Central Asia, puppet of the major powers: the new Great Game

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In 2010, from Kyrgyzstan to Tajikistan, the Central Asian cauldron has never ceased to boil. Its contents are toxic, even explosive, and its spillovers are therefore dreaded... President Medvedev’s presence in Lisbon on November 20 for NATO’s summit reveals the seriousness of this emerging instability in central Asia and the Caucasus.

Are we witnessing the surfacing of a new arch of crisis from Pakistan to Kyrgyzstan based on south Kyrgyz and east Tajik? This appears to be the idea behind Russia’s setting up of an operative group in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, which might be joined by an intervention battalion. Americans also seem to anticipate serious events in Fergana. To that extent, they are now establishing an anti-terrorist training centre in Tajikistan and doing their utmost to construct its equivalent in the vicinity of Batken, Kyrgyzstan.

China, as a direct neighbour of the arch of crisis, is also asserting itself in the region by rapidly building a quasi-motorway through the Celestial mountains. This quasi-motorway is intended to connect Osh and Fergana to Kashgar by 2011.

However, within the framework of the New Great Game(2), this triangularity could change into a quadrangular game through the addition of a fourth increasingly active. This fourth player is northbound from Pakistan and Afghanistan. It could correspond to a progressively active Islamic mafia in partnership with the Taliban and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU(3)). More, by profiting from drug money they could influence the Tajik, Kyrgyz and, particularly, Uzbek populations most influenced by Islam. This already visible entry of a fourth player in the game could result from a crisis in southern Kyrgyzstan, in eastern Tajikistan, or in Uzbekistan due to the succession of President Karimov. If tactlessness emanates from the highest ranks in power in Bishkek, Dushanbe or Tashkent, the Central Asian cauldron would change into a Fergana’s furnace. This time, it would be the long contained Fergana that would explode and drag the rest of Central Asia into a conflagration.

But, for the time being, it will be but the triangular game that will be round the cauldron. Thus, we content ourselves to describe:
1/ The toxic mixture and the febrile surroundings of the cauldron;
2/ The comparable assets of Russia, China and the United States of America;
3/ The New Great Game currently taking place, especially the Russian example and the Kyrgyz field of action.

To conclude, we will consider the hypotheses and the consequences of a Russian-American rapprochement and of a quadrangular game.

1/ THE BOILING CAULDRON

Let us highlight, for the outset, that the cauldron is half empty. In an area nearly 10 times that of France, the local population including Xinjiang region is close to 80 millions(4). This corresponds to a desert close by to the Chinese and Indian anthills. It makes it even more tempting!

The cauldron’s concoction is made from devil’s

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(1) The Central Asia considered here pertains to the five republics of former soviet Turkestan, as well as Xinjiang or Chinese Turkestan, an integral part of the Central-Asian world. Afghanistan, particularly for its northern region and mainly for its heroin trafficking through Central Asia, will at times be associated with Turkestan, “country of Turks”, a generic term to designate Central Asia along with the Touran.
(2) The “New Great Game” was first described in the Défense Nationale, issues of March 2002, April, May and June 2005, May and June 2007, and lastly of December 2009.
(3) Who have now taken the designation “Turkestan Islamic Movement”.
(4) On its own Xinjiang represents nearly a third of Central Asia and a fourth of its population.
tears! Thus, rightly, reminds of Turkestan, its oil and gas. Since the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991, the discovery of natural resources deposits has never ceased, making Central Asia one of the most important exporting regions of hydrocarbons. The monopoly of export was started by the USSR and tailed by Russia. The latter was joined, over the years, by Iran, China and finally by Western countries in particular through the BTC pipeline. Lastly, the Chinese have started utilising Turkmen gas in 2010 thanks to a hastily built gas pipeline; adding to the previously built Kazak oil and gas pipelines.

Another element is the tears of Allah\(^5\). That is, the Afghani heroine and cannabis together with the Kazak-Kyrgyz cannabis. Over a ten-year period, these yielded\(^6\) the trifling sum of 100 billion dollars towards the Central Asian and Middle-Eastern\(^7\) narcotics’ mafias, besides accrediting them with unprecedented power. The drug trafficking has reached unimaginable proportions in Russia, making it the country that suffers the most from heroin abuse, placing it above Iran and Afghanistan. In Russia, heroin claims more than 30,000 victims every year, accounting to 21% of the world’s heroin consumption.

