

Question & Answer

Question: It is noted that the political situation in West Turkistan (Central Asia:-Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan), is in a volatile state, sometimes we find such and such ruler under the mantle of Russia and after a while he rushes toward America ... and so on, can you clarify the current political situation in these republics? Jazaakum Allah Khairun.

Answer: Before getting into the details of the political situation in Central Asia and its volatility, we must be aware of the following matters:

1 - When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, and its former republics seceded, Russia was aware that it is essential to maintain a strong link with these republics, because they are neighboring regions ... essentially she tried to gather them in the so-called "Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)," but many of that association withdrew from it later whereas some did not enter the association at all, such as the three Baltic states ... after that she used the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and CSTO's Rapid Reaction Force and so on...

Russia also used centers of influence that she established in these republics during the era of the former Soviet Union, amongst whom the most notable are:

A – a demographic change created by the Soviet Union, particularly in the Central Asian Republics, wherein a Russian population was introduced and remained in the republics as "Russia's arm " ...

B – Russian bases, which were spread throughout these republics and which were not all withdrawn. So, some bases remain present in the Central Asian Republics and are centers of power and the frontline for Russia.

C - The nuclear and missile tests fields that were conducted in these republics, and Kazakhstan in particular because of its vast area...

D - Some economic ties with those countries, such as gas and oil pipelines...

2 - Although the disintegration of the Soviet Union produced a near-collapse of the Communist Party and excluded it from ruling, in the Central Asian Republic, the heads of the Communist Party remained the rulers, which means that those who were rulers in the era of the Soviet Union continued in government. The aim of this malicious plan is to allow the governments of these republics to keep fighting Islam and the people who work for it, even after the demise of the Soviet Union, out of fear of the effective spread of Islam within these republics, their unification on the basis of Islam, ruling by Islam and performance of Jihad in His path.

3- The disintegration of the Soviet Union was an opportunity that America did not miss. Central Asia, apart from neighboring Russia, shares an extensive border with China, making it a strategic area for America. Accordingly, America begun to spread its agents, institutions, intelligence and above all, its money, in order to secure a foothold in these republics.

Thus, Central Asia is a vital and strategic interest for both Russia and America, and the conflict between them that had eased has now intensified again. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is continual change in the influence and the type of agency of the rulers of this region, in accordance with the strength of influence available to each competitor:

* As for Russia, it has its former supporting factors: the demographic change that has been mentioned previously, let us call them the "Russian community" in these Republics, as well as their former bases and economic ties and so on...

* As for America, she has generous "carrots" on offer to these Republics, i.e. financial assistance, as well as her proposal to them that Russia is no longer a major power that they should be fearful of, and her promise of protection...

* This is from the aspect of an intense conflict between Russia and America in the region.

* However, the other aspect is the enmity of the rulers against Islam and the carriers of Islam, a matter which both parties in the conflict agree with.

In the light of these matters, we will review the political scenario in these Republics:

1 - **Kyrgyzstan:** We know how Bakiyev came to power in 2005 backed by Russia. He then renewed his presidency in the recent elections of 23/7/2009. Russia's support of him was clear, as was America's dissatisfaction with him. The U.S. Embassy issued a statement in Bishkek saying, "The United States shares the concern expressed by many observers regarding the presidential elections and its results. And that, whilst there were some positive aspects of the voting process, the United States has reservations that the elections in the Kyrgyz Republic did not fulfill many democratic requirements." The statement called for a "strict application of the electoral laws during the entire electoral process in accordance with democratic requirement in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan." (France-Press 2/8/2009). In contrast, the Russians congratulated Bakiyev on his re-election and the Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, visited Kyrgyzstan in 31/7/2009 and met with him to congratulate him and declare his support, before Bakiyev's formal inauguration for a second presidential term on 2/8/2009. It was announced that the Russian president's visit to Kyrgyzstan came within the context of the summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in the Kyrgyz city of Cholponata. It was stated in "Russia Today" on 1/8/2009 that "Russian President Medvedev signed on Saturday, 1/8/2009 in Cholponata in Kyrgyzstan, a document on the development and improvement of post-contractual legal basis of bilateral relations, governing the presence of the Russian formations and the presence of the Kyrgyz-Russian additional unit in this country. The document provides for the establishment of a joint training center for Russian and Kyrgyz military." And it was reported on Russia today, "The two presidents agreed on the drafting and signing a special agreement to establish a military base for the rapid reaction forces in the south of Kyrgyzstan for 49 years with a possible extension for another 25 years." It also stated that, "Bakiyev noted that the agreement must be signed before the first of next November and it will determine the entire Russian military presence in the country."

