

**INFLUENCE OF THE WORLD CENTERS OF
POWER ON KAZAKHSTAN AND
NEW GEOPOLITICAL TRENDS
IN CENTRAL ASIA**

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**Foreign Political Orientations of
the Kazakhstani Elites and
Western Strategies**

The republic is a natural geopolitical core of Central Asia, therefore the game the world centers of power are playing around Kazakhstan is very important for Central Asian politics. This is especially true in a situation where the number of challenges to regional stability is growing and the threats are becoming increasingly dangerous.

Kazakhstan is located deep inside Eurasia; it is a large state (five times larger than France and four times the size of Ukraine); it is ninth in the world in terms of size (2,724,900 sq km). With the largest territorial production complexes found along its frontiers, the country is fairly vulnerable.

Conventionally speaking, described in geographic, economic, and climatic terms, the geopolitical heartland of the Republic of Kazakhstan, a purely continental country, can be identified as a triangle: Almaty-Semipalatinsk-Aktiubinsk. Its eastern flank touches on the geographic center of Eurasia (the 78th meridian and 50th parallel); it includes vast expanses of hummocky topography (Sary Arka), parts of the Turgay Plateau, and the Turgay Lowland. The heartland is economically undeveloped, its poor transport and information infrastructure being hugely overloaded. The central geopolitical space of the Republic of Kazakhstan faces serious environmental problems, while its natural and climatic conditions are adverse. The heartland is depopulated: with an average population density of 5.8 people per 1 sq km across the country, there are 0.3-0.5 people per 1 sq km in the country's center.¹

Objectively, the North and the South, divided by the depopulated geopolitical Center, might move apart as they are attracted by stronger neighbors. The "void" of the heartland interfered with state development as such, and stimulated regional separatism among the local elites that belong to different tribal unions and pursue different foreign economic aims. Most of the Kazakhs of the Elder Zhuz are closely connected with Uzbekistan (with the South in the wider sense); the Middle Zhuz with Russia and partly (the Naymans and Kereis) with China. The Younger Zhuz looks at Russia, yet wants more independence than the other Kazakh alliances.

When it comes to international preferences, the Kazakhstani elite is clearly (albeit conventionally) divided into the "pragmatists" and the "idealists." The first group includes nearly all top bureaucrats and clan leaders; the second consists of the absolute minority either from the opposition or petty civil servants. The "pragmatists" are lobbyists and/or partners of large foreign economic structures working in Kazakhstan and leaders of practically all the elite groups. They are guided by fairly primitive common sense: we should cooperate with the countries present on the Kazakhstani market; as soon as they leave, we turn to other companies and, consequently, to other centers of power. This is how most of the top local bureaucrats and leaders of the largest clans think.

The very fact that lobbyists of foreign companies are present in the government together with members of various clans shows that foreign, mainly transnational, capital is playing an increasingly important role in the system of political governance. TNCs, for that matter, play an extremely important role in the world today, yet not all experts hail them as a positive phenomenon. There is the opinion that TNCs are exploiters on a worldwide scale that have doomed nations to backwardness and poverty. Those who disagree with it look at TNCs as a vehicle of progress that brings the undeveloped countries into the civilized world. This positive role notwithstanding, experts agree that the cost is high: TNCs wield too much political influence; they breed corruption, apply transfer prices, take profits away from the host country, ignore its economic interests, and make it more economically vulnerable and dependent.

Worldwide TNCs have come to the Kazakhstani market and struck root there. Having promptly mastered the local unofficial business laws, they perfectly adjusted themselves to the "tribalist" economic structure completely dependent on relations among the elite groups. As owners of the key enterprises, they play an important role in Kazakhstan. Less influential than the local clans, they are actively seeking the support of the leaders of the national establishment, which has already caused many of the TNC-related scandals that received lavish media coverage.

¹ See: Sob.inf. "Za poslednie piat' let iz Kazakhstana vyekhlo 1 mln 652,7 tys. chelovek," *Karavan*, 13 March, 1998.

So far the “idealists” cannot boast great influence on the elite; their foreign policy orientations are dominated not only, and not so much, by personal considerations as by their desire to match their ideological convictions with their country’s international image. The so-called Young Kazakhs—a group of Western-oriented young bourgeoisie—belong to the “idealists” camp.