Other ingredients to the concoction are Uzbek’s or Kyrgyz’s gold, Kazak’s uranium and rare metals, and Uzbek’s cotton.

The extreme poverty of the Kyrgyz and the Tajik added to the Uzbek, Chinese or Turkmen dictatorships are the basic elements of the concoction, whilst connected to inter-ethnic problems common to all populations. Not to mention the water shortage that is starting to spread.

An oriental elixir supplements the contents of the cauldron — that of Islam. That is, how the traditionally strong and structured Islamic sedentary Uzbek, Uyghur and Tajik are increasingly stimulated in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan by the narrow ties between drug trafficking and Islamic Taliban.

Who feeds the fire?

If formerly there was little more than China and Russia keeping the fire around the cauldron, in 20 years new actors have flocked.

First of all, a third master chef joined the Russian and Chinese “chefs”, - the American intruder.

Undoubtedly encouraged by the strategist Zbigniew Brzezinski, the United States rapidly profited from the war against terrorism, which started in 2001, to get a foothold in Central Asia. Subsequently, the USA settled in Manas, Kyrgyzstan and in Karshi-Kanabad, Uzbekistan. Indeed in a territory formerly under Soviet Union’s aegis and currently of Russia’s. Under the pretext of their intervention in Afghanistan, the USA invaded the backyard of China, Russia, and Iran, in relative proximity of the Persian Gulf and the Indian peninsula. Uzbekistan, a rare example of a country that is still independent, ousted the Americans in Karshi-Kanabad in 2005 through its terrible dictator. Therefore Washington stubbornly clung to Manas, through manipulations, around and inside the cauldron, in order to safeguard this unique projection platform.

The more discrete Chinese chef restricted its penetration to economics and business. China’s proximity, its obstinacy and immense financial and technical resources warrants it today major advances — not to say decisive ones — in Central Asia.

Let us now address the circumstances of the chef’s assistants, who become more active around the cauldron. They are boisterous, even undisciplined, but nevertheless manipulated by the master chefs. Although the most rebellious amongst the chef’s assistants has no special force, it is still well placed on the sides of the cauldron. It produces an abun-

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\(^{5}\) Originally this designation concerned liquid heroin.

\(^{6}\) According to Mr Victor Ivanov, director of the Russian Federal Service for drug control.

\(^{7}\) Recall the "Balkan Route", through Iran and Turkey, is of the utmost importance to supply Western Europe with heroin (40%). 30% pass through Central Asia to Russia. (According to Louri Fedotov, UN’s anti-drug foreman), “Sobytya”, Dushanbe, Oct. 14/10/2010.
dance of something that grants it with tremendous power — drugs. It is Afghanistan and its mafia. They produce 92% of the world’s opium and sell around 30% of their heroin production throughout Central Asia(8). With the enormous sums of money thus amassed, the mafias and drug networks begin to manipulate the economic agents — and even political actors — of Touran. They do that by acting underground, which already gives them control over half of the Tajik’s and Kyrgyz’s economies. In addition, they support a significant percentage of the Turkmen’s and Uzbek’s economies and a definite influence over Kazakhstan.

However, and even more unsettling, is the way this mafia-like/financial power starts to take on the rags of religion. In fact, we can assert to-day about Taleban, MIO and Uyghur extremists that they are “mafia-like Islamism”. Will it one day become as much of a stakeholder in the New Great Game as the three big players? We will consider this possibility in our conclusion.

