

‘Great Game’ Fanatics Spark Insurgency Against Central Asia

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

On Aug. 7, 1999, “Islamist” insurgents launched an uprising in Dagestan, in the Caucasus region of the Russian Federation. Rapidly, the assault expanded into renewed warfare in Chechnya, whose strategic aim was to split off the autonomous republic, and thus initiate the break-up of the Russian nation.

Now, one year later, the same insurgency has spread like a virus throughout the region, affecting and threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. Iran and China are indirectly threatened as well. What this amounts to is a war against Russia, being fought over Central Asia. The insurgents, so-called “Chechens,” who ignited the spark last year, are the same forces now ravaging Central Asia.

This is no sociological phenomenon, however—no organic development of some romantic fantasy of an “Islamic liberation struggle” or anything of the sort. What is threatening to become World War III, is a consciously and centrally deployed terrorist-insurgent capability, which was put together in the 1970s, under the likes of geopolitical madman Zbigniew Brzezinski, and reassembled, following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988, as a worldwide capability.

Today, this “Afghansi” force, which is based in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, is being deployed by forces of the Anglo-American financial oligarchy, in an insane drive to destroy what they have been incapable of taking over and controlling. This is a new version of the Great Game, fought by the British to control Russia and the Eurasian heartland: In the new script, Anglo-American geopoliticians have deter-

mined that they cannot easily subvert or overthrow strong national governments, nor can they totally dismantle their economies, as preferred.

Since their independence in 1991, the Central Asian republics have been under massive pressure by the International Monetary Fund, to open up their centralized economies to large-scale looting, on the model of what was done to Russia and the eastern European nations. This has failed, and, largely in response to signs of crisis in the West, leaders of Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have wisely reoriented their economic policy, and reasserted sovereign control over important areas of monetary and financial affairs (see box).

At the same time, the five Central Asian republics have been targetted for raw materials looting. Together they represent one of the greatest concentrations and variety of raw materials and minerals in the world. British and U.S. oil interests had been working overtime to secure title to the rich oil and natural gas deposits, by promising far-reaching oil pipeline deals. Although gigantic projects—all geared to bypass Iran and Russia—such as the famed Turkmenistan-Caspian Seabed-Turkey pipeline, were celebrated with fanfare, the funds to realize the projects have not been forthcoming from the West. Royal Dutch Shell has pulled out of the project, while Turkmenistan and Kazakstan have increased their oil deals with Russia. And, increasing cooperation has been building among Central Asians and other countries, such as Iran and China.

While their rich raw materials were being coveted, the political systems of the Central Asian republics were being targetted for “democratization.” With the exception of

Kyrgyzstan, the leaders of the Central Asian republics are men who come from the Communist era, and represent a continuity with the past, particularly regarding centralized control over important aspects of economic policy, and state industrial assets. The paragons of “democracy,” such as speculator George Soros and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, deployed their money and rhetoric, respectively, in an attempt to dismantle the state structures of leading countries in the area. Thus, when Albright visited Kazakhstan in April, she loudly criticized the elections that had been held, and demanded more of her brand of “democracy.” Soros, in a June 25 speech in Warsaw, called for an “international association of democracies” to be created, that should focus on “Peru, Indonesia, and the Fergana Valley,” where Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan meet. The leading reason behind this crusade for “democratization,” was that the financial oligarchy that the two represent, desired the introduction of more “flexible” political structures and personalities, the better to organize economic demontage and raw materials exploitation.

Regional Initiatives Emerge

Now, it is evident, that this has not worked. On the contrary, cooperation has been consolidated among the Central Asian states and with other regional powers, including Russia, China, and Iran. This has been the case in the economic sphere, as well as the security sphere, as the recent evolution of the Shanghai Five into the Shanghai Forum has shown. The group, comprised originally of China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, since its founding in 1996, has evolved from a defensive alliance largely against drugs and terrorism, into a powerful alliance for economic cooperation, within the Eurasian Land-Bridge perspective, and opposed to pretensions of hegemonism on the part of a “unipolar” power. At its most recent meeting, on July 4-5 in Dushanbe, the member countries formulated a strategic agenda, toward creating “new economic and political orders that are just and rational.” They explicitly rejected any attempt (like that of Madame Albright) to exploit “human rights” issues in order to intervene into another country’s affairs. Significantly, Uzbek President Islam Karimov attended the meeting, while India and Iran made known their interest in joining the forum. (See “‘Shanghai Five’ Summit Offers Eurasia New Strategic Outlook,” *EIR*, July 28, 2000.)