They closed ranks around two parties—the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK) and Ak Zhol—in the hope of acquiring a new role on the international scene and were stirred up to activity by the government’s inadequate moves. For example, the “old leaders” never expected the opposition ranks to swell with new “irreconcilable” leaders: former akim of the Pavlodar Region Galymzhan Zhakianov and former minister Mukhtar Abliazov. By instituting court proceedings against them, the government created “martyrs at the hands of the authorities.”

The group’s strategy and foreign policy priorities are greatly affected by the constantly increasing attention the Western human rights activists are paying to the country’s domestic developments. The corruption-related scandals, the sluggish Kazakh-gate in particular, which revealed that the government had stored away over \$1 billion of oil money in Swiss banks, make President Nazarbaev potentially vulnerable.²

The independence years have shown that integration with Russia and other CIS countries attracts both the Russian speakers and a large part of the Kazakhs. In this respect, the government and the opposition are at one. The country’s leaders, however, in control of real power in the country, could easily outplay their opponents by demonstrating an urge toward integration at all levels. The “Eurasian idea Kazakhstani style” was a godsend. The fact that the integration initiatives were mostly mere declarations, which could not be realized for many reasons, was of secondary importance. The opposition was left training behind, repeating that there was no alternative to the country’s strategic orientation toward the Russian Federation.

While the leaders were indulging in integration rhetoric, the opposition, especially its liberal-democratic wing, survived on foreign money supplied by international NGOs through absolutely legal channels.

The West, the United States in particular, is showing a lot of interest in Kazakhstan and pays lip service, through the State Department, to the cause of the opposition. Yet no real steps have been taken in this direction so far. At the same time, in view of Washington’s latest initiatives (the establishment of new state structures designed to promote democracy in the countries that America considers not democratic enough, and the adoption of corresponding laws³), the collapse of Akaev’s regime in Kyrgyzstan may add vigor to Western support of the local opposition.

Until 2001, the United States and the West as a whole paid little attention to the newly independent Central Asian states. They concentrated on the region’s energy potential and did nothing to help the few local dissidents. For a long time, America treated the area with caution as a potential stronghold of Islamic radicalism. However, the republics demonstrated their ability to cooperate with the world powers in all spheres, while Islamic radicalism failed to strengthen its position in Central Asia.

America’s current strategy in the region is basically a multi-level system: the United States flirts with the leaders and promises to resolve all domestic problems; through all kinds of NGOs it supports the Western-oriented opposition as a potential “reserve,” and builds up its economic presence. The American military presence in the region accelerated some of the negative processes there. In March 2005, President Akaev was removed from his post after a week of disorder and shop-plundering in Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital, and in the country’s south. The recent events there have demonstrated that the situation is becoming rapidly aggravated.

² See: M. Adilov, “Perekhodit’ li ‘rubikon’... Revolutsia v Kyrgyzstane snova postavila kazakhstanskuiu vlast’ i oppozitsiiu perez vyborom,” *Respublika*, 1 April, 2005.

³ “Kongress SShA podderzhivaet Zakon o demokratii v Tsentral’noy Azii,” RIA Novosti, 5 March, 2006.

The Western media responded to the suppressed riots in Andijan (Uzbekistan) with even more insistent demands to put economic and political pressure on the regime. Tashkent retaliated by achieving the withdrawal of the American military base from its territory, re-orientation of its foreign policy toward Moscow and Beijing, and membership in the EurAsEC.⁴

After losing its foothold in Uzbekistan, the United States has been hastily drawing up a new Central Asian strategy; it is trying to entice Kazakhstan into the role of its “strategic regional partner.” There is the opinion that the “American leadership decided to place its stakes on Kazakhstan not only in the economic, but also in the military sphere.”⁵ Indeed, for some time Washington has been lavishing compliments on Astana. It is lobbying the idea the republic’s leaders formulated on the eve of the presidential election in December 2005 about Kazakhstan’s special role as the Central Asian and Caspian leader. In March 2006, U.S. Secretary of Energy Samuel W. Bodman said in Astana that the United States wanted Kazakhstan to join the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline as soon as possible. Kazakhstan was advised to complete its talks with Azerbaijan on transporting Kazakhstan’s energy resources via the BTC pipeline. He also said that Kazakhstan should assume the role of a regional leader to develop the energy sector’s infrastructure and create more transit routes for energy resources.⁶

Having disrupted relations with Uzbekistan, the White House was left with the only alternative of supporting and encouraging Kazakhstan as a potential regional leader: none of the other Central Asian republics could claim this role.

