

**RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
INSTITUTE FOR SCIENTIFIC
INFORMATION
IN SOCIAL SCIENCES**

INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

**RUSSIA
AND
THE MOSLEM WORLD
2013 – 2 (248)**

**Science-information bulletin
The Bulletin was founded in 1992**

**Moscow
2013**

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Mikhail Vinogradov,
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A LOOK BEYOND THE OUTSKIRTS
(Foreign Policy as Seen
by the Russian Elite Farther Than
at Their Departments)

During the twenty years of the existence of new Russia its position in the world has radically changed. The level of its integration in the world economic, political, cultural, scientific and sport context has grown considerably. The speed of its movement in this direction was much greater than the average world rates of globalization. The geography of foreign countries is now studied in Russia not as something like, say, astronomy, a science far removed from everyday requirements.

Pictures of the Outer World

Russia’s foreign policy has also changed seriously. Our country was drawn more deeply in the activity of the world markets, its traditional partnership relations with other states became more versatile, it tackled more actively the practical problems of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapon and the unification of ecological standards, and the number of countries opened for Russian citizens without entry visas became greater.

Naturally, quantity has not always meant quality. Greater openness was accompanied with a certain growth of self-isolation. Suffice it to watch and hear TV news bulletins to see that public interest in the world processes is very low.

The reasons for this state of affairs are quite understandable. They lie in the depolitization of public opinion for many long years, and also in the loss of the former superpower status of the country. In these conditions society and the elites kept aloof from assessments of foreign policy and they became rather indifferent to it.

Discussions of foreign political realities within the elites are now rare and far between.

However, despite this it should be admitted that some subjects and ideas of international realities do exist for Russia and are discussed here. For instance, in certain border regions people voice their views unequivocally on vital issues. The inhabitants of Sakhalin region, for instance, are firmly against the transfer of Kurile Islands to Japan. Or representatives of the local elites in the north-western regions of Russia take part in joint meetings with their counterparts in Finland and Arctic states discussing problems facing the entire Arctic region.

The ideological situation in the South of Russia is quite tense. The elites of the North Caucasian republics harp on the premise that unfriendly acts toward Russia are due to the activity of radical Islamists, and schemes of the United States and Israel, for some reason or other. And the dangers coming from radical Islam are in the center of public attention.

Representatives of big business are not inclined to public discussions of foreign policy. True, Oleg Deripaska, a tycoon in many industrial spheres, is an exception. At the Baikal Economic Forum in September of 2011, he put forward the idea of a “turn to the East,” which envisaged reorientation of the economy of the Eastern part of

Russia beyond the Ural Mountains to China. However, the Moscow authorities were not too enthusiastic with regard to this idea because they saw a pro-Chinese bias in it.

Change of Generations and the Risk of Failure

Foreign policy is for the present Russian elite a field to be dealt with by professional diplomats. If business or commercial interests are not directly connected with a concrete country or a sphere of international relations, representatives of the elite deal with some or other problems of this sort sporadically, depending on concrete situation. In any case, a “west-oriented” approach dominates, proceeding from the premise that it is Western Europe and the United States that determine the course of events in politics and economics, and the alternative centers of force, like China or the Islamic world, are taken for something less understandable and hence potentially more dangerous.

The main result of the elite’s participation in international activity is the establishment of economic interaction or exchange of experience and study of modern technologies (including managerial ones). Public discussions of possible priorities of Russia’s foreign policy in the foreseeable future (advancement to the Arctic, arbitration in international conflicts, etc.) do not meet with noticeable response in society. Public interest in the future role of the country in the international scene is relatively low.

Such situation is quite stable and is not threatened by anything. Nevertheless, one can talk of certain challenges to be faced by Russian diplomacy. First of all, it is greater demand for the service functions of the state. This subject is discussed ever more frequently in the context of domestic policy, but soon it will be placed on the agenda in international relations. Will it be possible to reorient foreign policy

from serving the interests of the state to lobbying the interests of concrete economic and political players? True, it may take place only when the elites and part of society have rational ideas about their own interests in this sphere.

Another challenge is connected with the generation change. Foreign policy is now dealt with by the post-Soviet generation of politicians and diplomats whose views took shape in the period of the international isolation of the U.S.S.R. Their psychological traumas caused by the loss of the superpower status have not been overcome completely. However, the age groups best adapted to foreign realities are gradually coming to the fore. Many representatives of these groups have already succeeded in gaining enough business experience, are more open to communication and best oriented to ultimate results. Naturally, there is a possibility of generation conflicts, although it is not inevitable.

Finally, serious rethinking of Russia's place in the world is possible in case of noticeable failures in the international arena, provided they are viewed and felt as such not only by the elite, but also public opinion.

Expert Reconstruction of Ideas of the Russian Establishment Concerning the Rules of the Game in Foreign Policy and Optimal Aims of Russian Diplomacy

“Picture of the World” / Timely subject on the agenda

1. Exchange of signals. It proceeds from the premise that the country's belief in its strength, consistency, and moral grounds of its position is the most effective way of adapting foreign policy to the

existing rules of the game: the more confident one looks, the greater respect one enjoys; weakness should not be displayed.

2. **“Besieged Fortress”**. It presents a bipolar picture of the world, depicting reality of the 1970s.

3. **“Let’s Exchange”**. It regards foreign policy as a set of short-term measures aimed at compelling to mutual concessions and not oriented to reaching strategic aims and interests.

4. **“Atmosphere Decides Everything”**. It largely resembles the model of “Change as the Aim in Itself”. However, it presupposes another sequence of actions with an emphasis on making unilateral concessions in exchange for creating a comfortable atmosphere facilitating concessions on major issues in reply.

5. **“No politics – only business”**. It envisages interpretation of any developments in foreign policy on the basis of business interests. It is oriented to interpreting earlier events rather than modeling “optimal” manner of behavior. In formulating aims emphasis is laid on pragmatic tasks (softening of visa regime, legalization of capital, creation of comfortable conditions for Russian investors).

6. **“Loving him for his love of me”**. Support of countries which take complimentary position toward Russia and properly appreciate Russian values (similar assessment of events of World War II, etc.).

7. **“New times”**. The previous picture of the world is no more. Agreement should be sought with new actors. Among them are transnational corporations, opposition parties, and local regional leaders (China, Turkey, and others).

8. **“Intracorporative public relations”**. The main task is to concentrate on satisfying public opinion with foreign policy results and create the feeling among Russian citizens that Russia plays an important role in the international arena.

Military Hostilities in Syria

1. Russia should demonstrate that it is an important player. This is why it should help Bashar Asad.

2. Solidarity with the enemies of the U.S.A. – Syria and Iran – under the slogan “Russia may be next”.

3. Toughening the anti-American position with possibly exchanging it for concessions not connected with the situation in the Middle East.

4. Avoiding identification with Syria, giving western partners possibility to implement their own tactic and (in case of its success) using non-opposition of Moscow as an advantage in negotiations with the U.S.A. and West European countries.

5. Different variants are possible – from the need to preserve the market of arms for Russia to assumptions that total destabilization in the Middle East will boost the already high world prices of fuel and energy.

6. Syria takes a more “pro-Russian” position; besides Damascus and Moscow maintain prolonged historical ties and common economic interests.

7. There is no reason to interfere with processes which we cannot influence. Perhaps, failures of the West’s policy toward Syria could lead to the weakening of western positions and strengthening of positions of other players.

8. Russia has a special position differing from that of other players, and the latter have to reckon with it.

Eurasian Union

1. The project of the Eurasian Union is our reply to attempts of expansion in the post-Soviet area. Russia’s demonstration of the zone of its special interests is a sign of its strength.

2. The Eurasian Union should be given all-round support as it is a powerful military-strategic project; let Russia be its main sponsor. The CIS countries should realize who rules the roost.

3. The Eurasian Union is important not only as an instrument of psychological pressure to bear on foreign partners, but also as an instrument of containment of independent foreign-policy activity of post-Soviet countries. Russia should be the monopolist in the contacts of the U.S.A. with post-Soviet countries. This will ensure it the most advantageous positions in subsequent exchanges.

4. Although the ideas of searching for a new global international partner proved utopian for many CIS countries, Russia should not emphasize it and give the local elites the pretext for reviving the “younger brother” complex.

5. Restrained attitude to the importance of the problem on condition of Russia receiving preferences in the struggle for profitable assets in the post-Soviet area.

6. Support of countries in the post-Soviet area which adhere to integration rhetoric. Allies – Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Armenia, “fellow-travelers” – Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan. Opponents – Georgia, Moldova, Baltic countries. High degree of uncertainty – Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan.

7. Emphasis on relations not with the present-day elites of the post-Soviet countries, but with the generation coming to replace them (especially in countries with the unresolved problem of succession of power, including those in Central Asia).

8. Bolster up expectations of the “New Soviet Union is on the horizon” type, without mentioning the fact that the line of horizon inevitably recedes as one approaches it.

Resetting with the U.S.A.

1. Resetting is not the apt term, because it presupposes recognition of previous errors by both sides. Requirement for resetting exists in the United States, whereas Russia may confine to playing up to this rhetoric, if America agrees to concessions.

2. Repetition of the policy of détente is rejected as it proved to be a trap for the U.S.S.R.

3. Attempting that both presidential candidates in the U.S.A. should emphasize the significance of relations with Russia in the course of their election campaign. It will have greater effect if “soft” democrats gain success.

4. To use resetting to the maximum for creating a favorable climate and trustful atmosphere in mutual relations (“it’s easier to yield to friends”).

5. It is necessary to find factors which will demilitarize the Russian-American agenda and ensure the appearance of a lobby for economic and political cooperation.

6. Agree to resetting in exchange for open concessions made by the United States, narrowing down rapprochement with the appearance of such excesses as the “Magnitsky list”.

7. Dialogue is possible, but without thinking that the United States has controlling stake in international politics.

8. To lay emphasis on the military component of the Russian-American relations.

Relations with China

1. Cooperation with China gives Russia new advantages in its relations with other international partners.

2. This subject is often beyond the bounds of reflection.

3. To use BRICS for balancing NATO, to use SCO – for balancing BRICS, and the use OCST – for balancing SCO, etc.

4. To continue the present course envisaging a certain complimentary moves toward Beijing, which should not be accompanied with clear-cut political and economic obligations from both sides.

