

tions.” Mocking U.S. Independence Day, Gelb says that “most nation-states . . . have been a curse,” and they have not “behaved better” than the “empires they displaced.” He attacks Presidents such as Franklin Roosevelt for compelling “the European empires to shed their worldwide colonies . . . [and who] believed that by eliminating empires, they would also eliminate the main cause of wars. But . . . the new small nations proved no more democratic or peaceful than the old empires.”

**Sept. 27, 1992:** An article condemns Peruvian judges for hiding their identities and taking other measures against terrorist murder, which the *Times* says “incites” more terrorism. They quote apologist for Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) threatening, “There are no secrets in Peru. Everyone will eventually know who these judges are.”

**Jan. 25, 1993:** An editorial argues that Jack (“Dr. Death”) Kevorkian fills a gap in patient care, that can only be “solved” by the wider use of suicide. “Legislators, the courts and ethicists have already supported Americans’ right to make that decision [for suicide]. Tragically, that right—and the information to supplement it—is still very far from the bedside.”

**July 12, 19, and 24, 1993:** Articles attack flood control during massive flooding in the Midwest. Building 20th-Century dams and levees was “a huge pork-barrel boondoggle that fooled only the taxpayers.” Environmentalist “experts” are quoted saying that you can’t “fool Mother Nature.” The *Times* reports, “The [flooding Mississippi] river is taking back its old places. The water is saying, ‘This is where I want to be.’ . . . [E]cologists and farmers say [the river] was never supposed to follow the tight course humans have expected it to.”

The *Times* gloats that the Midwest floods are promoting hostility to God, that “the depredations of nature are a greater challenge to belief that the universe is in the hands of a loving God.” The *Times* reminds readers of Voltaire’s popular-opinion triumph over Leibniz’s “fantasy” of a loving God.

**May 5, 1997:** Financial writer Thomas L. Friedman celebrates Tony Blair’s victory: “[T]he British Labour Party has been converted . . . by Mrs. Thatcher. . . [who made Britain into] a fast, market-driven economy. [Most] principles of Thatcherism—breaking the unions, privatizing state industries . . . catering to the bond markets, . . . and fiscal austerity—were shared by both Conservative and Labour candidates. . . . Tony Blair and . . . John Major were . . . engaged in ‘synchronized swimming’ . . . Thatcher’s . . . model is being mimicked all over the globe. . . . [She is one of the] great revolutionaries of this century. . . . [W]hen a country puts on [her] golden straitjacket . . . its economy grows and its politics shrinks.”

**April 10, 2000:** An article quotes selectively from four “experts” to back up their claim that depraved culture and mass media are *not* responsible for the rash of mass murders by children. *EIR* interviews three of the four, who say the *Times* misrepresented them; one is an attorney for parents suing makers of killer video-games and movies.

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## Central Asia

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# Leaders Face Islamic Militants, Economic Crisis

by Ramtanu Maitra

A string of Taliban victories on the battlefields of northern Afghanistan, and the setting up of a base by Islamic militants in the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan, have rattled the nerves of Central Asian leaders. A number of visits by foreign dignitaries, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank personnel, and NATO officials, indicates that in the coming days, pressure to open up Central Asia to globalization will increase.

Despite repeated denials by the aggressive Taliban regime in Afghanistan, it is evident that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a militant group that has vowed to dismantle the secular regime of President Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan, has developed a training base in northern Afghanistan, with the Taliban protecting them. With the virtual conquest of northern Takhar and Kunduz provinces, Taliban militia are on the Tajik-Afghan borders. It is almost certain that pressure will mount on the Central Asian nations now that the Islamic militants have achieved some tangible success.

## Losing Ground

In Central Asia, Uzbek and Kyrgyz troops are still fighting the militants and trying to oust them from the region. However, the militants have slipped inside the Batken region of the Ferghana Valley, and have set up their bases in the adjoining mountains. Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev told journalists in the third week in September, that Kyrgyzstan is in the process of setting up an Anti-Terrorism Center in the Batken region in order to study terrorism, religious extremism, and narcotics trafficking. President Akayev also pointed out that the center would be under the aegis of the Shanghai Five (now the Shanghai Forum, an agreement set up by Kyrgyzstan, Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, China, and Russia). Akayev said that he has already received support from China’s President Jiang Zemin on the project.

Uzbekistan, which broke away from the Commonwealth of Independent States, made up of former Soviet nations, last year, is feeling the heat as well. It has already contacted both Beijing and Moscow for future military cooperation. During the week of Sept. 18, Turkish Interior Minister Sadettin Tantan was in Tashkent, Uzbekistan’s capital, discussing cooperation on anti-terrorism and security-related areas. Presi-

dent Karimov, who was in the United States in early September to attend the United Nations General Assembly sessions, met with both the Turkish and Israeli heads of state. It is widely acknowledged that Uzbekistan will be developing security relationships with both Turkey and Israel. Turkey, meanwhile, has a very strong presence in Uzbekistan's economy.

