meeting concentrated on the intermediate results of the two assessments still going on (the feasibility study and environmental impact assessment), about the latest results of which the World Bank briefly informed the representatives of donor organizations and diplomats working in the CA states. The preliminary reports on hydrology and geological studies were discussed at the meeting; they are some of the main structural elements of the feasibility study.

The latest results of the assessment of seismic danger and modeling of the Vakhsh cascade were also examined, as well as the geological situation; a talk was held with the representatives of two international companies engaged in carrying out the feasibility study and environmental impact assessment. Project management, alternative dam heights, and the impact the dam height might have on resettlement and infrastructure expenditures were also discussed.²⁰

World Bank Regional Director for Central Asia Saroj Kumar noted that all the information discussed at these meetings is preliminary; we are talking only about the latest results, which are subject to correction, that is, they cannot be considered a basis for making a final decision on implementation of the Rogun hydropower plant building project. Before the future of the Rogun hydropower plant is decided, many other factors will have to be examined related, among other things, to international agreements and funding issues.

After exchanging opinions, this is as far as the representatives of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan got.²¹

¹⁶ "Rogun: ne budet perekrytia—budet energokrisis," *ASIA-Plus*, No. 84 (673), 9 November, 2011.

¹⁷ See: *Millat*, 26 October, 2011.

¹⁸ See: *ASIA-Plus*, 2 March, 2011.

¹⁹ See: P. Chorshanbiev, "Tsentralnaia Azia obsuzhdaet promezhutochnye otsenki Rogunskogo proekta," *ASIA-Plus*, No. 84 (771), 8 November, 2012; *Millat*, 7 November, 2012.

²⁰ See: *ASIA-Plus*, 31 January, 2013.

²¹ See: P. Chorshanbiev, "Strany Tsentralnoi Azii obsudili Rogunsky proekt," *ASIA-Plus*, No. 13 (798), 14 February, 2013.

The general impression created by these meetings and statements of WB representatives is that the experts' examinations and assessments of the Rogun hydropower plant project will go on endlessly. Most people know that the best way to bury any constructive idea is to keep chewing over it. This is what the World Bank is doing, while the Tajik government is meekly following suit. Meanwhile, the Tajik people continue to sit in the dark on fall and winter evenings and wonder when they will see the light; when being the big question.

Meanwhile, the Kyrgyzstan Ministry of Energy and Industry has stated that at present, due to the changing conditions, as well as the new management and security requirements, measures are being taken to finish construction of the Kambarata hydropower plant. As for the environmental experts' examinations, they are to be carried out only on a reciprocal basis, without the use of double standards and a selective approach, and are to be applied to all the CA countries without exception.

Kyrgyzstan is worried about the absence of information on water consumption volumes in Uzbekistan, as well as reservoirs being built there without carrying out an environmental experts' examination. The statement of the Kyrgyzstan Ministry of Energy and Industry not only notes the need for balanced water use for irrigation purposes, but also for generating electricity for the needs of the population. Recently, Deputy Minister of Energy and Industry of Kyrgyzstan A. Kaliev said, "We are informing them (the Uzbek side) in every way, sending them our records, and elaborating technical assignments. They are ignoring everything. We cannot be constantly looking over our shoulders at them."²²

On 26 November, 2012, a meeting called "The European Union-Central Asia" was held at the foreign ministerial level. It was devoted to discussing the efficient, sustainable, and rational use of water resources in the region. Upholding the position of his republic, Tajik Minister of Foreign Affairs H. Zarifi noted that in his country, which does not have large oil and gas reserves, more than 70% of the population has suffered for long years from electricity and heat shortages during the 6-7 cold months. He said that in the winter Tajikistan has to reduce water consumption for the operation of hydropower plants to a minimum in order to ensure that the reservoirs are replenished and the water further used for irrigating farmland in neighboring countries. In addition, he drew the meeting participants' attention to two significant aspects.

- First, the hydropower industry is not a water consumer. In contrast to irrigable farming, it does not make irreversible use of river runoff, but only passes the water through the power plant turbines.
- Second, the downstream countries have the opportunity to develop their economy by assimilating rich deposits of gas and oil, while for Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which do not have enough proven hydrocarbons, the only vitally important resource is water.

In conclusion, he emphasized that not one of Tajikistan's hydropower facilities will ever operate to the detriment of another country.²³

In this respect, it is worth noting that international experts familiar with the Rogun hydropower plant project think that finishing its construction does not pose any danger to anyone and, on the contrary, might have a favorable effect on relations among the region's countries. For example, when analyzing a provoking article entitled "Hydromanipulation, or Water Resources as a Lever of Pressure" in the journal *The European Times* (28 January), which appeared on 25 January, 2013 in the Uzbek government newspaper *Narodnoe slovo*,²⁴ S. Stevenson, president of the European Parliament's intergroup on climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable development, called it "pseudo-academic." He noted that the Rogun hydropower plant could become a source of environmentally

²² "Kyrgyzstan zhestko otvetil Uzbekistanu po Kambaratinskoi GES," *ASIA-Plus*, 21 February, 2013.

