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EDITOR'S NOTE

Translated by Nick Oates

- 1 The interest of the People's Republic of China in Central Asia is not new. It has always been related to issues concerning the extension and control of the country's territory as well as its territorial security. A sign of this complex interest, official visits to the Central Asian republics since their independence have succeeded each other at a sustained rhythm following prime minister Li Peng's first tour in 1994.
- 2 The guiding thread of Chinese policy with regard to Central Asia is thus essentially one of "stability", leitmotiv of the current political authority, in a continuum that runs from internal stability, that of the traditionally restless regions such as Xinjiang, to the stability of the frontier zones and of the periphery, from where may emerge, since the end of the Cold War, a whole new series of risks¹.
- 3 Since the collapse of the Soviet system and the independence of the Central Asian republics, which has led to a fragmentation and a relative autonomisation of the region, the stakes, and the opportunities, for the People's Republic of China have been greatly complicated, and this movement is far from concluded today. In 1989, the first fruits of the end of communism in the USSR—greater liberty granted to the Soviet republics of Central Asia—had coincided in China with the resurgence of a democratic movement that found expression in Beijing around the students in Tiananmen Square but also in the autonomous region of Xinjiang, which has since experienced numerous periods of agitation².
- 4 To begin with, following the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet threat, it seemed that the bilateral dimension of relations between China and Central Asia would win the day, in an initially rather positive direction involving the development of exchanges, with the opening of frontier posts allowing traditional ties to be rewoven and with the themes surrounding the "new Silk Road". This was also the

period in which the final stretch of the Yili-Yining railway linking Xinjiang with Kazakhstan was constructed; it had been interrupted because of the Sino-Soviet conflict. Following the violent pro-independence incidents in Yining in 1997, the Chinese government reinforced its control over cross-frontier exchanges.

- 5 More recently, the emergence of concerns related to the role of NATO and the United States has added a more global dimension to this consideration of the risks, while today the new ambitions asserted by a more self-confident Russia—even if the means for Moscow to take action remain limited—have again complicated the stakes³.

The internal stability dimension

- 6 The stability of Xinjiang lies at the heart of the concerns surrounding the security of the People's Republic of China, and it constitutes one of the primary factors determining China's policy towards Central Asia. The problems of economic development and political control are in fact far from resolved in Xinjiang, a province that was only officially integrated into the Qing Empire in 1884, and which remains a "disputed periphery", to use the expression coined by Thierry Kellner, despite the implementation since the end of the 1980s by the central authorities of multiple strategies of both repression and development⁴. These strategies can be summarised in two slogans: that of the "hit hard" campaigns, launched in 1996, which are not solely targeted at Xinjiang but which are translated in the province into heightened repression⁵, and that of the "west development" supposed to extend the benefits of growth to this province far removed from the large centres of development. However, since the ascension to power of Hu Jintao, it seems that this campaign has become the object of some disaffection on the part of the central authorities in the face of multiple social tensions, also in the more developed regions.
- 7 At the economic level, Xinjiang is in fact not only confronted with a differential in development that remains significant in relation to the national average but, even more destabilising, with a persistent, not to say increasing, inequality between the population of Chinese Han origin, which today comprises almost 50% of the local population, and the indigenous population characterised, ethnically and culturally, by an identification with all of the populations of Central Asia.
- 8 This identification has of course played its part in the resumption of exchanges with the re-opening of the frontiers and the large communication flows following the collapse of the USSR, but the development of exchanges and the period of relative liberalisation that China has experienced since the beginning of the 1980s has also encouraged the re-emergence of autonomist currents. The strategy of control by occupation, which has been translated in a considerable increase in the population of Han origin in the region—accelerating from 6% of the total population of Xinjiang in 1949, with 300,000 people, to 40.6% of the total in 2000, with 7.5 million people, an increase of more than 2,200% in 50 years—also constitutes a subject of resentment.
- 9 In this objective of controlling territory at the marches of the empire (which, moreover, resumes a model initiated in the Han dynasty (202-220) with the institution of peasant soldiers), the role played by the production and construction units in Xinjiang entrusted with exploiting the agricultural land and controlling the frontiers is far from marginalised, in contrast to what has happened in the rest of the country where the people's communes have disappeared. Following a period of opening up that had characterised the end of the 1980s, the central government has put the emphasis back on the control and the rematerialisation of the frontiers⁶.

