



EURASIA SECURITY WATCH

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Related Categories: Central Asia

TAJIKISTAN FLEXES ITS MILITARY MUSCLE...

As temperatures climb in Central Asia, drug traffickers and the Taliban have begun to navigate the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border with increasing frequency - and regional states are responding in kind. In mid-March, Tajikistan's military held large-scale border exercises involving 50,000 Tajik soldiers and 2,000 troops from Russia. The drills, which took place close to the country's shared border with Afghanistan, are intended to enhance local response capabilities as a way of deterring Afghan militants from crossing into sovereign Tajik territory. (*Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, March 15, 2016; *Military.com*, March 15, 2016)

...AND STEPS UP RELIGIOUS OVERSIGHT

The Tajik government's grip on the practice of Islam within the country continues to tighten. As part of measures intended to counter extremist religious activity, the office of the mayor of Dushanbe, the national capital, has ordered the installation of security cameras and metal detectors to "track the contingent praying at the mosque [and] to identify among believers potential followers of Salafism." Meanwhile, a nationwide effort is also underway to increase governmental oversight of the teaching and interpretation of Islam in the country's classrooms through steps such as more invasive shaping of curricula — all aimed at "increasing religious knowledge" and thereby inoculating the country's youth against radical ideas. (*Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, April 5, 2016; *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, April 5, 2016)

WARGAMING THE FIGHT AGAINST THE ISLAMIC STATE

The Collective Security Treaty Organization, one of the region's most important political and security groupings, has launched a massive new military exercise to prepare to jointly combat the Islamic State terrorist group. The large-scale drills brought together 1,500 soldiers from Tajikistan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia for a four-day exercise held outside the Tajik capital of Dushanbe and designed to simulate a coordinated response to an ISIS incursion into the region. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 22, 2016)

FEAR AND LOATHING IN ASTANA

Kazakhstan's government has deployed security detachments to detain hundreds of protesters, reporters and demonstrators in Astana and other cities throughout the country as a means of heading off national unrest. The move marks the culmination of weeks of unrest engendered by controversial land reform proposals which would facilitate the sale of farmland and encouraging long-term leases by foreign investors in the largely-agrarian country. More than 1,000 activists and demonstrators have been detained by government forces so far as part of an official effort to head off rallies across the country in opposition to the land law changes. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 21, 2016)

[EDITORS' NOTE: The state actions are a culmination of growing governmental concern over the destabilizing potential of the unrest. On May 1st, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev used the occasion of a high-profile national address to warn his countrymen that continued domestic unrest could lead to an unraveling of Kazakhstan's economic and political trajectory in a manner akin to that which took place in Ukraine in 2014. "Ukraine, the second-biggest ex-Soviet state, today has an economy which is half the size of Kazakhstan's," Nazarbaev warned in a speech on the country's National Unity Day holiday.]