Pakistan is also a chef’s assistant trying hard to play its own game. Frightened by the idea of having its Afghan rear surrounded by India, Islamabad endeavours to pull its strings in Kabul. It does so by means of its Special Information Agency (ISI), which has played a significant role in the origins and in the beginning of the Afghan crisis. The Americans increasingly notice how the supposedly “Pakistan Ally” serves as a support base and instigator to the Taliban enemy; mostly as an offender than as a moderator. Pakistan is at any rate more favoured than India to consider acting in Central Asia. Its potential is real in these fervently Islamic countries, namely in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and mainly Xinjiang or “Uyghuristan”(9). Also, its potential is based on the Khunjerab Pass and its strategic route to Xinjiang. The Iranian people are at home in Central Asia. The Touran is primarily part of the Persian civilisation, notably in Tajikistan, an eminently strategic Indo-Iranian speaking country. This allows the Iranian empire, a stronghold of 75 million inhabitants and oil revenues, to benefit from a huge leeway. This enables Teheran to fight step-by-step against American influence and to offer Moscow an occasionally counterweight. The initiatives of USA on the one hands and Russia along with China on the other hands around and inside Iran, and the reaction of Iranian government are a good example of triangular game. We shall hark back at this subject. Thanks to the Islamic influence and particularly to its financial resources, an important chef’s assistant is Saudi Arabia, supported by the United Arab Emirates, which are not only religious and cultural powers but also economic powers. To that extent, by building thousands of mosques and by financing the education of mullahs in Egypt, Pakistan or in Syria, these Sunnite countries are preparing for their future in Central Asia. The influence of their “men of God” should not be underestimated. Through their rudimentary preaching, stocked with lies, they managed to turn entire villages and districts, even in low Islamised countries like Kyrgyzstan, into “nationalists”, that is racists...

Although Japan and South Korea — the latter relying on a central Asian Korean minority — are present and notably active thanks to their capital, they are too far away to play any significant role.

Turkey is amongst the chefs’ western assistants, that is to say within the American “chef’s” circle of influence. Turkey has a privileged role in the area thanks to its cultural and economic influence, which brings her closer to Turkestan that is from Azerbaijan to Kazakhstan. This region has become an economic and social hinterland for the growing power represented by Turkey: a modern Anatolia inhabited by 78 million people. The “Turkish big brother” is present thanks to his business, universities, schools, buildings, intellectual Diaspora, engineers, investors and workers. Also, thanks to his diplomacy and his underground activities, and even to a specific Islamic influence of the Sufis.

What to say about the European chefs’ assistants,

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(8) There is even an early onset of a path through eastern Wakhan, Afghanistan bound for Xinjiang and through the latter, to China.

(9) With the arrival of the Chinese Han in Xinjiang, the 9 to 10 million Uyghur, speaking a Turkish language, are but a relative majority of, perhaps, 47% of the population vis-à-vis the Han and other Turkic minorities.
particularly Germany, who benefits from the remains of an ethnic settlement in Touran? They are perhaps the only ones to show discipline, bound as they are by NATO. Germany has a military presence in Termez and the French in Dushanbe, both in the form of transit bases in support of military operations in Afghanistan. Conversely, Westerners’ allegiance to NATO is such that they change in the wake of America and they only reach to the political level as a matter of pretension. Only Germany, whose economic clout during the 90s was considerable in Turkestan, and still is, represents at times a power that should be taken into account. The European Union, now, tries to promote a foreign policy by opening embassies in all countries, by appointing renowned special envoys, and by generously subsidising all sorts of initiatives. The influence of European business, taken as a whole, is huge, especially in Kazakhstan. But Europe remains a minion of the American superpower: in the Central Asian opinion, it has no personality, no influence.

A small European chefs’ assistant that should not be disregarded is Switzerland, due to her independence. Humourously referred to, within the UN, as “Helvetistan”, Switzerland has close ties with Central Asia. These ties are very efficient at the humanitarian, economic and financial levels. To that degree, Berne ensures the commercialisation of Central Asia’s gold, as well as providing a refuge for expatriate capital…

Outside the state-owned framework, certain organisations (UN, OSCE, etc.), as well as certain international banks (World Bank, IMF, Asian Development Bank, etc.), and investment banks, can exert decisive financial influence through their politic, economic and credit capacity. The same can be said of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) — for example the Aga Khan Development Network — although to a lesser extent. But International organisations, banks and especially NGOs are often masterminded by the great powers making them rather obedient scullions around the cauldron. The United States master this kind of manipulation.

The aforementioned are thus the assistants the great powers can count on the ones they must work with, even to make do with.

2/ COMPARED ASSETS OF RUSSIA, CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES IN CENTRAL ASIA

• It must be emphasised from the outset that Russia is no stranger to Central Asia. As Napoleon once said “scrape the Russian and you will discover the Tatar”. Not only “Moscow the Tatar”, as alleged in Saint Petersburg, is at home in “its Turkestan”, long said Russian, it has also gathered to itself an incomparable knowledge and know-how on the subject. It also controls other fringing central Asian regions such as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Altai.