²³ See: A. Yuldashev, "Zarifi otkrovenno vyskazalsia o vodnoi probleme regiona," *ASIA-Plus*, No. 90 (777), 29 November, 2012.

²⁴ See: "Gidromanipulyatsii, ili vodnye resursy, kak rychag davleniia," *Narodnoe slovo*, 25 January, 2013.

clean electricity, cheap and abundant at the same time, and would meet not only Tajikistan's needs, but also those of its neighbors, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Belgian journalist, Thieu Cuypers, president of the Big Media Group Information and Consulting Company (Brussels), presents several arguments confirming the safety and advantage of implementing the Rogun project in his article called "Rogun Dam: Power for the Region."²⁵

Well-known Tajik economist Kh. Odinaev also agrees with the opinion of the foreign authors about the safety, advantage, and benefits of implementing the Rogun hydropower plant project. He presents another 30 arguments confirming the expediency, efficiency, and extreme need for completing this project in his article called "Rogun Theses-2 or How to Combine the Interests of the Power Industry and Irrigation in Central Asian Conditions" published on 22 February, 2013 in a campus newspaper called *K vershinam znanii*.²⁶

In February 2013, at a meeting with WB representative for CA Saroj Kumar, Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon expressed the hope that the international experts' examination of the Rogun hydropower plant project would be carried out without political prejudice and at the appropriate level, and that its results would be made public.²⁷

The Tajik people, after living through another pitch-dark winter, are still hoping for a positive conclusion to the experts' examination of the Rogun hydropower plant carried out under the auspices of the World Bank, which, incidentally, is not rushing to make public its results.

However, as we know, American diplomats reveal what the WB conceals. For example, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert O. Blake, justifying the WB's recommendations to resolve the energy problems in Tajikistan, said that this country will experience them for at least another ten years. In his opinion, the WB has drawn up an excellent road map on this problem; it recommends that the Tajik government do the following to overcome electricity shortages in the cold season:

- (1) reject unrealistic electricity consumption plans;
- (2) use more renewable sources of energy in order to enhance the available reserves formed by water resources;
- (3) increase the use of energy by means of neighboring countries that have surplus amounts of it.²⁸

A. Zuev, the permanent coordinator and head of the representative office of the U.N. Program in Tajikistan, went even further in his forecasts about the prospects of supplying Tajikistan with electricity. On 4 December, 2012, at a conference in Dushanbe, he stated that the Program envisages resolving the energy shortage problem in Tajikistan by 2030, that is, in 18 years. It goes without saying that such "gratifying" recommendations and "good" advice cause the man in the street to break out in a cold sweat, or to be more exact, shudders. This means the Tajik population will go on suffering, counting on favors from their neighbors, while heat and light will be the privilege of the next generation.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

The disputes around the land-water and border problems are closely related to energy, environmental, humanitarian, and economic issues. Their discussion frequently gets pushed into the back-

²⁵ Th. Cuypers, "Rogun Dam: Power for the Region," *The European Times*, available at [<http://www.european-times.com/news/rogun-dam-power-for-the-region/>].

²⁶ See: Kh. Odinaev, "Rogunskie tezisy-2 ili kak sochetat interesy energetiki i irrigatsii v usloviakh Tsentralnoi Azii," *K vershinam znanii*, No. 4 (1331), 22 February, 2013 (see also: [<http://news.tj/ru/news/kak-sochetat-interesy-energetiki-i-irrigatsii-v-usloviakh-tsentralnoi-azii>]).

²⁷ See: *Millat*, 20 February, 2013.

²⁸ See: *Millat*, 5 December, 2012.

ground, while the ambitions of the political elites striving to privatize not only national, but also regional resources vie for attention. The intertwining of all these far-from-simple questions and problems is creating an explosive situation in CA.

Meanwhile, such a commotion has flared up over completion of the Rogun project that the gist of the problem itself has receded to the background. Political ambitions are dominating, primarily those of the government of Uzbekistan, which continues to look at CA through the prism of the leadership it has contrived for itself and its supposedly privileged position. At times it seems that Uzbekistan sees the sovereignty of the other states of the region, their territorial integrity, national interests, and attempts to achieve independence as a hindrance to its great power strivings.

Implementation of the Rogun hydropower plant project is a question of survival for Tajikistan, which is striving for energy independence and to provide a dignified standard of living and prosperity for its people. It is also a criterion of political competency of the government of Tajikistan, to which the people are looking for justification of their hopes and trust. Putting the Rogun hydropower plant into operation is beneficial in many ways, and not only for Tajikistan, but also for all the CA countries and their southern neighbors. At this juncture, we must agree with the position of Academician of the International Engineering Academy B. Sirozhev who has headed Tajikenergo for many years. He thinks that Rogun is the guarantor of electricity generation for the entire cascade of the Vakhsh hydropower plants and of normal operation of the irrigation system of the land located on the lower reaches of the Amu Darya.²⁹

²⁹ See: *ASIA-Plus*, 12 October, 2011.