- 10 In terms of strategic priority, the defence of the frontiers and the control of the borderlands still constitute an essential mission of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), even though they attract less attention than the "external" targets of projection of the Chinese strategy, for example overseas or in the direction of Taiwan,. Thus it has recently been decided to reinforce the technological standards of the police units entrusted, together with the PLA, with the defence of the frontiers. The improvement of the infrastructures for the defence of the frontiers in Xinjiang, such as the road network and the control barriers, also represent a priority that shows a tendency to be reinforced rather than reduced⁷.
- 11 But although the factors of internal destabilisation do exist, for Beijing it is equally evident that control of Xinjiang entails control of the periphery and of cross-border contacts. Thus, while the central authority has insisted on the instigation of good relations with all the new republics of Central Asia, a directive from the Central Committee of the PCC underlined in 1996 the necessity of obtaining from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan a promise not to give support to the Uighur or Kazakh independence movements originating in Xinjiang⁸.
- Internal control and "border stability"
- 12 Internal control and the maintenance of order depend in fact, for the Chinese authorities, on control of the border aimed at preventing any "contamination" and any external support for the independence movements. Indeed, while the internal destabilisation factors are frequently noted, in particular those linked to the inequalities of economic development, the movements of discontent that are regularly expressed in Xinjiang are essentially perceived in reality, and denounced by the central authorities, as the result of destabilising manoeuvres originating from outside and that aim to weaken China and put a brake on its emergence as a superpower.
- 13 The strategy of stabilising the periphery, which forms part of the "border policy" put in place by a reform-minded China, linked to the theories of the pacifist rise, constitutes the theoretical foundation of this strategy that aims to "persuade" and reassure in order to better mollify in the absence of any real means of coercion. All of this is termed "the principal challenge and objective of China's foreign policy"⁹.
- 14 This strategy is also based on a "new concept of security" intended to promote "mutual trust, equality, mutual benefits and co-ordination", a kind of non-binding, Chinese-style multilateralism.
- 15 As far as Central Asia is concerned, this strategy of border stabilisation has at the same time been translated by the concern in an initial period to resolve all of the frontier questions inherited from the Soviet era in a sense rather more favourable to the new Central Asian republics with which Beijing wished to establish good relations. On these positive foundations, China then put in place a strategy of alliance against separatism, which has gradually taken the more established form of the fight against the "three forces of evil" represented by terrorism, extremism and separatism.
- 16 These elements, which also appear as a response to the themes of the "axis of evil" preached by the United States since the early years of the millennium, have similarly incorporated a commitment on the part of the Asian republics not to support the separatist movements originating in Xinjiang, a commitment that, ideally, should lead to active co-operation in terms of repression and repatriation of the "separatists elements" sought by Beijing¹⁰.

- 17 This element was all the more important given that more than 400,000 Uighur have settled in Central Asia, over 300,000 of which in Kazakhstan alone, where family ties are tight. Moreover, a dozen or so Uighur organisations have been tolerated in Kazakhstan despite agreements signed with Beijing¹¹. China has in fact put in place a co-operation network in the military realm and for the maintenance of order. For China, this was essentially a question of breaking an evident cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious community between Xinjiang and the Central Asian republics in order to construct, in contrast, a community of interests, linked to the nature of the regimes in power, between the central authorities. But while reinforcing the “strategic” links between China and Central Asia, it was necessary for Beijing at the same time to deny or minimise the natural and historical integration of Xinjiang with this whole region of Central Asia.
- 18 The recognition of the “common security issues,” foremost among which are terrorism and separatism, which, as Beijing underlines, “pose a threat to the leadership position of the authorities of all the regional powers,” has thus constituted the primary element of the implementation of genuine collaboration in security matters between China and the Central Asian republics.
- 19 The Shanghai Group, set up in 1996 and which brought together the People’s Republic of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia, had as its official mission the resolution of frontier questions, the reduction of military tensions and the implementation of confidence-building measures; more generally, it thus aimed to move from a status of confrontation to one of co-operation in a zone still profoundly marked by the Sino-Soviet conflict¹². In a sign of goodwill on the part of China, it was during his trip to Central Asia in 1996 that Jiang Zemin announced the suspension by China of its nuclear test programme, while the question of the tests and the risks of pollution was particularly sensitive in Kazakhstan and also represented an element of the dispute in Xinjiang itself.
- 20 At the bilateral level, China has similarly instituted with all of the Central Asian countries a series of “strategic partnerships”, the full titles of which nevertheless bear witness to a fine graduation in relations. With Kazakhstan, the partnership is termed “strategic”, this is the highest level, and Kazakhstan is also the most sensitive state for reasons relating to its geographic proximity, to the narrow ties that exist with Xinjiang but also, as we will see, to the potential for co-operation in the field of energy. With the other republics, on the other hand, the terms are much less “strategic”. With Kyrgyzstan, there is a “partnership of good neighbourliness and friendly co-operation”, with Uzbekistan a “partnership of friendly co-operation”, with Tajikistan a “partnership of good neighbourliness and friendly co-operation directed towards the 21st century” and with Turkmenistan “relations of friendly co-operation for the 21st century on the basis of equality and the common interest”. But beyond the concern for stability, for Beijing, following the fall of the USSR, there is also the question in this sensitive region of expanding its sphere of influence or privileged interest.
- The dream of expanding the sphere of Chinese influence
- 21 Reflecting a sensitive concern in the region, even if it is openly expressed only rarely and often only appears between the lines, a Chinese analyst wrote recently that “China will never attempt to draw Central Asia into its zone of influence and does not have the intention of bringing its resources under its control”. If the second part of the phrase, very significantly devoted to resources, constitutes a new element, the first part takes