As for why Bakiyev re-extended the lease for the American Manas airbase, after it was threatened with closure- that does not indicate that Bakiyev distanced himself from Russia and shifted to America. Rather this extension was with the permission of the Russia in order to placate America, so that she will not move her followers in Kyrgyzstan against the regime, for they are able to disturb the regime's "comfort" and thus have an adverse effect on the Russian bases in Kyrgyzstan. And so as to clarify this, we will recap the story of the base from the beginning:

Bakiyev had tried to close the American Manas air base in February 2009. The President of Kyrgyzstan, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, announced from Moscow that he will close the Manas base (Reuters 12/2/2009) and he elaborated further by saying: "Over the past three years I personally raised the issue of increasing the rent for the base with senior U.S. officials. I told them that we shall review the terms of our agreement, the prices have changed and Kyrgyzstan is in a difficult financial situation." He added, "They always respond to us; okay 'fine.' They have done so for years. But how long can we wait, we are a sovereign state and we should demand respect." (Reuters 12/2/2009).

It may understood from this that the problem of the Kyrgyz regime is acquiring funds. It may also understood that the Americans did not care for three years, even though Kyrgyzstan was begging them. Kyrgyzstan's parliament -which is under the control of Bakiyev's party- had adopted a resolution to shut down the American base. And it gave the US 180 days to leave. But before the deadline expired, an agreement between the two parties was announced in mid-July 2009. The U.S. embassy in Bishkek issued a statement regarding the agreement, included "The Government of the United States and the Kyrgyz Republic have agreed in their negotiations for the continued use of the Manas Air Base," (Al-Jazeera 15/7/2009). It was reported that the rent rose to \$150 million annually, after it had been 17 million! The truth is it was in the previously it was "17 million basic rent with an additional 133 million as aid, making a total of \$150 million annually." Under the new agreement it has become "the basic rent of 60 million with financial assistance of 90 million, making a total of \$150 million annually." As such nothing actually changed regarding the rent issue, rather it only termed the financial aid and the non-financial aid which was provided to Kyrgyzstan as "rent," instead of the term "aid," so as to preserve the prestige of Kurmanbek as a president of a country that wants to be respected and so that he shows that the state is respected regarding her sovereignty, as he said!! The New York Times 24/7/2009 has stated something similar to what we have said above about the actions of Bakiyev. It stated, "The agreement signed recently by the governments of Kyrgyzstan and the United States to extend the use of the America Manas air base is only a way to save the prestige of the Kyrgyz government in its reversal of its decision to close the base and to increase the annual rent for the base." Russia was behind this and the new agreement was announced after the meeting between US President Obama and Russian President Medvedev in Russia from 6 to 8/7/2009, when Russia agreed to allow US and NATO supplies to pass through the territory of Russia

and her allies. Russia was anxious about its base in Kant, Kyrgyzstan. Her concern was that if she did not settle with America regarding its base, America would work on "color" revolutions, aimed at overthrowing Bakiyev, who protects Russian interests in Kyrgyzstan.

All of this indicates the loyalty of Bakiyev to Russia. Bakiyev's allowing the Americans to continue to use the Manas air base in their operations against the Muslims in Afghanistan is only to satisfy the Americans, so that they do not move to overthrow him, as they did with his predecessor, Askar Akaev. He did so with the consent of the Russians, who want to maintain their presence and influence in Kyrgyzstan, fearing that otherwise America would work on destabilizing him and then overthrowing him.

