CENTRAL ASIA AND PAX IRANICA: COOPERATION AND INTERDEPENDENCE

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Introduction

For ten years now, Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan have been establishing a Persian-speaking community in Central Asia. The Turkic republics of Central Asia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey started moving toward a Turkic-speaking community as soon as the Soviet Union ceased to exist. The Persian-speaking countries acquired their chance in the early 2000s when the Taliban, an inveterate opponent of the IRI, was overthrown and Tajikistan ended its civil war.

In fact, the entire region is more or less involved: Tajikistan is a Central Asian state, while the other two are its close neighbors with a long history of belonging to the region at one time or another.

Today, Central Asia, Iran, and Afghanistan have economic interests, security concerns, and geopolitical imperatives in common. Iran, which badly needs a wider Pax Iranica, is the natural driving force behind integration of the Persian-speaking countries, a far from easy mission in the present geopolitical and international context. In Afghanistan, the Persian-speaking communities are dominated by the Pashtoons, the state-forming nation, who are dead set against all attempts to split the country into ethnic units. The U.S.-led occupation authorities, likewise, are firmly opposed to Iran's stronger influence on the Tajik and Hazara minorities.

Tajikistan is a homogenous part of Central Asia; its ties with the region and the post-Soviet expanse are too strong to allow it to completely integrate with the Iranian world. To strengthen its position in both countries, Tehran is contributing to their large-scale economic, energy, transport, and humanitarian projects.

It should be said that, in the past, the Iranian culture extended to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Iraq, and vast areas in the Middle East, which gives the IRI the opportunity to push its influence westward. With no chance of exploiting the ethnic and linguistic affinity there, Tehran relies on the Shi'a minority, which is rapidly developing into an important political factor in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gulf countries.

Iran—the Center of Pax Iranica

In one way or another, Tehran's foreign policy invariably involves Central Asia. This is true of its relations with Russia, China, Pakistan, India, Turkey, and the South Caucasian states; the Middle East being the only exception.

Many of its problems are caused by its very specific international status and the foreign policies of its leaders, whose nuclear ambitions have isolated the country once more from the rest of the world. In the 1990s, Iran restored its relations with the outside world and, at the turn of the 21st century, more or less successfully reformed its economy. Today it is entering another period of economic stagnation.

In the last two decades, Iran has acquired the status of a regional power and is determined to confirm its regional and global ambitions by building up its military-strategic (missile and nuclear) potential to the detriment of its economic health. The international economic sanctions expected to trim its nuclear ambitions do nothing for its social and economic sphere.

Its ethnic diversity (there are several large ethnic groups in the country, whereby Persians are no longer in the absolute majority) adds more problems. Ethnic Azeris, whose numbers have increased over recent years, regularly stir up ethnic discontent or even riots in Iranian Azerbaijan. For a long time now, Iran and its political regime have been and remain a target of numerous leftist and nationalist terrorist groups.

In 2004-2005, the United States became resolved to undermine the Iranian regime from the inside, the provocation of ethnic disagreements being one of the means to this end. The recent events which shook the country in the wake of the presidential election looked very much like the Color Revolutions in Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet expanse stirred up by external forces. It seems that similar methods will be applied to Iran: its ruling regime should either be removed or at least weakened to push the country toward neutrality on the international scene and force it to drop its nuclear program.

As the dominant religion and ideology, Islam is the key element of Tehran's foreign policy: Iran is the only Muslim state determined to export the Islamic revolution beyond its borders. Inside the country, the social sphere and economy are based on Islam.

In the last fifteen years, Iranian (Shi'a) nationalism and pragmatism have moved to the fore in Tehran's dealings with the outside world. While Islam remains an important element of the country's foreign policy rhetoric, the Iranian leaders proceed from the country's national interests and are not averse to exploiting the Islamic factor, particularly in the Middle East.

This means that security and stability in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Caspian depend on what is going on around Iran; its destabilization or involvement in a large-scale conflict might upset the Central Asian region.

A large-scale military crisis around Iran, as well as its nuclear file, will draw the big geopolitical players (the U.S., Russia, China, Europe, and the Islamic world) into it. This will destabilize the central part of Eurasia and change the military-strategic situation in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The external factor has been and remains an important or even decisive element of Iranian foreign policy. Its basic principles formulated at the dawn of the Iranian revolution—"neither West nor East but Islam," export of the Islamic revolution, and priority of the Muslim world on the foreign policy agenda—have somewhat changed. Its new constructive approach to foreign policy ended its international isolation of the first post-revolutionary years. Iran established contacts with the European Union, the Arab world, and Russia.

The Iranian leaders, however, were still worried about the Middle East settlement and destabilization in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Gulf where American military forces are stationed. President Ahmadinejad is resolved to make his country a regional power and a leader of the Muslim world; he speaks about common Islamic values, interests, and global aims to smooth out the traditional disagreements between the Sunni and the Shi'a; he has even moved closer to Saudi Arabia, which is not only America's key ally in the Gulf, but also Iran's traditional rival determined to limit its impact in the region.

China is another very important foreign policy partner: better relations with it mean another ally among the countries with a say in international relations and the opportunity to attract the investments badly needed for development of Iran's economy. In the 1990s, China, which for some time had been officially encouraging nuclear energy production in Iran, retreated under Washington's pressure. It

had, however, helped Tehran at the initial stages of its nuclear program. Arms trade opened many doors to the Iranian market for China and greatly advanced bilateral relations. Oil-rich Iran was indispensable for China's dynamic economy and an important part of China's strategic interests.

The Chinese factor plays an important role in Iran's international status undermined by America's mounting pressure. The two countries have moved closer to oppose the United States: Iran needs China as a geopolitical ally, economic partner, and source of strategic technology, while China needs Iran's energy resources. Moreover, seen from Beijing, Iran looks like a strong anti-American outpost on the Central Asian borders. It could, at some point, become part of China's strategic salient—Xinjiang, Central Asia, the Middle East.

Today, both Iran and China insist that the U.N. should have a greater role to play in reviving Iraq.

China has several reasons to be interested in Iran: Tehran can be used as both a diplomatic instrument in the geopolitical games in the Middle East and Central Asia and an important source of the energy resources needed to feed China's rapidly developing economy, while the country can also help to establish a new route for Chinese exports.

Today, scores of Chinese companies are involved in all sorts of projects in Iran: they are building metros in Iranian cities, railways, and TV networks and are involved in oil and gas production. Still wider contacts might create a new trade route commonly described as the North-South corridor to connect India, Iran, and Russia as an alternative to the Suez.

Today, some people in Iran think that its Chinese agenda can be used to move closer to multilateral cooperation among Tehran, Beijing, Moscow, and Delhi. Both China and Iran are driven by their shared concerns about the United States' unilateral policy; Chinese and Iranian politicians are worried about the American military bases which have already appeared in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Central Asia.