up virtually in the same terms the declarations of Li Peng during his first tour of the region in 1994 following the proclamations of independence¹³. The reiteration indicates in fact that the conviction of these statements is undoubtedly not as strong as Beijing might have hoped for.

- 22 Indeed, for an initial period, it seemed that the collapse of the USSR would offer China an undreamed-of opportunity to expand its zone of influence or, at least, of “benevolent neutrality” in a region that had until then been inaccessible to it. But, while in the course of the 1990s this strategy of reinforcing Chinese influence was limited to the strategic-diplomatic realm, since the beginning of this century, and particularly following the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, which brought with them a real disruption in the strategic situation in Central Asia, Beijing has also placed emphasis on reinforcing co-operation in the economic field.
- 23 The economic strategy that China is pursuing in Central Asia can be analysed at several levels. It appears to be a prolongation of the development strategy for western China, with one aim being the opening up of Xinjiang and the economic development of the province in order to cool tensions there. But Beijing applies the same analysis to the republics of Central Asia, the economic backwardness of which is denounced as one of the causes of the social tensions and of the rise of Islamic terrorism¹⁴. Moreover, and this is a relatively new element, Central Asia appears today to be both a market for Chinese products, beyond the border exchanges, but also a source of energy supply, the importance of which has grown considerably for China.
- 24 China is thus encouraging, with nevertheless qualified success, the development of infrastructure intended to facilitate the trade with Central Asia as well as the opening up of Xinjiang. The transport network, in particular the road and air network, has been considerably strengthened with trans-Central Asia motorway projects linking Andijan Osh and Kashgar and passing via the strategic route of Karakorum in order to open up the southern part of Xinjiang. The last agreement signed in 2005 with Pakistan provides for important works that will allow the Karakorum highway to be open to traffic throughout the year.
- 25 The strategic and security dimension of these projects is obviously not absent, but the newer economic dimension is also essential. Since 1986, the year of its reestablishment and in particular since 1992, border trade has developed considerably. In 2003, it accounted for 50% of the province’s total trade¹⁵. More than 28 crossing points have been opened, and in 2004 an agreement with Kazakhstan was signed to open a free trade zone centred on Khorgos.
- 26 However, the role of Xinjiang appears essentially to be that of a transit route for products that are exported to Central Asia but the vast majority of which come from its more developed neighbouring provinces. This fact means, however, that the development of trade, which largely remains in the hands of the Han community, constitutes another source of frustration. On the other side of the border, it is the invasion of the markets by the Han traders, such as has happened in Almaty, that provokes a sense of unease. Chinese economic dynamism thus plays a part in reinforcing a common feeling of exclusion that affects the local populations both in Xinjiang and in Central Asia.
- 27 But, beyond access to a new market for the less sophisticated of Chinese products, Central Asia, and Kazakhstan in particular, represent for China a major interest in the

matter of energy, and projects that for a period had slowed down for reasons of costs and the absence of any real sense of urgency have recently been reactivated by Beijing.