As for why there is a conflict between Russia and America, it is because of Kyrgyzstan's important strategic location in Central Asia. Its border with China extends for 858 kilometers. If America gained Kyrgyzstan it would become a base for her on the borders of China. Kyrgyzstan is of utmost importance for America in her work against China and the entire region. The Manas base has been of central importance in the war against Muslims in Afghanistan, since 2001 until today, and has a permanent presence of more than 1,000 US troops. The Kyrgyz government does not know anything about what happens in the Manas base, because the agreement states that no inspectors, Kyrgyz observers or anyone else are allowed to enter the base and that there is to be no inspection of any cargo, entering or exiting the US base. The base is far from Kyrgyz control and therefore it is far from the control of the Russians. "Russia Today" stated on 31/7/2009, within the news about Medvedev's visit to Kyrgyzstan and the issue of signing the military agreements with Bakiyev, that, "Kyrgyzstan has an important strategic location, unique in Central Asia and for many years has been marked as the intersection point of the interests of Western countries and Russia." This means that there is a conflict between Russia and the West, led by America within this strategic location. Recently, US General David Petraeus, the commander of US forces, visited three Central Asian Republics, including Kyrgyzstan, the other two being Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Russians reported via the news agency "RIA Novosti" on 20/8/2009 that commented hailed General Petraeus's visit as successful because officials confirmed in the three capitals that they want to increase cooperation with Washington. This visit is just part of the intense American activity in these countries, including Kyrgyzstan, in an attempt to attain and strengthen US presence there. Although the Kyrgyz President Bakiyev did not meet with the US General himself, Petraeus was met by the Kyrgyz Minister of Foreign Affairs. This is despite the fact that Bakiyev is still aware that America is not satisfied with him and has been raising concerns regarding his election. However, he is afraid of American influence upon followers at home and abroad and therefore he wanted to satisfy America. So he concluded the issue of Manas base by allowing America to use the base without changing the basic conditions but only playing with words regard to money to save him and the respect of his country's sovereignty, as he said!

2 - **Uzbekistan:** "volatile" is the most apt term to describe the President of Uzbekistan, Karimov. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, it was quite clear that Karimov started to distance himself from Russia. Russia had formed a joint security organization in 1992 to maintain the cohesion of all the republics of the former Soviet Union, or at least some of them, and then changed its name to the Collective Security Treaty in 2002, similar to the North Atlantic Treaty ... but Karimov has been temperamental towards such organizations. He withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty and joined the GUAM organization which consists of countries of the collapsed Soviet bloc opposed to Russia, such as Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. But he then left the GUAM organization and returned to the Collective Security Treaty, after America and the Western countries demanded to send teams to investigate the Andijan massacre of May 2005, whereas he was supported by Russia and its allies, who have stood by him during the brutal massacres in Andijan and elsewhere ... But then after America closed the subject of massacres and human rights violations, which is tied to US interests, America began contacting him and trying to attract him. Karimov returned to display a suspension of activities with Russians and started to show activity with the Americans and to work with them. The peak of his leaning towards America was when Russia felt that the Collective Security Treaty no longer met her security needs and aspirations of sovereignty and influence. She resorted to what is called the Rapid Reaction Force which entailed a rapid reaction to any threat to Russian influence in the region. But, Uzbekistan stood against it. She did not sign the convention for establishing the Rapid Reaction Force and stood against the deployment of forces in the region of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which includes Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Armenia, and Uzbekistan. The leaders of these countries then decided to establish a rapid reaction force, under another name "rapid deployment," on 4/2/2009. They signed this convention in Moscow on 14/6/2009, but Uzbekistan refrained from signing it, with Karimov providing an excuse that, "this agreement did not specify the tasks of the joint forces." He suggested that the agreement

