

Uzbekistan denies report on use of its territory

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, OCT. 12. Uzbekistan has denied an Indian media report that the U.S. may launch its commandos operation in Afghanistan from its territory. Government sources in Tashkent told the Itar-Tass news agency that Uzbekistan had only opened its airspace and one airfield for humanitarian and search-and-rescue operations.

The sources quoted the Uzbek President, Mr. Islam Karimov, as saying that "no combat land operations against Afghanistan will be allowed from the territory of Uzbekistan." He also ruled out any bombing raids from Uzbekistan. Quoting unofficial reports, Itar-Tass said a team of U.S. Air Force technicians was at Khanabad to prepare the airfield for receiving American transport planes.

A protocol signed by Uzbekistan and the U.S. on the terms of American military presence in the Central Asian republic expressly forbids the use of the Khanabad airfield for conducting military operations in Afghanistan. The document, excerpts from which were read in the Russian Parliament on Thursday, provides for the deployment of U.S. technical support personnel who will service aircraft and helicopters that will fly humanitarian and rescue missions only.

Klebanov to discuss defence deals

The Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Ilya Klebanov, who is arriving in New Delhi on October 14 on a three-day visit, will hold substantive discussions on the ongoing and new defence deals as co-chairman of the Indo-

Russian Commission on military-technical cooperation.

"Indo-Russian collaboration in the military-technical sphere is deeper and closer than America's ties even with many NATO allies," Dr. Alexander Vaskin of the Russian-Indian Security Forum said.

The expert believes that the new war on terrorism will whet India's interest in air-defence and anti-terrorist weapons. Russia's offer to design and build an integrated air defence system for India that will include elements from both countries is expected to be discussed during Mr. Klebanov's visit.

Russia can also offer India a range of anti-terrorist gear such as its latest Degtyarov sniper rifles, portable grenade-launchers, pilotless reconnaissance 'Pchela' (Bee) planes and various bullet-proof vests, which have all proved

their worthiness in Chechnya.

During Mr. Klebanov's visit, both sides are expected to finalise a contract for Smerch Multiple Rocket Launchers, a far more powerful weapon than the Grad launchers available with the Indian Army.

The acquisition of an Advanced Jet Trainer for the Indian Air Force is also likely to be discussed at the Indo-Russian talks, with the Russian side offering India a choice of the MiG-AT and Yak-130 trainers.

On the eve of Mr. Klebanov's visit, the two sides reported progress on the purchase of the Admiral Gorshkov aircraft carrier, agreeing on the technical parameters of the carrier refit. A protocol signed in St. Petersburg on October 10 opens the way to price negotiations likely to get underway in December.

THE HINDU

10 OCT 1999

Central Asia chance to forge ties with West

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Dushanbe, Sept. 25 (Reuters): Russia has handed the Central Asian states a chance to forge independent identities on the world stage by giving them a green light to offer practical support to US military action in neighbouring Afghanistan.

The ex-Soviet republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan remain little known in the West despite a decade of independence. Russia, which views them as strategic assets, is their largest trading partner and guarantor of security.

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday ended days of speculation on whether he would seek to block US involvement in the region by saying he was in "complete mutual agreement" with Central Asian states on providing limited support.

This opportunity to help Washington, including giving the Americans the possible use of air bases north of Afghanistan, gives the states a chance to establish warm ties with the world's only superpower without incurring a Russian backlash.

The United States is seeking broad support as it prepares to attack Afghanistan to find Osama bin Laden, "guest" of the ruling radical Islamic Taliban militia and prime suspect in the September 11 aircraft attacks in New York and Washington. The Presidents of the three ex-Soviet states which border Afghanistan have all already expressed outrage at the attacks.

Now they have been allowed to offer more than words. Putin said Russia was ready to offer airspace to US planes carrying humanitarian aid.

Troops in Tajikistan

Tajikistan has the longest border of the three with Afghanistan, stretching 1,300 km. It is also the only one directly dependent on the Russian military. Chronically weakened by a 1992-1997 civil war, Tajikistan relies on 6,000 troops of Russia's 201st motorised division and a further 11,000 Russian border guards for its defence.

Russia and Tajikistan signed an agreement in 1999 for Russia to build a military base there, but it has not yet done so. Russian defence minister Sergei Ivanov said today that Tajikistan may offer the United States use of the country's main airport in Dushanbe, although Tajik officials would not comment immediately.