- 28 In 1994, the China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) acquired 60% of the shares in the Kazakh company Aktobemunaj Gaz, which has been exploiting the Aktyubinsk field. In 1997, a joint venture agreement was signed with the company Uzemunigaz to exploit the Uzen field. In August 2005, CNPC also initiated the acquisition of Petrokazakhstan, and was supported in this project by the Kazakh authorities.
- 29 On the other hand, the pipeline projects requiring heavy investments, which foreign, in particular Japanese, companies, have not been prepared to make for both economic and strategic reasons, have for a long time experienced considerable delays despite recurrent projects promising to link the gas or oil fields of Central Asia, in particular in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, up to the Chinese market.
- 30 In economic terms, the aim of supplying energy to China's coastal regions, which are the most developed and the heaviest consumers, had appeared to lack incentives given the very high costs of exploitation and transport. The stakes have recently changed, however, for reasons that are both economic, with the increase in the cost of oil, and strategic, with the strengthening of the American military presence in the Middle East, China's primary source of oil imports.
- 31 In December 2005, a first section 998 kilometres long linking the oil fields of Kazakhstan to Xinjiang's northeast via the Alashan Pass was completed; the aim was to extend this network in the direction of eastern China towards Shanghai. There is, however, still a very long way to go to turn round completely in the direction of China and Asia the Kazakh export networks, which are essentially oriented towards Russia and the Caspian Sea. But with the construction of this pipeline, China is increasing Kazakhstan's room for manoeuvre and negotiation, with the latter thus gaining an additional partner alongside Russia and the United States. On the other hand, the gas pipeline projects linking Xinjiang to Turkmenistan have still not gone anywhere¹⁶.
- 32 But beyond these preoccupations, Chinese policy with regard to Central Asia possesses a more global dimension related to the reinforcement of the American presence in the region.

China confronted with the American offensive towards Central Asia

- 33 Starting in the first half of the 1990s, following the break-up of the USSR, China very quickly became worried about the links interwoven between the new republics of Central Asia and NATO, perceiving a risk that the influence of the United States would be extended under a rationale of "containment" of Chinese power. In a reflection of this concern, China launched research programmes concentrating on NATO, for example, and exhibited a new desire to establish direct contacts with NATO representatives¹⁷. For Beijing, this was in fact very clearly an issue of an "offensive by external forces that are attempting to control the security questions in the region".
- 34 China was particularly interested in the joint exercises organised for the first time between NATO and Kazakhstan in 1993 within the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace¹⁸. Beijing also fretted about the enlargement of the room to manoeuvre and of autonomy in terms of decision-making of the new republics of Central Asia who, as one analyst has candidly underlined, "only taking into consideration their self-interest, pursue with energy their own external security strategy"¹⁹.

- 35 This expansion of NATO to the east, despite its limits, was thus analysed as a threat to the security of China's northeast frontier, which, moreover, has always constituted a zone that the Chinese authorities have been preoccupied with. This threat comprises both a conventional dimension related to the ratcheting up of American military pressure, but equally an ideological threat related to the theories of peaceful evolution or regime change.
- 36 According to Beijing, this threat is exacerbated today, in particular since the attacks of September 11th, which led to a reinforcement of the military presence of the United States in Central Asia thanks to the opening of several military bases, but also an even greater emphasis placed by Washington on the link it has established between regime change, democratisation and security.
- 37 This implantation of American bases in Central Asia after the September 11th attacks, without the countries of the region who belong to the Shanghai Group even consulting Beijing, has thus represented for China a significant setback of its policy towards the Central Asian countries and has imposed the implementation of a new strategy of reconquest, the result of which has not been perfectly satisfactory for Beijing.
- The readjustment of Chinese policy with regard to Central Asia
- 38 After the attacks of September 11th, China attempted to regain the upper hand by aligning itself for an initial period with the seemingly common theme of the fight against terrorism. This theme in fact allowed Beijing to distinguish itself from the countries of the "axis of evil", to whom China was in reality very close, but at the same time to insist that its own analysis of the terrorist and separatist threat in Xinjiang be recognised. The success of this strategy can be found in the registering by Washington of ETIM (*East Turkestan Independence Movement*), a nevertheless very marginal movement, on its list of terrorist organisations.
- 39 This highlighting of a strategic interest shared in common with the United States has, however, not produced the expected results for Beijing, in particular as far as Central Asia is concerned. According to China, the theories of regime change, set in motion through the intermediary of certain NGOs supported by the United States, who praise especially the emergence of independent media promoting the expression of opposition, have in contrast been reinforced²⁰. According to Chinese analyses, the "colour revolutions" that have been fomented in the countries of the former Soviet bloc (Georgia, Ukraine) and above all the "tulip revolution" in Kyrgyzstan, as well as the events that occurred in Uzbekistan in 2005, were in fact only the result of destabilisation efforts on the part of the United States, which had the goal of reinforcing its zone of influence.
- 40 For Beijing, the risk would obviously be that, in line with the domino theory, these destabilisation movements expand to the whole of Central Asia and reach the autonomous region of Xinjiang. Moreover, the Chinese analysts place this American strategy in the continuation of the fight against communism, since the Cold War, the theory of humanitarian intervention, the war on terror, and up to the theory of the removal of "tyrannies" expressed by Condoleezza Rice. By doing so, China, significantly, is strongly reaffirming its ideological specificity, despite the policy of economic reforms that the regime has pursued for more than 25 years, but also attempting to recreate a kind of complicity with the Central Asian regimes that have emerged from the former Soviet nomenklatura²¹.