In short, the regional powers seem to have tipped over the chess board for the Great Game. And the response of the Anglo-American financial oligarchy, has been violent.

Thus, they have embarked on a slash-and-burn campaign, utilizing their “Islamist” proxies, to simply destroy the region. The model is provided by the continuing warfare ravaging large parts of Africa (sparked by the same forces), through the Great Lakes region, Angola, southern Sudan, and elsewhere: Unleash the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, to disinte-

grate nations, and use the warlords, after the smoke has cleared, to carry away the rich national resources loot.

In our issue of Sept. 10, 1999, *EIR* issued an exposé of this scenario, providing in-depth background documentation on the history of the originally British operation, centuries ago. Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. produced a dramatic video presentation of this “Storm Over Asia,” which spelled out in minute detail, how the fires that started in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent, were threatening civilization. LaRouche emphasized then, that the driving force behind this madness, was a panicked financial oligarchy, faced with the prospect of its imminent doom. Like the last, dying dinosaur, the beast is now rearing its ugly head, and thrashing out left and right in a destructive frenzy.

War in Central Asia

The new round of warfare in Central Asia broke out in early August, and was not confined to any one country; it appeared almost simultaneously in different areas of the broader regional theater. The first significant incident occurred in southern Uzbekistan, in the first week of August, when an armed group crossed into the country, reportedly from Tajikistan. Uzbek Security Chief Mirakbar Rakhmankulov announced later, that Uzbek forces had surrounded the group; however, later reports indicated continued fighting. On Aug. 8, Russian border security forces in Tajikistan killed three insurgents, near the Afghan-Tajik border, and arrested two men with explosives, on the Tajik border. A day later, Russian border guards came under fire on the Afghan-Tajik border, by terrorists from Afghanistan, who were apparently probing to find vulnerable spots through which to infiltrate forces into Tajikistan. On Aug. 10, Uzbek troops, supported by helicopter gunships, raided a base of insurgents in the Gissar Gorge, near the Fergana Valley. Ten Uzbek soldiers were killed by the insurgents, believed to be from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which seeks to overthrow Uzbek President Karimov and set up an “Islamic” state in the Fergana Valley.

The same day, Aug. 10, President Askar Akayev warned that Islamist rebels were gathering in central Tajikistan, preparing to attack eastern Uzbekistan through Kyrgyzstan, during Aug. 15-20. He reported to the Kyrgyz Defense Council, that the government had gathered intelligence on bandit formations in the Qarotegin Valley and Tavildara areas, on Tajik territory, and explained, “For them, the shortest route to the Fergana Valley goes via the Alay and Batken sector of our country.”

No sooner had the Kyrgyz President issued his warnings, than 100 militants penetrated the south of the country, and engaged government troops in fighting on Aug. 10-13, which left “about 30 militants” and “about 10 government troops” dead, according to the Presidential press service. The fighting continued for five days, before Kyrgyz government troops

succeeded in repelling the insurgents, on Aug. 15, driving them back across the border. However, as Bolot Dzhauzakov, secretary of the Kyrgyz Security Council, announced the following day, the rebels crossed into the country again during the preceding night, penetrating 10 kilometers inside Kyrgyz territory.

As the situation in Kyrgyzstan was heating up, neighboring countries were preparing to upgrade their own defenses. The Turkmen government on Aug. 11 beefed up security measures along its border with Uzbekistan, by demanding special identification for citizens in the border area. About 100 rebels of the IMU had attacked Uzbekistan a week earlier,

and captured a strategic road over a 4,000-meter pass. Uzbek forces said that the militants were trying to create a base for further operations and open a route to traffick drugs and weapons. Unofficial sources claimed that the rebels had succeeded in cutting the only road linking the Fergana Valley to the rest of Uzbekistan.