5. To search for spheres of economic cooperation with the PRC, but to be cautious and thrifty.

6. Cooperation within the framework of BRICS and SCO is a way to show that Russia is an influential player and partner.

7. To regard China as one of the potential leaders in international politics and economics in the near future, but without detriment to mutual relations with other partners (India, “Asiatic tigers”).

8. To demonstrate pragmatism of Russia’s policy in interaction with the “new world leaders”, without drawing attention to concrete aspects (prices of fuel and energy, change of borders, etc.).

“Rossiya v globalnoi politike”, Moscow, 2012, Vol. 10, No 3, May-June, pp. 22–33.

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**IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS-
POLITICAL EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM
IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS**

The entire post-Soviet period of the development of the North Caucasus has been characterized by the growing turbulence of socio-economic, ethnopolitical and cultural and civilization processes. This periodically changing turbulence is always at a sufficiently high level, and is determined by the functioning of the terrorist underground in the North Caucasus. In this connection the study of the ideological

foundations of religious-political extremism in the region is especially important and timely. As a rule, the value and ideological factor of conflicts and tensions in the North Caucasus is underestimated; researchers and analysts usually put to the fore the socio-economic conditions of regional development and specific features of political culture. However, such view is obsolete, to say the least, in relation to economic determinism as a universal explanatory model in Soviet science. The transformation vectors of North Caucasian society in the past twenty years insistently demand not only, and not so much, an analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of the region, but also a due account of the cultural and civilization and value and ideological foundations of its development. It is precisely ideology, in our view, that creates the backbone, which not only integrates and inspires this movement, but also draws new adepts in its ranks.

Looking into the recent past one can notice that the formation of the terrorist underground in the North Caucasian region is directly connected with the separatist movement of the 1990s, as well as with the process of religious revival, which began in the past years of the existence of the Soviet Union and grown sharply after its disintegration. A combination of the idea of separatism with the radicalized forms of Islam has determined the rapid development of religious-political extremism on the territory of the North Caucasus. A result of such combination can well be seen in such ambitious self-institutionalized underground organization as “Imarat Kavkaz.” True, in contrast to the last decade of the 20th century the idea of separatism has moved to the background and instead of it religiously determined ideology has come to the fore, which took North Caucasian religious-political extremism and terrorism from its narrow bounds and joined it to the mainstream of the global confrontation between traditionalist (fundamentalist) Islamic world and modern western civilization.

A characteristic feature of transfer to a new ideological doctrine is the systematic use of such terms as “global jihad,” “kafirs,” “murtads,” etc. A struggle against Russia is now described not as “national liberation,” but as a “sacred task.” Those who are fighting today in Chechnya and other republics of the North Caucasus do not talk of the struggle for the independence of Ichkeria. They now have other ideals and other aims. Doku Umarov has turned this struggle into religious confrontation, in which there are the mojaheds, or fighters for faith, on one side, and the kafirs (infidels), who have occupied the Muslim republics of the Caucasus, and their henchmen (murtads, or apostates) from among local national traitors. In the words of one of the local observers, the conflict within the militants’ camp of the North Caucasus is a confrontation between two ideologies: “separatist ethnic nationalism, whose aim is the creation of sovereign Chechnya even without fraternal Vainakh Ingushetia,” and a “universalist religious project, according to which the struggle of individuals is included in “part of the world jihad,” and its ultimate aim is not confined to the North Caucasus, or even the whole of Russia.

It is precisely universalism overcoming any ethnic boundaries and operating with global, but not regional (all the more so local) religious-political projects that is the distinctive feature of Salafism (Wahhabism). Claims to possession of the absolute truth, the only correct interpretation of the words of Prophet Mohammed not only give the Salafites the idea of their own exclusiveness within the framework of the Islamic world, but also allow them to consider themselves as the embodiment and quintessence of this world. Usurpation of the entire Islamic religious truth conditions the global character of their political ambitions which spread to the entire political area of the world. The latter is understood as the global confrontation between the Light and the Darkness, the Good and the Evil. From the point of view of such

ideology the Wahhabites are fighting against not one individual state, not some concrete enemy, they are fighting against the very system of the “world evil,” whose manifestations are the United States, Israel, Russia, etc. The North Caucasian Salafites (Wahhabites) regard themselves not as a separate religious-political force, but as part of a global system embodying the very Good, the very Truth as they were proclaimed by Prophet Mohammed. The extremist terrorist underground can now rightly be termed Wahhabi. First of all, ideologically the Islamic project devoid of ethnic content can now be spread beyond the boundaries of the Caucasus. The North Caucasus in the interpretation of the ideologists of Imerat is now the battlefield of the mojaheds against the forces of evil, against everything which is not Islam. As explained by Magomed Vagapov (Amir Seifullah), “we are waging the Sacred war against world Satanism, against the system which the enemies of Allah call civilization and world order. The Russian state is part of this system, which is trying to make people turn from Islam. Today, the Muslims of the Caucasus, the Volga area and the Urals have joined in the fight for faith.”

It is important to emphasize that we do not consider Islam as such to be the foundation of the ideology of terrorism and extremism. Just as any other religious system Islam is a complex and polysemic value-oriented entity, which is subject to different interpretations. In the view of the authoritative Muslim theologian Mohammed Al Masr, it is unworthy, immodest and challenging to say: “This is the precept of Allah,” or “This is the standard of Islam.” It would be more proper to say: “This is my understanding of a precept of Allah or a standard of Islam.” As one of our experts on Islam, A. Ignatenko, believes, the highest achievements of Islamic thinking are a result of the use of such system of creating standards, which combines the Divine foundation and human interpretation, common parameters and freedom of thought.

In this sense, the reading of the Koran in the spirit of radicalism is a result of interpretation of one or another person, but not an expression of the essence of Islamic religion as such.

The reasons for the growing popularity and spreading of radical interpretations of Islam should be sought, in our view, in the very character of sacred Islamic texts and specific features of the present stage of the evolution of the Islamic world. These features are clearly seen especially in the context of the parallel historical evolution of Christianity and societies which are usually regarded Christian. In this connection it becomes evident that the secularization processes going on for several centuries have led to the actual loss by Christian religion of its former status in many countries of the traditionally Christian world. In contrast to Christianity, Islam has practically retained its enormous importance for the development of Muslim societies, which it had a thousand years ago.

Taking into account this historical imbalance, the conclusion can be drawn that the main reason for spreading Islamist (that is, radicalized) ideology is the reaction of traditionalist consciousness and views on the processes of the rapid “updating” of the world. The ideologists of terrorism ably use the protest sentiments against the secularization of public life, morality and ethics, which are current among many rank-and-file Muslims who have been educated in the spirit of strict traditionalist moral canons. As a result of listening to sermons of the radically-minded imams, Muslim parishioners may have an impression that Devil himself in the image of the West (or Russia) is waging a struggle against their traditions and customs, and ultimately, against their very faith.

The present confrontation between Western and Islamic civilizations is conditioned by contradictions between the modern and the traditionalist, between the secular and the religious. In

A. Ignatenko's view, "Islamism opposes all new ideologies, political systems and socio-political projects as secular ones. Thus, the principal source of the global destabilizing activity connected with Islam lies in the irreconcilable conflict along the 'Islamism – secularism' line." The situation in the North Caucasus as part of the Russian Federation has many characteristic features of this conflict. Russia is actively searching for an adequate modernization project, relying on the development and introduction of more and more latest technologies. Similar processes are going on in the cultural sphere, which is less oriented to traditions and tries to free itself from religious motivations and regimentations and makes an emphasis on free creative self-expression of the individual. The practical absence of censorship, generally accepted standards and values and a deep crisis of the nation-forming collective identities have conditioned considerable atomization and disordered cultural landscape of a greater part of modern Russia. These processes, which can be called "post-modernization," draw Russia closer to the western cultural world.

The development of cultural processes in the North Caucasus proceeds in a quite different manner. Traditions are not rejected there, on the contrary, they become more pronounced and important, the religious component of the socio-cultural medium is not in a state of crisis, on the contrary, its significance becomes greater with every passing year, collective forms of identification become more consolidated. Movement in the opposite direction and the evident asymmetry and disharmony in development become more noticeable. In this connection it becomes clear that Russia is now perceived as part of the West not only by the ideologists of the militant fighters, but, what is more important, by a third of young respondents of the North Caucasian republics.

The deepening contradiction between the modern and the traditionalist, the secular and the religious creates a favorable ground for radicalization of a great many of the local residents. The situation is exacerbated by the policy (rather clumsy, sometimes) of the United States and a number of the NATO countries. The military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and the threat of such operations looming over some other countries of the Islamic world have indeed created an impression of the “conflict of civilizations,” a struggle of the two different paradigms, a clash of the two alternative projects of the future development of the world community. The universal liberal project of the West is opposed by a similar and ambitious Islamic project, which includes the entire North Caucasus. This is shown by the ideology of the terrorist underground, which took a turn toward Islamist universalism and global jihad, and also by the broad popularity of Islamist ideology among the population of the North Caucasian republics. One can agree with the following conclusion of scholars at the Southern research center of the Russian Academy of Sciences: “Today Islamic propaganda is popular because it is simple and understandable to modern man, creates an attractive image of religiously motivated violence, and has a clear aim. The Islamists are dangerous because they have a quite concrete aim – the desire to implement the Islamic political project. Their ideas may be absurd and unrealizable, yet they become an effective instrument, especially when society and the authorities have no clear-cut ideas and development priorities, which are understandable and shared by most local citizens.”

Despite the fact that modern Russian society has no generally accepted national idea and understandable cultural and civilizational ideology, which was one of the reasons for the atomization of society after the disintegration of the U.S.S.R., the priority of strategic

development, in our view, has been determined quite clearly: it is the further modernization of the socio-economic sphere and “post-modernization” of the cultural sphere. “Post-modernization” presupposes, among other things, growing secularization tendencies and hence the greater rapprochement between Russia and “post-Christian” Europe. Such rapprochement with Europe (the West) may mean the further cultural and civilization movement away from the religious North Caucasus, and consequently, greater contradictions between the secular model of the social being characteristic of the greater part of the regions of the Russian Federation and the religiously-determined model of being of North Caucasian society. The existence of this fundamental contradiction will inevitably entail the strengthening of the positions of radical Islam in the North Caucasus, a greater part of whose population will consider itself the “last bulwark” of Islam and true faith on the territory of “post-modernized” Russia.