Tajikistan could also offer the United States use of the southern air bases of Kulyab and Kurgan-Tyube. Even before Putin's speech yesterday, Tajik President Imomali Rakhmonov had expressed "our readiness to cooperate with the world community, including the government of the United States."

Uzbek airbases

Uzbekistan's authoritarian president, Islam Karimov, was quick to say: "Uzbekistan is ready to consider any question with the United States on fighting international terrorism."

Since then, airport sources have told Reuters that two US military transport planes landed at Tashkent airport last Friday and took off two-and-a-half-hours later. Neither Uzbek nor US officials have confirmed this. But Tashkent airport is the best equipped in Central Asia, and there is a separate military air base, Kuzel, in the capital.

With another two bases in the south, Kakaidi and Karchi-Khanabad, both capable of taking heavy aircraft and both used in the Soviet Union's own ill-fated 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan has a lot to offer the United States.

Neutral Turkmenistan

Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov said on television yesterday that his country, which has sought to style itself a neutral state in the volatile region, was ready to offer the use of air corridors to US planes carrying humanitarian aid.

"They have asked us to transit across our territory humanitarian cargoes of flour and other things, and I have given my agreement," Niyazov said after speaking to both Putin and US secretary of state Colin Powell.

THE TELEGRAPH

20 SEP 2001

Russia fears refugee influx into Central Asia

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By Atul Aneja

MOSCOW, SEPT. 24. Within days after his talks with the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, the Russian National Security Adviser, Mr. Vladimir Rushailo, headed for the barren divide that separates the Central Asian Republic of Tajikistan from Afghanistan.

From a helicopter, Mr. Rushailo and Tajikistan's President, Mr. Emomaly Rakhmonov, grimly surveyed key areas of the 1,500 km long border with Afghanistan from where a flood of refugees could descend if the U.S. wages a war with the Taliban.

If this happened it could destabilise the Central Asian region. Central Asia has been Russia's backyard since the late 19th century after a wave of Tsarist expansionism swept through the region and brought Moscow to the gates of Afghanistan.

Today, Central Asia is also its soft underbelly. Moscow perceives the destabilisation of Central Asia a threat to its national security. Aware of the necessity of a Central Asian buffer between Afghanistan and mainland Russia, Moscow has deployed 30,000 of its troops in Tajikistan. Tajikistan forms Moscow's first and foremost defence line. Its importance is evident as its next line of resistance has been positioned much deeper on the mainland.

Russia fears that refugees from Afghanistan can pour into Central Asia, not only through the Tajikistan border, but also from the 744 km-porous frontier between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan.

Its worries have been heightened as Turkmenistan is showing

no signs that it would intervene to stem the flow of refugees. Russia's apprehension about refugee flow is not just related to economic matters. Its concerns are political as it knows that a large number of those who arrive have been radicalised in Afghanistan and have links with simmering pro-Taliban Islamic movements active in Central Asia.

For instance, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which has intruded into Ferghana Valley, has well-established links with the Taliban. Led by Namangani, the IMU launched a spectacular attack to assassinate Uzbek President, Mr. Islam Karimov, last year.

The presence of refugees, many of whom are also likely to be armed, can greatly extend the sweep of radical Islamic movement in Central Asia, threaten the secular but mostly authoritarian regimes in these countries and gravely destabilise the region.

Russia also fears a political vacuum in the region if it looks the other way. Lack of activism on its part could result in the entrenchment of the U.S. in the area. There are several indications now that the U.S. may be inclined to launch an assault on the Taliban from Central Asia and possibly from Pakistan.

There have also been reports that the U.S. is seeking military bases, especially in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Russia, therefore, now wants to play a leading role in the campaign to dislodge the Taliban.

In fact, Moscow along with Tehran and New Delhi wants the Taliban Opposition, represented under the umbrella organisation,

the Northern Alliance, over which they have a considerable hold, revived. Once the Northern Alliance is rolled in, the U.S.-led coalition can complement its forays from southern Afghanistan. Russian diplomacy is currently in an overdrive to convince the U.S. to go ahead with the broad parameters of the plan.

In attempting to do so, Moscow has two cards up its sleeve. It still has the best intelligence on Afghanistan and can demand some price for sharing it. Russia also can make a solid contribution in consolidating an anti-terrorist coalition. It is positioned well to draw the Chinese into the campaign.

It also has special ties with Iran, which it had supported at a time when the U.S. attempt to isolate Teheran was pronounced.