Washington is nervous: signing the agreement on joining the BTC has been already postponed several times. Kazakhstan’s potential regional domination, seen in America as a step toward its own domination in Central Asia, is gift-wrapped: Secretary Bodman explained in so many words that the transparent, stable, and predictable investment climate would not only attract investments—it would also create new jobs; in the next five years, the volume of capital investments might double, he promised.

Astana never tires of repeating that in ten years’ time Kazakhstan will join the world’s ten largest oil producers and that, therefore, it should stick to its policy of maneuvering between the world’s centers of power that brings success.

We should always bear in mind that after launching a series of regime changes across the post-Soviet expanse late in 2003, known as the “velvet revolutions,” the West stepped up its efforts to seize control over the Soviet successor states. This, in turn, dramatized the confrontation among the local elites. Talk of “strategic partnership” and the promises of a “deluge of dollar investments” notwithstanding, the West is still aiming to change the elites in the post-Soviet countries.

Cooperation with Russia

Russia and Kazakhstan remain closely connected for many objective and subjective reasons. Kazakhstan looks at Russian territory as the main transit corridor; Russia is one of the major consumers of Kazakhstani products and Kazakhstan’s main economic partner. For Moscow, Kazakhstan is much more than one of the key economic partners in the post-Soviet territory and the place where its key military space structures are situated. It is also a geostrategic outpost that protects Russia against the challenges from the south. There is another, non-material factor: the two nations lived side by side

⁴ See: A. Asrorov, “Vozvrashchenie bludnogo syna. Kak Uzbekistan ‘vstroitsia’ v EvrAsES,” *Gazeta.kz.*, 3 March, 2006.

⁵ P. Sviatenkov, “Kazakhstan sdelauiut liderom,” APN-Kazakhstan, 7 November, 2005.

⁶ See: A. Grozin, “Novaia strategiya SShA v Tsentral’noy Azii,” RIA Novosti, 24 March, 2006.

for many centuries and shared many joys and many tragedies in the past. There are numerous personal ties among the citizens of both countries. Both Russia and Kazakhstan are members of the same organizations: the CIS, EurAsEC, SCO, and the Common Economic Space that is being formed. They are actively contributing to the functioning of the Antiterrorist Center of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Russia's political and economic influence in Kazakhstan is still strong: the two countries are technologically interconnected. Kazakhstan depends on Russia in the transport and commodity spheres, there is a large share of Russian speakers among its population, etc. Moscow still controls Kazakhstan's export of raw materials and import of commodities. Naturally enough, Russia wants to perpetrate the situation for material (tariff and tax allocations, control over raw material supplies to the Russian traditional export markets, etc.) and, more important still, geopolitical considerations. The two countries are tied together by the long-term agreements on oil transit. Since 2003, the CTC has been moving over 19 million tons of Kazakh oil annually.⁷ The KazRosGaz JV has very good prospects in the gas sphere.

All efforts to weaken its dependence on Russia notwithstanding, Kazakhstan, according to its statistics, is still economically very much Russia-oriented. The Russian Federation is the world's largest importer of Kazakhstani products.⁸ Up to 40 percent of Kazakhstan's import comes from Russia; 9 percent of its import comes from Germany; 4-6 percent from China; 4-5 percent from the U.S., followed by the U.K., Italy, Turkey, Ukraine, the Republic of Korea, France, the Netherlands, Uzbekistan, Japan, etc. Kazakhstan is one of Russia's 10 major trade partners and one of the major partners of the CIS countries. In 2002, bilateral trade turnover reached about \$4.4 billion; in 2003, \$5.5 billion⁹; in 2004, over \$6 billion, in 2005, according to Astana, \$8 billion.

Kazakhstan will not be able to become involved with other centers of power or take an active part in forming new geopolitical blocs inside and outside the CIS until it becomes relatively economically independent; this will take at least 10 to 15 years.

More active military-technical and military-political contacts add strength to the two countries' bilateral relations, the process being greatly affected by the situation in Central Asia, which suffers from terrorist inroads and the growing threat of the Taliban. This explains why in 2000-early 2001 the leaders of Kazakhstan accelerated the pace of military cooperation with Russia, while President Nazarbaev was one of those who initiated the Antiterrorist CIS Center.

Russia's military influence is underpinned by its real military presence in Kazakhstan (the Baikonur spaceport and two test ranges), the absolute majority of foreign-trained Kazakhstani officers receive their instruction in Russia; it is from this country that Kazakhstan gets military hardware, weapons, etc.

So far, however, the relations between the two countries have fallen short of the cooperation demands of both states and nations. The two presidents discussed this several times: in Omsk in the spring of 2003, in Moscow a year later, and in 2005, during their numerous meetings.

