

SECURITY CHALLENGES IN CENTRAL ASIA RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE PUBLICATIONS CONTENTS DIGEST

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The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is launching a new bimonthly on-line digest dedicated to Central Asia's regional security challenges. The digest will include reviews of the most relevant publications on various aspects of regional security, prepared by Russian and Persian-speaking experts from Central Asia, Russia, Iran and Afghanistan.

Due to this region's unique geopolitical location, the spotlight of world politics is often upon it, a focus which has intensified this last decade.

Immediately after gaining independence, twenty five years ago, the countries of Central Asia embarked upon a lasting course towards building secular national states. It is of crucial strategic importance for Europe to support Central Asian states and societies in establishing a stable system based on the rule of law and the principles of democracy, and neutralising challenges and threats from Islamic fundamentalism, political radicalism and terrorism which are acquiring special significance – for the countries of Central Asia themselves, as well as for European interests.

This summary of articles intends to inform German and European experts and professional circles about foreign assessments of the Central Asia region. The views and opinions of the authors do not necessarily reflect the position of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

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Foggy tomorrow: what risks does Kazakhstan face?

*Saule Isabayeva,
Journalist of "Central Asia Monitor" newspaper (Kazakhstan)*

The article is focussed on the mounting number of risks that Kazakhstan is facing today and the means by which they may be minimized.

According to Kazakh political scientist, Maxim Kaznacheev, one of Kazakhstan's most pressing challenges is that of social inequality, which, in turn, begets a range of further difficulties, such as social and political tensions, and a shrinking social base capable of modernisation, due to the erosion of the quality of the educational system. He argues that a society lacking a strong middle class will be unable to adequately modernise and innovate. Societies wholly without a middle class are often socially and politically unstable, and vulnerable to extremism. As this line of thought would suggest, in the past few years Kazakhstan has already been encountering a surge in popularity of its citizens' religious self-identification. Deepening imbalances in the development of the country's regions has also had a negative impact on the domestic situation, preserving the less prosperous – and consequently subsidised – regions' developmental backlog.

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Murat Temirkhanov, a financial analyst, believes, meanwhile, that the main risks Kazakhstan is facing lie in the country's economy, which is highly dependent on global oil prices and industries related to raw materials. The state programmes of economic diversification haven't, as of yet, yielded tangible outcomes. Temirkhanov highlights a further challenge: the observable deterioration of conditions for private business and free competition. He underscores the state's high presence in the national economy and the underdevelopment of its financial markets, noting that both aspects are detrimental to the development of non-oil sectors.

<https://camonitor.kz/26653-tumannoe-zavtra-kakie-riski-stoyat-pered-kazahstanom.html>

Kazakh nationalism: It isn't Europe for you

*Saule Isabayeva,
Journalist of "Central Asia Monitor" newspaper (Kazakhstan)*

An analysis of comments in social networking sites indicates that nationalistic ideas are on the rise in Kazakhstan. In the opinion of Kazakh political expert Sultanbek Sultangaliev, the phenomenon of nationalism in Kazakhstan can be divided into the everyday variety, and the political. Political nationalism in Kazakhstan arose in the 1990's, however today Kazakh nationalists aren't a real socio-political force due to both objective and subjective factors. This said, the popularity of nationalism is set to increase as the socio-economic situation worsens. In view of this, Kazakh nationalism can be said to have serious political perspectives; this may be further exacerbated by the fact - according to demographic statistics - that Kazakhstan's state format is shifting from the pluri- to the mono-national. The demographic percentage of ethnic Kazakhs in the country's population is increasing from generation to generation.

Sultangaliev believes that the authorities should legitimise Kazakh nationalism as a political party so as to effectively confront it. In this way, through acting in the established political and legal fields, and due to the laws of natural political evolution, Kazakh nationalism will be forced to jettison what might have been a radical approach to state-building. In sum, the legalisation of nationalists will give their opponents ample opportunity to illustrate the former's inadequacy.

<https://camonitor.kz/26524-sultanbek-sultangaliev-nacional-patrioty-sami-sebya-diskreditiruyut-kak-tolko-obedinyatsya-v-partiyu.html>

Is the Taliban able to become an ally in the fight against ISIS?

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*Egambergi Kabulov,
Independent journalist (Kyrgyzstan)*

This article is dedicated to the prospects of negotiations between Kabul and the Taliban, and of mutual cooperation in the fight against Islamic State.