should stipulate that, "The joint forces only launch in order to repel external aggression and each state of the joint forces shall station only its forces only in its territory." (RIA Novosti 26/8/2009). This indicates that Karimov is aware that this force will be controlled by Russia and that Russian troops will be deployed in the countries mentioned in the Collective Security Treaty, including Uzbekistan. And this force could interfere under any circumstances, allowing Russia to interfere in the territory of the members of this organization, because the tasks were not specified. Therefore, Karimov asked that the forces are deployed only when an attack is external to these countries and nothing else. And also that no troops other than the troops of the participating state are deployed in the territory of each state, i.e. to refuse entry to Russian troops within the Uzbek territory in response to any matter that may threaten Russian influence in Uzbekistan and the region.

Thus, Uzbekistan is currently the opposite of Kyrgyzstan, which agreed to this Convention and allowed the Russians to establish a second base on its territory. Uzbekistan did not participate in the recent exercises of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which ran from 26 August until 15 October 2009. Uzbekistan's behavior is lukewarm such that its membership in this organization is not announced officially. Not only that, but Uzbekistan has objected to the deployment of a second Russian base in Kyrgyzstan on the grounds that it threatens her sovereignty because the base will be deployed near the Uzbek border, in the Fergana Valley. RIA Novosti quoted on 5/8/2009 that Uzbekistan announced in a statement released by the "Gakhon" agency of the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 3.8.2009 that they do not see "the need or feasibility of implementing the plan for the deployment of a Russian military base, in addition to the other Russian base in southern Kyrgyzstan, noting that the deployment of the new base could lead to instability in the region." It was announced in the statement released by the "Gakhon" agency of the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs that: "the implementation of such projects in a complex area, where the borders of three Central Asian countries meet, may give impetus to acceleration in militarization of the region and fuel confrontation between various forms of nationalism and raise radical forces." (Novosti 3/9/2009). All this indicates that in recent times the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan clearly began moving away from Russia and is closer to America. And the indications of this are:

* on 18.8.2009 during his meeting with US General David Petraeus, in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, President Karimov said that "Uzbekistan is ready to extend constructive cooperation with the United States on the basis of the principles of mutual respect and equal partnership." (RIA Novosti Russian 18/8/2009). The US General, David Petraeus, in response said that, "I commend the efforts of Uzbekistan in order to support the stability in Afghanistan and the security in the region," which indicates that Karimov has manifested his desire to return to the Americans and be tied to them. The straw that broke the camel's back in the former relationship between Karimov and the American was his refusal of America's request to allow the US investigators to investigate his massacres in Andijan, which led America to levy sanctions against him. He turned his back upon America, heading back to Russia, his natural support. When the US put the Andijan incident behind her, he returned, seeking America. And recently the US lifted the sanctions against the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan.

* Observing tensions between Uzbekistan and Russia, the US did not miss the opportunity and sought to develop its relations with Uzbekistan. She signed an agreement with Uzbekistan to transport North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) freight from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan. [Source: National Center for Strategic Studies, 04/04/2009]. However, the relations between Uzbekistan and the US administration did not stop there, rather the US administration issued a congratulatory message to Uzbekistan on the occasion of 18th anniversary of its independence. Then Karimov accepted the visit of the US Ambassador in Uzbekistan, Richard Norland. Before that on 18 August, Karimov accepted the visit of the US CENTCOM Chief, General Hal David Petraeus, and they signed a cooperation agreement between the two countries including military programs, training and vocational education.

Thus, Karimov's is temperamental in this respect and his current reality is distancing himself from Russia and drawing closer to America.

3 - **Tajikistan**: the political situation in Tajikistan is similar to the political situation in Kyrgyzstan and President Rakhmanov's loyalty is to Russia and he appreciates the protection of his throne. However, he secures American interests so that they do not stir up trouble against him. Americans have many agents in Tajikistan but until now they can not remove Russian influence. Therefore, America is satisfied with achieving her interests ... at least for the foreseeable future.