In its manoeuvres the Kremlin also benefits from the support of at least six million Slavs spread throughout the Touran. These Slavs, who have been called “russiasian”, often show Asian-like particularities and are sometimes very close to the natives. Today they tend to rejoin their respective motherland (Russia, Ukraina) but they still constitute a considerable source of influence Russia can count on, particularly in Kazakhstan.

Russia also has inherited from the USSR an entire logistics network (roads, railways, oil and gas pipelines, etc.) which maintains the new states, particularly of Central Asia, dependent on the «metropolis». This state of affairs was only attenuated by the emergence of China’s logistical effort toward Central Asia.

Russia maintains an entire set of military bases inherited from the USSR in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Among them there are some important bases such as Baikonur, Kazakhstan, or the
Kant air-force base near Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and, last but not least, 6000 men of the 201st base stationed in the outskirts of Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Russia and its soviet avatar have always resorted to an institutional approach, essentially to conceal certain insufficiencies on the ground. Thus, it can take advantage from this approach to “regiment” weaker countries.

The same can be said of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), set up in 2002. This new organisation is primarily oriented toward Central Asia since alongside Russia, Byelorussia, and Armenia, 4 of its 7 members belong to Central Asia: namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and since 2006, Uzbekistan. This organisation has quickly recovered its rapid deployment force created in 2006, renamed Collective Rapid Reaction Force (KSOR) in 2009.

Following the example of CSTO, a successor of the Warsaw Pact enforced in Central Asia, the Eurasian economic community or EurAsEC is, in some ways, a resumption of the CMEA (or COMECON) toward Turkestan and her resources. CSTO’s and EurAsEC’s members are the same ones and Russian influence remains significant over them.

However, a hard core has developed within EurAsEC, attesting for the prominence of Kazakhstan in Central Asia. In 2006 a project emerged to develop a Single Economic Space (SEE) incorporating a “free-trade zone” and a “customs Union” between Russia, Kazakhstan and Byelorussia. In 2009, these three partners formed a monetary union based on the rouble. Moreover, they set up in 2010 a customs union deemed very useful to avoid a Chinese monopoly over Kazakhstan’s resources.

Last but not least, the social glue of the patriotic Great War, the communist party and the Soviet Union, as well as the linguistic advantage, still intervenes to bring Moscow and its administration together with the local intelligentsia. The latter speak often perfect Russian, and have a natural tendency to turn to Russia as soon as a problem arises. This is particularly true for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, two Central-Asian countries constituting the hard core of Russian presence in Central Asia.

At least for another ten years Russia benefits in its “Central-Asian near abroad” from a network of influence that sometimes allows her to display considerable power over the course of events, despite the weakness of its resources. This is being monitored in Kyrgyzstan.

China’s main asset in Central Asia is, naturally, the close monitoring she exerts on nearly a third of the region; Xinjiang shares frontiers with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This provides Beijing with an ideal proximity to establish a penetrating logistics network (roads, railways), but also to engage in energy and mining exploitation (oil and gas pipelines, electric grids), thus leading to a particularly high business control over Kyrgyzstan. A current joke in Bishkek is to draw a parallel between the military presence of Russia and America around the capital, with the massive presence of Han traders in the local bazaars. This business control is booming today in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan and it is at the origin of an infiltration of Chinese nationals. To that degree, the presence of an active and industrious Chinese Muslim minority, namely the Dungan, in Kazakhstan and in Kyrgyzstan, is of some interest.

It should be noted the low profile of Chinese workers, for instance in the motorways under constructions; they are equally discreet and efficient. Their relative poverty puts them on an equal footing with the locals, albeit their modern technology and equipment arouse general admiration. Moreover, the Han share with Central-Asians the meaning of the gift and, supported by their immense financial capabilities, are efficient in local bargaining of very

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(10) Turkmenistan is the only former soviet state in Central Asia to have chosen neutrality over CSTO membership.
(11) Russia, according to the expression of Jean Radvanyi, remains a “poor power” with its relevant problems (alcoholism, drugs, falling birth rates, corruption, etc.).
(12) China’s and Kyrgyzstan’s membership to the World Commerce Organisation (WCO) has made things easier.
cheap products. The only obstacle to their success lies in the low quality of their products.

