

TAJIKISTAN'S GEOPOLITICAL LANDMARKS

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Foreign policy of any state is designed to protect its national interests with the help of instruments ranging from military-political and economic to cultural and ideological. At the same time, there is any number of states unable or unwilling to create or to apply such instruments. While pursuing their strategic interests they prefer to coordinate their foreign policies with the policies of the world's centers of power. Tajikistan belongs to this latter group. Having paid dearly for its newly acquired independence, it is actively developing its contacts with the rest of the world.

In the early 1990s, the country's leaders regarded cooperation with the CIS, the Russian Federation in the first place, as their absolute priority. Later, however, in the last few years of the 20th century Tajikistan's foreign policy acquired many more vectors. Before going into details, let's look at the young Tajik state. It is a small country that covers 143,100 sq km (93 percent of its territory being mountains). Tajikistan is found in the south-eastern corner of Central Asia and borders on Kyr-

gyzstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and China. The country is rich in coal, marble, gold, silver (its deposits come second in the world after Mexico), tungsten, lead, uranium, zinc, etc. Sixty-five percent of the Central Asian water resources are also found in Tajikistan.

From time immemorial, its territory was part of the Great Silk Road that stitched together the major Eurasian cultural and economic areas: China, Central Asia, India, the Middle and Near East, the Mediterranean, and Europe. This was why all world empires (the Persian Empire, the Arabian Caliphate, the Russian Empire and its heir the Soviet Union) never let the country out of sight. At different periods the territory saw all great conquerors: Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane.

Today, one can discern traces of Aryan, Buddhist, Islamic, and Orthodox Christian civilizations in Tajikistan, which helps our republic cooperate with the nations belonging to these civilizations.

Relations with China

Diplomatic relations between Beijing and Dushanbe date from 4 January, 1992; since that time the two countries have signed over 40 intergovernmental agreements related to all aspects of their bilateral relations. They are not marred by serious political disagreements on either regional or global issues. Still, the trade and economic relations between them leave much to be desired: their level is much below that of trade turnover between China and Kazakhstan that has already reached the figure of \$2 billion.

In 1992, the volume of bilateral trade between China and Tajikistan was \$2,757,000 (export from China accounted for \$1,953,000). In 1993, the figure went up to \$12,350,000, to drop in the next year to \$3,177,000. In 1995, trade turnover went up once more to \$23,859,000; in 1996, it dropped to \$11,115,000; the figure for 1997 was \$20,230,000. By that time the countries had reached a certain import-export balance. The figure for 1998 was \$19,230,000; for 1999, \$8,040,000; in 2000, turnover somewhat revived to reach \$17,170,000; in 2001, it dropped to \$10,760,000; in 2002, it was 12,390,000 (Chinese export accounted for \$6,500,000, while Tajik export to China, for 5,890,000).¹

While trade and economic cooperation is developing on the bilateral basis, the cooperation in the security sphere is developing within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (set up as the Shanghai Five on 26 April, 1996). At the early stages it included China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. It was set up to deal with the territorial disagreements between China and the former Soviet republics that bordered on it. The border issues settled, the Shanghai Five extended its activities to other vitally important spheres. It was transformed into the SCO when Uzbekistan, with no common border with China, joined it.

China, the main player in this structure, does its best to use it as a vehicle of its stronger influence in each of the countries. In fact, the SCO can be interpreted as a statement of Beijing's strategic interests in Central Asia as a whole and in Tajikistan, in particular. This has made cooperation with China one of Tajikistan's foreign policy priorities.

According to all existing criteria (territorial, military, economic, demographic, etc.), China is the strongest neighbor. It is much more powerful than all our neighbors (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan) taken together. We are convinced that none of the states the world over can afford to ignore the Chinese factor.

Contacts with Central Asian States (Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan)

Our country is involved in active cooperation with the regional countries (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan). It has a stretch of common border with the former two; on top of this, up to 15 percent of Tajikistan's population are ethnic Uzbeks; 1-1.5 percent is ethnic Kyrgyz living in the mountains.

It seems that the relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are somewhat strained. Uzbekistan unilaterally placed landmines along its border with Tajikistan. Even though it explained this by the national security considerations the mines have not yet claimed lives of militants. It was Tajik civilians who died.

- The relations between the two countries are marred by several factors, territorial issues being one of them.