U.S. reschedules Pak. debt

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

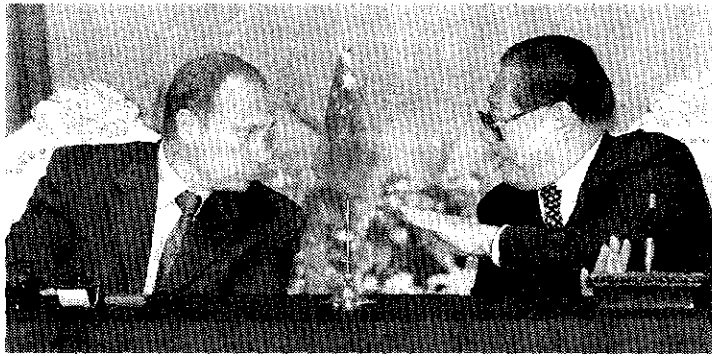
ISLAMABAD, SEPT. 24. Pakistan and the U.S. today signed an agreement here to reschedule a \$379 million government-to-government debt Pakistan owes the U.S.

The agreement, between the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, Ms. Windy J. Chamberlin, and top Pakistan Finance Ministry officials, is in line with the general agreement on debt rescheduling for Pakistan reached by Paris Club members in January this year.

It is significant that the agreement comes in the context of Pakistan's decision to side with the U.S. in its fight against Osama bin Laden and the Taliban.

THE HINDU

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The Chinese President, Mr. Jiang Zemin, gestures while talking to the Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin (left), during the signing of a declaration by the now "Shanghai Six" summit in Shanghai, on Friday. — AFP

Shanghai group pact to combat terrorism

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, JUNE 15. China, Russia and four Central Asian Republics today formally launched the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) in Shanghai today as the six nations reiterated their support to the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.

Indicating the importance they attached to fighting the "three forces", the SCO Heads of State signed a "pact" to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism. While the text of the pact was not immediately available, *People's Daily Online* reported that it stipulated the "specific way and procedure of cooperation" among the six countries to combat the "three forces". It also defined "terrorism, separatism and extremism".

"The six countries will join hands to crack down on the three forces, which they say are threatening the territorial integrity and security of the six countries and their political, economic and social stability," the official Chinese newspaper said. "The signing of the Shanghai pact had laid the legal foundation for jointly cracking down on terrorism, separatism and extremism and reflects the firm determination of the six States on safeguarding regional stability," the Chinese President, Mr. Jiang Zemin, was quoted as saying at a press conference in Shanghai.

A communique issued by the Heads of State of China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan stated that measures must be taken to expedite the setting up of an anti-terrorism centre in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan). On the ABM Treaty

(a U.S.-Russia bilateral treaty which the Bush administration wants to abrogate in its push towards missile defence), reports from Shanghai said SCO Defence Ministers declared it to be the "cornerstone of global stability and disarmament".

The Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister, Mr. Zhang Deugang, was quoted as saying that SCO leaders were united in their opposition to the anti-missile shield plans of the U.S. "On missile defence they agreed it would have a negative impact on the safeguarding of world strategic balance and security," Mr. Zhang told presspersons after the summit. The communique issued by the SCO Heads of State said they had discussed the current international situation and "unanimously held" that the formation of the SCO would "help promote the multi-polarisation of the world and democratisation of international relations".

"They (the SCO leaders) expressed their willingness to make active efforts to strengthen global and regional strategic stability, maintain and further perfect the systems of arms control and disarmament treaties," it said. "As proposed by Kazakhstan, the SCO will hold its firm summit of Heads of Government of member-countries in mid-September 2001. The Heads of State agree that the Foreign and Defence Ministers of the SCO member-countries will hold annual meetings to strengthen and expand their co-operation on major international and regional issues, first and foremost on issues concerning security and stability in Central Asia," the release said.

RUSSIA'S SOFT UNDERBELLY ^{x19-12}

RUSSIA'S ATTEMPTS TO rig up a regional grouping that can help stem the tide of Islamic fundamentalism in the neighbourhood appear to be meeting with modest success. Mr. Vladimir Putin, who came to the Presidency riding a wave of popular support for ordering a massive military operation against the Islamic rebels in the breakaway republic of Chechnya, has stepped up the drive to evolve a coalition with the former Soviet republics to fight the threat. Most of these republics which won their independence when the Soviet Union broke up more than a decade ago have been receptive to the idea of a broad-based coalition but each has its own reservations, arising from particular domestic situations. Moscow's efforts acquired a measure of urgency and desperation when the Taliban seized control of most of Afghanistan, the southern gateway to Central Asia, and threatened to export its version of fundamentalist extremism. This has proved no empty threat in a region that is in a state of extreme flux following the end of the Cold War. The interplay of forces has immense potential for change, positive and extremely negative as well.