Another distressed nation in the region is Tajikistan, which has emerged as the "front-line state" facing the aggressive and orthodox Islamic regime of Afghanistan. Across the Tajik-Afghan border travels two-thirds of Afghanistan's huge production of opium and heroin to China, Europe, and beyond. Recently, both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have criticized the Tajik leadership for its failure to prevent infiltration by the Islamic militants into the region, and for its officials' complicity in the Afghan drug trade.

### **Political Maneuvering**

The military pressure exerted by the Islamic rebels and the threats posed by the advancing Taliban regime seem to have rattled all the Central Asian leaders. Uzbek President Karimov visited Turkmenistan recently, and at a joint press conference, both he and President Suparmurat Niyazov of Turkmenistan welcomed Taliban participation in economic projects in the region. Subsequently, President Karimov announced that the Taliban do not pose any threat to Uzbekistan.

On the other hand, Turkmenistan, which has maintained direct contact with the Taliban throughout the last four years, was involved recently in whirlwind diplomacy in the region, trying to find a way of ending the Afghan civil war. One of the trial balloons that they floated, was to have an "informal" partition of Afghanistan, whereby that part of northern Afghanistan north of the Kunduz River, would be under the control of the anti-Taliban opposition, while the rest of Afghanistan would be under Taliban rule. The idea was nipped in the bud, as the anti-Taliban opposition collapsed in mid-September under Taliban pressure.

Uzbekistan, meanwhile, is toying with a number of ideas on how to blunt the Islamic rebels' influence. A high-level Uzbek official told the news daily *Uzbekistan Report*, that his government is planning to encourage Naqshbandi Sufism to counter the orthodox Wahabi form of Islam preached by the militants. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Naqshbandi order was heavily attacked by the Soviets as a threat to regional stability. Many of the most committed opponents of the Bolshevik rule in Russia were Naqshbandi followers.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of orthodox Islam, in the form of the Taliban and the IMU, for instance, have helped to change this view. In recent years, officials from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have begun to make some critical distinctions between the orthodox Wahabi form and the Naqshbandi or-

der. In various forums, they have pointed out that the followers of the Wahabi form of Islam want to set up a theocratic state and thus challenge the existing political and social structure. On the other hand, they claim that the Naqshbandi order has adapted itself to the existing social circumstances and the political milieu.

In mid-September, upon his return from the United States, President Karimov declared two amnesties. The first one was to those who are already serving sentences inside Uzbekistan, and the second was addressed to the Islamic militants who are now operating beyond Uzbek borders. President Karimov has offered an olive branch to these militants, asking them to come back home without fear of prosecution. The decree, considered a major step down by President Karimov, some observers point out, stems from the fact that the President is under pressure from all quarters, including the Uzbek Army.

### **Financial Pressures**

Besides threatening security, the Islamic militants' activities have also put considerable pressure on the limited financial resources of these resource-rich countries. The much-required developmental fund is getting smaller, as cash is being channelled into strengthening security arrangements and enhancing the strength of security forces.

Kyrgyzstan, for instance, does not have much of an army. Militants' activities in the southern part of the country have forced its army to deploy about 5,000 men in the area. Efforts are afoot to enhance the Kyrgyz Army's combat readiness. Fortifications work, work to perfect tactics for mountainous regions, and to reconnoiter and accurately anticipate possible directions of terrorist movements are draining the limited Kyrgyz exchequer faster than it can generate fresh revenues.

Uzbekistan's defense forces, by far the largest in the region, are divided into ground troops, air force, security troops (internal security and border guards), and the National Guard. Uzbek defense expenditures in 1997 were \$200 million. Although this year's figure has not been made available, it is evident that expenditures have soared. If the Kyrgyz government estimates that at least 70,000 people in the Namangan, Ferghana, and Andizhan regions (all located in the Ferghana Valley) are sympathetic to the Islamic militants, it is a near-certainty that defense expenditure of Uzbekistan in the coming years will grow fast.

Similarly, Kazakhstan has announced that its military spending will rise sharply this year. Explaining the higher defense expenditure, Kazak President Nursultan Nazarbayev said on Sept. 1, "The sharp deterioration of the situation on the southern borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the dramatic events of this August in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are a precursor of serious times ahead for Central Asia as a whole." The military spending, he said, would be 1% of Kazakhstan's Gross Domestic Product—

FIGURE 1

**The Central Asian Cauldron**



a rise of 100% over the current defense budget—in the year 2000.