According to the latest population census in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2001), the share of Russians and Russian speakers remains high (about 40 percent), despite a considerable outflow of these groups from Kazakhstan. Those who stayed behind are still grappling with the old problems: inadequate representation in the higher echelons of power and business; inadequate access to education in the native tongue; and the narrowing field of the Russian language in the republic. Today, however, they feel less pressure than in the 1990s.

⁷ See: R. Streshnev, "Na novyi uroven' integratsii," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 21 April, 2004.

⁸ See: "Itogi sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia Respubliki Kazakhstan za 2003 god i zadachi na 2004 god" [www.minplan.kz].

⁹ See: R. Streshnev, op. cit.

While Russia's domination in the cultural and information spheres is gradually disappearing in the countries of the region, it will obviously be preserved in Kazakhstan because of the large Russian and Russian-speaking diasporas, which painfully respond to all attempts to squeeze them from the Russian cultural field. Russia should treat support for the Russian language, Russian culture, and education in Russian in Kazakhstan as one of its objective priorities. It should work harder to tap the momentum that Russian culture, art, and science will preserve, even in the most adverse conditions, in the next 15 to 20 years. This is especially important in view of the world competition unfolding in the Central Asian cultural and education expanse.

Russia can neutralize America's efforts to extend its strategic influence at Russia's expense: Moscow should increase weapon deliveries and extend educational programs for the military from the Central Asian countries.¹⁰ These countries will find the transfer to NATO's military standards too costly and unrealizable in the foreseeable future.

The Russia-Kazakhstan summits, which have become a regular and frequent feature of their policies in the last three years, discuss bilateral relations, regional developments, counterterrorist efforts, and the performance of the collective security regional structures. Public information is normally scarce, while the experts of both countries insist that "press releases are used to detract attention from the problems discussed at closed meetings."¹¹

The rapidly changing situation is forcing the two countries to strengthen their contacts: the prospects of destabilization of the situation in Uzbekistan, which became real after the series of terrorist acts in Tashkent and Ferghana in March-April 2004 and especially the failed riot in Andijan in May 2005, threaten to isolate the Russian military contingent in Tajikistan and cut off the line of supplies. Moscow and especially Astana should plan preventive measures to stabilize the situation in Uzbekistan—the country has come too close to boiling point.¹² If worst comes to worst, the two countries should be prepared to minimize the destructive effects. On the other hand, despite the counterterrorist operation, Afghanistan has developed into an international drug-producing center threatening both close neighbors and distant countries alike.¹³

Russia and Kazakhstan should arrive at mutually acceptable bilateral and multilateral patterns of relations to be able to face the alarming trends in Central Asia and the new threats evident across the post-Soviet expanse.

In January 2004, the presidents of Russia and Kazakhstan signed a package of bilateral agreements on the Baikonur spaceport (among other objects), under which Russia will continue using it until 2050 for the same annual rent of \$115 million. In addition, Moscow and Astana reached an agreement on the environmentally save Bayterek (Topol) space missile complex in the spaceport based on the Russian space-missile complex in Angara.¹⁴

"The nuclear sphere is one of the few in which Kazakhstan is absolutely competitive with many of the world powers: Kazatomprom is one of the world's four leading uranium-producing companies. Kazakhstan mines and processes uranium into nuclear fuel for nuclear power stations. In 30 years, the republic will mine over 15,000 tons of uranium every year.¹⁵ The atomic industry is expected to create an impetus for a "big technological leap" to prevent Kazakhstan's degeneration into a "raw material appendage."

¹⁰ See: *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 29 September, 2003.

¹¹ M. Chernov, "Kazakhstan tianetsia k Rossii, pered litsom amerikanskoy ekspansii v Sredney Azii Astana vynuzhdena poyti na sblizhenie s Moskvoy," *RBC daily*, 21 April, 2004.

¹² See: Michael Hall: "Uzbekistan is Experiencing Calm Before the Storm," *EurasiaNet.org*, 2 March, 2006.

¹³ See: R. Ushakov, "Amerike nuzhen Kazakhstan," *Liter*, 30 December, 2005.

¹⁴ See: R. Streshnev, op. cit.

¹⁵ See: Iu. Zolina, "Urana—zavalis'," *Ekspress-K*, 6 April, 2004.