The stability of the current President, Rakhmonov, in Tajikistan was achieved with the intervention of Russian troops after a civil war, from 1992 until 1997. He was able to arrive at an agreement to hold elections for a five year presidential term and then hold free elections with the movements which were fighting against him, such as the Popular Movement and the Islamic Renaissance Party. But then Rakhmonov increased his first term to seven years. He then held a referendum on amending the constitution to remain in power until the 2020. When unrest broke out in 2001 in reaction to this amendment, Russia helped him to quell the unrest and secured his throne.

Russia under Putin has strengthened its relations with Rakhmonov. Russia managed to establish a second military base in Tajikistan in August 2008, twenty kilometers from the capital Dushanbe, noting that Russia already has a large military base in Tajikistan established in 1943 called Base No. 201. The Russians have also another station "Ooknu" in Tajikistan to monitor the satellites and the ballistic missiles, which Tajikistan approved in June 2008 to grant to Russia for 49 years. Tajikistan is very important for Russia in strategic terms. Therefore, Russia is holding on to the country and trying to maintain its presence there. So, she supports Rakhmonov regime publicly because he secures all these possibilities for Russia in Tajikistan. Russia is trying to tie Tajikistan economically for control and influence. And Rakhmonov appreciates the Russian assistance that secures and strengthens his rule. Rakhmanov engaged his country in the Collective Security Treaty, tabled by Russia, and agreed to participate in the Rapid Reaction Force led by Russia. Many people in Tajikistan are dependent on remittances from their sons who are working in Russia. In fact these are half a million workers within a total population of seven million. And Tajikistan is also a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which is convened by Russia with Chinese assistance. Recently Russia and China carried military exercises in Tajikistan on 18/4/2009 under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

However, like Bakiyev, Rakhmanov tries not to provoke the United States with the consent of Russia. He secures some of their interests, so that the US does not move against him. Whilst allowing Russian companies to undertake projects up to a value of \$2.5 billion, he has also allowed American, European, as well as Chinese, companies to carry out projects and business in Tajikistan. Rakhmonov has offered America the use of airports in the country ... And recently, on 20.2.2009, he has also allowed the passage of the American supplies through Tajik territory to Afghanistan, using Tajik Railways. That was announced by the Deputy Commander of United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), Vice Admiral Mark Harnitchek, during his visit to Tajikistan, when he said, "We intend to transport between fifty to two hundred containers a week from Uzbekistan to Tajikistan and then onto Afghanistan. Tajikistan is very important because it is the closest to our bases." (Al-Jazeera 20/2/2009). And all of this is because Rakhmonov aware that America has political forces in Tajikistan that could affect his rule. If he did not bow to American interests in his country, America can move her followers against him intensively and effectively.

It is worth mentioning that there is a somewhat popular political movement in Tajikistan calling for disengagement with Russia and there are forces in the army and in the government calling for the same thing. Rakhmonov is aware of this, therefore he secures United States interests in exchange for her silence. He also is placating the popular sentiment against Russia. This is why he made some public gestures which appear as if he is distancing himself from Russia. He publically called the commander of Tajik Border Guards for the withdrawal of Russian troops from his country. He stopped the broadcast of Russian language channels in Tajikistan and made the Tajik language the official language instead of Russian, even though this action has irked Russia. Yet Rakhmonov is still closer to Russia, as explained previously.

Tajikistan is strategically important due to its neighboring Afghanistan. Its mountains in the southern eastern part are continuous with the mountains of Afghanistan. The length of its shared border with Afghanistan is about 1206 km, whilst it shares a border with China of around 414 kilometers. In this regard by being close to China, it is as important as Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, America will not overlook Tajikistan and is expected to gain her at any available opportunity.