41 For the Chinese analysts, after, indeed to a certain extent “thanks” to, the attacks of September 11th, the goal of the United States has been “to acquire a strategic superiority in Central Asia by means of a military and ideological penetration”. China thus denounces the reinforcement of the military co-operation with the countries of Central Asia, the opening of bases and the agreements in matters of trade and training in the military sphere²². Beijing is also preoccupied with the multiplication of high-level visits by American leaders to the region, which have come in quick succession since the beginning of the decade²³.

42 The United States has also reinforced its presence at the economic level through the multiplication of aid and investments, including in the field of energy, which is a particularly sensitive one for Beijing. China has noted that after the attacks of September 11th the United States has, for the first time in history, had access to more than ten airports in the region, without counting the military bases set up in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan²⁴. Thus, despite a discourse that incessantly recalls the principle of *win-win*, the Chinese regime continues in reality to analyse the parameters of its security in terms of an asymmetry in its favour and a capacity to control and influence, as is demonstrated by the privileged ties woven by China with regimes that are especially isolated on the international stage. The increased room to manoeuvre offered to the countries of Central Asia thanks to the implied involvement of the United States thus appears for Beijing as a setback in relation to the situation that had seemed to prevail in the course of the 1990s.

China's bypass strategies: the triumph of pragmatism

43 Facing up to this offensive on the part of the United States, China has successfully demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation and reaction. Abandoning to a certain degree the discourse of the common fight against terrorism, which has not brought with it any major evolution within the current American administration as far as its analysis of the Chinese regime is concerned, Beijing has in contrast conducted an ideological realignment in the direction of the less democratic regimes, attempting to play off a common interest against the rise in power of the United States and threats of regime change. The goal here is to reduce the influence of the United States in the region while creating a new rationale for an alliance with the Chinese regime.

44 Russia has a role to play in this process. However, for Beijing, the return of a strong Russia to Central Asia is no longer considered a positive point. As in the case of relations with Japan or India, the fact that Moscow is today emphasising the recognition of its own economic and strategic interests over those of the “Russo-Chinese strategic partnership” also constitutes a subject of preoccupation for Beijing on account of the elements of uncertainty related to it.

45 Thus, in Central Asia, the Chinese analysts class as an “unfavourable factor” the role of external forces, primary among which is the United States as we have seen, but also the integration of the countries of Central Asia “in the organisations of collective security of the CIS”. In reality, Beijing, going beyond the discourse of collusion surrounding a strategic partnership with Moscow, which was expressed in particular in the organisation of joint naval manoeuvres in the China Sea in 2005, seems just as much to deplore “the persistent influence of the CIS, which is playing a much more important role in Central Asia”²⁵. In fact, Russia, confronted with the rise in power of the United States but also faced with China, is trying to preserve a significant military presence in Central Asia by maintaining its own network of bases and privileged relations²⁶.