In the conditions of the objective process of “updating the modern world” leading to a greater distance from traditionalist theories and practices, which are frequently religiously determined, the radicalized interpretations of Islam can be regarded quite logical. Historical conditionality together with specific features of the concrete situation in the North Caucasian region at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of this century led to the spreading of Wahhabi ideology, which nurtures religious-political extremism and terrorism in the North Caucasus. Aply using adherence of many Muslims to the traditionalist format of living activity and at the same time demonizing the oncoming “modernity” with its anti-traditionalism and almost absolute secularization, the Wahhabis are striving to strengthen and popularize the idea of the need for the “struggle for Islam.” Such situation requires, in their view, a special regime of existence

of Muslim communities. Postulating the unity of all Muslims, the Wahhabis assert that “Muslims in Russia lead sinful life.” They state that Muslims should not live on hostile territory, that is, where the Sharia law is not valid completely and everywhere. There is only one exception – the mojaheds who fight the infidels. Moreover, it is stated that Muslims who help, by word or by deed, the infidels against Muslims, be they government officials, military officers, policemen, religious figures, etc. are against Allah and therefore must be fought and done away with, just as the infidels. In such situation of a “besieged fortress” jihad is a must for each Muslim, just as the fast or prayer.

The essence of the ideology of the North Caucasian Wahhabism, and also the terrorist underground, lies in the sacred “war for Islam,” “in the name of Islam,” “in the name of Allah,” which is a must for each true Muslim. The highest sanction to this struggle allegedly given by Allah himself justifies any actions in the eyes of fanatics, even the most brutal and senseless acts of terror. The irrational character of the “worldwide struggle for Islam” results in irrational terrorism which turns from the instrument of solving concrete and rational political tasks into an end in itself, pure violence, and a means of acquiring eternal bliss. The psychology of terrorism and of each terrorist is based on the traditional set of religious symbols, such as sin and paradise. One of the basic premises is that there is no sin which could not be expiated by a good deed committed in the lifetime of a Muslim. Evidently, quite a few mojaheds, if not most of them, have committed many crimes before joining the armed groups, which should close the path to paradise for them, according to the Koran. The example of lofty victimhood, along with the promised seventy virgins in the pastures of Heaven, becomes a great attraction a great many idealistically-minded Muslim young men.

The activity of terrorists, which many inhabitants of North Caucasian republics tend to heroize, is a very dangerous example to follow. The leaders of the militants who often turn to popular masses with pathetic sermons can become idols for young men. The existence of a powerful ideological base answering both religious and social sentiments of definite groups of the population provides a dangerous possibility for the formation of new collective identities founded on the ideals of “global jihad” and the realization of the universal Islamic project.

The constant growth of Wahhabi influence and ideology in the North Caucasian region shows that these ideals become a great value not only for marginal persons, but also for a part of quite “normal” people. As experts on religion note, Wahhabism today is a rather small sect, but it is the ideological platform answering the aspirations of hundreds of millions of Muslims living in various parts of the world and protesting against their living and working conditions. These protest sentiments are bolstered up not only by domestic propaganda, but also by geopolitical factors outside (wars in the Caucasus, Iraq and Afghanistan). They are growing from year to year and this increases the number of potential adherents of this religious trend.

These sentiments will definitely be growing in the North Caucasus if Wahhabi ideology is not countered by a powerful ideological doctrine attractive to the population. It should be borne in mind that for a man of traditionalist trend ideal dominants of life and activity are more important than purely economic and material motivation. The socio-economic development of the region is absolutely necessary, but the formation of a value-ideological base, which could ensure the real integration of the North Caucasus in the cultural-civilizational area of Russia, is no less important. The formation of such basis and its introduction in the life of North Caucasian society

is one of the most important strategic tasks of the Russian state in respect to the North Caucasian region. The future of the North Caucasus, as well as the Russian Federation as a whole, depends on the successful solution of this task.

*“Nauchnaya mysl Kavkaza,”
Rostov-on-Don, 2012, No 1, pp. 30–34.*

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**MODERN POLITICAL PROCESS IN THE CASPIAN
REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS (View from Moscow)**

The most important factor of recent time is the world economic crisis which greatly influenced the geopolitical situation of certain states and the European Union as a whole due to migration and ecological and demographic problems in a number of the European and Middle East countries.

Today the entire world follows the events in Western Europe connected with the integrity of the European Union and the “chain revolution” in certain African and Middle East countries. However, it is too early to complete our analysis of the development of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa as yet. Apart from radical shifts in these regions, the world has come across the outside military intervention with a view to supporting one of the sides in internal conflicts there. Unfortunately, this interference is becoming commonplace. Besides, it can be “sanctified” by an amorphous resolution of the UN Security Council. One could agree with the conclusion made by certain authoritative analysts of the situation in the region that such mass actions, which began in Tunisia, then Egypt and

then spread to other Arab countries, have not been organized by any political force, including the Islamic force. Apparently, the reasons for these events lay much deeper, and are connected with political problems of globalization and a change of the vector of the geopolitical forces of the leading world powers.

At the same time we observe that the events in many countries of the Middle East and other states are not taking place properly, that is, according to a civilized scenario. Instead of assertion of democracy, instead of the protection of the rights of the minority, the ruthless destruction of the opponent and a coup take place, when the domination of one force is replaced by the more aggressive domination of another. Some forces are trying to realize the Libyan scenario in Syria. The efforts of the world community should be directed, first of all, to reaching peaceful reconciliation in Syria. It is necessary to stop violence in that country and begin a national dialogue without preconditions and foreign interference and with due respect for the country's sovereignty.

Old approaches and existing recipes of the analysis of the present situation do not give tangible results, and recommendations for the normalization and improvement of the situation in these countries are futile so far. It has now reached the state in which it will be impossible to resolve the present difficulties without taking serious or extraordinary measures. Today globalization processes become increasingly evident all over the world and directly bear on one of the strategic links between the North and the South – Russia and the Persian Gulf – as a source of supplying oil and gas to the markets of Europe, and the Caspian region is an important place in this respect. The Caspian basin is a fuel-and-energy treasure store of the 21st century, which has been thoroughly investigated and described by Russian and foreign researchers and analysts. Moreover, some authors

in their monographs often give Caspian oil a tint of geopolitical mystery, which makes it possible to exaggerate the significance of the Caspian region. They advertised the region as a safe fuel-and-energy paradise, as the “fuel-and-energy navel-cord of the West free from Russian influence. Numerous descriptions of the Caspian energy resources even led to the assessment of the Caspian region as the potential alternative to the Middle East.

The problems of the Caspian basin are not confined to the hydrocarbon subject alone. They are much more complex and multifaceted. The Caspian region has experienced many changes in its assessment, turning it from a Eurasian periphery into a dynamic geopolitical crossroads, which it became during major political upheavals. Such transformations have always been connected with Russia’s geopolitical retreats and denuding of its southern borders. The exit of the Caspian region from the zone of Russian control each time turned it into a disputable supra-national unit, exacerbating the struggle for domination over it. It was precisely such events in the 20th century (first, the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917–1920, and then the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. in 1991) that induced western geostrategists (first W. Churchill and then Z. Brzezinski) to see the territory of the Caucasus and Central Asia in the role of the soft underbelly of Eurasia, where Russia as the “pivotal continental state” proved to be the most vulnerable.

As to the oil-and-gas factor, the Caspian basin comes out not as an alternative, but rather as an energy addition, to the Persian Gulf, in the view of certain analysts. If regional criteria are used, these resources are of vital importance for the countries of the Caspian basin. The discovery of the Tengiz, Kashagan and Karachaganak oil deposits on the Kazakhstan shelf and the South Iltan – Osman and Dovletabad gas deposits in Turkmenistan has made Caspian hydrocarbons an important

part of the world fuel-and-energy market. For instance, the Kazakhstan Kashagan is one of the world's largest oil deposits discovered in the past thirty years. In the view of M. Bhadrakumar, the former Ambassador of India to Uzbekistan and Turkey, the Kashagan deposit has about seven to nine billion barrels of oil. And according to a statistical survey of the British Petroleum Company, gas extraction in Turkmenistan has increased by four times during the past decade, and that country has now become a bigger producer of gas than the Netherlands.

However, even if the hydrocarbon potential of the Caspian region can make it a more significant factor of the world's energy policy, it would only be possible through control over pipelines, which will bring the resources of the region to world consumers. This is why we agree with some of the analysts that the real significance of the Caspian basin consists not only of its fuel-and-energy potential, but also of its entire economic, transport and military-political opportunities. The border and transit-communication functions of the region continue to predominate. For many centuries the Caspian region has been the most important transport communication line, connecting parts of the Eurasian continent in the North – South and East – West directions.

The events in Iraq and the North Caucasus, the periodically exacerbated relations with Iran, Israel and the United States, the military conflict between Russia and Georgia are all the consequences of global processes and manifestations of the national interests of the leading powers of the world. All this is largely connected with and conditioned by the natural hydrocarbon resources in which the Caspian states are very rich, as well as the geographical position of the region, which is a crossroads of transport trade routes; besides the Caspian Sea is a unique biological resource. Apart from that, the migration processes going on in the region serve as a background of potential

conflicts which can change the geopolitical situation there in favor of certain interested states.

The Caspian basin remains one of the most important regions for the United States in its foreign policy, and the latter continues to carry on active attempts to gain priority positions there. But in doing this the U.S.A. often shows tendencies of a superpower nature. For instance, it continues to adhere to a double-standard policy toward Iran. The United States has lost a regime in that country which was completely oriented to America, and naturally, Washington was displeased that it was replaced with an authority independent from either West or East. This explained negative western propaganda against Iran so active nowadays.

The U.S.A. has repeatedly stated that it will use an “aggressive diplomacy” toward Iran. President M. Ahmadinejad in his letter to the U.S. President George Bush called Washington’s foreign policy “hypocritical” and its assertions about protection of the interests of the world community “utterly false.” At a UN session in September 2009 M. Ahmadinejad stated that it was impermissible that countries thousands of kilometers away from the Middle East interfered in the affairs of the region. The invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan was carried out under the false slogans of protecting security and fighting the production and sale of narcotic drugs.