However, Beijing, being at the origin of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), has added China’s diplomatic skilfulness to her business skills. Such an organisation was essential to help forget not only how the Chinese to keep over 10 million Uighur and Kazakh Turks in an iron grip, but how they managed to crush the vague attempts at independence of these Central-Asians, as seen in July of 2009 in Urumqi. The SCO was equally necessary to prevent the Uighur Diaspora, that have taken refuge in ex-soviet Turkestan, to remind at every turn the misdeeds of Chinese colonialism in “Uighurstan”. As a matter of fact, the Chinese, currently with the help of the Russian, have managed to attain the aforementioned objective to such an extent that one forgets their presence and power in ex-soviet Central Asia.

The SCO, slowly developing since 1996, resulted from the signature in July 2004 of a treaty of good-neighbourliness, friendship and cooperation between China and Russia. Well structured and in constant evolution, this huge regional organisation regroups today around Russia and China such countries as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, but also observing countries such as India, Pakistan, Iran and Mongolia. Thus, gradually providing the economic, military and anti-terrorist components, the “Anti-hegemonic” coalition surged, made of China, Russia and Iran, precisely what Brzezinski feared and talked about in his 1997 book “The Grand Chessboard”.

• Compared to the assets of Russia and China, those of the United States in Central Asia are much smaller.

The late 2001 “intrusion” of the Americans occurred by military means and continues more or less to take on this nature. Their presence still lies upon increasingly substantial intervention in Afghanistan. To this end, they use Central-Asian NATO bases, namely Manas in Kyrgyzstan, Termez in Uzbekistan and Dushanbe in Tajikistan. A new direction provides Washington with a third fulcrum. That is to say, the outset of a “northern logistic network”, so as to supply Afghanistan by railways and roads through Latvia and Russia, toward Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The creation of this network, coupled with an air corridor, is carried out similarly to the establishment of bases. Thanks to the usual asset of the superpower: “the king dollar”, “baks” in Russian slang. However, this financial advantage is faced today with the greediness of local states that manage to get a better return by investing on international rivalries. Alongside the economic asset exploited through banks and businesses, an additional American asset is the attractiveness of the “American way of life” over youngsters and nouveaux riches, but also, the prestige of the English language over the various strata of society. This facilitates the establishment among the population of NGOs promoting democracy, education, in brief the American type of society. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the representatives of these NGOs are very diversified and all over the map. Among them are the Peace Corps, Freedom House and Baptist NGOs. They can be found in the administrative staff of political parties up to villages lost on the Chinese border. They were somehow successful due to their knowledge of local languages. However, they increasingly confront with populations rendered impervious to Western influence by preaches of the Muslim extremists. At the end of the day, the American assets in Central Asia are limited and fragile. Washington now realises its distance at both the geographical and psychological levels. This might explain the low profile of the United States in the New Great Game during the last few months, contrary to Russia’s stand.
3/ THE NEW GREAT GAME

The New Great Game corresponds to the actions of each of the great powers intended to influence or even control Central Asian countries through their specific resources. Central Asia is more than ever positioned on the world stage and has become very affluent in energy resources and rare metals.

The Great Game in the near abroad: the example of Kyrgyzstan

We start with the example of Kyrgyzstan to explain the Russian Great Game. That is, what Russia has undertaken for the last years to preserve its position in Central Asia, particularly against the American encroachment.

This spectacular action of Moscow in Kyrgyzstan relied upon the Kirghiz territory through:
- The existence of an influential minority composed by 600 000 Slavs (11% of the population);
- A new Russian embassy in Bishkek — the most important embassy in place — supplemented by a Consulate General in Osh;
- A renowned Slavic university located in Bishkek;
- The maintenance of 5 small garrisons whose overall strength is comprised of 400 to 600 men. Among them, the Kant’s air force base which can host almost instantly a reinforcement of airborne troops; what happened during each of the Kyrgyz revolutions.