The Shanghai Co-operation Organisation: the instrument of pragmatism

- 46 In order to respond to these complex challenges, which have, moreover, evolved considerably over time as we have seen, China has relied on a mechanism that is itself evolutionary: the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Although it no longer corresponds today to what it could have been at the time of its creation in 1995 under the name of the “Group of Five”, whatever the evolution, the SCO’s fundamental objectives remain as they were at its establishment. For Beijing, these are to counter the penetration of the United States in the region; to promote the reinforcement of Chinese influence; to play a part in the stabilisation of the marches and frontier zones; and possibly to be able to present it as a “new model for international relations” that could be extended to the rest of Asia.
- 47 At the time of its creation in 1996, the Shanghai Group (which was to be expanded in 2001 to include Uzbekistan and adopt the new name of the SCO) was intended to reinforce the cooperation and define a new framework for relations between China and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia following the disappearance of the Soviet threat. It was also a question, and this is the “model” aspect that is found here as elsewhere in Africa in particular, of creating “a new economic and democratic political order, that was just and reasonable” according to the principles of mutual trust, mutual benefits, regular consultation and respect for different cultures. This last point may well appear as a concession on the part of China, itself confronted with the “cultural specificity” of the autonomous region of Xinjiang.
- 48 On the other hand, China’s overriding strategic interests were heavily emphasised: opposition, at that time, to any reconsideration of the ABM treaty; support for the Chinese positions concerning Taiwan and Tibet; and opposition to any “separatist” manoeuvre.
- 49 With regard to these, for China, essential goals, the attacks of September 11th 2001 represented a genuine turning point and a reason for disappointment when faced with the fragility of the structure built up since 1996. All of the member countries demonstrated in 2001 their support for the United States, Russia accepted the abrogation of the ABM treaty and the Central Asian republics authorised the opening of American military bases on their territory.
- 50 Having to a large extent lost the initiative within the SCO, China therefore began to reorient its strategy, which from that point on has insisted on the economic and energy co-operation dimension as well as on that of the common fight against the attempts at regime change encouraged by Washington.
- 51 As one Chinese analyst has recognised, following the attacks of September 11th, any frontal opposition to the presence of the United States in the region had no chance of succeeding, and China thus had to find divergent means to rebuild, progressively and based on other factors, its influence in the region²⁷.
- 52 For an initial period, Beijing thus insisted on the fight against terrorism, without however obtaining any genuine reorientation of American strategy in its favour. Beijing has also highlighted the common fight against non-traditional risks. Here too, however, it has not taken into account the real issues in matters such as pollution and water management in so far as they call into question the principle of non-restrictive unilateralism in the management of its resources that Beijing continues to promote where it finds itself in a position to impose it²⁸. But, in a tangible example of the co-

operation in the fight against the new risks, joint manoeuvres were organised at the bilateral and multilateral level in 2003 and 2004²⁹.

- 53 At the economic level, Beijing proposed in 2003, in accordance with a strategy that can be found everywhere in Asia, the establishment of a free trade zone based on highlighting the potential of the Chinese market and the supposed complementarity of the Chinese and Central Asian economies. China has similarly proposed that a working group on energy be set up with the intention of facilitating large-scale trans-border projects such as the construction of pipelines³⁰. At the political level, bilateral visits have been multiplied and several working groups have been set up. During the 2004 SCO summit, a development aid programme for the countries of the region based on low-interest loans was also initiated by China. Nevertheless, Beijing remains a minor actor in Central Asia despite a very pointed discourse. Its principal partner remains Kazakhstan. But, even in this case, Russia continues to be by far Astana's primary commercial partner. In terms of investment, it is the Western countries (72% of the total) who have taken the lead, with the United States (40% of the total) predominant, followed by Russia and then by China (3% of the total)³¹.
- 54 However, as a result of this patient bypass strategy, which attempts to put the emphasis on a Chinese-style *soft power*, during the SCO summit that was held in Astana in July 2005 China and Kazakhstan signed a strategic partnership agreement, founded in particular on Beijing's strong support for the principle of political stasis as opposed to that of regime change preached by the United States. The accent was also put on the common fight of all of the SCO members not simply, as in the case of the United States, against terrorism alone but against "terrorism, separatism and extremism". At the institutional level, China only obtained one arm, also established in Shanghai, of the Regional Anti-terrorist Structure (RATS), which comes under the predominant influence of Russia, since the structure was set up in Tashkent in 2003³². Primarily, Beijing demanded that a deadline for the closure of American bases in the region be fixed and obtained from Uzbekistan the pledge that a deadline of 180 days from July 29th 2005 for the closing of the Karshi-Khanabad base be mentioned. On the other hand, and thus confirming for Beijing the risks induced by democratisation, Kyrgyzstan has refused to comply with Beijing's demands³³.
- 55 Above all, despite these successes, Beijing's influence within the SCO has been diluted. As we have seen, China is no more than one actor among others, one on which the Central Asian states can rely to buttress their own strategies and defend their interests, but also one on which they are not absolutely dependent. In addition to the United States, Russia is also counted among the external actors, and it has demonstrated its renewed interest in the region, both against an overly invasive American presence but also against any attempt on the part of China to make Central Asia its exclusive zone of influence. As a Russian analyst recently underlined, for Russia the notion of a post-Soviet area of interest remains, in particular around the core question of the control of transit in matters of transport or energy, and Moscow could not accept the implementation of large-scale projects from which Russia would be excluded³⁴. From the Russian perspective, this is as true for the United States as it is for China.
- 56 For these analysts, as for the Central Asian republics, China does not appear as a privileged partner, despite once more the discourse on "strategic partnership". On the contrary, in so far as Russia can no longer play a lone hand in the region, it is the