The UN resolution No 1747 adopted in March 2007, which introduced a whole number of sanctions aimed against the nuclear program of Iran, is still valid. Bank accounts of 13 Iranian companies and 15 physical persons have been frozen. The resolution recommended that other countries should refuse to sell arms and grant credits to Iran. However, the effect of these sanctions is negligible. The means of bringing pressure to bear on Iran are limited. Russia and China do not support these sanctions. Besides, if adopted, these

sanctions may be violated by the companies interested in the Iranian market. Apart from that, even if they are fulfilled, they can easily be avoided with the help of smuggling. Iran is not threatened with the fate of Iraq or Afghanistan where the U.S. and NATO forces have bogged down.

The tough policy of the United States toward Iran and one-sided adoption of sanctions against private companies suspected of cooperation with Iran place European-American relations into a conflict situation inasmuch as the European Union is still interested in economic cooperation with Tehran. The problem of the application of the U.S. legislation outside the boundaries of the United States has time and again cropped up in European – American relations.

Naturally, today, too, the foreign-policy actions of the United States should be viewed and judged against the backdrop of the world geopolitical processes. For example, the United States is trying to pursue its policy of domination in the Caspian region through Turkey, which is a NATO member, which has close ties with Azerbaijan and Georgia and is the mediator between the West and the Trans-Caucasian republics. One of the aims of this policy is to diminish the influence of Iran as an enemy and reduce its role in the South Caucasus and the Caspian region.

Many strategists in Washington tried to convince the democratic administration of the 1990s that the strengthening of American influence in the Caspian region should be one of the main aims of American policy. A high official at the National Security Council asserted that the United States simply could not allow Russia (or Iran) to dominate the fuel-and-energy resources of the Caspian region because they were an important political instrument in dealing with Europe. The Caspian region was not only an important component of the energy security of the West, but also a reliable base in the changing

balance of forces in Eurasia, Asia and the Middle East. This is very important at the present time.

Russian political analysts define the Russian-Iranian relations as partnership with definite prospects. One could agree with the fact that Russia and Iran have certain disputable problems in the Caspian region. First of all, it is the problem of the division of the Caspian Sea bottom. It should be emphasized that the conflict of gas interests has an objective basis and is of no political character, just as the problems of the division of the entire Caspian Sea surface.

The Russian side has always come out in its relations with Iran and other states in the Caspian region from the position of a dialogue of cultures. Official Moscow has time and again stated its interest in the development of peaceful, good-neighborly relations. Russia does not believe in the effectiveness of sanctions. It protects its interests in the Caspian basin and avoids conflicts with Iran in the Trans-Caucasian region. It does not want an Israeli-Iranian war. Russia trades with Iran and is resolutely against any violation of the non-proliferation regime. It is always trying to minimize risks and to draw as much advantage as possible from the existing situation. Russia is also interested in good-neighborly relations with all states bordering it in the South. As to cooperation with Iran, Moscow prefers to work on joint civilian projects in the economy, culture, education and trade.

Iran has put forward an idea about a “strategic Tehran – Moscow alliance.” Russia is well aware of the prestige and significance of 72-million-strong Iran and is doing everything possible to keep the regime of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapon and retain all positive elements in Russian-Iranian relations. These relations and the Russian position of a dialogue of civilizations concern the entire Caspian region, including such states as Syria and Libya. The Southern and Northern Caucasus as a component of the geopolitics of the

Caspian region are a territory of strategic importance for which an acute struggle is being waged by the leading powers in the world arena, because, apart from its rich natural resources, it is a crossroads of civilizations, a region which can ensure influence on a large territory of any country, or countries dominating in it. At the same time instability in the North Caucasus, for instance, means instability in a large Eurasian area, not only of Russia, but of other states which have economic, cultural and other connections with the entire Caucasus.

The broad range of all these problems is a subject of our investigations centered around the study of the political processes going on in the southern regions of Russia and connected with other territories which lie to the north of the Caspian region. It is necessary to investigate these processes, and also those of the influence of migration, demography, ecology and ethno-political conflicts on the geopolitical position of the Caspian states. It is also necessary to try to analyze and forecast the processes influencing the position of Russia and its further cooperation with other states in the world political arena. The timely character of this problem is substantiated by the exacerbated relations between the states of the Caspian region (for example, in their dispute over the division of the Caspian Sea surface and regional resources), as well as between world powers striving for control over the situation in the region.

It is quite natural that this problem is extremely timely and is actively discussed at various inter-regional and international forums. There is an extensive material collected by political analysts, sociologists and lawyers on the problems of the Caspian Sea and its region. As we have mentioned, the main spheres of research concern the problems of the division of the Caspian Sea between the states of the region, and also ecology, the Caspian Sea bioresources and

hydrocarbon resources in the region, transport corridors with an outlet to India, deployment of military bases in the Caspian region, etc.

Research associates of the center of political studies of the countries in the Caspian region at Astrakhan State University have prepared and published quite a few works. Among them “Geopolitics of the Caspian Region (View from Russia),” “The Great Volga Route: Its Past, Present and Future,” “The South of Russia in the Parameters of Migration and Ethnic Conflicts,” and others. At one of the latest international conferences on the Caspian region in the epoch of globalization discussing the problems, trends and prospects of international cooperation held in Astrakhan in September 2011, a thorough analysis was made of the prevailing situation in the region. The conference was attended by researchers and scholars from Moscow and Astrakhan, as well as from Germany, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Quite a few proposals were put forward on regional development and the protection of political, socio-economic and cultural security of this polycultural and strategically important region. It should be borne in mind that the continuing financial-economic crisis and frozen the conflicts near the oil and gas pipelines there create definite risks and dangers for the Caspian region possessing great oil and gas resources. This is why it is exceptionally important for the world community to study and cherish the historical experience of the Caspian nations which have evolved their real cultural and historical traditions of tolerance and political correctness over many centuries. This will, undoubtedly, serve the prosperous dialogue of cultures of the peoples of the region, and their positive experience may definitely become a standard of cultural and political behavior removing the threat of a conflict of civilizations.

*Kaspiiskii region: Politika, ekonomika, kultura”,
Astrakhan, 2012, No 2, pp .12 –130.*

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FOREIGN POLICY OF AZERBAIJAN

It is known that for many centuries the Caucasus attracted attention of “the great powers” as a focus, one of the perceptible knots of not only regional but also world politics. The largest post-Soviet state of the South Caucasus is the Azerbaijani Republic marked by the depths of its history. However, the previous state entities were not identical to contemporary Azerbaijan in terms of territory, names etc.

As a result of the Russian-Persian war of 1812 and in accordance with the Gulistan and the Turkmanchai peace treaties Russia extended its sovereignty to the territories, which partially constitute the basis of Azerbaijan. Following disintegration of the Russian Empire, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia formed the Trans-Caucasian Democratic Federative Republic dissolved in May 1918. The proclaimed Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (ADR) became the first parliamentary republic in the Muslim world, which gave, for instance, election rights to women before it was done in Great Britain and the U.S.A.

The ADR existed for less than two years and succeeded to establish diplomatic relations with only six countries. However, the Soviet power was established in the country already in spring of 1920. For the period of existence as the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic (AzSSR) the country possessed certain plenary powers in the field of foreign policy. According to article 80 of the Constitution of the USSR of 1997, the union republic had the right to maintain relations with foreign states, to conclude with them treaties and exchange diplomatic and consulate representations, to participate in activities of international organizations. Like other union republics, Azerbaijan had its ministry

of foreign relations. However, it would be difficult to speak about self-dependent Azerbaijani foreign policy equally as about Kazakh, Lithuanian or even Russian foreign policy. The functions of the republican foreign ministries were reduced to the representative sphere, and the Foreign Ministry of the USSR carried out the real policy according to decisions of the CC of the CPSU.

For the period in the end of the 1980s the latent ethno-political conflicts were aggravated and started to take the military form in a number of regions of the Soviet Union, including the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region within Azerbaijan. Due to inconsistency and lack of definite position of the Union leadership, the appeals for independence started to grow in the AzSSR. As a result, in 1990 the Supreme Soviet of the AzSSR adopted the Declaration of Sovereignty of the Azerbaijani Republic and restored the flag of the ADR as a state flag, and in October 1991 it adopted the Declaration of independence, which was confirmed by the all-national referendum.

The first years of existence of the Azerbaijani Republic were darkened by the events in Nagorny Karabakh. The military conflicts between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces started soon after proclamation of independence and continued till 1994, when with Russian mediation Azerbaijan, Armenia and the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic signed the three-partite agreement on the cease-fire. Azerbaijan lost 16% of its territory, including Nagorny Karabakh, and 30 thousand killed people, while one million people had to leave the native places.

The formation of the basis of the foreign policy of the new Azerbaijani state was under the great influence of exactly this factor and of the acute internal political struggle in the Azerbaijani Republic in the beginning of 1990, which terminated mainly only in 1993, when G. Alyev became the President of the Azerbaijani Republic.

The final date of formation of the political order of the Azerbaijani Republic should be considered 12 November 1995, when its Constitution was adopted and determined the general foreign policy principles of the country. But formation and realization of foreign policy as well as establishment of diplomatic relations started much earlier, practically immediately after proclamation of independence.

For about one year Azerbaijan established diplomatic relations with the majority of countries of the world. Turkey became the first country, which recognized the Azerbaijani Republic, while Bahrain was the last country, which established with it diplomatic relations in November 1996.

At the present time, Azerbaijan maintains diplomatic relations with 158 states and is a member of 38 international organizations. In May 2006 Azerbaijan was elected at the session of the UN General Assembly as a member of the just established Council for Human Rights and in October 2011 – as a non-permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations. The President of the Azerbaijani Republic I. Aliyev in his speech on 4 May 2012 at the session of the UN General Assembly expressed his gratitude to all UN members for the support of the candidature of Azerbaijan. For the first time in its short history Azerbaijan was elected a non-permanent member of the Security Council, it is a great responsibility, and we are ready to assume this responsibility, said I. Aliyev.