4 - **Turkmenistan:** under the former President Saparmurat Niyazov, it was loyal to Russia and most of her policies were directed by Russia. However, the current President, Gurbanguly Berdi Muhamedow, who came to power after Niyazov in December 2006, has implemented a policy which is more open to the West and involves drawing closer to the West in general and America in particular. In November 2007, he hosted a summit between US and European officials over the energy sector, with the directors of BP and Chevron,

alongside Russian companies. He wanted to make clear to them that he wants to deal with everyone. This is also what emerged from a number of agreements made with different parties:

* In May 2007, Russia signed an agreement with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to build a new pipeline that keeps the gas of Central Asia under the control of her company Gazprom, by monopolizing the export of most of the gas from Turkmenistan. Putin considered this as a victory for Russia, declaring, "This agreement represents a victory for Russia. It allows Russia to buy gas from Turkmenistan at a price less than the market price." (BBC 17/5/2007). The former Turkmen president Niyazov remained president for two decades. He ensured exclusive Russian monopoly over the gas of the country and prevented access to other parties. Therefore, as an outcome of previous agreements, Russia currently purchases 90% of Turkmen gas, equivalent to about 50 billion cubic meters annually. She buys at a rate of \$100 per 1000 cubic meters of gas and sells it to Europe for up to \$250 and more than that during winter, up to \$345. Whilst at the time of Niyazov, Russia used to buy at \$35, until prices were raised to \$70 and then to \$100, allowing Russia to gain huge profits from the gas of the Muslims in Turkmenistan. Although prices have been increased, Russia still make huge profits on these gas resources.

* In contrast, Muhamedow agreed in principle to the build of a gas pipeline in the Caspian Sea, according to a project supported by the United States which is intended to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian gas supplies. An agreement was recently signed by the Americans and Europeans in Turkey regarding the Nabucco (Nebuchadnezzar) gas pipeline. So, gas will be piped from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan and then into the Nabucco pipeline, through Turkey and onto Europe. An unnamed US official was quoted by Reuters on 24/4/2009 as saying, "Turkmenistan is the other big potential supplier to the Nabucco project which is supported by the European Union. But Turkmenistan needs to make tangible advances regarding implementation."

* And China is active in this region. Chinese President, Hu Jintao, visited Turkmenistan in April 2006 under former President Niyazov, who had a strong relationship and alliance with Russia and China. The Chinese president then promised during the visit to buy 30 billion cubic meters of gas annually from Turkmenistan. China has extended a gas pipeline from the Amu Darya River in the east of Turkmenistan to reach China. It has been recently announced, on 30/8/2009, that China will undertake a \$3 billion development of a gas field in Turkmenistan using the PetroChina company. China has loaned Turkmenistan hundreds of millions of dollars to assist her in the development of its industrial ambitions because of Turkmenistan's great wealth. The size of Turkmenistan's gas production in 2006 was 62. 2 billion cubic meters annually. It will rise to 120 billion cubic meters per annum by 2010.

* The America and European incentive to Turkmenistan is that it would sell its own gas directly to Europe at current prices through the Nabucco pipeline, which will be ready for use in 2014. So, the profit will be hers and not Russia's. This is what inclines Turkmenistan to shift to America and the West. Being a small nation, Turkmenistan will not be able to blackmail or cajole Europe as Russia does. Instead, Turkmenistan will be at the mercy of America and Europe after the implementation of the Caspian gas pipeline. Although the Nabucco pipeline will bring gas from several countries, America will have the upper hand when it controls the sources of gas. Turkmenistan has large gas reserves of up to 100 trillion cubic meters and she is the most important and largest gas producer, not just regionally but globally. In addition, Turkmenistan has significant oil reserves, estimated to be as much as 80 billion barrels. Presently, although the oil is currently not extracted in large quantities, its production not exceeding 200,000 barrels a day, they are planning to reach 2 million barrels a day in the future.