On Aug. 15, Kazak television announced increased security measures, and training for military readiness, in southern Kazakhstan, evidently in expectation of an assault by the IMU.

At the same time, the affected governments intensified efforts to coordinate their defense. On Aug. 12, a working meeting took place in the Kyrgyz city of Baktan, with Kyrgyz,

Uzbekistan and National Economic Policy

Uzbek President Islam Karimov, in his book *Along the Road of Deepening Economic Reform* (Tashkent, 1995), outlined the principles for the transition to a market economy. These included, that “the state should play the role of a chief reformer.” The reform process, founded on a legal basis, should take into due consideration, the demographic characteristics of the population and its living standard, and include “a strong and efficient mechanism of social protection and guarantees, which will maintain social and political stability.” Karimov emphasizes that an abrupt shift to a market economy, would lead to “destruction, to the brink of precipice and to social violence.” Citing the popular saying, “Never destroy the old house before you build a new one,” Karimov insists on maintaining a strong role for the state: “Denial of state regulation of [the] economy in yet volatile conditions of self-regulation under strong impact of supply and demand with no visible signs of free competition and limited range of external links provokes [a] deepening of [the] crisis, price rises, and a higher inflation rate.”

Referring frequently to the disastrous consequences that “shock therapy” had on Russia, Poland, and other former Communist countries, Karimov explains that his country “categorically rejected ‘shocking’ methods,” and introduced price liberalization, for example, gradually, from 1992 to 1994. In the process, the government maintained price controls on several categories of basic goods and services: Grain, bread, and flour producers were subsidized; education and school lunches for children were covered by the state, as were certain products for children and medicines. “Prices for bread and flour were still subsidized, as well as housing and public utility services and

public urban transport.” In addition, “The state secured reliable protection of the interest” of the population through various compensation funds, introduction of child-care allowances, regular increase of minimum salaries, pensions, and stipends, etc. Child-care allowances were increased, as was the length of time they were paid, to two years. All families with children under the age of 16 were granted state support. In the second phase of the transition, which began in 1994, Karimov identifies as priority tasks, continuing privatization (with the emphasis on small and medium-sized enterprises), overcoming the recession, and stabilizing production, strengthening the national currency (the soum), and shifting the structure of the economy, from a raw materials exporter to an industrial economy, producing a wide range of manufactured goods.

As for the privatization process, Karimov again stresses that it cannot be wild and all-encompassing, but must be carefully guided. “The privatization process should not be considered as the end in itself of economic reforms. Privatization is not a panacea for all the vices in the economy and social sphere inherited by us from the totalitarian and completely state-controlled system.” Therefore, he writes, it is not the number of firms privatized that counts. Again, learning from the tragedy of Russia, Karimov says, “the experience of other countries provides us with a number of examples when mass privatization has practically brought no desired results for the revival of the economy. Moreover, without appropriate preparation, without creating effective mechanism[s] of support for enterprises, it aggravated the economic crisis, drove many enterprises to the verge of bankruptcy, increased unemployment, as well as increased stratification of the population by their income and social status. No wonder that such privatization was not welcomed by the majority of the working people and became the subject of corrupt, criminal bargains.”

Uzbek, and Tajik representatives of bodies for defense, interior, and national security. It was reported later, that one option under discussion, was joint air strikes. Kyrgyz Presidential spokesman Osmonakun Ibraimov said that the three governments were discussing air raids, against mountain bases where they believed up to thousands of rebels were situated. He added that Uzbekistan had offered its Air Force for deployment against the rebels in the tri-border area, and in fact, on Aug. 15, the Russian agency Interfax reported that an air strike had taken place, against a rebel position in the Bakten region. In addition, it was decided to set up a joint headquarters in Khujand, Tajikistan.

The position expressed by the governments, was of total intransigence: Uzbek Foreign Ministry spokesman Bakhodiy Umarov said, "We don't intend to enter into polemics with bandits and terrorists. We can make them understand only one way, which means using force to destroy them." And Kyrgyz Security Council head Dzhanuzakov said, "With our joint forces we will annihilate the rebels, and we will take measures to annihilate them wherever they gather." He told reporters that the three governments would not only expel the invaders, but "wipe them out completely from the territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States."