According to the Conception of National Security of the Azerbaijani Republic, the priorities of the Azerbaijani foreign policy include as follows:

- Restoration of the territorial integrity of the country;
- Liquidation of the consequences of the loss of Nagorny Karabakh and of seven other regions of the country;

- Integration in European and European-Atlantic structures; Input in international security;
- Cooperation with international organizations;
- Regional cooperation and bilateral relations;
- Consolidation of defense potential;
- Ensuring security by internal political means;
- Consolidation of democracy;
- Preservation of ethnic and religious tolerance;
- Scientific, educational and cultural policy and keeping of moral values;
- Economic and social development;
- Strengthening of internal and frontier security;
- Security policy in the sphere of migration, energy and transport.

So long as restoration of the territorial integrity is the first and foremost foreign policy priority of Azerbaijan, the analysis of its foreign policy should be started with consideration of relations with Armenia, being the sole neighboring country, which has no diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan. Since 1994, the parties occupy the positions corresponding to the situation at the moment of signing of agreement on cease-fire, and the largest part of Nagorno Karabakh and some adjacent territories are kept under control of the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic maintaining close ties with Armenia and using its national currency – dram. For the past time, the leadership of Azerbaijan not once stressed that if the Armenian party does not liberate the occupied territories and if no changes take place in the process of Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations, it would mean that all peaceful chances for the conflict's settlement would be exhausted and Azerbaijan would have to use forceful means to settle the conflict. Under conditions, when Armenia ignores four resolutions of the UN

Security Council (N 822, 853, 874 and 884) with the appeal for the immediate withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all occupied Azerbaijani territories, Azerbaijan actually has a small choice of its further actions. The Minsk group for regulation of the Karabakh conflict of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, created in 1992 and headed by Russia, the U.S.A. and France as the Co-Chairmen, for the past 20 years took impressionable efforts; however, the results of its activities do not impress. Baku and Erevan can not achieve the consent on the three principles proposed by it: self-determination, territorial integrity and none-use of violence. For instance, the Azerbaijani party expressed its agreement to the autonomy; however, Armenia brings forward the argument that in time of the USSR such status existed already. As far as the non-use of violence is concerned, the Armenian party presses for the prior agreement of Azerbaijan to it. The Azerbaijani party in principle does not deny the peaceful way, stressing that the conflict may arise due to any “sparkle”.

So, the president I. Aliyev in his interview to the South-Korean magazine “Diplomacy” noted that this conflict all the same may be regulated only in the peaceful way on the basis of international principles within the framework of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the tension in line of opposition does not weaken and periodically results in armed conflicts. Under these conditions, Azerbaijan increases its defensive potential. However, it should be noted that in spite of the fact that the defense budget of Azerbaijan in absolute expression exceeds twice the whole state budget of Armenia, its military forces, according to the estimates in 2008, were not in the state of good fighting order and were not sufficiently prepared for the large-scale fighting actions. The economic sanctions on the part of Turkey and Azerbaijan caused a rather great damage to

the budget of Armenia; however, the situation is still far from its solving.

Under the existing conditions, the Azerbaijani Republic continues to develop reciprocal action with other states. The objectives of the reciprocal action are not reduced to the search for such partners, which might contribute to solving the Nagorny Karabakh problem. Given the absolute importance of this foreign policy priority, Azerbaijan pursues also other objectives. They are as follows: integration in international structures, cooperation with international organizations for the sake of ensuring international peace and security as well as mutual actions in economic, scientific and other spheres.

It should be stressed that the geopolitical position of the country long since attracted to it attention of near and distant actors. Leaving aside the history of the Persian-Ottoman or the Russian-Britain rivalry in the struggle for influence and dominance, it is possible to say that up to today Azerbaijan is in the focus of the fixed international attention. As a result, its policy can not help being the many-vector and balanced policy.

The relations with Russia are of special significance for Azerbaijan. The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security signed on 3 July 1997 is the kernel of their legal basis. The close ties in various fields characterize relations between two countries, which cooperate both on the bilateral basis and within the framework of dozens of international organizations. Russia participates in oil and gas projects of Azerbaijan. For instance, Russian company “Lukoil” has the share of 10% in development of deposit “Shah-Deniz” and the share of 80% – in project D-222.

At the same time, the amount of Russian investments in Azerbaijani economy is rather small comparing with western

investments. In 2003 the two countries signed the inter-government agreement of military-technical cooperation.

After Azerbaijan obtained independence and became the owner of Gabalin radar tracking station (RLS “Darial”) Russia continued to use it as a component of its system of tracking the launches of ballistic rockets. The agreement on the status, principles and conditions of RLS use was signed by Russia in 2002. In 2007 for the period of aggravation of relations between Russia and the U.S.A., due to the plans of the U.S.A. and NATO to locate the complexes of the anti-rocket defense in East Europe for protection from the hypothetic Iranian rockets’ threat, Russia made the proposal to the U.S.A as an alternative to use Gabalin RLS. The U.S.A. did not pay interest to it, but it should be stressed that the Russian proposal was supported by the leadership of Azerbaijan.

Characterizing the relations between Azerbaijan and Russia, president I. Aliyev in his interview to Russian TV pointed out that the new stage in development of relations between Russia and Azerbaijan was started just in the beginning of the 2000s, when Russia was headed by V. Putin, who made his first official visit as the Russian president to Azerbaijan. Much was done for the past ten years. Briefly speaking, all sore or complicated subjects in bilateral relations were settled. None of them was left.

Speaking about other countries, it should be said that Azerbaijan stresses “special relations” with the Turkish Republic. Turkey actively supported Azerbaijan in solving the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, having joined the Azerbaijani economic sanctions, actually economic embargo of Armenia, and closed its border with Armenia. The withdrawal of Armenian forces also became the condition of establishment of Turkish-Armenian diplomatic relations. The close economic ties were shaped between Azerbaijan and Turkey. Turkey purchases from Azerbaijan natural gas and participates in infrastructural projects, such

as the oil pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Jeyhan, the gas pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum and the railway Kars-Tbilisi-Baku. The military cooperation was started in 1992 after signing the agreement on military education. Turkey started to render assistance to Azerbaijan in the military sphere, which amounted to \$ 200 million in 2010. In December 2010 the agreement was signed on mutual guarantees in case of an attack of the third party. The military doctrine of the Azerbaijani Republic adopted in the same year fixed the possible location of foreign military bases on the territory of Azerbaijan. It raised speculations on the coming location of Turkish forces in Nakhichevan region. However, there are no proofs of this information.

Georgia is another neighbor of Azerbaijan. In the past time there were no significant contradictions between the two countries. For the period of 1918–1920 the two republics had close ties. After disintegration of the USSR the diplomatic relations between them were established on 18 November 1992. The countries cooperate extensively in the regional development of energy, transport and economic projects, which is conditioned by existence via territory of Georgia of the main transportation routes of energy carriers to Turkey and further to Europe. The joint project is being implemented for starting of railway transportation Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, and Georgia within the framework of the project received the Azerbaijani credit of \$ 775 million. Azerbaijan keeps its second place in the list of Georgian biggest trade partners.

The Islamic Republic Iran is the fourth country having the land frontier with Azerbaijan. The relations between the two countries are not simple. For the longer period of time, before the Azerbaijani territory 200 years ago became subject to Russian/Soviet sovereignty, the territory of Azerbaijan was a part of Persia. One heritage of this history is the fact that 16% of the population of Iran consists of Azerbaijanis. The tension in connection with uncertainty of

consequences of realization of the Iranian nucleus program, more so the apprehension excited by probable big military conflict can not help causing anxiety in Azerbaijan.

In this connection, president I. Aliyev pointed out that the frontier of Azerbaijan with Iran made over one thousand kilometers, the trans-border contacts were arranged and over half of ethnic Azerbaijanis lived in Iran...He noted that any aggravation of the situation in the region, evidently, would result in dangerous consequences for all countries, since in terms of political, economic and military plans the countries of the region were connected with each other. Destabilization in one of them might have catastrophic consequences, and it would be difficult to predict their nature, he said.

The external connections of Azerbaijan are not reduced to its relations with neighbors. Thanks to its geopolitical position some distant from the region countries are also interested in development of mutual action with it. Azerbaijan itself also proceeds from the benefit for it of such cooperation.

The European Union and the U.S.A. as the biggest economic centers with a half of the global GNP, making \$ 63 trillion in 2010, represent in the region the main actors. It is important to take into account not only the absolute amount of the GNP but also its structure and quality. In essence, these two centers are the sources of the lion's share of contemporary technologies; and the national modernization is difficult and actually impossible to be attained without these technologies. Finally, the U.S.A. and almost all of 27 countries-members of the European Union (and also Turkey, as it is significant) are united in the oldest and mightiest military-political structure of the contemporary world – North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In view of this fact the reciprocal action of Azerbaijan with these centers of force is of great significance.

On the other side, they in the West also objectively estimate the role and place of Azerbaijan. Thus, a patriarch of American political science Z. Brzezinski stressed that Azerbaijan with its vast energy resources had a key importance in the geopolitical sphere. It seems that this appraisal made by Z. Brzezinski in the beginning of the new century should be renewed to some extent. The importance of Azerbaijan has grown since that time.

First, the world prices of hydrocarbons have risen several times. Second, the struggle for the routes of gas and oil pipelines from the Caspian and the Central Asian regions to Europe has aggravated to a large extent since that time. Third, Iran as a big neighbor of Azerbaijan, for the last years turned out to be in the focus of the counter struggle of all leading geopolitical actors and became a potential objective of use of force, which also changes the place of Azerbaijan in the general scheme without its knowledge, by the way.

By the present time, the whole South Caucasus has turned out to become the arena of the geopolitical rivalry between the West, on one side, and Russia, Iran and China, on the other side. Having analyzed the new strategic conception of NATO, adopted in Chicago in spring of 2010, Russian political analyst V.V. Shtol points out that the evident strategic perspective will be the consolidation of NATO in the Central Asian region and the South Caucasus representing the basis of a new strategy of the block for the coming decade.