Iran plays one of the key roles in the Middle East, which means that none of the conflicts can be settled without it. Recently, Iran shifted its attention to Turkey and its Islamist leaders; the developments in the region suggest a much wider platform, which can be tentatively described as anti-Arabic.

There is information that Iran is not seeking a nuclear status: it merely wishes to obtain a "virtual nuclear weapon state" status similar to that of Canada and Germany; the three countries are part of the non-proliferation regime. The "virtual nuclear weapon state" status means that the country knows how to enrich uranium and agrees to use the results for peaceful purposes. If Washington and its allies agree to meet Iran halfway, Tehran will abide by the additional protocol which stipulates IAEA control.

This means that Tehran is striving to establish a multipolar world under the U.N. aegis, with Iran and other Muslim states being one of the poles; it considers Central Asia to be part of the Gulf area and a zone of its vital economic interests. The Islamic Republic consistently insists on energy transportation routes from Central Asia across its territory as the cheapest and, therefore, economically most expedient.

Iran's political and intellectual communities mistrust Russia; the so-called partnership between the two countries is a product of the hostility of the United States and its allies toward Iran. The country, which has an observer status in the SCO, sought full membership and was rejected by Russia and China to avoid America's negative response. Tehran is convinced that the SCO members treat it as their partner; it is involved in decision-making at all stages.

Iran will exploit Russia's contradictions with other countries to promote its own interests and is seeking a regional power status to communicate with the West. On the other hand, it seems that the Kremlin cannot come to any agreement about the Iranian file: sources in the top leadership claim that the Iranian file "is one of Putin's personal responsibilities" and that he has the final say on all issues of importance. Indeed, in the first months of 2010, President Medvedev repeated in public that sanctions were unavoidable, while Prime Minister Putin was much vaguer.

Iran's claim to a regional status of any consequence moves the Caucasus and Central Asia into the sphere of its foreign policy interests, even though the northern sector of its interests depends much less on its domestic policy and ideology.

Today, Tehran's long-term interests in the Caspian boil down to involvement in economic, political, cultural, and other contacts in Central Asia and the Caucasus, as well as in the regional system of interdependence, which cannot function without Iran.

Iran is seeking greater involvement in energy resource production and transportation and, therefore, a stronger position in the Caspian; it wants to bring its gas to the European and Asian markets to become the region's transit hub and play a more active role in setting up and operating a united Mid-Eastern electric power system. Its international involvement is expected to remedy the systemic faults of the Iranian fuel and energy complex.

Iran is resolved to keep the extra-regional powers (the United States and Israel in particular) out of the Caucasus; it agrees with Russia, which believes that none of the extra-regional actors should be allowed to meddle in the domestic affairs of the Caucasus, the Caspian, and Central Asia. Recently, Tehran has been building up its military presence in the Caspian Basin in an effort to prevent the United States and Europe from developing strategic cooperation with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan; it is modernizing its Caspian forces and naval police as part of its Caspian navy. The country's leaders are acting under the pressure of a "foreign irritant" and do not conceal this.

From the very beginning, Iran sided with Russia on the new legal status of the Caspian sea/lake; the sea and its resources should be used jointly by the five littoral states (condominium) with the help of interstate structures and companies entrusted with offshore oil and gas production.

As distinct from its Caspian neighbors, Iran has retained the share of the seabed and subsoil it had during Soviet times because it has never been engaged in offshore oil and gas production or survey. It is much less willing to be involved in squabbles over the Caspian resources than the other Caspian states. Its current situation does not depend on energy production in the Caspian, while in the future it might profit from this lucrative enterprise, a positive, yet not vitally important, factor.

In 2007, Iran began trying to transform the Caspian Five into a new regional economic structure—an organization of the Caspian states in which Iran will play the first fiddle. All the Caspian states hail the idea of demilitarization of the sea. In the past, the United States tried to help Baku reorganize its naval forces, allegedly to protect the BTC oil pipeline, and invited Ashghabad and Astana to engage in military-technical cooperation in the Caspian.

Geography, which left Iran with a small sector in the southern part of the sea, and geology, which has so far revealed no considerable energy reserves, are two factors which determine Iran's position on Caspian delimitation.

Formally, Tehran refused to recognize the northern agreements[1] by saying that "any changes in the legal regime related to the use of the Caspian Sea's mineral resources should be approved by the five littoral states," and suggested that each of the states receive an equal part (20 percent) of the seabed. This infringes on the interests of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, with which Iran should negotiate first in order to arrive at a mutually acceptable decision. In July 2001, Iran demonstrated its resolution to rebuff all unilateral actions: an Iranian warship and two jets forced Azeri research vessels to leave the area of the Alov, Araz and Sharq oil fields in the Caspian.

Recently, however, Tehran retreated from its implacable position: it is prepared to talk and forget the red lines; it has become interested in some of the Caspian projects. To add weight to its position and strengthen its presence in the Caspian, Iran has launched independent prospecting for gas and oil in the southern part of the sea, particularly in areas to which Azerbaijan might also have a claim. It obviously intends to emulate its neighbors: first claim oil and gas fields and then invite others to the negotiation table; however, unlike its neighbors, it has not yet started this process.

[1] In 1998-2003 Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan divided the seabed in the northern Caspian and left the water area in common use.

To find out the real volumes of its resources, it will have to move into the deep-water area of its sector, for which it has neither the expertise nor the technology. The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), which has two offshore platforms in the Caspian Sea, had to turn to foreign companies. So far, Iran has done nothing to explore and use its offshore oil and gas resources. As time goes on, it will find it much harder to deal with neighbors who have already divided the sea's northern part. The Iranian leaders have accepted the situation and want to cooperate with the other players. They just want to be one of the active participants in the sphere of energy production.

Iran also wants to be actively involved in the transportation of Caspian oil and to increase the amount moved across its territory; it wants to acquire more oil for its modernized and newly built oil refineries in the country's north. Iranian oil could be moved to China across Central Asia, but so far there are neither specific plans nor decisions regarding this.

Swap deals are another, partly realized, alternative for transporting Caspian oil: oil from other littoral states is moved to the Iranian Caspian ports, while Iran sends out equivalent volumes of its oil through its Gulf ports. In the Caspian, it uses Neka as the main port and Noushahr and Anzali as subsidiaries. In the Persian Gulf, it relies on Kharg Island. Iran has found it hard to attract the Russian and Azeri players in the Caspian market: with many other alternatives at their disposal, they have not shown any interest in the Iranian route up to now.

Iran is still developing its infrastructure, which is expected to provide Iranian companies with a greater role in energy transportation in the Caspian. So far, like its Caspian neighbors, the country does not have enough state-of-the-art tankers, and Tehran is very well aware of the advantage it could gain here. By enhancing its tanker fleet and filling the vacant niche in the market, Iran could satisfy at least some of its energy-related ambitions in the region and also use this advantage as an additional argument for having raw hydrocarbons sent to its ports.

