

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

This spring has so far witnessed a number of events which will prove to have major implications for the security situation and the geo-political alignments in Eurasia. Russia has stepped up its activity in Central Asia, especially in the energy sector but also through an expanded military presence. The European Union has under Germany's presidency for the first time demonstrated intent to take the strategic significance of Central Asia seriously. Meanwhile, the U.S.' deployment at Manas airport in Kyrgyzstan is looking increasingly uncertain after a fatal shooting of a Kyrgyz citizen combined with a Kyrgyz domestic political opinion questioning a continued U.S. presence. China has maintained a relatively low profile in the past months and most of its attention seems focused on infrastructural development. This is both in the energy sector with the planned China-Uzbekistan pipeline as well as in the further development of the Asia-Europe transport corridor via Xinjiang and Central Asia.

Despite the significance of Central Asia, the world's attention is on Afghanistan. The country is spiraling downwards in radicalism and 2007 increasingly appears to be the make-or-break year for this country's distressing development; either the Taliban will continue its offensive and further adapt the tactics used by insurgents in Iraq or the ISAF will be able to counter this before it reaches its tipping point. As Thomas Johnson argues in his article in this issue, what seems to be the key to win back the country is to win back the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. This needs to be complemented by a troop surge. Heavy investments in infrastructure and institution building may also be required to give Afghanistan tools to manage its own future. However, even if this could be accomplished, the U.S. and NATO's mission in Afghanistan is increasingly becoming more and more dependent on Pakistan's stability. Musharraf's increasingly fragile position, his dependency on the radical Muttahida Majles-e-Amal, and the upcoming general elections will have major implications for stability in the region, and indeed for Afghanistan's and Pakistan's future.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has so far had limited success in acting as a security provider for the region and it is becoming increasingly evident that a continued NATO and U.S. presence in the region is crucial. Even if SCO has stepped up its activity in both the economic field, in cooperation with the CSTO, and its engagement with Pakistan, India, Iran, Mongolia, and Afghanistan, there is little in way of effective cooperation as of today. This spring has witnessed a number of exercises: the recent "Issyk Kul Anti-Terror-2007"

exercise in Kyrgyzstan in May and the CSTO's Rubezh 2007 exercise in March being two examples. An upcoming major event is the SCO's anti-terrorist exercises named Peace Mission 2007, which will take place in Russia's Chelyabinsk region. Judging by the nature of the last large-scale exercise Peace Mission 2005, it is likely that the upcoming exercise will be another demonstration of power-politics by Russia and China. Considering the deterioration of relations between Russia and the U.S. over the missile shield, as well as Russia and Europe over energy, this exercise will likely be interpreted as a further step away from the West by Russia. The results of the upcoming SCO heads of state summit in July will also be watched closely by Western observers.

Moreover, in end of June the German presidency of the European Union will present its conclusions and launch the EU's new Central Asia Strategy for 2007-2013. Although it is unclear how much influence Germany, the one power in Europe with the most evident interests in Central Asia, has had in the formulation of this, it is clear that Europe has realized its energy vulnerabilities and the importance of Central Asia and the Caspian in meeting these needs. The announcement in May that Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan have agreed to build a pipeline along the Caspian coast is clearly not in the interest of Europe's future energy security since additional Central Asian energy resources will be channeled through Russia. It may even be argued that the Central Asian states themselves may not have an interest in continued dependency on Russia for their energy sales. It remains to be seen whether the Western backed trans-Caspian pipeline eventually will be built and this will also be an indicator as to the future direction of Central Asian and Caspian supplies, and possibly even these states' political alignments.

The authors to this issue will explore these issues further and we trust that you will find their arguments interesting. Considering the importance of the upcoming SCO summit this summer we invite you to submit contributions to the August 2007 issue analyzing the outcomes of this meeting. Article submissions can be sent to me at nswanstrom@silkroadstudies.org.

Finally, on behalf of the CEF team we hope you will enjoy your read.

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