The Central Asian republics appeared on the maps as a result of a rather crude delimitation carried out in the 1920s. The Soviet leaders did not bother about the region's historical, cultural, and ethnic aspects. As a result, in post-Soviet times territorial disputes flare up

¹ See: S. Zhuangzhi, "Torgovo-ekonomicheskoe sotrudnichestvo mezhdru Kitaem i Tajikistanom: sovremennoe sostoianie, problemy i perspektivy," in: *Izmeniaushchaisia Tsentral'naia Azia i regional'noe sotrudnichestvo*, Dushanbe, 2003, p. 90.

at the non-official level in all Central Asian countries. This strains, to a certain extent, their relationships.

- Ethnic relations are the second important factor. There is a large Tajik diaspora living compactly in Uzbekistan (mainly in the Surkhandaria, Samarkand, and Bukhara regions). According to the Uzbek official statistics, there are slightly over 1 million Tajiks living in Uzbekistan (about 4 percent of its population). The unofficial figure is over 6 million, the Tajik diaspora coming second after the titular nation where its numerical strength is concerned.
- The jointly used communication lines are the third factor of the two countries' bilateral relations. Central Asia inherited its infrastructure from the Soviet Union where it had been set up as part of the entire country's communication system. The system that fell apart together with the great empire developed into another destabilizing factor.
- The influence of third countries is the fourth destabilizing factor. As a strategically important region that boasts of favorable geographic location and vast natural resources (hydrocarbons, ferrous and non-ferrous metals) and cotton Central Asia attracted close attention of all leading centers of power: China, Russia, the EU, and the United States. Each of the local countries and its leaders guided themselves by national interests when pursuing their foreign policy strategies and siding with one of the key players.
- Finally, the fifth factor that betrayed itself early in the 1990s is Tashkent's desire to establish its preeminence in Central Asia. These claims are supported by the demographic factor (Uzbekistan is the region's most densely populated state with the strongest army) and by the fact that nearly all communication lines go across its territory.

The bilateral contacts between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan do not match their potentials even though the countries have a stretch of common border and no political disagreements. We believe that their bilateral mutually advantageous cooperation is slowed down because all transportation and communication lines starting in Dushanbe go to Tashkent. This adds to the price of commodities moved from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The problem is being successfully tackled: in addition to the Osh-Khorog highway that functions seasonally the republics will receive (with the help of foreign investments) a shorter highway between them.

The two countries are brought together by the factor of water resources. They are, in fact, the region's "water donors." The problem of water, an acute one in the arid region, will boost their status. The two countries should obviously coordinate their actions.

Cooperation with Russia

It was more that 150 years ago that czarist Russia conquered the territory of contemporary Tajikistan and established its military-political and cultural presence there. During this period Russia fully dominated in Central Asia and drove away all rivals. In the post-Soviet period, however, Russia has been facing a qualitatively new problem in Tajikistan.

Today the relations revolve, to a greater extent than before, around military-political cooperation: a fairly great number of Russian troops are stationed in Tajikistan. There are 201st motor rifle division, the 670th aviation group, 92nd motor rifle regiment, a separate tank battalion, and regiments of self-propelled artillery and anti-aircraft missiles deployed in Tajikistan's capital alone. There is the 149th motor rifle regiment in Kulob, 191st motor rifle regiment in Kurgan-Tiube and a separate rocket launcher battalion. There are also units of the RF Federal Border Service deployed in Tajikistan. Military cooperation is also carried out within the interstate structures (the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty, CST). The very fact of Russia's military presence will remain a decisive factor in the near future and will limit military-political presence of all other countries.

Economic cooperation with Russia is overshadowed by the military-political cooperation despite numerous bilateral agreements and the documents signed within the CIS. Recently, however, economic cooperation with Russia has been picking up. Russia has come into Tajikistan's leading branches (hydropower engineering, agriculture, construction, etc.). There are several JVs working in these fields.

The dynamics of Russia-Tajikistan cooperation is illustrated by the following figures: in 1999 Russia exported to our republic \$92.5 million-worth of goods, the figures for 2000 and 2002 being \$105 and \$129.4 million, respectively. In 2001, the volume of trade between the two countries reached \$234 million and accounted for 17.5 percent of Tajikistan's foreign trade. By that time about 100 enterprises with Russian capital had been functioning in the republic. Russian firms helped Tajikistan prepare feasibility studies for the stage-by-stage construction of the Rogun Hydropower Station and a JV based on the Adramanskiy Ore Dressing Works, the Vostochniy i Zapadnyy Kanimansur mines and (at a later stage) of the Bol'shoy Kanimansur mines.²

Cooperation in the sphere of education is going ahead. Since 1996 the Russian-Tajik Slavic University has been functioning in the republic. Within a very short period it developed into one of the leading research centers.