The changes on the world markets might force the Russian Federation to start importing uranium instead of exporting it. This may happen in the relatively near future. For this reason, the uranium of Kazakhstan and its products are of special interest for Russia, while bilateral cooperation in the atomic, space research, and other high tech applied spheres might pull all the other branches along with them. Russia does not profit financially from its relations with Kazakhstan, which has nothing to do with altruism: financial input is accepted as payment for Russia's geopolitical interests and national security. This is a long-term strategy that allows the Republic of Kazakhstan to adjust its nearly entire scientific and technical potential to Russia: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are two key Central Asian states. This strategy also applies to the military-technical sphere—Moscow sells its resources for “allied” prices, not only to strengthen military and foreign policy contacts with Kazakhstan, but also tie it, for many years to come, to Russia's military-industrial complex and standards.¹⁶

Recently Russia has been paying more attention to educating Kazakhstani officers in Russia's military colleges and academies. In December 2003, the RF president announced that Russia would offer free military education to the officers of the member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. This will undoubtedly strengthen cooperation between the Kazakhstani and Russian power-wielding structures. Whereas in 2002, 150 representatives of the higher command corps, officers, and officer cadets from the Republic of Kazakhstan were sent to Russia, in 2003, the quota was increased to 250 people; and Russian experts give lectures at the Kazakhstani military higher educational establishments.¹⁷ Other joint projects in the same sphere are no less important.

Moscow and Astana share the same approach to the legal status of the Caspian Sea. Back in 1998, the two countries signed an agreement on the delimitation of the seabed in its northern part to ensure their sovereign rights of the use of the sea's natural resources. In May 2002, they signed a protocol to the agreement that specifies the coordinates of the dividing line on the seabed.¹⁸ Russia and Kazakhstan reached an agreement on the debatable parts of the Caspian shelf (the Khvalynskoe, Tsentral'noe, and Kurmangazy fields) that would be developed together on a 50/50 basis.

Both countries are concerned about the international aggravations in South Asia and the Middle East. Since some of the local countries have WMD and means of its delivery (or are very close to acquiring such), Russia and Kazakhstan should at least upgrade their early missile attack warning systems.

The special political orientations of the Kazakhstani political elite should not interfere with the two countries' economic cooperation. An extension of mutually advantageous contacts in this sphere and effective promotion of bilateral integration projects should make political relations more effective and more confidential. We should never forget that the politics of Kazakhstan is the product of its ruling elites. Public opinion has a certain role to play in the country's politics, yet political decision-making belongs to those in power. Kazakhstan has a rigidly arranged vertical of power; all-important initiatives belong to the president and his closest circle.

The chain of the Color Revolutions awakened the post-communist elites of Kazakhstan to the U.S.'s intention to replace President Nazarbaev with a young, pro-Western, and (more important) pliable politician. This forced the elites to seek support anywhere, in Moscow, in the first place. It goes without saying that Russia is not in the least interested in the realization of such American plans. The top crust of the Republic of Kazakhstan has recognized that it needs “Moscow's standby” in case of force majeure circumstances. So far, Moscow's support is realized in the form of closer cooperation in the sphere of defense and high technologies.

¹⁶ See: A. Matveev, “Kontaktam voennykh vedomstv Rossii i Kazakhstana net al'ternativy,” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er*, No. 45, 30 November-6 December, 2005.

¹⁷ See: T. Koroleva, “Kazakhstan i Rossia narashchivaiut voennoe sotrudnichestvo,” *Panorama*, No. 46, November 2002.

¹⁸ See: R. Streshnev, op. cit.

It seems that Russia, on the whole, is interested in supporting the present regime in Kazakhstan and the Kazakhstani president's models of a possible transformation of power (up to and including the appointment of a possible "successor"). If the situation spirals out of control, if the republic becomes part of the zone of direct American influence, most of the Russian-Kazakhstani projects will lose all meaning and be discontinued. Astana is aware of this—it regularly offers integration initiatives. So far, only economic integration is on the agenda. During the period of relative stability, Nursultan Nazarbaev showed no interest in integration projects. He will agree to political integration only when the pressure of the West reaches its absolute maximum and Russia's umbrella becomes the only way out.

Problems of Contacts with China

Cooperation with China, Kazakhstan's great eastern neighbor, is of great importance for its national security. The countries have common approaches to many international issues. China is actively supporting Kazakhstan's intention to join the WTO. Astana and Beijing reached full agreement on many fundamental issues and the future of SCO. This was registered in the Treaty on Good-Neighborly Relations, Friendship, and Cooperation between the RK and the PRC signed in December 2002.