The relations between Azerbaijan and NATO started to form in March 1992 after its entry into the Council of North Atlantic Partnership; and the beginning of real reciprocal action may be considered to start on 4 May 1994, when Azerbaijan joined program "Partnership for Peace". The representative office of Azerbaijan was opened in 1997 in the headquarters of NATO in Brussels. The Azerbaijani peacemaking forces, created in 1999, started to participate in peacemaking operations

of NATO in Kosovo in 1999, in Afghanistan – since 2002, in Iraq – since March 2003. On 19 November 2002, Azerbaijan was admitted to become an associated member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Nevertheless, for the whole period of cooperation with HATO the leadership of Azerbaijan never spoke about its wish to enter this organization. And what is more, for the last time the tempos of cooperation between NATO and Azerbaijan slowed down. On 25 May 2011 Azerbaijan entered “Non-Alignment Movement”, uniting, as it is known, the states, which proclaimed as a basis of their foreign policy course the non-participation in military-political blocks and associations. In view of this fact, the prognoses of Azerbaijan’s entry into NATO in the near future, leaving behind Ukraine and Georgia, seem to be completely unfounded, since in general there was no question of that. Azerbaijan maintains working relations with NATO and EU, and it is interested in cooperation with member-states in all spheres of mutual interest.

For the future period, Azerbaijan intends to carry out the balanced foreign policy of equal in rights, mutually beneficial and multilateral cooperation with all countries of the region and the world, which are interested in such cooperation. As president I. Aliyev stressed in his speech at the sitting of the UN Security Council (May 2012), Azerbaijan will stand up for ideals of justice, international law and peaceful cooperation among all countries...I may assure all our friends in United Nations and the UN member-states that Azerbaijan will become a reliable and friendly partner for all countries, said he.

*“Obozrevatel-Observer”,
M., 2012, N 10, pp. 85–92.*

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ISLAM IN CONTEMPORARY KAZAKHSTAN

The states of the former USSR, including Kazakhstan, enduring the spiritual crisis and the devaluation of settled values, confronted the situation, when democratic reforms in social life engendered essential changes in self-consciousness both of individuals and of the nation as a whole in their aspirations for perceiving their place in history and changed society. Under these conditions, the concept of spirit acquires real sense, and the feeling of the indissoluble connection with it penetrates more and more the public consciousness. The interest in spiritual traditions grew rapidly, and there appeared an urgent need in theoretical perception of historic destinies of spiritual culture and of perspectives of its development.

The problems of spiritual search, being quite distinctive in each epoch, traditionally keep special urgency both for social-philosophical theories and for practice of cultural renovation of society. The complex of contradictory tasks generated by contemporary life and formulation of these tasks are caused by the specific conditions of social practice.

The rise of national consciousness, interest in culture's history and greater concern about the present and future society represent the special feature of spiritual search for the period between the second and the third millennium. The rigid time limits fixed and given by history for radical changes, for innovations in all spheres of society's life

aggravate tension of the search for their genuine human and cultural foundations.

Therefore the urgent task is a scientific analysis of spiritual phenomena, such as religion with its many century history, former spiritual dominant in society for the Middle Ages, but forced out to the periphery of social life under conditions of the 70-years domination of Communist ideology in the USSR.

Religion is one of the ancient forms of spirituality, a social-cultural phenomenon traditionally claiming for monopoly of the whole spiritual life of the individual and of the society as a whole. The new state, Kazakhstan after obtainment of its sovereignty proclaimed itself as a secular state and started formation of civil society. As far back as in 1992, the post-Soviet Kazakhstan adopted the law on freedom of religion, which became the legal basis of state-confessional relations.

Democratization of social life engendered the problems, which had not existed beforehand: the religious associations were given the right of legal entity letting them carry out beneficial and educational activities on the whole territory of Kazakhstan. The term “religious renaissance” started to be used more often in scientific and publicist literature. But what should be understood as a renaissance: renaissance of religious traditions or simply return of the religious property, consolidation of the material basis of religious organizations? From the point of view of commonplace consciousness the latter is considered as a kind of “religious boom” in society. Naturally, under conditions of the pluralistic world outlook, poly-ethnicity and poly-confessional characteristic of society in Kazakhstan, the new secular state turned out to be in rather complicated position.

The religious situation changed greatly after proclamation of independence by the country. The demand for religious knowledge increased. A great number of young people left the country abroad to

get religious knowledge. The people, having got religious education in various countries and having come back to the Motherland, become the cause of many problems. At the present time, the religious question is the most urgent one for ensuring unity and security of our country. The need of arranging education in Kazakhstan of its own cadres and experts in religion has become an acute problem. The education of highly qualified specialist in Islam in the country has also a political significance for Kazakhstan. Therefore, in order to free the youth from the need to leave abroad it is necessary to ensure for them a chance to get religious education in national education institutions. This problem may be solved by giving the youth grants for free education in order to liquidate the situation, when young people have to look for free education abroad.

At present, the freedom of religion lets people get back their traditional Islamic values. Before declaration of independence, there were 68 mosques in Kazakhstan, while at present there are 2500 mosques, and many of them are not subject to comparison with the former ones in terms of space and architecture. All of them are located in the most beautiful places of the country. Big cities and regional centers of the republic, such as Astana, Almaty, Pavlodar, Aktobe, Oral, Djambul, Karaganda and others, are marked by existence of new built big mosques, the chef-d'oeuvre of architectural creative work, and the mosques located in the post-Soviet space would hardly be compared with them. Before the time of independence, the Muslim clergy of Kazakhstan was separated from the Uzbek clergy as a centralized religious association, which further became a big organization with its own role and aim as well as the statute for its activities. Today, the Spiritual Department of Muslims of Kazakhstan has achieved great success in its activities. In Soviet time, Islam was ousted to auls, where elders and aksakals supported it incognito, while

at present the situation is quite different. The mosques in big cities are overcrowded by parishioners, and most of them are young people. And what is more, the number of existing mosques is not sufficient for the ever growing number of parishioners. In Almaty, 32 functioning mosques do not have enough space for the growing number of parishioners. The role of imams has grown in society, since it is not limited to execution of religious rites, and they make reports to scientific conferences, cooperate with the press, and make successful contribution to scientific activities. Some new demands are formulated for the clergy. The youth of Kazakhstan has got a chance to receive religious education abroad. As a result, the need emerged to arrange training of religious cadres in the country itself. For instance, since 1991 the Islamic Institute of Raising Qualification of Imams at the Spiritual Department of Muslims of Kazakhstan started its activities; and since 2001 as a result of the inter-government agreement between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Arabian Republic of Egypt, according to this agreement, the Egyptian Nur-Mubarak University of Islamic Culture started its education work. Apart from other activities, eight medrees function in various regions of the country, and each of them provides for average special religious education, while education institutions are engaged in raising qualification of imams.

The subjects of sermons in mosques are systematized and characterized by certain succession. The uniform of imams was adopted. The present chairman of the Spiritual Department of Muslims of Kazakhstan supreme mufti Absattar Derbisali, having continued the cause assumed and begun by the first leader of the SDMK Ratbek Nysanbauly, completed the first stage of development of the first spiritual center of Muslims in the country.

The religious literature was published of many copies. A wide scale of religious texts were translated into the Russian and the Kazakh

languages and published for extended circulation, including translation of the senses of Koran, hadises of the Profit, provisions of shariat etc. For this sake, there were established some specialized editing centers and highly qualified experts, canonic editors, professional translators were engaged in work over there. The publishing houses engaged in publication of magazines and newspapers publicizing religious, scientific and social themes, such as newspaper “IslamErkenieti”, magazines “Shapagat Nuri” and “Musylman” etc. The first TV channel of Islamic broadcasting “Asyl Arna” started its work. A lot of Islamic sites exist in Internet. On the initiative of the government, the Foundation for Support of Islamic Education and Science was established for publication and free dissemination of religious literature, for rendering financial assistance to Islamic students by payment for education and provision of scholarships.

The foundation “Zeket” started its work at the Spiritual Department of Muslims of Kazakhstan with the following objectives: collection of zakyat provided by Muslims of Kazakhstan and its rational distribution according to Holy Koran, sacred Sunna of the Profit and provisions of shariat. The foundation pursues also the following objectives: payment of monthly salary to workers of mosques in auls, where they lack ability for self-sustaining; providing scholarships for the students of religious education institutions of Kazakhstan; construction of housing for religious education institutions and providing of the needed technical basis for them; construction for students of modern houses meeting the contemporary requirements for religious medreces of Kazakhstan; working out and publishing of the needed religious literature as well as its dissemination; giving financial support to the spread of Islam at the adequate level; rendering financial assistance to the socially vulnerable strata of the population; giving financial support to the other officials of the SDMKG.

The main principles of the foundation are as follows: correspondence to shariat (according to mazhab of Aby Hanif); transparency to the population; official status.

Regretfully, the gaps in the law “On Freedom of Religion” created a chance for dissemination of different trends, which attracted to their sides many representatives of traditional Islam and Orthodoxy having a pernicious effect on unity of the nation and stability of the state. Thus, hotbeds of extremist trends of Hizb ut-Tahrir as well as Sufi trend of Ismatulla were registered in the country.

Following proclamation of independence, the passage of society from atheistic views to rebirth of the spiritual and cultural wealth resulted in global changes in consciousness of people. The ideological struggle was going on for the sake of rebirth of Islamic values. The university dedicated to Ahmet Yasui, a known preacher of Sufism in Middle Asia was founded in the city of Turkestan. The underground mosque Beket Ata in Mangystau was restored. Some conferences were held in Kyzulorda for discussion of life and activities of known Islamic preacher Maral Ishan. In the Pavlodar region, the works were arranged to restore the mausoleum of Mashhur Zhuzip Kupeev (the central mosque of the region was named after him). Many works of this enlightener were published. The annual scientific conferences are dedicated to his creative life.

The scientists engaged in research of religion in time of the Middle Ages on the territory of Kazakhstan have become subject to increasing attention of contemporary scientists. Some significant facts of life of scientists of that time, such as Hisam ad-din as-Syganaki, Kauam ad-din al-Itkani al-Farabi, Hibatullah at-Turkistani have been discovered. A lot of scientific articles were published, and the mass propaganda of life and activities of great historic figures was started. For instance, a mosque was named after Syganaki in Zhanakorganof

Kyzylordin region, while one of the villages in the South-Kazakhstan region was named in honor of scientist Hibatullah at-Turkistani.