Following the Bakten meeting, an emergency meeting

To achieve macro-economic stability, Karimov rejects the monetarist approach, which, he writes, is based on "the suppression of the inflation level, stabilization of currency circulation by means of abrupt reduction of money stock and aggregate capacity to pay." This, he says, reduces output, and freezes investment. Rather, Karimov opts for the option based on production: "the stimulation of the production and entrepreneurship activities, the promotion [of] structural transformations and elimination of discrepancies in the economy along with the measures based on the moderately tight fiscal and monetary policies, constraining excessive demand that is not backed up by goods. Our approach," he summarizes, "is as follows: We can overcome the deep protracted crisis we have found ourselves in, without social upheavals and explosions, *through reliance on production, on those who create material values. We are supported by those who produce goods, cultivate land, erect buildings, constructions and new production capacities*" (emphasis added).

What this means concretely, is that priority sectors must be identified and promoted in every way. This, in turn, requires a fiscal and tax policy that promotes production. Rejecting the idea of balancing the budget at all costs, Karimov insists on maintaining state expenditures to support production, and specifies, "The most important function of the taxation system is its stimulating influence on the development of production, efficient utilization of material resources and raw materials, natural, financial, and manpower resources, property accumulation." Furthermore, the taxation system must be changed, so as to reduce the tax burden on enterprises: "The high enterprise income tax rate gave no possibility for an enterprise to allocate funds for the development of production, technical retooling, replenishment of their working capital." Otherwise, he argues, recession would ensue, and increased tax revenues could only be accrued as a result of inflationary growth in profits, which could lead to a collapse of the financial

system. By reducing corporate income taxes, enterprise would also have the ability to raise workers' wages. Similarly, with credit and monetary policy: "Bank credits should be advanced in first turn to those who can increase the output of the strategically important products, consumer goods and to ensure their timely repayment." Uncontrolled credit extension, he writes, would be inflationary and undermine the currency. "This is the reason why every soum being put into circulation must be backed up by goods." Strengthening the national currency, which was introduced as legal tender in 1994, is to be achieved through increasing reserves, in terms of production. "The major objective is to increase the domestic output of the goods that would meet the most vital needs of the people."

Furthermore, foreign exchange reserves are to be increased, through the increase of exports of manufactured goods. The sectors which Karimov identifies as priorities for development, include of course oil and gas, but the emphasis is on developing the processing industries for such raw materials. In particular, the chemical industry is targeted for reorganization and expansion, for manufacture of polyethylene, polypropylene, polystyrene, etc. In addition, the machine-tool production sector is to be developed, so as to expand domestic production of manufacturing machines, agricultural machinery, and vehicles. Aircraft, automobile, and electronics production are also scheduled for development.

To achieve this transformation, Karimov writes, "Dynamic development and an increasing role of science-intensive production is the most important priority of the sectoral structural policies. Orientation to the development of science-intensive and technology-consuming industries will resolve the strategic task, i.e., strengthening Uzbekistan's hold in the world market, achieving economic and technological independence for the country."

— Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

took place with leaders from the immediately affected countries, in Sochi on the Black Sea, where Russian President Vladimir Putin was vacationing. A CIS summit was scheduled for Aug. 18-19 in Yalta. However, Kyrgyz President Akayev announced that he would not personally attend the summit, "because of the aggravation of the situation on the southern borders of Uzbekistan and attempts to carry out subversive acts." On Aug. 16, he issued a call on national television for people to remain calm, assuring them that government troops were fully deployed against the rebels. He said about 150 rebels were close to the border, from Tajikistan, and that an estimated 700-800 more were preparing further invasions from the neighboring country.

Who Are the 'Islamists'?

One might question, how several hundred rebels could simultaneously threaten three nations, each equipped with national military forces. The point is, the so-called rebels are the advance striking force of an army, which is the Taliban occupying power in Afghanistan. From reports issued by officials of the governments targeted, the insurgents are not Uzbeks, but are an international force, including Indians, Arabs, Pakistanis, Chechens, Russians, Ukrainians, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tajiks. They are the long arm of the radical Taliban movement, which has militarily occupied most of Afghanistan, and set up a bestialized, stone-age regime there, which is based on drug cultivation and weapons smuggling. One secondary aim of their sweep across Central Asia, is to set up drug- and weapons-trafficking routes, into the three target countries. But their primary aim is to do what they are now engaged in doing: destroying nations.