The treaty and the fairly high level of their bilateral relations notwithstanding, mutual mistrust between the two countries still lingers. In the last five years, the Chinese factor has developed into an important domestic issue in Kazakhstan. The large Chinese enterprises in Kazakhstan are plagued by social conflicts while Kazakhstani and Chinese petty merchants at the markets find it hard to work side by side. The fact that the Chinese employers at the Aktiubemunaygaz JV (the Zhanazhol gas fields in the Aktiubinsk Region) forced the Kazakhstani workers to sing China's national anthem every morning and fired those who refused to obey echoed across the country. No matter how hard they tried, the workers failed to overturn the practice in court.¹⁹ Many expected the Chinese to apply this rule at the RK-PRC pipeline construction site²⁰ and at many other joint projects (the Northern Corridor, etc.).

It would be no exaggeration to say that the Kazakhs have already formed a set of fears, imagined and real, related to China, the most nagging of them being the fear of a "flood of Chinese" ready to inundate the republic. If it continues, it might transform into a geopolitical nightmare.²¹

In the 1990s, the border issue loomed high on Kazakhstan's domestic scene. It was successfully resolved, yet the drawoff of the border rivers, another big issue, remains unresolved. No one knows why Kazakhstan failed to settle it along with the border issue. Today, Astana has to face the results of its own mistakes: the Chinese are trying to bring the drawoff of the Cherny Irtysh and Ili, two large rivers with the riverheads in China, to the maximum.

Said B. Turarbekov, counselor to the Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan, who personally supervised the border rivers issue: "From the very first days of Kazakhstan's independence, we have been aware of the issue's importance; throughout these years, we have been working on its settlement. Today, we are forcing China to pay adequate attention to it. ...Before that, no matter how hard we tried, the Chinese side preferred to totally ignore the issue."²² Today, China is completing the Cherny Irtysh-

¹⁹ See: O. Petrova, A. Klimonov, "'Airanguli' dlia kitaytsa. Obratnaia storona inostrannykh investitsiy," *Respublika*, 19 November, 2004.

²⁰ See: M. Auezov, "Boytes' kitaytsev, v Khorgos prikhodiashchikh. Zakhlestnuvshiy nash rynek potok kitayskikh tovarov zastavljaet vs'er'ioz zadumat'sia ob ekspansii," *Respublika*, 12 November, 2004.

²¹ See: O. Zhylykbaev, "Kitayskiy aysberg," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 10 November, 2004.

²² *Panorama*, No. 35, August 2000.

Karamay canal that will deprive Pavlodar and Ust-Kamenogorsk in Kazakhstan and Omsk in Russia of water from the Irtysh.

When trying to answer the question of why China is seen as a serious potential threat in Kazakhstan, we would do better to avoid deliberations about the hegemonic Maoist ideology or imagined Han chauvinism. The answer is much simpler: according to the most optimistic Chinese forecasts, China's natural and economic potential within the present borders will feed only 1.5 billion.²³ Today, there are about 1.25 billion Chinese; by 2010, their numbers will probably be slightly over 1.5 billion. The question is: What is to be done? According to official figures, there is about a 130 million-strong unoccupied agricultural population; 17 million have no industrial jobs.²⁴ Different sources cite different, even larger figures. No matter how effective, the Chinese economy cannot support everyone. The answer is that the country should extend its territory. Indeed, "the demographic situation in China is a headache for all its neighbors."²⁵

In their book *China after Deng Xiaoping: 10 Most Outstanding Issues* published in early 1994, two prominent Chinese scholars, Wu Guoguang and Wang Zhaojun, openly spoke about the "contradiction between the narrow natural base, on the one hand, and the numerical strength of China's population and its growth rates, on the other," and pointed out: "The contradiction is glaring to the extent that we cannot exclude a situation of spontaneous 'demographic imperialism'." They justified this by the following: China has 3.3-fold less arable land per capita than the world's average; 7.5-fold less forests, and 3-fold less meadows. Of 32 megapolises, 30 "are experiencing an acute water shortage;" "over half of the Chinese cities and towns" live under conditions of a water shortage.²⁶

In the past, the population outflow from China was caused by the military factor. Today people leave China mainly for economic and demographic reasons: the Chinese diaspora in 164 countries is nearly 50 million strong.²⁷ Chinese commercial capital and Chinese migrants prefer poly-ethnic countries engaged in accelerated modernization. In 1960s-1980s, Southeast Asia, which was living through several stages of catch-up modernization, was the main attraction for the Chinese.²⁸ Today, the post-Soviet expanse has become especially attractive. The Russian media write a lot about the "China-ization" of the Russian Far East. Similar processes can be observed in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In the former, the situation is aggravated by the absence of a well-oiled mechanism of migration control. Inadequate migration policies have already created primitive Sino-phobia. To forecast and defuse the situation, migration patterns must be studied to separate commercial from labor migration and identify those who come to stay from those who come to earn, etc. This has not been done yet.

