

## Dramatic Shift Under Way Toward Russia, China

On Aug. 29, the turn of the Central Asian Republics toward Russian and China was noted in a series of dramatic developments. Uzbek President Islam Karimov announced both a strategic cooperation agreement with China, and a formal request by his government to Russia for military help against the “Islamist” rebel armies.

Two days earlier, an incisive article entitled “Putin Lives in the Cold War,” appeared in the German paper *Welt am Sonntag*, by well-known journalist Peter Scholl-Latour. Scholl-Latour described how Russian President Vladimir Putin has been turning the West’s flank, on both strategic and petrochemical issues, in Central Asia:

“Between the Caspian Sea and the Chinese province of Xinjiang, there emerged an economic and strategic shift, which will trigger great alarm in Washington. Just one year ago, everybody believed that the big American energy companies had succeeded in pushing the Russians out of their spheres of influence in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. It seemed as if they had finally and fully grabbed the exploitation of the vast resources of oil and natural gas in this region, as well as the control over the transport lines via non-Russian territory. But in this reenactment of the ‘Great Game,’ Vladimir Putin has clearly won against the alleged omnipotence of the U.S. giants.

“Recently Moscow has signed an agreement with Kazakhstan, which secures it the lion’s share of the oil production there, as well as the export via Russian territory. With that the grandiose pipeline project of the Americans, which — by circumventing Russia — is planned to go from

Baku via Georgia and East Anatolia to the Turkic port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Sea, is supposed to have lost any chance of turning a profit. Almost at the same time, Turkmenistan’s President [Saparmurad] Niyazov has turned his back on the Americans and cancelled a pre-contract with an American consortium, which was only signed in 1999. Also here the Russians clearly gained a big advantage concerning the delivery of the vast natural gas reserves of Turkmenistan.

“Even more remarkable is the about-face of the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov. Until recently, the armed forces of this most powerful Central Asian state prepared for a military cooperation with the United States and NATO, and suddenly now a strategic partnership with Moscow is being looked for. On short notice, a meeting of Karimov with NATO’s Secretary General George Robertson was cancelled. Instead, the strongman of Tashkent, an ex-communist, who rules Uzbekistan like an Oriental despot, met several times with Vladimir Putin.

“This sensational shift of power in favor of Moscow, which the West hardly acknowledged, is certainly not a manifestation of mutual sympathy, and the time of merciless Soviet oppression is not at all forgotten here. But the new ‘emirs’ . . . are immediately threatened by the advances of a militant Islam. . . .

“CIA headquarters in Langley must have noticed with astonishment, that the so-called ‘Shanghai Forum’ — Russia, China, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakstan — met in the beginning of July in Tajikistan’s capital, Dushanbe, in order to jointly discuss the containment of the ‘Islamic danger,’ which is also threatening Beijing in Xinjiang. Looked at from a global standpoint, Putin’s overall account is not as negative as was portrayed in the context of the tragedy in the Barents Sea, which explains the fact, that about 65% of the Russian population still supports him.”

massive rail and road infrastructure to pipelines and communications.

Enter Albright. Her themes were: democracy, human rights, free market economics, and the fight against terrorism. Her message was clearly understood as a direct attack on the sovereignty of the nations in question.

In a joint press conference with President Nazarbayev, Albright announced the commitment of the U.S. government, to provide help in the fight against terrorism. But the help? — but \$3 million for enhancing border security, including “training and equipment for counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics,” and an invitation to Kazakstan to attend a conference on counter-terrorism at the State Department in June of this year. Albright was to repeat her offer of \$3 million and the conference invitation, on her stops in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

### Albright’s Ulterior Motives

It became clear to journalists, that there was an ulterior motive to Albright’s anti-terror proposals: to thwart these countries’ growing cooperation with Russia and China, in that fight. One journalist asked Albright about Kazakstan’s role in the Shanghai Five (now renamed the Shanghai Forum), the group which came together in 1996 to fight terrorism, and has since expanded to become a powerful regional arrangement for defense against terrorism, extremism, and separatism. The group includes Kazakstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, plus Russia and China, with Uzbekistan, India, and Iran ready to join. Albright pointedly did not mention the Shanghai Five in her answer.

Cooperation with Russia was raised by the press, whose representatives were well aware of what Albright’s mission