In Kazakhstan, the work is carried out to prevent dissemination of non-traditional Islamic trends, as well as to consolidate influence of traditions of Abu Hanif mazhab adopted in the country. The Spiritual Department of Muslims of Kazakhstan held in 2009 in Almaty a scientific-practical conference dedicated to Abu Hanif. A new Abu Hanif medrese was built in Astana. The Abu Hanif scientific research center functions at Nur-Mubarak University. This center is occupied with study and propagation of works written by scholars of Orient, experts in Islam. The Kazakh people display a raising interest in Islam. More and more people strive for fulfilling their religious duty.

At the present stage, one of the urgent tasks is popularization of the works of Hanafit theologians, and this fact may cause a pride of the Kazakhs in rich historic heritage of their ancestors and may educate Kazakh patriotism. Just in this context the scientists of the authors' university carry out their work and achieved success in finding out the maximum synthesis of founding Islamic values and peculiarities of local traditions. By the present time, the collective of authors under the guidance of professor Sh. Kerim on the basis of traditional Hanafit material worked out the educational methodical basis and the curricula for training national theologians in the religious education institutions of Kazakhstan.

For the first time in history of sovereign Kazakhstan they prepared the state standard for special subject "Islamic research". Since June 2011 this subject was officially fixed in the classification of professions at the level of higher education and post graduation in the Republic of Kazakhstan. At present, the state standards for special subject "Islamic research" are under preparation for programs for a master's degree and a doctor's degree.

The accomplishment of the mentioned tasks will let at the ideological level prevent and neutralize the reasons, which engender displays of religious radicalism.

Kazakhstan has been deeply rooted and possesses ancient traditions in terms of religious tolerance and inter-confessional consent. Since old times Kazakhstan was at the crossroads of various cultures and religions. It is common knowledge, that for many centuries the territory of contemporary Kazakhstan was marked by existence of religious beliefs, such as Tengrian, Zoroastrian and Manichaeian teachings, Buddhism, Christianity and, certainly, Islam, which quite peacefully coexisted and were a perfect example of tolerance and inter-confessional consent. This ancient tradition has its reflection also in contemporary ethno-confessional policy of Kazakhstan. Tolerance, mutual understanding and mutual respect, inter-ethnic consent and religious endurance are the founding principles of inter-confessional relations within Kazakhstan. It means that the principle of tolerance comes forward as the fundamental principle in the reciprocal relations of the state both with various, including new religious, entities and in the inter-confessional relations. But in no case it gives occasion to interpret tolerance as allowance to take arbitrary actions. In his time, one of the French presidents on this occasion mentioned that the principle of tolerance should have its threshold of applicability, and otherwise it makes no sense at all. Actually, this sense should be applied to religious entities characterized by positive and constructive activities and in no case in relation to the associations, which are marked by destructive activities and present a threat both to national security of the state and to physical and psychic health of the people.

It is necessary to perfect the legislative basis of reciprocal relations of the state with various, including new religious, entities, primarily with the aim of security of society as a whole and of each

individual. The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan has fixed by means of the legislation the principles of freedom of consciousness and freedom of religion, the equal right of citizens with various confessional belonging for creation of their religious associations, for separation of the state from religion. A number of other legal norms for regulation of social functioning of religion and religious associations have been elaborated. Despite the fact that in contemporary Kazakhstan to some extent the normative-legal basis of functioning of some or other religious associations has been worked out, the status of religion, their genuine position and the role in society, i.e. the status, the sphere and limits of religious influence have not been determined up to the present time. In this respect, it is necessary, to the mind of the authors, to work jointly with the new created Agency for Religious Affairs, the Spiritual Department of Muslims of Kazakhstan, with other state organs.

In conclusion, it would be advisable to stress that for the XXI century Islamic religion in Kazakhstan will play a growing role in consolidation of society and strengthening of inter-cultural and inter-civilization dialogue, which acquires greater significance in the contemporary world.

*“Islam v SNG”, M. – N. Novgorod,
2011, N 4(5), pp 46–49.*

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**CULTUROLOGY ASPECT IN FORMATION
OF UNITED EURASIAN SPACE:
VIEW FROM TAJIKISTAN**

The culturology-civilizational factor is not less important than economic and political interests of the state in creation of integration

blocks and unions. For many decades, the countries of Central Asia were united by Eastern-Christian (Orthodoxy) civilization within the framework of historic Russia. The common character of the historic past, the Russian-Soviet culture and the Russian language are the important components fixing the Central-Asian space round Russia also at the present time. At the same time, the geopolitical changes going on in the region may in perspective radically change the arrangement of forces in Central Asia having started up the mechanism of disintegration processes.

Tajikistan may be an example of the struggle for the dominant cultural influence in the country in case of five civilizations' competition.

The Russian culture is represented by its seats in Tajikistan beforehand and at present in big cities, where officials, intellectuals and representatives of non-indigenous peoples (mainly Slavonic people) are concentrated. The main carriers of this culture are the non-indigenous peoples as well as elders of the urbanized part of the aboriginal population. The Russian language and the key elements of Russian culture remain up to present a characteristic feature of the ruling elite. At the same time, today it is possible to see the evident trends of contraction of the sphere of their dissemination. At the present time, the size of the Russian Diaspora has reduced and makes about 40 thousand people (less than 1% in the structure of the seven million's population of Tajikistan). This process has reduced the using of the Russian language and the level of mastering of this language. Some other problems may be cited: the insufficient number of hours fixed for the Russian language teaching in the high general schools of the republic (the reduction to 2–3 hours per week), the shortage of textbooks and methodical materials in Russia, as well as the deficit in qualified teachers. The new law "On the State Language" adopted

in October 2009, which prohibited to use the Russian language not only in the official documents but also in applications to the official organs, has radically weakened the position of the Russian language in Tajikistan.

The Iranian culture is the most traditional culture for Tajikistan. The common character of the language and partially of the historic past with Tajik is used by Iranians as the main cause for participation in the politics of this state. The majority of the Tajik population speaks the language being near to the Farsi language and feels itself to be a part of the Iranian language world. The ideological basis of the special confidence in relations between two countries is the recognition of the following: the present Republic of Iran and the Republic of Tajikistan are the direct descendants of the ancient united Arian civilization. This position may be regarded as a kind of counterbalance to the idea of Pan-Turkism, which is used as the framework of the efforts exerted by Turkey for coming nearer to the countries of the post-Soviet space with mainly Turkic population (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). The actions taken by Tehran in Tajikistan resemble a real cultural expansion. There are 17 representations of Iranian culture in the Tajik higher education institutions. For almost one half year one TV channel of the republic demonstrated the Iranian feature film “Hazrate Yusef” (“Prophet Joseph”). The offices of Iranian radio-stations and of information agencies function in the capital of the country and in its regions, while the Iranian book shop exists in Dushanbe. It is worth mentioning some other cultural projects of Iran, implemented in Tajikistan: the financial support to publication in Cyril alphabet of the Persian classic works, books on history of the East, of dictionaries and religious literature. Iran rendered financial assistance to publication in two volumes of “History of the Tajik People”, written in Soviet time by prominent scholar of the

Orient, academician and state figure Babadjan Gafurov. Iran also paid attention to the sphere of education. And with its support and owing to its influence since 1 September 2009 the new subject was introduced in the curriculum of the general high schools – “Marefate Eslami” (Islamic education). At present, as never beforehand, the people, including children paid great interest in study of Islamic culture, according to S. Dzhulolov, one of the officials of the education department of Sogdi region of Tajikistan. Therefore, as a result of this great motivation this subject as well as the Persian language was included in the curricular of the schools. A great assistance is rendered in terms of text books and arranged training courses for teachers of the Iranian language, probation periods of students, who study this language. Iran rendered financial assistance to construction of some big libraries and education centers for people studying the Iranian language.

The Turkic culture and ideological influence of Turkey is disseminated in Tajikistan through the Turkish lyceums, which function there and enjoy popularity within the local population. The teaching of the Turkish and the English languages is of rather great significance, since it provides the students with opportunity to enter further higher education institutions of Turkey and countries of the West and later to find a prestigious work at home and abroad. To the mind of French political analyst B. Balchi, the founding aim of cultural-educational policy of Turkey in Central Asia is creation of the new national elite, which will speak English and Turkish and shape a positive attitude to Turkey. However, it is not possible to think that the Turkish lyceums established in Tajikistan really are able to transform consciousness of the local population. A small number of such education institutions in the country established for formation of the elite would hardly be able to have a radical impact on society. At present, only six such

schools function in Tajikistan, and they enjoy great popularity among representatives of the local elite. For instance, the children of state officials and of wealthy people attend the Tajik-Turkish boarding school “Hadji Kemal”. The teaching is arranged in four languages: English, Turkish, Russian and Tajik. Unlike ordinary republican schools, school “Hadji Kemal” is located in a renewed two-storey building and has the modern equipment. The best students of this school take part in international education competitions on various subjects.

The Chinese cultural expansion, unlike dissemination of Turkish culture, penetrates Tajikistan mainly by means of teaching the Chinese language. The Cultural-Educational Confucius Center located in Dushanbe concentrates its work in teaching the Chinese language. The students are very interested in learning the Chinese language and culture. Five Chinese teachers, including three professors of universities, are engaged in S. Ulugzade State Higher Education Language Institution, in the chair “Languages of the Far Abroad”. From 12 to 25 post-graduate students are admitted annually to the budget and contracted groups at the branch of the Chinese language. At present, 166 students study in this department. Since the date of formation of the branch in charge of teaching the Chinese language 78 students, including 13 graduates with excellent diplomas, terminated their studies. For the period 2009-2010, more than 60 students graduated from the Center of the Chinese Language of the Russian-Tajik (Slavonic) University. And the number of students wishing to devote their life to study and research of the Chinese philology remains rather great. In the sphere of high education the Tajik students in gymnasium Kafolat study the Chinese language, where the ethnic Chinese teach the Chinese language, having been sent to the republic by the Chinese

government, which assumed obligation to provide the gymnasium with full financial support for teaching the Chinese language.