It seems that public concern is mostly caused by the lack of comprehensible information about Chinese migration rather than by the migration itself. People are absolutely convinced that China is deliberately moving its surplus population to neighboring territories in general and Kazakhstan in particular. In the absence of reliable information, people turn to rumors. In the winter of 2004, *China Daily* carried information about an agreement between Kazakhstan and China, under which the latter leased 7,000 hectares of arable land in the Alakol District to be tilled by 3,000 Chinese peasants. The response was negative.²⁹ The repeated official refutations were accepted with a grain of salt. So far there are no Chinatowns in Kazakhstani towns and cities, but Chinese citizens are rapidly settling in abandoned hostels, which could serve as the cores of future Chinatowns.³⁰

²³ See: *Polis*, No. 6, 1992, p. 30.

²⁴ See: *Azia-kur'er*, 24 October, 1994.

²⁵ *Panorama*, No. 45, November 1994.

²⁶ V. Gel'bras, "Rossia i Kitay: voprosy sobirania geoeconomicheskikh prostranstv," *Polis*, No. 6, 1995, pp. 44-45.

²⁷ See: N. Mustafaev, "Kitayskie immigranty v Kazakhstane: mify i real'nost'," *API*, 22 July, 2002.

²⁸ See: *Kitayskie etnicheskie gruppy v stranakh Iugo-Vostochnoy Azii*, Moscow, 1986, p. 75.

²⁹ See: O. Zhylkybaev, op. cit.

³⁰ See: N. Mustafaev, op. cit.

Kazakhstani authors engaged in studying the “Chinese question” in-depth come up with vague deliberations. O. Kviatkovskiy, a journalist close to power, for example, insists: “In the U.S.S.R., the mentality of any borders with the Chinese was at all times rigid and lacking confidence.” The same person went on to write: “Kazakhstan has its own methods of ‘quenching’ all possible ambitions of the Chinese right-left: China is turning into one of the world’s major consumers of oil, gas, coal, electricity, ferrous metals, wool, and mineral fertilizers.”³¹ There are indications that the country’s leaders agree with the above.

Today, Kazakhstan exports its raw materials to China on a grand scale: this creates mutual trade advantages and ensures Kazakhstan’s national security in the Chinese sector. The Druzhba border checkpoint is of strategic importance for Kazakhstan: it will serve as the key point of future transit traffic between the Far Eastern and West European countries. In the years of independence, the volume of transit through the checkpoint has been on the rise as follows: 0.2 million tons in 1991; 1.2 million tons in 1995; 4.3 million tons in 2000; 5.8 million tons in 2002; and by 2014 the figure will reach 14 million tons.³²

Kazakhstan’s export is profiled as follows: non-ferrous metals, 9 percent; ferrous metals, 26 percent; oil, 15 percent; pellets, 9 percent; chemicals, 1 percent; timber, 2 percent; consumer goods, 5 percent; scrap metal, 27 percent; and fertilizers, 4 percent.³³ Today, Caspian oil has become one of the major factors drawing China into the “Big Game” around Central Asia. China’s unprecedented economic growth has created a growing demand for energy resources. According to certain sources, by 2010 the APR countries will import 1.5 billion tons of oil, while the figure for China is forecasted at 200 million tons.³⁴ In China, domestic oil production is sluggish. Beijing created an ambitious program of gaining access to Central Asia’s oil and gas fields and is working on it. This makes it an obvious rival for Russia, the U.S., India, and some other countries in the region.

It looks as if Murat Auezov, one of the best Sinologists of Kazakhstan and its former ambassador to China, has provided the best substantiated picture of China’s future influence on Kazakhstan: “I know Chinese culture. We should not trust Chinese politicians no matter what they say. As a historian I can tell you that China of the 19th century, China of the 20th century, and China of the 21st century are three different countries. They have only one thing in common—the desire to extend their territory.”³⁵ Six years later he offered the following: “Everything that is going on in Xinjiang means gaining a foothold for a leap into Central Asia and Kazakhstan... This is a multidimensional process that is state-regulated in certain respects; in other respects, the question of which merchants and which companies will move northwest is objectively stimulated.”³⁶

The economic ties between the two countries cannot be reduced to “surreptitious expansion.” Some Kazakhstani experts and politicians are alarmed by the flow of Chinese goods, yet Kazakhstan is just one of the countries on the receiving end. In 2004, when its trade turnover exceeded \$1 trillion, China became the world’s leader in this respect, therefore we should not look at Kazakhstan as a unique case of China’s relations with the outside world.