Facing her rivals Moscow employs its traditional levers to exert influence internally. To that extent, she resorts to underground activities, particularly toward political parties; to development of Gazprom’s energy monopoly; to the integration of Kyrgyzstan in the network of military and economic alliances, namely CSTO and EurAsEC; to the education of Kyrgyz elites in Russia; to the presence of a 400 000 Kyrgyz workforce on the Russian territory, etc.

By the end of 2003, Russians reacted to the American base that had been established two years before in Manas, north of Bishkek. Consequently, they set up their own base in a former soviet airport in Kant, to the east of the Kirghiz capital. In the eyes of Russia, this time gap corresponded to a waiting period to evaluate America’s intentions, followed by a reaction phase. The distance between the two bases is less than 30 Km. They have coexisted for the last eight years without apparent friction. It is worth mentioning that the Russian base, over which Moscow pays no rent for the time being, is eight to ten times smaller than the American base.

In April 2005, the Tulip revolution was mainly organised by the CIA in line with the colour revolutions: namely, in Bishkek, where Freedom House funded the printing of opposition newspapers or in Jalalabad where the insurrection was monitored by a youth club supported by an American NGO. From 2005 to 2009, Bakiyev steered between the USA and Russia, applying the so-called multi-vector diplomacy. This allowed Bakiyev to draw advantage and benefits from rivalries between the great powers. Thus, in May 2009 NATO organised in Astana the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the first time outside NATO’s territory. The Kyrgyz president agreed to support Russia’s response to this new intrusion by allowing the installation of a Russian battalion and a control centre against drugs in the south of the country. In November 2009, however, the installation was postponed and even the Kyrgyz agency against drugs was dissolved. The Kremlin became increasingly irritated by Bakiyev’s procrastination and felt betrayed by the Kyrgyz President. Although Russia granted him with very advantageous donations and credits in exchange of the ousting of the Americans from Manas, he finally accepted America to remain in his territory. Infuriated Putin brought obviously his support to the revolution on the seventh of April that looked like a Russian machination. In June, however, as Rosa Otunbayeva, the new Kyrgyz President, demanded insistently a CSTO’s intervention in Osh, neither this organisation nor the Russian armed forces proved able to act. The “Afghan Syndrome” has perhaps prevented President Medvedev from sending its troops into a possible trap. At the moment, Mos-

[13] Gazprom currently controls more than half of the gas stations in Kyrgyzstan... and it frequently raises the Russian flag!
cow’s material and financial support to Kyrgyzstan remains the same, although the Kyrgyz choice for a Parliamentary Republic is inconsistent with Russia’s political orientations and choices.

As of today, these developments are underway since the resumption of the negotiations regarding the deployment of a 400 men Russian battalion near Osh. This installation would double the Russian military presence in Kyrgyzstan and, given its involvement in a hot zone, would allow the Kremlin to influence the upcoming events far better than Washington. Undoubtedly for this reason, the United States is reconsidering the installation of a training centre in southern Kyrgyzstan... The preparations for the Kyrgyz elections of October 10, as well as the following events have obviously shown who pull the strings in Bishkek. The parties’ leaders did not stop lobbying Moscow and to take advantage from announcing it...

The Great Game in Central Asia

Russia continues to assert her presence in all the ex-soviet countries of Central Asia despite her limited resources. She favours the energy factor everywhere. While it would be relatively easy for Russia to assert herself in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, the same cannot be said in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

> In Kazakhstan, Russian action is supported by an active minority of 4 500 000 Slavs (30% of the population), backed by a military air and space base in Baikonur, and revolving around Nazarbayev - a key political figure. The latter, a keen strategist, knows that he cannot oppose Russia without risking the partition of his country. It is also in concordance with this perspective that he has set up the capital in Astana in order to keep under control the Slav majority living in Northern Kazakhstan. On the one hand, Astana flirts with Beijing by preparing itself to supply China with oil and gas on a very large scale. On the other hand, even though 50% of the oil delivered by the BTC has a Kazakh origin, current supplies of Kazakh hydrocarbons to Russia amount to the half of the national production of oil and gas. Note that the onset of the Common Economic Space (CES) is to some extent restraining the Chinese hoarding of Kazakhstani resources.

> Besides, Moscow knows that in the coming 10 to 20 years, when water scarcity would become critical, she could possibly restore a considerable dependency on Russia over Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan diverting to Central Asia the surplus of Siberian rivers.