Late last year, Russia and five of the Central Asian Republics signed a collective security treaty at a summit at which the blueprint for a rapid action mobile force for the region took shape. The five — Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus and Armenia — and Russia have just renewed their resolve to hasten the formation of a security alliance. Save Moscow, however, the other members have neither the resources nor the political strength at home to contribute to the peace force, which can be activated at short notice in case a member-nation is threatened with invasion. Among the vulnerable are Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, both of which are just recovering from a summer of violent disturbances sparked by Islamic extremists.

More dependent on any peace force is Tajikistan which has a 1,200 km border with Afghanistan that has become uncontrollable and is a source of illegal drugs, weapons and, even more disastrously, militant Islam. A civil war in the country was the cause of regional instability and Moscow, which seized the opportunity, has now a powerful military presence as part of the effort to present a joint front.

A Central Asian coalition for peace, if it does evolve, will be of immense value to India in its own fight against fundamentalist extremism. But the obstacles are formidable and are inherent in a region that has for centuries suffered because of its geographical location. Russia's interest in stability derives from its experiences in some of the breakaway republics such as Chechnya and its neighbour Daghestan. Mr. Putin has been attempting to tighten Moscow's grip on the remote provinces, especially the non-Russian ethnic republics. The strategically vital north Caucasus has in fact always been the soft underbelly of the Russian empire. A combination of ethnic rivalry, religious extremism and guerilla infiltration have in recent years compounded the worries of distant Moscow. Mr. Putin is quietly retrieving the ground lost under his flamboyant predecessor, though he may have no illusion that his country can return to its former status as a superpower. He chose to ignore all the shrill noises that the West made over his hardline policy on Chechnya, declaring at the millennium summit of the United Nations that "erecting a reliable barrier in the way of the evil of terrorism is our common task". If six months ago he was seriously concerned over the degree of closeness that the U.S. and China had been able to achieve under Mr. Bill Clinton, he must be breathing easy now as he watches the standoff over a mid-air collision.

THE HINDU

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Russia presses for joint force

By Vladimir Radyuhin

Central Asia
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MOSCOW, APRIL 9. Russia is stepping up pressure on its allies among former Soviet republics to establish coalition forces in Central Asia to counter the growing threat of Islamic insurgency in the region.

The National Security Council chief, Mr. Vladimir Rushailo, on Monday called for intensifying efforts to form a regional security force describing it as a key element in the broader system of collective security being formed under the Collective Security Treaty. Mr. Rushailo discussed the plan with Russian General Valery Nikolayenko, Secretary General of the Collective Security Council, who has just returned to Moscow after computer-simulated war games in Central Asia codenamed Southern Shield.

A blueprint for a joint mobile force in Central Asia was approved by the six members of the Collective Security Treaty — Russia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus and Armenia last October at a summit in Bishkek,

capital of Kyrgyzstan. The force, modelled after the Eurocorps recently formed in Europe, should comprise 70,000 to 80,000 troops which in peacetime will be deployed in their respective countries, ready to be rushed to any member-State at its request to deal with a possible insurgency or aggression.

However, the plan has so far made little headway as Russia's allies are reluctant to commit troops and money to the project. Moreover, Uzbekistan, which together with Kyrgyzstan fell victim to Islamic insurgencies last summer, has refused to take part in the proposed force and walked out of the Collective Security Treaty last year. The Russian plan will again be discussed at a meeting of the Collective Security Council next month in Yerevan, capital of Armenia, Gen. Nikolayev said.

The strength and command structures of collective rapid deployment forces have already been agreed upon, said Gen. Viktor Prudnikov, Russian com-

mander the Southern Shield war games.

Russia is anxious to have the collective forces in place by the time Islamic militants, based in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, may launch new incursions into neighbouring newly formed states of Central Asia.

"We foresee a worsening of the situation in Central Asia and increasingly frequent incursions by groups of terrorists in this region," the RIA news agency quoted Gen. Prudnikov as saying.

Moscow appears ready to supply the bulk of the planned coalition forces for Central Asia. The Russian General Staff earlier this year proposed deploying a 50,000-strong Russian contingent in the region. An unnamed high-ranking military official said last month that 3,000 Russian paratroopers would soon be sent to Tajikistan to form the backbone of future mobile forces in the republic and beef up a motorised army division and several detachments of border guards already there.

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