If and when Iran acquires enough state-of-the-art tankers, the NIOC will be able to act as a transit country and a broker for transit of large volumes of oil from the Caspian: so far the other littoral states do not intend to acquire large tanker fleets. This explains why Iran is insisting on the principle of free navigation in the Caspian. This coincides with what Moscow wants, which means that this principle stands a good chance of being approved when the sea's legal status is negotiated.

Iran's position in the gas sphere in the Caspian is explained by its intention to increase its own gas exports and have as much gas as possible transited through its territory. In the past few years it has been concentrating on gas exports: its expanded export capabilities are fortifying its position at the talks on gas transit across third countries.

Today Iran is interested in two international projects that appear to have good prospects: the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline (IPI) and the European Nabucco project. Unrelated to Tehran's interests in Central Asia and the Caucasus, they affect the IPI's aims and position in the region. Until recently Iran was interested in two other alternatives for transporting its gas to Europe—through Turkey, if the present infrastructure were extended, and through the Southern Caucasus to Ukraine, Poland, and on to Eastern Europe.

Iran's involvement in South Stream will unite the pipeline systems of Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia; Iran will not only diversify its export routes, it will also strengthen its position in the Caucasian gas market and gain access to the region's economic and political life.

On the whole, Tehran's Central Asian policy is absolutely correct and balanced: the pragmatic wing of the Iranian political community knows that culture and revival of the cultural community are a much better vehicle of Iranian influence.

From the very beginning, Iran has been very interested in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) as a way to consolidate the region. A project shared by Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, it is designed to bring them closer together. Iran, as one of the leaders, is actively participating in implementing the projects in order to raise the relations among the partners to a higher level of mutual trust, add to its political weight in the region, and eliminate some of the problems caused by political isolation.

Tehran insists that the country's common culture and history, shared borders and economic foundations, and ancient trade contacts with the region all bode well for developing cooperation between Iran and the regional states; the pipeline issue is not only of economic but also of strategic importance for Iran.

Its interest in the energy transportation routes in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus consists of at least three components: first, Iran aspires to become the region's energy transportation hub, which can be described as the most ambitious of its political and economic aims. Its territory offers the shortest and, therefore, most profitable oil and gas export routes between the former Soviet Caspian republics and the world markets. Iranian experts have been talking about this for twenty years now. Second, Tehran is striving to gain access to new energy markets via new oil and gas export routes. Third, Iran wants to provide the oil refineries in the country's north with stable deliveries of oil, gas, and electric power; it aims to gasify some of its regions; and ensure uninterrupted power supply throughout the year. Closely intertwined, the three components should be regarded as a single whole.

Its geographic location makes its interest in energy transportation much more logical and the possibilities of its realization much more numerous than its claims to be involved in mining Caspian mineral resources. In the last 15 years, Iran has been supplying its northern provinces on a regular basis with oil and gas from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

Its consistent interest in gas exports to the foreign markets is supported by another, no less important, interest to become a transportation hub for energy resources of the entire region. It expects to send oil from nearly all the Caspian countries and gas from Turkmenistan in particular across its territory (thus hoping to eliminate the need for this gas to be transported through the planned Trans-Caspian and Trans-Afghan gas pipelines).

The relations between Iran and Turkmenistan, which are prompted by economic and political expediency, stand apart from Tehran's relations with the other Central Asian capitals. Neither of the two is worried about domestic collisions on the other side of the border, while international isolation adds to their mutual attraction.

As distinct from Iran's relations with the other Caspian neighbors, its relations with Turkmenistan stand on a much firmer foundation of close cooperation in the energy and other spheres. There is the Mashhad-Sarakhs railway which, in 1996, provided Iran with access to previously closed Central Asia. Over 90 percent of Turkmen oil is exported through Iran.

In the late 1990s, they jointly built the Balkanabat-Ali Abad power line to connect their energy systems; in March 2003, they signed a Memorandum on Cooperation in the Fuel and Energy Sector, under which they are performing a contract on electric power export from Turkmenistan for a period of 10 years; the completed project will allow Iran to import $140 million-worth of electric power from Turkmenistan every year. Half of the payment will arrive in money form and the other in the form of spare parts, commodities, products, equipment, and services for the industrial facilities and organizations of the Ministry of Power and Industry of Turkmenistan. One kWh of Turkmen electric power costs $0.02.

Since 1997, Turkmenistan has been exporting up to 6 bcm of gas every year to the north-east of Iran along the Korpeje–Kurt-Kui gas pipeline, which covers 5 percent of the country's needs. The new Dauletabad-Sarakhs-Hangeran gas pipeline will double the volume, with some of the gas being sent to Turkey on a swap basis. At the same time, Iran obviously wants to decrease its dependence on Turkmen gas or rid itself of this dependence altogether.

In June 2009, the two capitals agreed to increase the volumes of annual gas supplies to 14 bcm and build another pipeline. Before that Russia imported between 30 and 42 bcm of gas from the Dauletabad fields every year. Iran moved in when, in April 2009, Russia reduced the amount of gas it transports from Turkmenistan. Today, Turkmenistan supplies Iran with 8 bcm of gas a year transported from the Korpeje gas fields in the country's west to Kurt-Kui. The additional branch of the Dau-

letabad-Sarakhs-Hangeran pipeline commissioned in December 2009 will gradually bring the volumes up to 20 bcm.

The failed Transcaspian gas pipeline project increased the chances of Iran's participation in Nabucco; the country will finally be able to realize its ideal scenario: selling its own gas and moving Turkmen gas across its territory.

As an SCO member, Iran will be more actively involved in its energy sphere if it steps up cooperation in this field; this will greatly affect the position of Russia, China, and the Central Asian CIS countries. Involved in the less competitive (from Russia's point of view) Asian market, Iran will not be in a position to reduce the share of Russian gas in the European market. Russia and the other SCO countries will be able to influence Iran's energy policy and, in this way, its behavior in the security and non-proliferation spheres.

It seems that Iran's confrontation with the West (and the United States in particular) will remain at least at the present level, whereas the risk of an armed conflict will rise.

Afghanistan—A Bridge in the Persian-Speaking Expanse

In many respects Afghanistan is the key security factor for Central Asia because of its geographic location, complicated domestic policies, ethnic and confessional diversity, and deep involvement in the worldwide shadow economy. Today it is caught in the entangled web of interests of many states and non-state forces. The developments in this country cross the borders to cripple the security of its direct and even more distant neighbors. This fully explains the close and unflagging attention of Pakistan, India, Iran, the post-Soviet Central Asian states, China, and Russia to what is going on in Afghanistan.

The developments in this country and around it will greatly affect the geopolitical situation in Central Asia and its security. On the one hand, the Central Asian republics (and Russia for that matter) need the counterterrorist operation to succeed. On the other hand, the military-strategic presence of the United States and its NATO allies in Afghanistan and some other nearby states creates tension with Russia and China, which the Central Asian countries must take into account.