Labor migration is another highly important side of our bilateral relations. According to experts, there are from 500,000 to 1 million Tajiks now working in the Russian Federation (mainly in Moscow, Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Samara, Kazan, Irkutsk, and some other cities). They work at construction sites, in agriculture and trade at city markets. These people send back home from \$700 million to \$1 billion every year—the money playing an important role in Tajikistan's national economy. In Russia Tajiks and migrants from other Asian countries have to bear persecution of the law enforcement bodies and attacks by all sorts of neo-fascist and nationalist organizations that claim lives of dozens of people every year.

Contacts with Iran, Pakistan, and India

In antiquity the Hindustani Peninsular and Iran were the seats of the world (Aryan) civilization from where it spread far and wide and reached Tajikistan. The ancient states that flourished there contributed to the cultural heritage of the vast Asian continent and to the life style of the people living in India, Iran, Pakistan, and Tajikistan in the first place.

This explains why our contacts with Iran, Pakistan, and India are important for us. Dushanbe is doing its best to maintain contacts with all the three countries. Iran was the first country to recognize Tajikistan as an independent state; it was at that time that the sides agreed to deepen their cooperation by setting up a joint commission for trade, economic, technological, and cultural cooperation. In 2003, trade turnover between Iran and Tajikistan reached \$77 million; according to preliminary estimates, the figure for 2004 was even higher. Today, Tajikistan exports aluminum, cotton and other raw materials to Iran and imports food, equipment, clothes, etc.³

Pakistan is one of the states that never wavers when it comes to defending its national interests; this fully applies to its relations with the Central Asian republics. It was early in the 1990s, during the period of the "parade of sovereignties" across the post-Soviet expanse that Islamabad made public its strategic interests in the region. There is the opinion that the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Tajikistan have not yet reached their maximum—still, Pakistan values high its relations with Tajikistan. Production of hydropower is obviously its priority: Islamabad wants to be involved in

² See: M.S. Ashimbaev, N.T. Laumulín, L.Iu. Guseva, *Tsentral'naia Azia do i posle 11 sentiabria*. [<http://www.kisi.kz>], 12 December, 2003.

³ See: G.R. Rasulov, "Pakistan i Iran—strategicheskíe partnery Tajikistana," *Ekonomika Tajikistana: strategiya razvitiya*, No. 2, 2004, p. 186.

the construction of hydropower stations in Tajikistan; it is also interested in the chemical industry, transport, and agriculture.

Tehran and Islamabad are Dushanbe's partners in many international structures, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Economic Cooperation Organization among them.

Recently, India has come out as an important member of the world community whose opinions are heeded in Asia. Its opinion is especially important in the regional security sphere: the large country may prove a counterweight to Islam that is gaining momentum and China.

Relations between Tajikistan and India are smoothly developing in many directions. We believe that processing precious and semi-precious stones mined in Tajikistan should become one of the priority branches. Indeed, while Tajikistan has huge resources India has vast experience in this sphere going back many centuries and coupled today with the latest technologies. Today, India is engaged in several projects in Tajikistan (reconstruction of a military airfield to the southwest of Dushanbe being one of them). There are several construction projects in the Tajik capital as well where India plans to build a five-star hotel.

Contacts with the West

Even before its independence Tajikistan maintained close economic, cultural, and academic ties with European countries. Some of them were directly involved in building certain large objects in the republic.

In recent years the contacts became even wider. European states came to the mining sector (a Tajik-British JVs—Zaravshon and Darvoz—are mining gold). There are Tajik-Italian JVs—Abreshim, Javoni, and Todini—the latter being engaged in building a road between Dushanbe and Kulob, etc.