Meanwhile the establishment of Western or rather American military bases in Central Asia affects the relations between Astana and Beijing; they may even affect China’s position on certain problems related to the Central Asian republics. The bases can be used to “project force” onto neighboring territories, China’s western provinces in particular. The radically changing geopolitical situ-

³¹ O. Kviatkovskiy, “...I linia granitsy—kak linia sud’by,” *Karavan*, 3 May, 1996.

³² See: B. Antsiferov, “‘Druzhba’—druzhboy, a chto v budushchem?” *Gazeta.kz*, 24 September, 2003.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ See: O. Sidorov, “Neftianye interesy Kitaia v Tsentral’noy Azii,” *Gazeta.kz*, 16 October, 2003.

³⁵ M. Auezov, “Kitaisko-kazakhstanskije otnoshenia,” *Vremia po*, 30 April, 1999.

³⁶ M. Auezov, “Boytes’ kitaytsev...”

ation has forced China to add more vigor to its relations with the Central Asian countries, not only in the economic, but also in the defense sphere. Obviously concerned with the American presence in the region, which China regarded as a sphere of its direct national interests, it spared no effort to transform the SCO set up in 2001 from the Five into a regional counterweight to extra-regional forces.

The 2005 summit in Astana demonstrated that the SCO countries are concerned with Washington's rising involvement in the region in the military sphere, as well as with America's efforts to change the political regimes in the region under the pretext of their democratization.

The SCO members exercise different approaches to Central Asia than the United States. America is striving to "disseminate democracy" in the region, because of its ideological obsession and remnants of neo-conservatism and because of America's profound and sincere belief in democracy as a panacea for all social and geopolitical evils. Obviously, any attempt at fast democratization will turn these countries into "failed states."

Moscow and Beijing are less obsessed with democratic messianism. They know the region much better to be convinced that without economic and social modernization democratization in these republics will be impossible and counterproductive. Democratization as part of modernization should not outstrip it.

For objective reasons, Russia and China, two large Eurasian powers with huge military potentials, are playing the leading role in the SCO. This is quite justified since, unfortunately, in the near future the military-political situation in Central Asia might significantly deteriorate.

So far the SCO is oriented toward "counteracting terrorism and creating an effective mechanism to deal with this task."³⁷ There are numerous signs though that with the active involvement of Beijing and Moscow, the SCO might develop into a powerful regulatory and attractive factor. In June 2004, at the Tashkent summit, the heads of state of the SCO members issued a statement about the beginning of the full-scale work of the SCO permanent structures (the Secretariat in Beijing and the Antiterrorist Center Headquarters in Tashkent). At the same summit, China displayed more activity than before. It bears the main financial burden within the SCO and decided to give its SCO partners trade credits totaling \$900 million.³⁸ China made it public at the Astana summit.

The SCO founders obviously intended it to become one of the "poles" of the multipolar world; the structure has every opportunity to achieve this since in future it may serve as the link in the "arc of stability" as opposed to the "arc of instability" stretching from Western Europe to South-east Asia.

The above should not be taken to mean that the SCO has an exclusive advantage over other mechanisms when it comes to ensuring regional security. It looks as if the Central Asian republics have no concrete and well-planned strategy in relation to the SCO and to all the other regional military-political projects. One feels that Erlan Karin, a Kazakhstani expert, was right when he wrote that when tracing their own foreign policy, the new independent states are guided by short-term rather than long-term interests.³⁹

³⁷ K. Kosachev, "ShOS kak al'ternativa amerikanskomu vliianiu v Tsentral'noy Azii," *Dipkur'er-NG*, 29 September, 2003.

³⁸ See: T. Stanovaia, "Iz ShOS v ODKB pereletaia," *Politkom.Ru*, 21 June, 2004.

³⁹ See: E. Karin, "ShOS i ee znachenie dlia Tsentral'noy Azii. Gosudarstva TsA posle 11 sentiabria," *Assandi Times*, 25 June, 2004.