Since 2003, the ISAF (set up in 2001 on a decision of the U.N. Security Council) has been operating in Afghanistan under the NATO aegis. NATO's involvement not merely tests political solidarity between the United States and its European NATO allies, the Alliance is also looking for a new place in the world, as well as new functions and a wider responsibility zone.

Nothing has changed under the Democratic Administration of President Obama, despite his talk about the need to revise the Afghan strategy and Washington's relations with its European NATO partners. And although the new strategy may have made noticeable changes to the old Republican patterns (related to an integral approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan or the so-called political amnesty for the Taliban), America is largely following the political course of previous Administration.

Security threats created by radical Islamism and drug trafficking, rather than the economy, constitute Russia's main interests in Afghanistan. In a wider geopolitical context, Russia is concerned about the military-strategic activities of the United States and its NATO allies in the region. At the regional level, Russia is returning to its support of the Northern Alliance in the form of the so-called security belt to respond to the country's increasing decentralization.

At the Sochi meeting with representatives of Pakistan, Iran, and Tajikistan, Russia presented its position on Afghanistan in very specific terms: Moscow expects that foreign troops will remain in the country for several more years before responsibility can be safely shifted to the Afghan army and the

police. The transition period will create certain threats for Russia, which expects the revival of Taliban activities and increased drug trafficking.

The expert community is convinced that Russia should maintain balanced contacts with all of Afghanistan's ethnic groups (which will require closer contacts with Pakistan) while keeping in mind that the national minorities will be unable to establish law and order in the country. Russia can and should be involved in the country's economic reconstruction and promote economic cooperation at the regional level in particular. President Karzai managed to secure Moscow's promise to continue rendering significant assistance to his country even after 2014 when the international coalition leaves Afghanistan.

Some time ago, Beijing was very worried about the security threats emanating from Afghanistan; the Operation Enduring Freedom caused concern about the military presence of America and NATO close to the Chinese borders. The new leadership headed by Chairman Hu Jintao, who concentrated on adequate supplies of mineral resources, changed the main policy tack in Afghanistan to economic expansion. Beijing decided in favor of business cooperation, rather than military involvement, which it presented as its aid to the world community.

The sum of $150 million Beijing contributed to Afghanistan's reconstruction within the framework of the international program is fairly modest (compared to Japan's $900 million). Beijing prefers to give money to small agricultural projects; late in March 2010, President Karzai visited China where the two leaders signed agreements which made China the greatest investor in the mining projects in Afghanistan.

Beijing is mainly interested in the considerable mineral resources neglected because of the war; it is believed that China might become the only serious investor in Afghanistan with a special interest in the raw materials sector. So far its achievements in Afghanistan look impressive against the failures of the states involved in the conflict.

Recently, the top crust of Pakistan's political establishment concluded that what Islamabad wants for Afghanistan has little in common with what Washington wants in this country. Pakistani strategists have come up with a road map of their own, which they are trying to impose on Karzai.

It is believed that Islamabad is tilling the soil for a new game in the Afghan geopolitical field if and when America pulls out of the country and the Taliban is invited to the negotiation table to talk about its involvement in the official power structures. Some experts are convinced that Islamabad is liquidating the Taliban leaders to resume its grip on the movement and encouraging the moderates ready to start talking with Kabul after 2011 while bearing in mind Pakistan's interests.

The fairly large Indian community in Afghanistan maintains traditional economic and cultural ties with India, which has already made large investments in road building in Afghanistan; it has an embassy in Kabul and four consulates; the Taliban never leaves India's facilities in peace.

By the mid-2008, India had contributed $1.15 billion to the country's reconstruction; it is the fifth largest donor. The money is spent on infrastructure, humanitarian aid, building modern institutions, and personnel training. Delhi is paying for the 217-km Zaranj-Dilaram highway between the southwestern border of Afghanistan and its ring road. At a cost of $180 million, this highway will join the road which connects the Iranian port of Chah Behar with the Afghan border and will provide India with access (via the Iranian port and Afghan territory) to the Central Asian markets.

Indian projects include maintenance of roads and supply lines, energy-producing facilities, and hospitals; India will help to improve the education and training of diplomats and civil servants. India is using its satellites to bring television to Kabul and ten provinces of Afghanistan; it is also paying for new power lines for the country.

Iran is interested in its relations with Afghanistan not so much because of their common border as because of the strong American and NATO military groups stationed there. At the official level, Tehran supports the internationally recognized government of Afghanistan; it is one of its largest trade and economic partners with large investments in some of the projects in Western Afghanistan.

The Iranian leaders are dead set against talks with the Taliban. In March 2010, President Ahmadinejad visited Afghanistan to feel out the situation and assess the moods prevailing among the country's political leaders and the limits of President Karzai's powers imposed by the U.S. military presence.

He had in mind another strategic task: the country should not become a military lever to be used as a security threat or a pressure instrument. Tehran's interest in what the White House is doing in Afghanistan is well-justified and quite understandable.

Iran's economic aid is intended to consolidate its position in Afghanistan; it is seeking more stability in the country, a stronger central government, much more vigorous anti-drug efforts, return of the Afghan refugees, and intensified regional cooperation and trade.

Today, it is involved in all sorts of projects, while bilateral trade is developing by leaps and bounds. By late 2006, Iran was exporting consumer goods and foodstuffs totaling $500 million to Afghanistan every year; the total turnover amounted to $1 billion. Every day between 400 and 500 Iranian wagons crossed the Iranian-Afghan border. The first Iranian bank was opened in Kabul to encourage bilateral trade.

Tehran is active in reconstructing and extending the country's economic infrastructure; financial aid totaling $560 million (promised in 2002) was spent during five years on expanding the power network; in 2005, a power line with a total capacity of 132 kWh which, at the first stage, brought electricity from the Iranian border to Herat was commissioned; potentially its capacity could be increased ten-fold to bring electric power to other cities. Iran built a 122 km-long highway costing $65 million to connect its northeast with Herat; it is building a highway between Western Afghanistan and the Iranian port of Chah Behar on the Gulf, an alternative to the Pakistani route via Gwadar to provide Afghanistan with access to the sea. Iran is building dams, schools, polyclinics, and other social facilities; its financial aid has topped $1 billion.

Iran built a road between Dogarun and Herat which will be extended to Maymana; it is also implementing a trans-Afghan corridor project (Iran-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan) of strategic importance for both countries and the Central Asian republics and is exerting immense efforts to train specialists in information technology for Afghanistan.

Afghan refugees are a headache for both countries; since 1979 Iran has given shelter to over 3 million. Drug trafficking is another big problem which mars bilateral relations. Iran has already spent over $800 million on fighting drugs and drug trafficking. On the whole, Kabul expects Tehran, its regional partner, to support its rehabilitation efforts on a large scale.