In mid-September, a military exercise was carried out by the Tsentrzbat-2000 (Central Asian battalion) in Kazakstan, within the framework of the NATO Partnership for Peace program. The program was partially funded by Washington. Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Henry Shelton, who attended the exercise, made it clear that the United States is keen to provide security to Kazakstan. As a gesture of Washington’s commitment, General Shelton pointed out, the United States has delivered \$3 million to reinforce Kazakstan’s southern borders, in the tri-junction

area of the Fergana Valley.

The Commander of the U.S. Central Command, based in Europe, Gen. Tommy Franks, was in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on Sept. 24. He held meetings with the Kyrgyz Defense Ministry and discussed stepping up military cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and the United States.

**An Opportune Time for Some**

These developments in Central Asia are taking place at a time when Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are suffering from drought. Forecasts issued by the Tajik government indicate that the country will undergo a shortfall of foodgrains of

FIGURE 2  
**Insurgents' Destination: The Fergana Valley**



almost 50%. Uzbekistan has not fared much better. Its cash crop, cotton, is hit hard by lack of rain and lack of irrigable water. The latest estimate shows that Uzbek cotton production will be down by as much as 50,000 tons. The rice harvest, which is beginning now in Uzbekistan, is expected to be 50% less than that planned for. Uzbekistan, along with the United Nations, has appealed to the international community for help. According to one Uzbek report, at least 1 million people are going to be affected by the drought in Uzbekistan this year.

Due to the shortfalls of cotton and rice production, and enhanced defense production, the Uzbek currency is under severe pressure. At the IMF-World Bank meeting in Prague (ongoing as this is written), it is expected that Uzbekistan's continuing control over its currency will be discussed. The IMF has already told Tashkent to open up its economy further and to allow full convertibility of its currency.

In Kyrgyzstan, the economic situation is precarious. Due to the additional funds allocated to fight the Islamic militants, the Kyrgyz Treasury is dwindling fast. One estimate is that the government now faces the impossible task of running the country on less than \$155 million (\$32 per capita) a year.

Unemployment in Kyrgyzstan is also rising, and relief from poverty is not in sight. The only saving grace for Kyrgyzstan is that its President, Akayev, still enjoys the confidence of the people.

Financial weakness and the security threats to the region as a whole, have opened up "opportunities" for some to intervene. U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who, during her visit last spring to Uzbekistan, had made it a point of criticizing President Karimov's "iron fist" approach, is very much on the warpath. During her recent meeting with the Uzbek President in New York, Secretary Albright

cited cases of mistreatment of individuals by the Karimov government and discussed areas in which the United States feels that the government should do more to move toward full democracy. It is evident that President Karimov's mid-September amnesty announcement resulted directly from the pressure exerted by the U.S. Secretary of State.

Aga Khan, whose Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is highly active in the region, has enhanced his presence in these difficult times. He has recently set up the first University for Mountainous Region in the Kyrgyz hills. It has been said that the AKDN plans to set up more such universities in the hills of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Aga Khan, who has often been cited as having links to British and French intelligence, boasts a host of followers, known as Ismailis or Aga Khanis, in the drug-infested Pamir region of Tajikistan. Pamiri Ismailis are notorious for their role as "mules," carrying Afghan drugs through some of the most inhospitable mountain regions into the plains of Central Asia.

### Another Visitor

Another recent visitor to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was the Duke of Gloucester, cousin of Queen Elizabeth II of England, on Sept. 5-8. The Duke was in the area "to support Britain's interests in the Caspian region and to help project the United Kingdom as a key economic partner and strategic investor in Kazakhstan." He brought along with him representatives of such companies as British Gas, which is already involved in developing the Karachaganak oil and gas fields in Kazakhstan. The British Duke is close to the powerful and widely hated speculator, George Soros, whose Eurasia Institute has a strong presence in Central Asia.

In addition, Uzbekistan hosted recently a British Council delegation, led by its director-general, David Green, who is involved in reforming various fields of activities in Uzbekistan—for example, compiling a new generation of textbooks.

In Kazakhstan, where China, Russia, Britain, and the United States are vying for its gas and oil resources, an oil-trade-related corruption charge appeared in the Sept. 23 *Washington Post*. The corruption scandal is about to hit President Nazarbayev and his Oil Minister, Akezhan Kazhegeldin. It is alleged that the President and his men salted away large sums of money through offshore banks with the help of an American middleman, James Giffen. Giffen claims to be close to U.S. Presidential candidate Al Gore. Giffen's company, Mercator Banking, has a client list which includes such powerful multinationals as Chevron Corp. and Archer Daniels Midland Co.

The scandal, as presented by the *Washington Post*, has the potential to dismantle Kazakhstan's entire political spectrum. It has already apparently claimed a victim: Finance Minister Mazhit Esenbayev, who was in Prague attending the annual IMF-World Bank meeting, has been hospitalized with complaints of heart trouble.