The IMU is armed with advanced equipment, including Stinger missiles, and is capable of shooting down planes. If its forces immediately threatening Kyrgyzstan are estimated at 800, they are backed up by 8,000 in bases, including in Afghanistan. And, more broadly, the handfuls of rebels are fully backed by the entire military force of the Taliban in Afghanistan. As Kyrgyz Security Council chief Dzhanzakov said on Aug. 16, two helicopters were given by the Taliban to the terrorists fighting in southern Kyrgyzstan. Financing for the multi-pronged attacks comes from the Taliban directly, as well as from Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden, also protected by the Taliban regime.

Representatives of the legitimate government of Afghanistan, have testified to the Taliban's patronage of the IMU: On Aug. 15, Rahmatollah Bazhanpour, Minister of Immigration of the ousted Burhanuddin Rabbani government, told Iranian radio that it is the misfortune of the CIS countries that they have a common border with Afghanistan. Charging the Taliban with taking "unnecessary and unjustified steps" to extend its influence beyond the borders of Afghanistan, Bazhanpour said that opponents of the governments in the CIS and Central Asian countries are still being trained at camps in Taliban-

controlled territory. He also pointed to the international composition of these forces, naming Arabs, Chechens, Kashmiris, Pakistanis, Punjabis, and others.

If the IMU is nothing but an extension of the Taliban, the Taliban itself is the product of the Anglo-American intelligence services. As *EIR* has documented, the Taliban was conceived, planted, nurtured, cultivated, and deployed, through the Afghansi operation of Brzezinski, Margaret Thatcher, and George Bush, first to smash the Soviet Union, then the Russian Federation, and now all the republics of the region. The Taliban, in addition, enjoys the financial and political backing of Saudi and American oil interests in Unocal and Delta.

Finally, the entire Taliban-Islamist insurgency enjoys the political backing of Anglo-American intelligence, and their media outlets. As Uzbek television complained in mid-August, both BBC and Radio Liberty opened their programs to interviews with leaders of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Tohir Yoldosh and Juma Namangoniy, "seeking their expertise to analyze the events." Furthermore, the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy has been identified as the official sponsor of a book being circulated by the Islamic-fundamentalist Hizb ut-Tahrir group, which is leading attempts to overthrow Uzbek President Karimov.

And, as Russian authorities recently revealed, there is a direct British hand in the "Islamist" insurgency in Chechnya — also backed by the Taliban — called the Halo Trust (see article in this issue).

Beyond Afghanistan

Until the Afghanistan disaster is ended, by effective international political force, to reestablish international law and a legitimate government in the war-torn country, there will be no means of halting the poisonous spread of terrorism in the region. To date, well-meaning attempts, including diplomatic efforts by the neighboring countries, plus the United States and Russia, under the aegis of the United Nations, to create a multi-party coalition in Afghanistan, have failed.

It is not to be excluded, given the life-or-death threat this insurgency now represents for Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, that these nations will mobilize their military forces jointly into an effective offensive against the rebels, and, under the rules of hot pursuit, also against their training bases inside Afghanistan. Such an option could also involve Russia directly.

The Voice of Russia carried a commentary on the crisis on Aug. 16, by Anatoly Potapov, who reported that a meeting of the Presidents of four Central Asian states and Russia was scheduled for that day in Sochi. The "Islamists" who oppose Uzbek President Karimov, he wrote, have gained strength through their cooperation with the Tajik opposition, and heavy financing from the Taliban, Islamic extremists in Saudi Arabia, and the notorious Osama bin Laden. The separatists have reached Kazakstan, and are threatening all Central Asia.

The Russian General Staff, he reported, is concerned lest the Taliban forces reach the border with Tajikistan. This is the border that the Russian military help defend. Potapov argued that Russia could provide crucial help to repel the insurgents, because it has “border troops, aircraft, and military equipment in Tajikistan.” And he expressed the hope, that such Russian help would be solicited by Uzbekistan.