> In Uzbekistan, a lot depends on President Karimov’s mood. The periods of hostility, illustrated by a systematic fight against the Russian language, were followed by the skilfully negotiated retrievals of Russian influence. However, the evolution of Russian-Uzbek relations also depends on the evolution of American-Uzbek relations. Thus, in 2005, the sharp criticism of Andijan’s repression by the West resulted in the closing down of the American base in Karshi-Khanabad, as well as in the return of Tashkent to EurAsEC and CSTO. Rapprochement is the current tendency between Uzbeks and the West. This is supported by the creation of an extremely lucrative Northern Logistical Network for Tashkent intended to supply Afghanistan through Termez. For the time being — and the figure is significant — gas represents 90% of Uzbek’s exports toward Russia; it is a considerable amounting to 15,5 billion cubic meters a year.

> Due to the improvement of Turkmenistan’s economic situation, the Russian minority is modestly strengthened throughout the country. Moscow’s actions are mostly focusing on the energy sector in order to preserve the export capacity of the oil and gas pipelines. These have been undermined both by the ageing of the installations and by foreign competition between western (BTC) or Chinese actors. Until his death in 2006 the Turkmenbashi was satisfied with controlling the export’s monopoly of Gazprom through the former Soviet gas pipelines.
His successor, however, was quick to reorient part of the exports to Iran and particularly to China accounting for 6 billion m³ in 2010 and with a growing potential up to 30 / 40 billion m³ in 3 years time. Compromised in May 2009 by a suspicious explosion of a Russian gas pipeline in the desert of Karakum, Russia’s gas imports from Turkmenistan have levelled at 12 billion. In fact, the struggle over the resources of the “Turkmen Gas Emirate” is done almost at daggers drawn. This situation could worsen if the deposits were less abundant than predicted.

In 2010, Ashgabat started supplying Bakou through oil tankers. Today, Turkmen’s and Kazakh’s oil represents half of the deliveries assured by the BTC to the Mediterranean. This is an important victory for the American (and Western) side under the triangular game as it offsets the Chinese progression toward the Turkmen gas. But in both cases, Russia, in a hard position in Turkmenistan, remains the underdog.

> In Tajikistan, despite the near absence of a Slav minority, driven out by the civil war, Russian action still benefits from the presence of 6000 men of the 201st base; a legacy of the intervention in Afghanistan and of the Tajik civil war.

Nourek’s optoelectronics station, another legacy of the soviet period, became Russian property in 2004. It is a centre of first importance to locate and evaluate objects in space. Moreover, the recent opening of a dam on Sangtuda confirms Russia’s strategic preference for the energy sector. Nonetheless, although Russian border guards are no longer in charge of Tajik’s borders (sadly...), some Russian military advisers, planes and helicopters are still in place. They are said to help (14) the Tajik to nip in the bud the uprising of the Islamic opposition as observed from August 2010 (an attack in Khodjent, a prison break in Dushanbe, an ambush in the valley of Garm, etc.).

The external Great Game: the Iranian example

Externally Russia relies on an alliance with China, particularly through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). This implies sacrifices from Russia, as the Chinese hive of industry and know-how pose an undeniable threat on the Siberian or Central-Asian deserts. In the current triangular game Moscow, which chose Beijing as a long-standing partner, turns for the moment a blind eye to China’s threatening approaches, especially those regarding logistics and the Han progression over Russia and her “near abroad”.

The Kremlin and Beijing agree on the state of affairs of Iran, which has become an observer at the SCO. Russia encouraged — at least in the beginning — the construction of Bousher nuclear power plant, while China keeps on purchasing Iranian gas and oil. In 2007, the possibility of Iran entering into the CSTO was even debated. But it was mostly a threat toward Washington and ultimately the Russians cancelled the delivery of S 300 missiles.

(14) The same can be said about the Americans...
CONCLUSION

The risk of a reappearance of a guerrilla in Tajikistan (only 70 km away from the French airbase in Dushanbe…) was a major overflow of the Central-Asian cauldron this summer. It was preceded by another overflow: Osh’s pogrom in June. For such, is there really a new arch of crisis from Pakistan to Kyrgyzstan through Afghanistan and Tajikistan? It is still too soon say, although the kamikaze attack in Khodjent on September 3 2010 indicates the proliferation of Afghan-Pakistan methods in Central Asia. Such a phenomenon would correspond to a new major actor near and in the cauldron, that of an Islamic mafia. The game would thus evolve from a triangular to a quadrangular framework, unless the three great powers become united to fight against the Islamic “terrorists”.