The Iranian regime uses financial levers to interfere in Kabul's domestic policy. In October 2010, it became known that Iran was supplying Kabul with considerable sums of money. The Iranians admitted the fact; it is believed that the Afghan authorities spent the money on buying the loyalty of members of the country's parliament, elders, and the moderate Taliban.

A pro-American government in Kabul brought to power to legalize the American and NATO military presence in the country as a result of national reconciliation or complete rout of the Taliban will deprive Iran of any more or less efficient political instruments to influence Afghan developments. If American troops remain stationed in Iraq, Iran will find itself in geopolitical pincers.

Iran will not gain much if the Americans pull out of Afghanistan before the crisis has been finally settled. Many regional integration projects will be buried if the Afghan conflict spreads far and wide and confrontation between Kabul and the Taliban develops into open hostility. In this case, Tehran will be forced to side with the official authorities in Kabul.

If the situation remains unchanged after 2011, that is, if confrontation between NATO and Kabul, on the one hand, and the Taliban, on the other, continues, Iran will preserve its present position in the region.

Afghanistan is still potentially the most likely source of instability in Central Asia. The expert community is convinced that after regaining power the Taliban will move on. Islamabad looks like

the most likely target: in more or less peaceful times, former President of Pakistan Musharraf and his special services could preserve relations with the United States while flirting with al-Qa'eda and the Taliban. A total crisis in Afghanistan, which might hit the country when the coalition has removed its forces, is fraught with all sorts of complications up to and including a coup in Pakistan with its nuclear weapons falling into the hands of extremists.

The experts, analysts, and special services disagree on what may happen. Some of them believe that the danger is exaggerated and Central Asia is absolutely safe. Better informed analysts, however, believe that clandestine activities of the Islamists and extremists should not be ignored and that they are closely connected with organized crime and the drug mafia.

For twenty years, Tashkent remained absolutely independent when dealing with Afghanistan, or rather with its northern Uzbek-populated enclave. American and NATO occupation left Uzbekistan two spheres of political involvement: creating and maintaining the so-called security belt and establishing intensive economic ties to integrate the enclave with Uzbekistan; it supplies the northern part of Afghanistan with electric power and oil products.

In practice, everything Tashkent is doing there encourages separatist trends among the Uzbeks (or Uzbeks and Tajiks). It actively supports Moscow's idea of a security belt in the north of Afghanistan. In April 2008, at a NATO/EAPC Summit in Bucharest, President of Uzbekistan Karimov was very open about his country's approach to the problem. Later, in August 2009 at the SCO summit in Dushanbe, he confirmed it.

He pointed out that

(1) there is no military solution to the Afghan problem, an opinion that is gaining wider currency among an increasing number of states;

(2) the most acute social problems (poverty and unemployment) should be addressed without delay. Today, a great share of the able-bodied population, young people in particular, are left without means of subsistence, the situation being actively exploited by extremist fighters and drug pushers;

(3) conflict settlement should take into account the Afghans' confessional and national specifics (confirmed by the numerous wars in the past in which external forces were involved). Tashkent believes that the 6 + 2 Contact Group for Afghanistan, which functioned under the U.N. aegis, should be restored; NATO, an active participant in the settlement process, should become one of its members.

At the non-official level Tashkent is convinced that, first, no compromise with the Taliban on matters of fundamental importance is possible; second, the Afghans and the world community should know that what is going on in this country is spearheaded against the terrorists, not the Afghans; third, any concession will invite an offensive on all fronts—military, geopolitical, information, ideological, psychological, etc.

This means that everything possible should be done to deprive the terrorists of their sources of conscripts. On the whole, Tashkent believes that the international peacekeeping operation will go on for a long time.

For geographic and historical reasons and because of its ethnic connections, Turkmenistan needs peace and stability in Afghanistan and wide economic cooperation with this country. The Turkmen leaders are concentrating on the gas pipeline expected to bring gas from Dauletabad to the Hindustani Peninsular via Afghanistan.

Astana's position on the Afghan issue can be described as active. At the 2006 London Conference on Afghanistan, it supported the Treaty on Afghanistan between the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the international community, which identified the time within which the

country's economy should be restored and enumerated the related social and economic projects, as well as the most urgent regional security problems (including drugs).

In 2009-2011, Kazakhstan allocated $1.5 million under the cooperation plan with Afghanistan. In 2008, Kazakhstan allocated $2.4 million for school construction and $50 million under the international educational support program to pay for training Afghan students in Kazakhstan. Between 2006 and 2010, the country acquired an economic agenda which included investments in railway construction, as well as prospecting and mining mineral resources (oil, gas, iron ore, coal, and copper) in Afghanistan.

On the whole, Astana sides with all the peace initiatives and processes which bring conflict settlement closer: Kazakhstan is fully aware that Afghanistan is one of the key factors of regional security in Central Asia.

America's "new strategy" in Afghanistan boils down to "leave in order to stay." The United States cannot pull out of Afghanistan and leave Pakistan alone to deal with its Islamists without risking its own security and endangering its numerous allies and client states (particularly in the Middle East).

America and NATO will gradually decrease their military presence at a much slower pace than in Iraq; it is expected that Washington will keep its 30- to 50-thousand-strong military contingent in the country to prevent its military and political destabilization. It should be said that the interests of the key players (America, Russia, and China), which differ at the global level, are identical in Afghanistan and can be described in a nutshell as stability at any cost.

Tajikistan—Periphery of Pax Iranica?

There is a more or less concerted opinion that Tajikistan is the region's weakest link in terms of its internal situation and external security. This mostly stereotypical opinion is confirmed by the Islamic opposition inside the country, the rivaling clans, the increasingly active militants, the impossibly low living standards, Afghanistan's negative impact, full-fledged drug trafficking, etc.

Tajikistan has had the hardest lot: in Soviet times the living standards were low, the birthrate high, the infrastructure undeveloped, and the public institutions traditional and archaic to the highest degree. During perestroika, the republic was the first among the other Soviet republics to acquire an Islamic party—the Islamic Resurrection Party (IRP).

For several years now, its people have been living in the midst of serious changes at home and abroad. President Rakhmon is consistently building a so-called power vertical in an effort to consolidate his regime and state institutions; the republic aims at de-Russification and is trying to shed its excessive dependence on Moscow.

It spares no effort to attract investors from Russia, Iran, China, the European Union, and America; China and Iran are showing a great interest in the republic's economy. Dushanbe has joined forces with Tehran and Kabul to establish a Persian-speaking community; India is another important partner.

Tajikistan belongs to the CIS and SCO; it is a member of the OIC, ECO, and OSCE and is actively cooperating with NATO. Through the EurAsEC and CSTO, Dushanbe is also involved in post-Soviet integration. The West sees Tajikistan as an important source of energy for Afghanistan.

Dushanbe, in turn, is busy promoting its own ambitious plans of domestic and regional hydropower production countered by Uzbekistan and, to a lesser extent, by Kyrgyzstan. Russia is dead set against Tashkent's insistent desire to seek international assessment of Tajikistan's large-scale hydropower projects (the Rogun HPP) to keep the West away from regional affairs.