The Tajik expert on Afghanistan, Kosimsho Iskandarov, believes that it is Pakistan which hampers the launch of peace talks with the Taliban. The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence exerts strong pressure on those Taliban leaders willing and/or desirous of entering into negotiations with the Afghan government. Iskandarov suggests that if Kabul is serious about softening the attitude of Islamabad it will have to officially recognise the 2.430 kilometre Durand Line as an international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, or at the very least, initiate interstate talks on the matter. The Durand Line is a historical irritant in Pakistani-Afghan relations, and the overwhelming majority of the Afghan elite aren't favourably inclined to its being recognised today. Iskandarov further asserts that it is incorrect to assume the Taliban and ISIS to be sworn enemies, since the Afghan wing of ISIS consists of both Afghan and Pakistani Pashtuns, most of whom are prior members of the Pakistani Taliban. Furthermore, the Taliban and ISIS share much common ground as regards ideology and state-building; there is, thus, little to suggest that they will initiate hostilities against each other. Iskandarov notes that Afghanistan may become the likeliest harbour for ISIS militants, should they suffer defeat in Iraq and Syria.

<https://m.ritmeurasia.org/news--2017-05-18--sposobny-li-taliby-vystupit-sojuznikami-v-borbe-s-igil-30197>

Terrorist emigration from Central Asia

*"Stan Radar",
News portal*

The number of Central Asian citizens involved in terrorist activity has been rapidly growing in recent years. According to the head of the Eurasian Club, Nikita Mendkovich (Russia), ISIS and other terrorist groups show strong interest in recruitment of Central Asians due to their higher educational levels, as compared to Arab militants. He conjectures that Russia needs to adopt a set of measures to prevent the involvement of labour migrants in criminal and terrorist activities. First of all, the Russian authorities ought, he notes, to introduce centralised employment and accommodation programmes aimed at handling labour migrant flows. Additionally, it is necessary to fight clandestine prayer rooms that are used by radical Islamists to propagate their ideas. Prayer rooms have to be created under the supervision of the spiritual administrations and authorities. Preventing radicalisation of labour migrants will also require closer cooperation with ethnic and cultural communities in order to socialise migrants through language courses, cultural events and social

clubs. Labour migrants should, in sum, be given more opportunities to freely immerse themselves in the host country's social life.

<http://stanradar.com/news/full/24740-nikita-mendkovich-u-ekonomiki-kyrgyzstana-mnogo-pljusov-no-ona-nedostatochno-ustojchiva.html>

SCO is gradually shifting the omphalos of the world to Eurasia

*Vasily Vankov,
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the Centre for Strategic Analysis,
Institute for Innovative Development (Russia)*

The entry of India and Pakistan into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) changes the geopolitical configuration of the world. With this new development, four nuclear states (Russia, China, India and Pakistan) are in SCO and their total nuclear potential exceeds that of the West. SCO countries account for 25% of global GDP, and one fourth of the world's population.

The editor-in-chief of the "National Strategy Issues" journal (Russia), Azhdar Kurtov, believes that Afghanistan will be seeking to join the SCO for financial reasons. Some SCO member countries are also looking with favour on Iran's attempts to acquire membership. Concerning Indian-Pakistani relations, which are at times fraught due to diverging interests, Kurtov surmises that they won't harm the SCO decision-making mechanism. SCO member states generally try to avoid sharp corners, therefore it is unlikely that issues sensitive for India and Pakistan will be included in the agenda. Kurtov asserts that in the medium term the SCO is unlikely to become the Eurasian version of the EU or NATO. The leaders of member countries prefer to view the SCO as a structure of cooperation, not confrontation. The organisation is built upon an absolutely new philosophy resting on different-level integration principals, with the rule of consensus decision-making that is very attractive for small countries. Andrei Grozin, senior research fellow of the Russian Institute of Oriental Studies, underlines that the entry of India and Pakistan into the SCO doesn't exhaust its expansion potential. Today, given all levels of partnerships, the SCO de facto unites the greater part of Eurasia, excepting the EU, the Persian Gulf monarchies, South Korea and Japan. According to Grozin, the SCO is in fact a geopolitical project, already more than a mere organisation. Resumption of talks about the need to expedite the process of setting up an SCO Bank further corroborates the seriousness of the SCO's structure. Like Kurtov above, Grozin also believes that the SCO doesn't claim the status of being the 'Asian NATO'. Meanwhile, its future will greatly depend on whether or not the member countries will be successful in developing an attractive and workable unifying concept.