Part of the oil supply for America's military equipment in Afghanistan comes from Turkmenistan. Besides the "Trans-Afghanistan" gas pipeline transfers 1,1 billion cubic meters a year from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan. So, Turkmenistan also became important for America in this regard, besides from America's ambition to control all the oil and gas reserves, not just of Turkmenistan, but the entire world, in order to maintain her dominance and control so as to retain her position as the sole global superpower, as well as to reduce or eliminate the impact of other major powers, such as Russia, and achieve huge profits in the energy sector. For this purpose, America has focused on Turkmenistan, which possesses huge oil and gas reserves upon which Russia depends, in order to take it entirely from Russia or control the lion's share of it. So, she will tightly control Turkmenistan through its imports and exports. Consequently, she will supply gas to Europe instead of Russia, thereby keeping Europe at her mercy and under her hegemony, whilst both weakening Russia's standing and

her alliance with Europe. The current allure of Turkmenistan lies in the struggle over her gas wealth, though in the future her oil will play the major role in the struggle.

Despite all of this, Turkmenistan still has great economic ties with Russia that she has not been able to remove as yet. The United States hovers over her to seize her and take her out of this sphere of Russian influence. Russia is aware of this and so when Turkmenistan called for a raise in gas prices to Russia, Russia responded immediately out of fear that Turkmenistan may move in a direction other than dealing with her, turning to American and Western assistance against Russia. The Nabucco project will distance Russia from Turkmenistan's gas supply to Europe, taking Turkmenistan out of the sphere of Russian influence. It should be noted that Turkmenistan is neither a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization nor the Rapid Reaction Force nor the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and there is no Russian military base in Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan is a subject of attention for Russia, America and the West, and to some extent by China, primarily from an economic aspect, due to her vast oil and gas wealth

5 - **Kazakhstan:** Kazakhstan is the largest Central Asian Republic with an area of 2.7 million square km, although the population is low considering the area, estimated at 15 to 17 million. It was important for Russia in that nuclear tests were conducted there. In fact, Russia has conducted around five hundred nuclear tests at the Semipalatinsk Test Site, Kazakhstan. On 29/9/2009, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed for closure of the test site. Kazakhstan agreed to a ban on nuclear testing in 24/9/2009. America has worked to strengthen its relationship due to Kazakhstan's geo-strategic importance and oil and gas wealth. The oil wealth is estimated at 100 billion barrels. Currently, she produces more than one million barrels a day and production is expected to rise in 2015 to 2.5 million barrels per day. The gas reserves total approximately 150 trillion cubic meters, which makes the Western colonial powers led by America drool over this wealth and compels them to extend their influence within this large, wealthy Islamic country. Therefore, Kazakhstan's link to America became strong and the Kazakh president granted US companies rights to invest in oil, gas and other sectors such that American companies became the main investors in the country's oil and gas. Dick Cheney, who later was to become US Vice-President, worked in the mid-nineties of the last century in the advisory board for Kazakhstan oil and struck deals for American companies, including a deal in favor of Chevron, in which Condoleezza Rice was working in management at the time. The relationship culminated with the June 2006 visit by Kazakh President Nazarbayev to America to meet President George W. Bush. It was stated in the joint statement they issued, "The partnership between the two countries in the energy field will help American companies to explore the large reserves of oil and gas in Kazakhstan and the Caspian region." (BBC. 30/6/2006). Kazakhstan approved in February 2009 permission for America to transport equipment and supplies by road, through the Kazakh territory to the US military and NATO forces that are fighting Muslims in Afghanistan. The Russian Chief of Staff, Nicolas Makarov, at the end of last year revealed, "schemes of Washington for the establishment of US military bases in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan." ("Middle East" 18/12/2009). She has shares a long border with Russia of 6846 km, and it shares a border of 1533 km with China. It has the longest coast on the Caspian Sea, with a length of 1894 km. As such it has strategic and economic importance for America. It has been engaged in a Peace Partnership with NATO. It is considered the United States' biggest ally in Central Asia.

In addition, it is one of the states bordering the Caspian Sea. It is rich in fish, particularly sturgeon fish (caviar fish) of which it produces \$400 million worth annually for Russia. It contains huge oil reserves of 200 billion barrels and gas reserves of 600 trillion cubic meters, over which the Western states and America drool. This closed sea is a strategic basin with oil and gas economic riches.

