

Eurasian Diplomacy Reviving At Almaty and St. Petersburg

by Mary Burdman

Leaders of 16 Eurasian nations met in Almaty, Kazakhstan on June 3-4, at the first multilateral Eurasian summit since September 2001. They met at the initiating summit of a new organization, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), which had been proposed by Kazak President Nursultan Nazarbayev at the UN General Assembly in 1992. The CICA founding meeting was to have been convened in November 2001, but this was preempted by the launching of the U.S.-led "war on terrorism" against Afghanistan.

The CICA member-states are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Egypt, China, India, Iran, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Palestine, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. These nations have a population approaching 3 billion people, 40 million square kilometers, and 40% of the world's petroleum reserves.

Immediately afterwards, on June 6-7, the leaders of the six Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) nations—Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—were scheduled to meet in St. Petersburg for their annual summit.

The member-nations of the CICA face great—and in many cases, enormous—economic, security, and political problems. Nevertheless, there were certain highly important developments around this meeting.

How To Eliminate Terrorism

On June 4, the CICA nations adopted a Declaration on "Eliminating Terrorism and Promoting Dialogue Among Civilizations," and the "Almaty Act," calling for the CICA to become a forum for dialogue and consensus on security issues in Asia. The ideas, at least those put forward in the declaration, stand in stark contrast to the stated "Clash of Civilizations" policies of the hegemonic elites in Washington.

The declaration emphasizes that a *dialogue* of civilizations is the only way to meet the menace of terrorism. "We consider, not to allow terrorism [to] involve us in the conflict of civilizations, religions, [and] cultures, principally important," the declaration states.

It concludes that the CICA is "a unique Asian forum, including countries of different cultures and traditions, which makes it one of most important mechanisms [for] civilizations' and cultures' dialogue development. . . . We confirm our full support to . . . UN General Assembly [Resolution]

56/6, on Dialogue of Civilizations, and we are convinced that its implementation contributes to international efforts for achieving development of peace, well being, and stability in the entire world. CICA national participants intend to develop such a dialogue, taking into consideration that Eurasia is not only the cradle of the biggest world civilizations, but also serves as the bridge among them."

The CICA Declaration also states "that elimination of terrorism is a common goal of all cultures and civilizations. . . . We stress that terrorism cannot be identified with any religion, nationality, or civilization. . . . We take [as] an obligation, to take care, that the purpose of battling global terrorism, is not turned into a war, targetted against cultures, religions, and nations. We are united in this struggle. . . . We are also against using the fight against terrorism, as a cause for interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. We reject use of force against sovereign states."

There has also been a level of Russian and Kazak diplomatic initiative, and Russian-Chinese cooperation, in the context of the Almaty meeting, which had not been seen since Sept. 11. These are indications that the much-touted expansion of U.S.-Russian and Russian-NATO relations, are not the only strategic developments in the current situation. What the future course will be, remains to be seen. However, the "sole hyperpower" status of the United States, is eroding, in the view of many in Beijing, New Delhi, and, increasingly, Moscow.

Dialogue, Not Clash

The Eurasian situation has changed since last Autumn. The United States and its "anti-terror" allies remain enmeshed in their war in Afghanistan, while still deployed far forward into South and Central Asia. These military operations exacerbated the already-high tensions between India and Pakistan. Since the beginning of May, Washington and London, especially, have been approaching frenzy, about the dangers of nuclear war on the Indian Subcontinent. More and more lurid allegations, by government officials, "experts," and journalists, warn of nuclear exchanges, mega-deaths, and mass destruction, in terms that recall the writings of H.G. Wells, the British Empire's "one-world" visionary who promoted devastating warfare to achieve his one-worldist aims. There are hysterical demands for some 65,000 U.S. and other Western citizens to flee the Subcontinent.



Left, Russian President Putin (at left) and Pakistan's President General Musharraf; and (above) Chinese President Jiang Zemin (right) and Indian President Vajpayee, at the June 4 Almaty summit. Putin and Jiang are actively attempting to reopen a dialogue to reduce tensions on the Subcontinent.

In this situation, there was a concerted, coordinated effort initiated by Russian President Vladimir Putin and closely supported by Chinese President Jiang Zemin, at Almaty, to lower tensions and reestablish a dialogue between the two sides, which had been broken by the Kargil war of 1999.

As the danger of conventional war between India and Pakistan grew in the last week of May, President Putin announced that he had invited both Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf to meet him at the Almaty summit, with the aim of encouraging them to hold a direct bilateral meeting. Putin announced this initiative as U.S. President George Bush was visiting Russia. There was close coordination with China on this effort as well.

India is committed to its "no-first-strike" nuclear policy, and war avoidance. Since the wild threats made by the Pakistani Ambassador to the United Nations in New York in May, Islamabad has also distinctly cooled down the rhetoric. However, internal pressures related directly to the U.S. and allied military presence in Pakistan and other regional countries, has put Pakistan in a "dual-power" situation. Conventional war would cause severe problems, not only in Pakistan and India, but which would also spill over into Central Asia and western China.

Putin and Jiang held meetings with both Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf. The results were useful, and Eurasian diplomacy is continuing. Vajpayee has already been invited to visit China later this year, and Musharraf was invited by Putin to Russia.

Also, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov visited Beijing at the end of May, his first visit as Defense Minister. On May 31, he had an extensive meeting with Jiang Zemin, and the next day met his Chinese counterpart Chi Haotian for further discussions on military exchanges. Chi Haotian had been in Moscow on May 13-16, at the pre-SCO summit defense ministers meeting.

Future of Eurasian Ties

Questions had been arising, in both Beijing and New Delhi, on the overall direction of Russian policy. There have been certain initiatives on the Russian side toward Pakistan, including statements made by the Russian Ambassador to Islamabad and discussions on the possibility of constructing pipelines using the Afghanistan-Pakistan route, which raised concern in India. In China, whose longer-term relationship with Russia has been more checkered than the Indian one, there has been more concern about Russian commitment on the future of Eurasian relations. China is also worried, with good reason, about its future oil security, a problem in which the continuing U.S. military presence in China's neighbor Kyrgyzstan, as well as in Uzbekistan and its close ally Pakistan, plays a big role.

Recent commentaries in the official Chinese press have been warning that the U.S. "unilateral superpower" policy is going too far, and is a risk, not only to world security, but also to the security of the United States itself. A Xinhua news agency commentary of June 3, criticized the Bush Administration's "aggressive diplomatic posture" on the Indian Subcontinent as "more based on self-interests" than any genuine intention to help India and Pakistan solve the conflict over Kashmir. Beijing began to publicly question the purpose of the U.S. deployment into Central Asia, when Jiang visited Iran in late April. On June 4, Jiang told the CICA summit, "If we want to manage Asian affairs well, we need to rely on none others than the Asian people ourselves and on the solidarity and cooperation among all Asian countries."

More than solidarity will be necessary to create the conditions in which what the Chinese call the "problems left over by history" in Eurasia, can be resolved. The future of Jammu and Kashmir is only the most prominent of these at this time. The development of the Eurasian Land-Bridge—economically as well as culturally—has been dealt a heavy blow since last September. This initiative now must be revived.