The global western (English) culture is being developed in Tajikistan. The U.S.A. spreads its culture via the network of American centers. In Dushanbe, Khudjand, Khorog, Kulyab and Kurgan Tyube there are five American centers having collections of books in English about the U.S.A., fiction books, business and official publications, English textbooks. The European Union carries out its activities via the French culture's center "Baktria" located in Dushanbe, which organizes language courses, musical performances, meetings with known European writers and actors. Thanks to the creative approach, the Europeans achieved great success of the Center's work, and Tajik society mainly is satisfied with its activities, leaving aside the French origin of the center.

The official policy of the local authorities in the sphere of education is concentrated on the linguistic triad: the obligatory knowledge of the Tajik language as a language of the national culture, of the English and of the Russian languages as an exit to the global world showing as well the definite trends to strengthening of positions of the Western culture and the English language.

The perspectives mentioned below are as follows. The weakening of cultural-civilization's influence of Russia in Central Asia and fulfillment of the engendered vacuum by ideology of other countries may lead to the situation, when the gap between former Central-Asian republics of the USSR will become final and will be accompanied by re-formation of the whole civilization-cultural code of the peoples living in this region. At the same time, the peoples of Central Asia and Russia have the old history of cultural-civilization's integration. As a result of historic events in the space of the Eurasian post-Soviet space the process of mixing and mutual penetration of

various cultures was going on. The universal world outlook, the common spiritual values were formed and the Russian language became the language of inter-national intercourse. This identity should be cultivated; it is exactly the cultural link uniting the Central-Asian states in common paradigm. In this context, the question is the strengthening of the historically shaped united cultural space, the integration model, which would be based not only on the economic foundation but also on the social and spiritual factors.

“Evraziyskoye prostranstvo: Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee”, M., 2012, pp. 65–69.

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HOW MYTHS ARE BORN?

Tashkent View on CSTO and Central Asia

Long consigned to the background of the international arena, Central Asia has been a testing ground for such sensational concepts as “a clash of civilizations,” a “Big Game,” etc. I believe such ideas have become morally and historically obsolete.

The world is developing differently today, although its evolution is still driven by the immediate and long-term economic interests of its various countries. However, inert thinking and overconfidence by the great powers, fueled by vast resources, has created a situation where it is harder to understand (not to mention acknowledge) that some countries previously regarded as objects in “the Big Game” in Central Asia are now emerging as independent actors. In this particular case I am referring to Uzbekistan. My belief rests on Uzbekistan’s recent decision to suspend its membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). This move did not fuel open debate, official

rejection, or a negative reaction on the part of the other member-states, yet it has become a subject of active backstage talk, speculation, and fantasy, involving countries that will never join the CSTO.

The question is with whom Uzbekistan will side today and who its allies will be in the near future. One opinion is that Uzbekistan will turn towards the United States again and distance itself from Russia and the former Soviet republics. This conviction hearkens back to the deep-rooted and stubborn mindset of bloc allegiance that “if you are not with us, you are against us.” Secondly, it is a repeat of the above-mentioned inert thinking, which brings into doubt Uzbekistan’s ability to act independently in the international arena.

In reality, discussions among political journalists, analysts, and politicians concerning Uzbek foreign policy have been ongoing ever since Uzbekistan declared its independence. More often than not, a primitive mechanistic approach is used, in which conclusions about the country’s foreign policy priorities are made based on a simple analysis of meetings by the Uzbek president and other top officials with a foreign partner. Regular official contacts are indicative of the dynamics of international relations, but nothing more.

Uzbek foreign policy is based solely on national interests and its priorities are defined accordingly. Uzbek President Islam Karimov is widely known as an independent player. Allegations that Tashkent withdrew from the CSTO under U.S. pressure to spite Russia show that some political analysts do not know much about modern Uzbekistan and Central Asia. For example, several Russian television channels (including the highly-regarded “Mir”) have released absurd reports that Washington promised Uzbekistan that it would resolve, in Uzbekistan’s favor, water supply problems with Tajikistan in exchange for Uzbek withdrawal from the CSTO. Unlike other countries in the region, such as Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan, Uzbekistan is self-sufficient both

economically and politically, which enables it to make independent decisions regardless of what others may think. Tashkent's position on the CSTO is neither pro-American nor anti-Russian. Uzbekistan made its decision without pressure from the U.S. or coordination with Russia.

Firstly, although relations between Uzbekistan and the CSTO, Tashkent and Moscow, and Uzbekistan and the U.S. may intersect, they present different issues, each with its own record and logic. Attempts to find interconnections between these issues generate myths and speculations.

Secondly, regarding Uzbekistan's position solely within the context of Russia-U.S. relations is a prejudiced approach, which also stems from bloc-allegiance thinking and is a vestige of the "Big Game" concept. Uzbekistan has pursued a policy of diversification in its foreign relations since the country became independent. In its partnership policies, Uzbekistan prioritizes those countries with which cooperation is most beneficial for meeting national current and long-term interests in various fields. For example, Uzbekistan has strong partnership relations with China, South Korea, and Japan in Asia.

Thirdly, the STO and Uzbekistan's position are different issues that should be considered separately.

The CSTO emerged from the Collective Security Treaty (CST) in Tashkent in 1992. At the time, creating such an organization was justified for Uzbekistan because tensions in neighboring Afghanistan were escalating rapidly. National armed forces and law enforcement agencies were just being established in Central Asia and their defense capability was very low. The situation was exacerbated by the civil war in Tajikistan. Close ties between various law enforcement agencies in the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union were a consolidating factor, but the mechanism of implementing the Collective Security Treaty was not clear in case of outside threats, specifically

from Afghanistan. The treaty merely played a preventive role, with no member-state to throw its weight behind it.

The transformation of the CST into the CSTO politicized the organization, with subsequent attempts to make it into a military-political alliance. Those who handled these issues at the time remember how many illusions there were about post-Soviet integration. Moreover, the CSTO was presented as another way for integration. This implied plans to establish supranational agencies that would consequently infringe upon the sovereignty of young independent states. It contradicted national legislation from the beginning, according to which Uzbekistan could not participate in any military-political alliances. As a result, Tashkent quit the CSTO.

An analysis of the CSTO's subsequent activities leads to a number of important conclusions.

Firstly, the organization has not shown any signs of activity during its two decades of existence. The mechanism to realize its potential remains unclear; i.e., it is unlikely that a Belarus or an Armenian soldier will guard the Tajik-Afghan border, or that a Tajik or a Kyrgyz will intervene between Armenia and Azerbaijan in case of an armed clash.

Secondly, the conceptions and legal framework that determine the objectives, tasks, functions, and the authority of the CSTO are as vague as before. Such a powerful and well-established organization as NATO has members that often take a special position of their own. In the CSTO, this has happened already at the stage of its establishment and conceptual elaboration, which has certainly hampered the organization from gaining a firm foothold.

Thirdly, even though the CSTO has stepped up its military exercises, such maneuvers are meant to train for joint actions against potential terrorist groups. However, practice shows that all of the

member-states have already encountered attacks by terrorist groups, including international ones, but they have subdued them on their own, without resorting to the military potential of the CSTO.

Lastly, a new upsurge in speculation about the organization's conceptual crisis was triggered by the bloody conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010. The events highlighted the urgency to expand and specify the CSTO's zone of responsibility. However, the CSTO's involvement in the settlement of internal conflicts may result in an international expansion rather than keeping them confined locally.

The conceptual vagueness of the CSTO is aggravated by the growing differences in the member-countries' government, political systems, legislation, resource base, economic and military potential, level of national self-interest, decision-making mechanisms, and responsibility for implementing decisions at the national level. Furthermore, occasionally the CSTO member-states have to face emerging contradictions among themselves.

The above-mentioned circumstances largely explain the present decision to suspend Uzbekistan's CSTO membership. However, this does not mean that Tashkent has walked out of the CSTO. Much will depend on how the organization evolves and how pragmatic its decision-making is. Critics of Uzbekistan's position on the CSTO often make gloomy forecasts about a mounting external threat following the withdrawal of U.S. and Western troops from Afghanistan in 2014. Obviously the situation there will not improve immediately or even become stable. The risks that stem from this neighboring country persist and will always be taken into account. Uzbekistan's decision on the CSTO does not threaten its bilateral relations with Russia and Uzbekistan's allied relations with Russia will remain unaffected. Moreover, bilateral military and political interaction between Uzbekistan and CSTO member-states can be settled faster and more

effectively in the present situation, without coordination with the CSTO, since some countries are too far from Central Asia. Consequently, regional problems in Central Asia, including Afghanistan, are not central to their policies. Hopefully Moscow understands this.

Uzbekistan is aware that its foreign policy moves may provoke an unfavorable reaction from some countries, including neighboring ones. Yet its ability to implement national strategy and ensure national interests, without fear of a possible negative reaction or attempts by influential foreign states to assert pressure, is the most convincing sign that Uzbekistan's independence is real. Undoubtedly, all the Central Asian countries are striving for real independence, although they are progressing at a various pace. Practically all the Central Asian countries, even such politically challenged systems as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, have argued in favor of a diversified and multi-vector foreign policy. Yet in order to move from slogans and statements to real and tangible results, there has to be guarantees of political and economic self-sufficiency, which is essentially the core of genuine sovereignty and independence.

At present, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are the only two countries in Central Asia that have the capacity to actually diversify their foreign policies and foreign economic activities, while at the same time maintain well-balanced relations with leading international actors in securing their own national interests. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have made more progress than other Central Asian countries towards self-sufficiency, thereby creating conditions in which these two countries' opinions are not only heard, but also listened to. This approach is helpful in getting rid of new unjustified illusions and myths.

“Rossiya v globalnoy politike”,
M., 2012, vol. 10, N 4, July-August, pp. 81–85.

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МУСУЛЬМАНСКИЙ МИР
2013 – 2 (248)**

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№ 77.99.6.953.П.5008.8.99 от 23.08.1999 г.
Подписано к печати 21/І-2013 г. Формат 60х84/16
Бум. офсетная № 1. Печать офсетная. Свободная цена
Усл. печ. л. 4,0. Уч.-изд. л. 3,6
Тираж 300 экз. Заказ № 9

**Институт научной информации
по общественным наукам РАН,
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Москва, В-418, ГСП-7, 117997**

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(по вопросам распространения изданий)**

Отпечатано в ИНИОН РАН
Нахимовский пр-кт, д. 51/21
Москва В-418, ГСП-7, 117997
042(02)9