However, Russia has centers of influence in Kazakhstan and has a Russian space launch site there. Therefore Russia has strong ties with it. Russia has re-settled so many Russians there that it has the highest percentage of Russians in any Central Asian Republic, where the percentage has risen from 30% to 40%. The impact is that their nationalist and Orthodox religious ties remain with their native Russia, though the highest percentage is of Muslims at more than 60%.

Recently, Kazakhstan has shown a rapprochement with Russia, a matter to which Russia attaches a high priority as well. Russia made Kazakhstan alongside China as one of the founders of SCO. Kazakhstan is a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization led by Russia and the Eurasia economic grouping which was established in 2000 ... She signed to participate in the Rapid Reaction Force whose inception was announced by Russia. China is also working to strengthen ties and has extended terms for a 1240km oil pipeline from Kazakhstan to provide for China's growing oil needs.

Thus, Nazarbayev wants to keep his relationship with Russia and China strong. He expressed his policy once by saying, "If we talked about projects to circumvent the East or the West I answer that we and Turkmenistan have a pragmatic approach" (Russian Interfax 17/5/2007). This means that he sets his policy according to the dictates of reality and immediate interest. Therefore, despite his alliance with America which amounts to close ties and despite what has been leaked recently that the US has plans to establish military bases as well as granting of the Americans the lion's share in oil and gas reserve investment ... in spite of all that, Nazarbayev does not want to disrupt strong relations with Russia so that his regime is not threatened.

In summary, Russia is trying to maintain and strengthen its influence in the Central Asian Republics using various ways and means, whether through regional treaties such as the Commonwealth of Independent States which was established by Russia after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the Collective Security Treaty, the Rapid Reaction Force or through bilateral treaties and agreements with each state separately and establishing military bases in each and every one of them, so as to strengthen its influence in these countries and to prevent them from slipping out of her hands. She is also leaning on China regionally and internationally through what is known as the Shanghai Treaty Organization, as well as engaging China in the Central Asian Republics. This is all besides from treaties and economic projects ... and the other centers of influence that were set up by the former Soviet Union...

Also, America uses financial aid as a temptation for the Central Asian Republics, in addition to drawing the attention of these states to her strong followers which can stir up unrest within them ... as such she is using the carrot and the stick. She is also working on belittling Russia before the eyes of the Central Asian Republics and other countries in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe, so that none shall fear her and she even encourages them to revolt and escape from her control. US Vice President, Joe Biden, said after his tour in Georgia and Ukraine, "Russia is nothing more than a junior partner of the United States after the loss of her past strategic role." And he said, "The weakness of the Russian economy will compel Moscow to make concessions to the West, in particular the abandonment of attempts to dominate the former Soviet states, and to agree to reduce its nuclear capabilities." (Wall Street Journal 26/7/2009) and this explains the stance of the Central Asian regimes in Central Asia. They recognize the Russian weakness before the Americans, and so not only try to please the Americans, they try to draw close to America.

And the result of this is a volatile conflict in Central Asia, the political reality of which can be described briefly as follows:

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are the principal states that are loyal to Russia, whilst assuring American interests so as not to provoke America by standing in her way, in order to preserve the stability of the political situation in the two countries, which can be disturbed if America moved its followers in both countries strongly and actively.

Uzbekistan is currently leaning in favor of America, taking into account the volatile mood of Karimov.

As in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, they are the arena of a contest, politically and economically with America and Russia and to some extent with China economically.

But what is really painful is that all the conflicting parties and competitors, as well as the local rulers, are fighting Islam and its workers and they all abuse the wealth of the Muslims of Central Asia. So the enemies of Islam become rich from Central Asia, whilst the general masses in Central Asia live a miserable existence.

Central Asia has an important location and its enormous wealth will return to the Muslims, inshAllah, when their Khilafah will be established at the hands of the workers for Islam, and that day is not far away from us, inshAllah. And then the believers will rejoice in Allah's victory.

29 Ramadan 1430 H

19.9.2009