



## EURASIA SECURITY WATCH

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of  
Security in the Post-Soviet Space

# Eurasia Security Watch: No. 360

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**Related Categories:** Central Asia; China; Middle East

### CHINA INVESTS IN TAJIK SECURITY

Dushanbe and Beijing are deepening their counterterrorism cooperation. In late October, Tajikistan began joint anti-terror drills with China near its common border with Afghanistan. The four-day maneuvers appear to have been initiated at China's urging, and reflect Beijing's increasingly active security role in the "post-Soviet space." They follow the announcement of Tajik authorities last month that China will soon begin construction of security infrastructure designed to increase oversight and control over Tajikistan's 1,300-kilometer border with Afghanistan, which has historically served as a haven for drug traffickers. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 21, 2016)

### AZERBAIJAN'S OIL RICHES GO SOUR

Over the past 15 years, oil-rich Azerbaijan has benefited handsomely from the global oil boom. Things, however, are beginning to change. As global oil prices continue to slide, Baku is beginning to feel the pinch. Azerbaijan's national currency, the manat, has reportedly lost half its value over the past year, and the government of President Ilham Aliyev is now actively negotiating for loans and bailouts from both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. "Walk around the city," says political analyst Farid Guliyev. "It doesn't give you the feeling of being in a luxury, oil-boom town any more."

The predictable response by Aliyev is to seek to strengthen power, including through a recent political referendum widely seen as a "power grab" by the country's already-powerful president. The referendum, which passed handily, contained provisions "extending the presidential term limit from five to seven years and making it easier for the state to seize private property." (London *Guardian*, October 3, 2016)

### UZBEKISTAN'S NEW DIPLOMACY

Although he took over the Uzbek presidency just a month ago, Shavkat Mirziyayev is already making big changes. Among the most pronounced is a new foreign policy push for reinvigorated relations with neighboring Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan - ties which had languished for years under the rule of former president Islam Karimov. Tashkent has a range of outstanding disputes with all three nations (including contested territory, borders and water resources), and those issues have for years seemed all but intractable. But Mirziyayev's new diplomatic outreach has raised hopes among many for a "new era of regional cooperation," even if greater integration won't happen overnight. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 5, 2016)

### THE CSTO EYES SYRIA

Is the Collective Security Treaty Organization poised for expansion? The Russian-led regional defense bloc, which consists of seven former Soviet states, is in discussions with the United Nations about taking on an active role in future UN peacekeeping missions. "We have agreed to prepare a roadmap on the involvement of CSTO peacekeepers in UN peacekeeping operations," CSTO Secretary General Nikolay Bordyuzha has confirmed, and the UN "has already proposed the steps that we need to take and there is quite an active dialogue going on."

The new initiative, analysts say, has everything to do with Syria, where Russia is seeking to protect its long term equities. "It wouldn't surprise me that once there is a peace agreement, or something to be done in Syria, that the government of Syria and the Russians would say 'we need to have Russian forces here to guarantee the security of the government.' And it could be the CSTO," notes Jair van der Lijn, a peacekeeping expert at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (*eurasianet.org*, October 5, 2016)

## **RELIGION ON THE RISE ON KAZAKHSTAN**

The former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan is facing a new phenomenon, with major implications for politics and security in the country - that of unprecedented levels of religiosity among its youth. A new study by sociologist Madina Nurgaliyev of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies in Almaty has found that as much as 90 percent of youth surveyed throughout the country are "actively practicing believers." An overwhelming percentage of that group (86 percent) is Muslim. The trend, according to Nurgaliyev, is attributable to a number of factors, including "unemployment," "low levels of education," and the proliferation of "religious propaganda" via the internet and social media sites. That last avenue, in particular, has led to a spike in inter communal tensions in many parts of the country, in particular the "Atyrau, Aktobe, Mangistau and West Kazakhstan regions," Nurgaliyev notes. (Moscow Regnum, October 12, 2016)