At the same time, signal pieces have appeared in major Western press, touting the line, that U.S. ambitions to dominate the region have failed, and that Washington has decided that it might be better to “let Moscow handle affairs.” In light of the unfolding warfare, one is tempted to ask: Could this be a polite way of saying, let Russia get embroiled in a regional conflict, a new Afghanistan, this time encompassing all of Central Asia?

Drought Is Devastating Central and South Asia

by Mary Burdman

The worst drought in 30 years is now devastating parts of Central and South Asia, with the worst-hit nation being Afghanistan. Tajikistan is also badly affected, as are parts of Iran. Drought struck northwestern India and adjoining areas of Pakistan in the Spring, but this has been somewhat relieved by the arrival of the monsoon.

Around 60 million people are already affected by the drought, and the overall economic impact will strike many more. Lack of water is a critical problem in many regions of Eurasia. To the east, drought has been taking a heavy toll in China this Spring and Summer, and now, drought is spreading west, into the Caucasus.

The worst, and potentially most dangerous situation is in Afghanistan, a nation already devastated by 20 years of civil war. Three years of inadequate rainfall, on top of the collapse of what water management had existed in the country, could cause full-scale famine.

Reports during the Spring and Summer by the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), warn of the dangers of famine and mass migration. Crops have been destroyed; livestock are dying; fruit trees are destroyed. Sanitation, already a problem, is collapsing, and the effect on public health is extremely bad. There could be mass migrations within the country, or even across the borders, by people who have lost everything. The effects on the countries, themselves already hit by drought, where such refugees might go, would create even more instability in this already highly volatile region.

‘A Human Catastrophe’

In its report of July 27, the WFP warned: “A failure to provide fast and effective food assistance in Afghanistan raises concerns of a human catastrophe that could range between acute malnutrition and loss of life. It could also lead to massive movement of people within the country and across borders into Iran and Pakistan.” Some 3-4 million Afghans are in danger of famine, out of a population of 21.9 million, and another 8-12 million will also be affected, if less severely, the WFP estimates. Famine is already affecting areas including southern Samangan province, the Panjshir Valley, and Badgis and Ghor provinces.

In a bitter irony, the drought is reportedly also taking a big toll on Afghanistan’s opium crop, one of the biggest in the world, and estimated for last year at 4,600 tons. This will certainly have an effect on the Taliban regime in Kabul.

In late July, WFP teams reported a very bleak situation in the provinces of Ghor and Badgis. Many people have already consumed their seed wheat, and sold their livestock — and the Summer is still at its height. This year, agricultural production could be only about 55% of last year.

Next year could be worse. While 300,000 tons of wheat seed is planted annually in Afghanistan, this year there will be a deficit of at least 60,000 tons. Since much planting is generally done during October-November, there is little time to distribute adequate seed grain, and some 400,000 farmers could miss the Winter planting season, the WFP reports.

The worst-hit area of Afghanistan is a wide region extending from the northwest to southeast. Rain-dependent wheat farmers in the north have lost their entire crops. This is the second year of severe drought in these regions, and last year people had already sold off most of what they possessed just to buy food. In 1999, southwest Afghanistan harvested only 40% of the previous year’s crop.

All areas of the country are affected. In the southern areas, up to 80% of livestock have died due to lack of water and fodder. The nomad population is possibly worst affected, some people losing all their livestock, and forced to go to the cities in search of food.

Even regions which have irrigation are facing deteriorating conditions. Water infrastructure was damaged by floods two years ago, on top of overall lack of maintenance due to the chaotic situation in the country. The low water levels in the rivers, will also limit production.

The poor in the cities are also facing rising food prices and lack of water. Already, the WFP reports, in the cities of Mazar and Herat, wheat and flour prices are double those of last year, and drinking water is in short supply.

Afghanistan, always dependent on food imports, now will have to import an unprecedented 2.3 million tons of food over the next year, twice what it needed last year. However, it is becoming much more difficult for Afghanistan to import food. Formerly, food had been imported from Pakistan, but,