Economic cooperation was launched by the Agreement on Trade and Textile Products between Tajikistan and the EU signed back on 16 July, 1993 in Brussels. Accreditation of the permanent representative of the Republic of Tajikistan at the EU was another step in the right direction. This strengthened our ties with the EU and with each of its members on the bilateral basis.⁴ In the last ten years the EU has extended its aid to Tajikistan in the form of grants to the sum of 350 million Euros.⁵

Political cooperation with Europe is developing within the OSCE, which made an important contribution to the inter-Tajik talks. From the very beginning this organization has been playing a leading role in developing democratic institutions in Tajikistan. The OSCE Paris Charter adopted in 1990 said that Central Asia (including Tajikistan) was an inalienable part of the European security system.⁶

Even though Dushanbe is far removed from Washington, American influence is more and more strongly felt. At the first stage of our bilateral relations the U.S. focused on the human rights issue, humanitarian aid, support of the NGOs and education of young men and specialists in the United States.

This went on until 9/11. Our republic was one of the first to offer its support for the Operation Enduring Freedom; it opened its airspace for the aircraft engaged in the counter-terrorist campaign in Afghanistan. In November 2001 Dushanbe agreed to stationing troops of the U.S.-led counter-terrorist coalition on its territory and offered its airfields in Kulob (that can receive 60 planes) and in Kurgan-Tiube, 80 km to the south of Dushanbe with the capacity of 70 planes. Even though the airfields' operational capacity was small, their tactically favorable location (and the use of airfields in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan) made it possible to control the entire Central Asian region.⁷

The United States has been contributing to guarding stretches of the Tajik-Afghan border controlled by the military of Tajikistan (gradually, the republic is gaining control of all stretches of its state border).

⁴ See: G.M. Maytdinova, "Sostoianie i perspektivy sotrudnichestva Evrosoiuza i RT," in: *Evropeyskiy Soiuz i Tajikistan—sostoianie i perspektivy sotrudnichestva*, Dushanbe, 2003, p. 22.

⁵ TIA Khovar [http://www.kabar.kg/04/Mar/17/65.htm], 17 March, 2004.

⁶ See: G.M. Maytdinova, op. cit., p. 23.

⁷ See: M.S. Ashimbaev, N.T. Laumulin, L.Iu. Guseva, op. cit.

Washington extends financial aid and helps train border guards. It should be added that in view of Russia's exceptionally great military-political influence (in the Central Asian context) Dushanbe (as distinct from Bishkek and Tashkent) shows more cautious when it comes to greater American presence in the republic.

C o n c l u s i o n

Tajikistan is actively developing its contacts with the world, which helps strengthen its sovereignty and independence.

Foreign policy results depend, as a rule, on the state's ability to use all instruments: demographic, natural and natural resources, economic, military, etc. Each state strives to protect its national interests, therefore they should be clearly outlined. Tajikistan not only protects its interests but also takes into account the interests of other states. This trend is especially obvious in the China-Pakistan-India triangle in which Delhi remains isolated. This fact did not prevent our republic from establishing close relations with the three countries.

We believe that our republic will establish closer cooperation with China in some areas. Bilateral trade will flourish when the strategically important Kulob-Khorog-Kul'ma-Karakorum highway connects Tajikistan with China. Today, Chinese goods can be bought in every shop across Tajikistan. The highway will also connect our republic with Pakistan and provide an outlet to the Indian Ocean. It will let Tajikistan out of its geographical impasse and make it less dependent on the routes leading to Uzbekistan and further on across its territory.

While pursuing its foreign policy course our republic is primarily concerned with Central Asian security; its closer ties with the EU help it integrate into the world community. One can expect that under favorable conditions large European companies will invest in our economy. Today, there are 13 draft intergovernmental agreements with Italy, the Netherlands, France, the U.K., the FRG, Switzerland, and Austria. These documents relate to many spheres, including cooperation in fighting organized crime and drug trafficking, encouragement and mutual protection of investments, closer trade, economic, scientific and technological contacts, avoidance of dual taxation of incomes and properties, development of air communication, etc.⁸

For the first time in the last 2,400 years (after Alexander the Great's invasion) western troops appeared in Central Asia. This changed the balance of forces in the region and allowed Tajikistan to strengthen its relations with the United States and other Western countries.

If it turns out well Tajikistan will get more financial aid from them and the United States in the first place in the form of loans, investments, etc. There is certain progress in this. In 2002, Tajikistan came second after Uzbekistan where American financial aid to the Central Asian republics was concerned (\$85.3 million). At the same time, we cannot expect considerable American investments in our economy.

Thus, Tajikistan is pursuing a multi-vector policy by maintaining partnerships with the world leaders, regional powers and its Central Asian neighbors.

⁸ See: G.M. Maytdinova, *op. cit.*, p. 26.