At this point in time we observe a rapprochement between the Kremlin and the White House. To that extent, even though China displays an uncommon arrogance, Russians and Americans claim a “new atmosphere in the Russian-American cooperation”\(^{(15)}\). This has been dramatically illustrated in Lisbon, November 20, by president Medvedev’s two hours meeting with Barack Obama on the sidelines of NATO’s summit. Notwithstanding, this should not challenge the close links between Beijing and Moscow created through the SCO. The fact of the matter is that Russia now understands it profits from the American intervention in Afghanistan. Notably, through the creation of air and land corridors throughout the Russian territory to supply NATO’s troops. This begins to yield Russia with a considerable Manna. In compensation for this overture, the Kremlin expects the United States to carry on a tougher battle against drugs in Afghanistan\(^{(16)}\); that is, largely against the Islamic mafia…

Even the Chinese are not far from sharing this expectation, as they feel deeply concerned with the introduction in Xinjiang of Afghan drugs by Uyghur extremists and drug dealers.

Does this general rapprochement, as the charming United States ambassadress in Kyrgyzstan Tatiana Gfoeller contends, means that “the thesis of the Great Game was only appropriate in the 19th century?” Indeed… With the Americans in Manas, the Russians in Kant and the Chinese traders in between at Dordoy Bazaar, there will still be bright prospects for the manoeuvres of the Great Game! Under these events, the expansion of an Islamic mafia means that the alliance between drugs, Islam, and the mafia is about to emerge at the forefront of the New Great Game. This combination of interests is more dangerous than it seems: in the opinion of increasing number of Central-Asians it appears as a regional and national reaction against foreign players. As it does in Afghanistan, the Islamic mafia will play up the “hostility to external influences”, in order to secure the popular and religious mobilization it requires to win. The convergence between the United States and Russia, together with China’s benevolent neutrality, would be very necessary to oppose this evolution.

\(^{(15)}\) Russian MFA Press Release, 28/10/2010
\(^{(16)}\) Recall that Russia, followed by Iran and Afghanistan, occupies the first place in regard to heroin deaths. These account to an annual rate of 30 000 victims, most of which are youngsters.
Central Asia, puppet of the major powers: the new Great Game

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PRESENTATION OF RENÉ CAGNAT

Born on 25 june 1942 at Tananarive (Madagascar),
Doctor of Political Science (IEP Paris 1983)
Master diploma in russian (Sorbonne 1979)
Patented of the French War College (Ecole de guerre) in 1982.

From 1962 to 1999 military career.
62-64 Saint‐Cyr
First speciality in the Army : mountain infantry
career mainly in eastern countries: Soviet Union (assistant military attache Moscow) 70-72, West‐Berlin 73-75 as a company commander in
an infantry regiment, defense attache in Bulgaria 85-88, in Roumania 90-93, in Ouzbekistan 94-98, in Kirghizistan 96-98.
Appointments in the central administration : General Secretariat of national defense (75-79 et 88- 90), cabinet of minister of defense (82-84 et 94).

Having reached the grade of colonel in the army, he prefers to retire from armed forces in 1999 in order to stay in Central Asia and, from
there on, he lives in Kirghizistan where he was an Honorary Consul of France in 2001-2002.

Literary Career:
*1979 Essay « Euroshima, for an Europe of defense ». (ed. Media), collective publication.
Collective publication.
2003 Roman « Djildiz or the song of the Celestial Mountains » (ed. Flammarion).
2005 essai « Central Asia after the war against terror » (ed. L’Harmattan), Collective publication.

*Noumerous articles published specially in « Le Figaro », Revue de défense nationale, Stratégie, Défense, Courrier des pays de l’est, Quotidien de Paris, Geo, Missives, Courrier de l’Unesco, Times of Central Asia, Journal des lointains, etc.
“Amiral Marcel Duval award” in November 2008 for two articles about Afghanistan in “Défense nationale et sécurité collective” in may and
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Distinctions :
Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, Officer of Merit.