<https://svpressa.ru/politic/article/174312/>

**We live in an ecological environment
that can't be divided by administrative boundaries**

*Internet portal "Gazeta.Uz"
(Uzbekistan)*

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Water issues remain one of the gravest challenges for the states of Central Asia. The executive director of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia, Iskandar Abdullaev, notes that owing to population upsurge and economic growth water shortage may become the overriding problem in the future. In the 1960's water consumption in Uzbekistan was of 5.000 cubic metres per capita. Now this indicator stands at between 1.500 – 2.000 cubic metres, approaching the critical notch. In case of further climate change, Central Asia may face the reduction of its water resources by 10-15% . In this regard, the chief question is how to manage demand amid dwindling water reserves. In addition to this, the region's states will need to resolve the issue of infrastructure obsolescence because most waterworks facilities were built 40-50 years ago. The introduction of innovative technologies will allow for the reduction of both water consumption and of water losses during delivery. This, in turn, will require the modernisation of the educational system, since a new technological ambience will require a constant supply of trained specialists.

www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/04/25/iskandar-abdullaev/

**China will strengthen its economic positions in Kazakhstan
through agriculture**

"Nezavisimaya gazeta" (Russia)

Research fellow of the Russian Institute of Oriental Studies, Alexander Vorobyov, considers agriculture to be a prospective new sphere of Kazakhstan-China cooperation. Beijing is interested in increasing its supplies of Kazakh agricultural products. At present, China imports almost half of all the food it consumes. China's total food imports have reached US\$117 billion a year, yet the share of products originating from Kazakhstan is still low. According to Kazakh authorities, the future agricultural cooperation with China will develop in two directions: Astana intends to entice Chinese investments in deep processing of agricultural products and, simultaneously, to increase its agricultural exports to the Celestial Empire. The parties have already agreed to raise Kazakh grain exports to 500.000 tons a year. Astana and Beijing are also working on setting up laboratories in Kazakhstan for the certification of agricultural products exported to China. Agricultural cooperation between Astana and Beijing contains, however, a range of potential risks for Kazakh internal stability related to the issue of renting agricultural lands. Vorobyov considers that despite tensions China has not completely abandoned its plans to rent 1 million hectares of Kazakh land. This matter caused mass protests in 2016, and today Kazakhstan's public remains concerned about the possible resurrection of Chinese plans.

http://www.ng.ru/courier/2017-05-29/11_6997_raund.html

Is there a need to transfer Chinese excess enterprises to Kyrgyzstan?

Politicians, economists and ecologists of Kyrgyzstan are actively discussing the expediency of transferring Chinese factories to Kyrgyzstan within the framework of the "Silk Road Economic Belt". The Kyrgyz government has chosen 42 manufacturing facilities that could help revive the national industry. This initiative's proponents point out that Chinese factories will create new jobs, increase the volume of exports and tax proceeds, bring new technologies and help narrow imbalances in trade with China. Currently, about 30% of Kyrgyzstan's foreign trade turnover, 25.2% of imports and 2.1% of exports fall on China.

However, opponents say that technologically obsolete and morally questionable Chinese plants will inflict irreparable damage to Kyrgyzstan's environment, just as they have already caused air pollution and water contamination in China. They emphasise that the underlying criterion for receiving Chinese facilities should be their compliance with ecological requirements and standards.

Some environmentalists offer an alternative model of economic interplay between Bishkek and Beijing. In particular, Kyrgyzstan could become a supplier of ecologically sound food products to China, as well as a recreational area for wealthy Chinese tourists. Therefore Chinese financial injections in agriculture and tourism would be welcomed. Following this line, the only Chinese industrial facilities which would be acceptable for Kyrgyzstan are those that specialise in manufacturing renewable energy equipment and devices (solar panels, windmills, micro-hydropower plants), air and water purification systems, and other energy-efficient solutions.

<http://kabar.kg/news/est-li-neobkhodimost-perenosa-izbytochnykh-predpriatii-kitaia-v-kyrgyzstan/>