Iran treats Tajikistan as its main and close regional partner with their relations, particularly cultural, being rooted in ethnic communality. Tehran extends humanitarian aid to the Tajiks. In September 2004, President Hatami visited Dushanbe where the two presidents signed a memorandum under

which Tehran was expected to acquire a controlling stake in the Sangtuda HPP-1 being built on the River Vakhsh, the largest of the joint projects. This caused a lot of irritation and opposition in Russia.

In 2006-2008, the two countries moved into new spheres, such as civil engineering, transport, agriculture, energy production, and machine-building. Tajikistan wants to see Iran among the SCO's full members; despite their contradictions, Moscow, Beijing, and Delhi have accepted the Tajik-Iranian tandem.

Iran and Tajikistan cooperate in the military-technical sphere; Iran paid for new uniforms for the Tajik army, communication means, small arms ammunition, and a JV for sewing military uniforms. Tehran would not mind extending military cooperation to the three Persian-speaking countries (Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Iran) for the sake of regional security. If realized, this cooperation will add efficiency to anti-drug efforts and to fighting international terrorism. Some think, however, that Iran intends to use Tajikistan as a springboard for interfering in the international operation in Afghanistan.

Recently, Iran has been consistently building up its presence in Tajikistan; there is a lot of talk about a visa-free regime between the two countries for the sake of closer economic cooperation. In 2010, Iran with $65.5 million in direct investments in the Tajik economy outstripped many other countries (Russia among them) as one of the largest investors. The trade turnover between the Iran and Tajikistan reached $201.7 million.

In the fall of 2011, the Iranian Sangob company intends to commission the Sangtuda HPP-2 on the River Vakhsh, after which it will immediately move on to three other hydropower projects: two Nurobod HPPs with a capacity of 350 megawatts each on the River Vakhsh and the Ayni HPP (170 megawatts) on the River Zaravshan. Iran will take part in the Shurob and Dashtijum hydropower projects and, together with Pakistan, will set up a united electric power grid in Tajikistan.

The two countries have always considered energy production, transportation, water resources, road building, trade, and culture as priority spheres of cooperation. Tehran insists that Dushanbe abide by the 2008 agreement, which envisages a Persian-language educational and cultural TV channel. Dushanbe is accused of deliberate delays, while the Tajik leaders are merely trying to avoid another round of Islamic propaganda directed at the younger generation.

Tajikistan is pinning its hopes on cooperation in uranium mining: Iran, determined to go ahead with nuclear power production (despite international resolutions), needs access to the republic's uranium resources (about 13 percent of the world's total), which means that this sphere will come to the fore in the near future.

President Rakhmon visited Iran in March 2011 on an invitation from its president to stimulate closer cooperation between the two countries.

Iran sees its relations with Tajikistan as cultural and religious cooperation between two nations with a common past. Iran's economic involvement has a political dimension as well: it is Tehran's response to America's military and economic presence in the region.

Between 2001 and 2004, military cooperation between Russia and Tajikistan subsided; Dushanbe was compelled to increase its pressure on Moscow in view of America's military presence and the money Washington paid Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan for use of its bases on their territory. The Tajik leaders demanded preferences; they postponed enactment of the Treaty on the Status of and Requirements for Deployment of a Russian Military Base in the Territory of Tajikistan signed back in 1999. For some time the sides discussed the possibility of "investments in exchange for the base."

Moscow was seeking control of Tajikistan's defense industry, while Dushanbe wanted to write off the debts for training its military and obtain contracts on modernizing its armaments for its military plants. American authors are puzzled by the air defense system Russia set up in Tajikistan since Afghanistan, the main source of threats and instability in the region, has no missiles. Moscow is seeking not so much its stronger influence in the republic (it is strong enough) as keeping other players and

their bases away (after all, Tajikistan is free to invite other states and their bases if relations with Russia worsen).

In 2007, under the Treaty on the Status of and Requirements for the Deployment of a Russian Military Base, Russia started moving its troops from the airport of Dushanbe to Ayni, while Tajikistan (seeking and not receiving enough money from international structures and other countries) changed its approach. In the hope of obtaining larger investments, it confirmed its cooperation with Russia as its strategic vector, which buried America's hopes of moving into Tajikistan. Moscow, too, failed to obtain the best possible conditions and, late in August 2008, it signed a treaty on wider military and military-technical cooperation and accepted the terms under which it would share the Gissar airport with the Tajik military.

By declining Russia's claim to unilateral use of the airport, Dushanbe expected, if problems arose, to put pressure on Moscow by inviting other countries and their military forces to the airbase. For some time now, Russia and Tajikistan have been concentrating on large-scale hydropower and mining projects (in addition to their traditional security concerns about the situation along the Afghan border, the Nurek space-surveillance station, drug trafficking, etc.).

In 2004, during the visit of then President Putin to Dushanbe, it was agreed that Russia's Rusal Company would move in to take part in the last stages of the Rogun HPP with a capacity of 3.6 thousand megawatts. Russia left the project when Dushanbe refused to give it the controlling stake in the station.

In 2009, the Rogun project acquired regional and international dimensions. Uzbekistan, objected to the project, while Kyrgyzstan accepted it; Russia and Kazakhstan changed their positions several times. Tashkent, very concerned about the dam, which would inevitably change the stream-flow regime and create a water deficit for the millions of people living on the lower reaches of the transborder river, insisted on international assessment. In March 2010, Astana sided with it, while Moscow objected. Dushanbe, in turn, ignored Tashkent and its arguments; the resultant tension forced the EU to interfere.

Dushanbe, meanwhile, is playing its anti-Russian card: the republican leaders are prepared to seek American investments in all sorts of projects (hydropower production in particular); they argue that the Americans will inevitably be attracted by projects related in one way or another to Afghanistan. Experts believe that Tajikistan has performed a U-turn turn toward the United States.

Uzbekistan is as determined as ever to prevent construction of the Rogun HPP; about one hundred and fifty trains of construction material for Tajikistan have piled up in its territory. Even if Tajikistan gathers enough money to start the project, it will never break the transport blockade. From time to time Moscow makes use of the labor migrant issue, an important factor of bilateral relations between Russia and Tajikistan, to put political pressure on President Rakhmon.

Today, Russia has to take China and Iran into account as the potential largest investors and donors. Iran is involved in several hydropower projects in the republic, as well as in railway and road construction; it is creating free economic areas to facilitate investments and trade. These developments are eased by the fact that Moscow has lost much of its former influence in the republic and has to apply more pressure on it.

In August 2010, when talking to President Rakhmon in Sochi, President Medvedev told him that Moscow was displeased with Dushanbe, which had failed to fulfill its numerous promises: it has not paid for the electric power supplied by Russia; it has not stationed Russia's troops at the Gissar airbase, and it has failed to resume broadcasting of the RTR-Planet TV channel. Behind closed doors, Moscow explained to Dushanbe that it was prepared to discuss the involvement of Inter RAO UES in the project for building medium-sized HPPs on mountain rivers and to cancel the higher tariff on Russian oil products as soon as Dushanbe fulfilled its earlier promises.

An apple of discord between Russia and Tajikistan is the Gissar airfield (the Ayni airbase) not far from Dushanbe (a semi-rundown airdrome built in Soviet times and restored by Indian special-

ists),[2] where Russia was to deploy its aviation. Back in 2004 the sides agreed that Russia would move its planes and pilots stationed at the Dushanbe civilian airport there. When Tajikistan banned training flights for five Su-25 assault planes, they were moved to the Kant airbase in Kyrgyzstan. Russia is interested in Gissar mainly because under the agreement between the two countries Russian military planes would be serviced free of charge at Tajik military airdromes. However, this means that Tajikistan would gain nothing at all from Russia's military presence in its airfields.

With a 3,200-meter airstrip, the airbase is the largest in Tajikistan; it is suitable for all plane types; this means that America and NATO will not mind using it. The final decision on which country will use it has been postponed until 2014.

Moscow is prepared to meet Tajikistan halfway on the issue of lower tariffs on oil products used inside the country. Earlier Tajikistan, very much like Belarus, earned money by selling them to third countries. Russia asked Dushanbe to present the balance sheets on supply and demand: the Russian budget would lose about $170 million every year on the annulled tariffs.

During his visit to Dushanbe, Robert Simmons, NATO Secretary-General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, said the Alliance might set up its anti-terrorist center in Tajikistan. He described Kulob and the Ayni airbase in the city of Gissar not far from Dushanbe as the best possible bases. On the other hand, in 2010, when in Dushanbe, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Robert Blake said that the United States had no such plans.

This does nothing for relations between Moscow and Dushanbe; in fact, the rise in domestic tension in September 2010 due to the escape of a large group of opposition members, terrorist acts, and assaults, might have been instigated by external forces.

On the other hand, the situation inside the republic demands better relations with Russia. The second Russian military base being set up in the republic[3] will raise the popularity of the Tajik president, whose rating has been declining for some time now. Dushanbe is actively involved in security-related cooperation; in April 2010, Tajikistan hosted joint command-post exercises Rubezh-2010 of the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces with the participation of military units and task forces of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In September 2010, the republic provided use of its territory for the local anti-drug operation Kanal-Yug, which involved the anti-drug services of Kazakhstan, Russia, and Tajikistan, as well as security and customs services, structures of the ministries of internal affairs, border guards, and the financial intelligence services of these countries.[4]

In fact, if Tajikistan fails to stabilize the situation in the near future (the events of late August-early September 2010 show that the threat of destabilization is real), the region's three worst problems—Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and southern Kyrgyzstan—will merge into a vast seat of conflict. Moscow is aware of the threat, which means that it should look for and find ways to keep Rakhmon in power for the sake of stability in the republic.

The counterterrorist Operation Enduring Freedom and Tajikistan's 1,200-km stretch of common border with Afghanistan made Tajikistan an indispensable part of the coalition's forces. Early in 2002, the republic opened an air corridor for the military-transport aviation of the NATO members.

In the context of the Afghan operation, the republic could become the U.S.'s main partner and ally in Central Asia. Recently, cooperation between the two countries has acquired more vigor, how-

[2] Reconstruction cost $70 million which was shared by the sides. India invested $19.9 million. Russia hopes to station military facilities of its 201st division there.

[3] On 10 November, 2010, Tajikistan and Russia agreed to guard the Tajik-Afghan border together. The Russian expert community believes that their country wants to return to the border in expectation of the fact that America might want to pull its forces out of Afghanistan and move them to Tajikistan.

[4] During the operation, the sides instituted 6 thousand criminal cases, 1,108 of which were related to drug trafficking; they confiscated over 1.3 tons of drugs (including 52 kg of heroin, 50 kg of hashish, 1 ton of marijuana, and over 400 kg of precursors).

ever the Tajiks have not made any important statements yet that might allow Washington to regard the republic as a reliable and predictable partner.

Both NATO and the United States view Tajikistan as a key partner in light of the planned expansion of the counterterrorist operation. By the time the Americans hinted that they were willing to talk to any interested Central Asian country about the transit of military and non-military freights and about the so-called temporary military bases, the Tajik leaders were already openly displeased with Russia's position on the Rogun HPP project.

The United States prefers to "wait and see:" the Americans are no longer criticizing President Rakhmon's domestic policy record—they are waiting to see how things develop in Afghanistan. At the current stage, the United States sees Tajikistan as a strategic springboard rather than a target of lucrative investments. The country's future as another "new partner" of the United States in Central Asia (and possible military NATO and U.S. bases in its territory) depends on Washington-Dushanbe cooperation.

The United States extends considerable economic assistance to the republic; it has already built two bridges across the Panj (and paid in part for another two bridges) to connect Tajik territory with Afghanistan. Direct transport outlets to the Indian Ocean via Afghanistan are all-important for a country cut off from the region by Uzbekistan.

The Obama Administration, determined to bring the counterterrorist operation to its logical conclusion, moved cooperation with Tajikistan higher on its foreign policy agenda. Potentially, the Americans can offer much wider cooperation to any of the Central Asian states up to and including American military bases in their territory. Dushanbe stands a good chance of exchanging its involvement for several economically profitable projects.

In February 2009, President Rakhmon visited the NATO Brussels headquarters where he said that NATO, the key security element in Afghanistan, should actively cooperate with its neighbors, Iran, and particularly Tajikistan because of its long border with Afghanistan. He meant to say that Tajikistan was allowing the Alliance to use its railways and roads for non-military transit in exchange for investments in the republic, which has been badly hit by the world economic crisis.

The Americans offered a variety of assistance which the republic (with practically empty coffers) could not refuse. Today, America has allocated over $1 billion in loans and aid; this sum may increase.

Early in February 2010 in Washington, Tajikistan and the United States discussed four blocks of issues: the political and economic situation in the region; implementation of water and hydropower projects; transportation projects; and the situation in Afghanistan. The Tajik leaders are prepared to invite the Americans to participate in investments in their economy, particularly in power engineering.

In the military sphere Dushanbe is willing to set up a training camp where the Tajik military (so far trained in Russian military centers) would be trained by Americans. The United States would like to move its troops stationed at Manas (in Kyrgyzstan) to the Ayni airfield to support the NATO forces in Afghanistan.

The United States has not abandoned its plans to carry out a military operation against Iran, which means that Washington will either insist on exclusive use of the Ayni airfield or its joint use with the Tajik military for a fixed rent and investments in several economic projects in the republic (including those financed by China: power engineering, transportation, roads, and tunnels). This is precisely what the Tajik leaders are counting on.

In June 2010, Washington announced that it was prepared to allocate $10 million to build a military training center for Tajikistan to be opened in 2011. This means that as long as the Americans remain in Afghanistan they will build up their military presence in Tajikistan.

According to Brussels, and contrary to what some experts say, Tajikistan is a weak rather than a "failed" state. It suffers from poverty and experiences electricity shortages in the winter despite its

huge hydropower potential. The threat of destabilization is very real because of its direct proximity to Afghanistan with its ethnic Tajik population (35 percent of the country's total).

Europe mainly extends its help through the European Commission and the German government. The European Union aims at lowering the poverty level and helping to maintain functional civil services; it is also engaged in a wide-scale program of budget support in the social sector.

The EU intends to use the human rights dialogs in Kazakhstan to demand that Dushanbe provides civil society members and the Red Cross with access to prison inmates; ratifies the optional protocols to the Convention against Torture and the Convention on the Elimination of All Possible Forms of Discrimination against Women; decriminalizes libel and slander; bans child labor at cotton plantations; bans torture in national legislation; provides free access to legal services for the poorest population groups; and compensates for resettlement for state purposes.

From the very beginning, India has been and remains one of Tajikistan's priority Asian partners. India's interest in Tajikistan is largely explained by its proximity to the Afghan-Pakistani belt.

Delhi is actively seeking a stronger military-political position in Tajikistan on its own and in cooperation with the other actors of world politics. It has already established its first outpost in Farkhor on the Tajik-Afghan border; it paid for a military hospital, which was later moved to Kabul, and an air strip to be used by the Northern Alliance. India was rather troubled at first when Tajikistan, mainly through the offices of Pakistan, joined the Islamic OEC and OIC.

In 2002, India joined the reconstruction project of the Ayni airfield, in which it invested about $20 million; the project involved 150 Indian military specialists, mainly engineers and auxiliary units. It intended to station 12 MiG-29 fighter planes at the reconstructed airbase. It seems that by drawing India into the project Moscow intended to contain Beijing's increasing political impact in the region and, probably, add weight to the SCO military component (India has an observer status in the SCO).

Since that time the situation has changed radically: India has revived its formerly slack military relations with the United States, which has made Indian planes in Tajikistan an unwelcome prospect for Moscow. The Kremlin put pressure on the Tajik president demanding that he should annul the Indian contracts.

Economic cooperation between the two countries is realized through the loans and grants India extends to Tajikistan (to buy Indian commodities and services) and free aid. India helps with small scale construction projects (like a fruit-processing plant in Dushanbe) and hotels; it transfers batches of pharmaceutical products and supports municipalities. With no common border with Tajikistan, India has to rely on Pakistan to import electric power from Tajikistan.

India, which has a lot of Soviet-made military equipment, is helping to modernize similar equipment for Tajikistan; India trains Tajik land and air forces; Indian students study medicine at the Tajik State Medical University.

Recently, the share of Chinese businesses in the Tajik economy has risen; the two countries are engaged in a political dialog; they are working on various new economic projects; and the prospects for their economic cooperation have become much clearer. It should be said that China regularly extends free financial aid to the Tajik Defense Ministry; in the last ten years, China spent $10 million on these purposes; the two countries are actively cooperating within the SCO. On the whole, in the last few years, China has invested nearly $1 billion in the form of loans in Tajikistan, as well as $250 million in building new roads and modernizing old ones.

Afghanistan and Tajikistan maintain close cultural and economic relations in four spheres in particular:

(1) transborder trade (up to $20 million);

(2) hydropower production;

(3) joint struggle against drug trafficking and extremism;

(4) development of cultural ties within the Persian-speaking world.

The two countries are moving ahead in energy production; when commissioned, the Sangtuda HPP (built jointly by Russian and Iranian companies) will generate extra electricity that can be exported to Afghanistan and on to Pakistan. Russia helped to build a power line from the Tajik border to Pul-i-Kumri, which will be extended to Kabul and Pakistan. Dushanbe and Kabul plan to build a HPP cascade on the Panj (13 stations with a total capacity of 17,720 megawatts and annual production of 86.3 billion kWh). The project inherited from Soviet times requires an international consortium with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as its members.

Dushanbe is using the Afghan factor in its own foreign policy interests; the government of Tajikistan capitalizes on the Afghan factor to expand its military cooperation with the United States.

From time to time bilateral relations are marred by conflicts: in September 2010, Tajik border guards had to use grenade launchers and machine-guns to stop Afghan militants.

As the only non-Turkic-speaking country in Central Asia, Tajikistan stands apart from its neighbors; it survived a cruel civil war which undermined its economy and the social sphere along with its international status. The echo of the civil war, the impossibly slow economic rehabilitation, and the extremely low standards of living negatively affect the republic's political context.

Tajikistan's relatively modest economic and political weight at the regional level aside, the republic is critically important for the region's security and stability. Its stronger ties within the Persian-speaking community with Iran and Afghanistan are, on the whole, a positive regional factor. Its close ties with India and China's mounting economic impact on the republic's future should not be ignored. Indeed, China's large-scale economic presence in Tajikistan will affect the region as a whole.

Tajikistan is a small but a very much needed link in Central Asian integration within EurAsEC, the Customs Union and, in the future, the Common Economic Space.

Conclusion

Today, we are seeing efforts to create a Persian-speaking world. Recently we saw the failed attempts to set up Pax Turcica as a vague alliance of Turkic states on a common Turkic basis with Ankara's leadership. The process ran into a dead end, although Turkey remained a welcome partner of the CA countries in many spheres and Azerbaijan's key ally.

The Persian-speaking countries are looking for ways to move closer, whereby their common language is clearly not the main motivation in this respect. Here, as elsewhere, economic and political factors carry more weight. All the Central Asian countries want, for different reasons, to enlarge their international spheres; a more or less consolidated bloc of Persian-speaking countries will help them to confront the West, the Islamic world, and the CIS (the latter is especially important for Dushanbe). It should be kept in mind that in the future Tehran plans to expand the bloc by adding the Shi'a world.

The Turkic states should respond in one way or another to these developments; each of the states can respond differently. Turkey cannot ignore Iran's stronger position even though in recent years they have essentially become allies. Much closer relations between Afghanistan and Iran (and moving further away from Pakistan) are in the interests of all the actors (particularly India) with the exception of the United States.

Tajikistan is in a much more difficult situation: the Central Asian states see it as part of the region, while for Russia it is an inalienable part of the CIS. Uzbekistan might react the most acutely; most of the large-scale transport and communication projects can only be realized across its territory.

China's response is hard to predict: it is developing into the largest investor in Tajikistan (it would be negatively disposed to a Turkic alliance because of the Uighur factor).

In any case, Beijing has no reason to rejoice at the appearance of another group of states (even if headed by Iran, which is its ally). We can expect a political response to these developments in the near future—from Russia and China (with respect to Tajikistan), from the West and the U.S. (with respect to Afghanistan), and from Pakistan (with respect to any of the countries involved).