multiplication of actors that should ideally allow Russia and the Central Asian states a share of initiative.

- 57 For its part, Japan has since 1992 also been very active in terms of development aid³⁵ and still holds the financial keys to the most costly investments, in particular in the field of energy. For Tokyo, too, Central Asia presents an important strategic interest and, in a sign of this interest, in August 2004, during a meeting in Astana, Ms Kawaguchi, minister of foreign affairs at the time, proposed the initiation of a “dialogue between Japan and the republics of Central Asia” to which China was not invited. On the subject of energy issues, India is also proving to be much more active in Central Asia, in particular in Uzbekistan, although this activism in competition with China may also be translated in share agreements.
- 58 Finally, during the SCO summit held in July 2005, several “observer” members were admitted, certain of whom, such as Pakistan and Iran, can be considered rather more pro-China, but others of whom, including India and Mongolia, are much more sceptical when it comes to the role of Beijing.

Conclusion

- 59 China’s policy with regard to Central Asia thus reveals a capacity for adaptation, a flexibility and a pragmatism that contrasts with its policy for example towards Taiwan. Beyond the search for alliances with authoritarian states that share Beijing’s distrust of the strategies of “regime change” initiated by the United States, the ideological dimension is in effect absent from the relations between China and Central Asia.
- 60 The highlighting of multilateralism and of the SCO a model bears witness to this pragmatism. Since its creation in 2005, the SCO has undergone important evolutions; nevertheless, the permanent objective of Beijing has been, with more or less success and more or less room for manoeuvre, to try to orient the group in the direction of the narrow interests of the regime both at the strategic as well as at the economic level.
- 61 But this supple pragmatism of China’s Central Asian policy is, in essence, testimony to the failure of the strategy of direct influence, which was the characteristic feature of the first phase of China’s Central Asia policy, that had preceded the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001. Beyond the discourse on multilateralism and the implementation of new win-win principles in international relations, it is indeed, in Central Asia as elsewhere, the evaluations of the balance of power and the prudent consideration given to them, in the attempt to avoid excessively costly crises, that constitute the principal factor in the evolution of the directions that China’s external strategy is taking.

NOTES

1. Nicolas Becquelin, “Criminalizing Ethnicity: Political Repression in Xinjiang”, *China Rights Forum*, 2004, and Dru Gladney, *Dislocating China: Muslim Minorities and other Subaltern Subjects*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2004.
2. Valerie Niquet, “China, Mongolia, Central Asia: China on The Edges of the ex-USSR”, *China News Analysis*, Taiwan, No. 1532, April 1st 1995.

3. Zhang Weiwei, Xu Jin, "An Observation of Security Cooperation between China and the Central Asian Countries", *International Strategic Studies*, 04-2005.
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ABSTRACTS

Despite the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the USSR, Central Asia remains a core element in the security strategy of the People's Republic of China. This strategy, establishing a continuum between China's internal and external security, has evolved from a strategy of influence following the independence of the new republics to a period of pragmatic adaptation to developments in the international arena after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. The Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) has emerged as the instrument for this flexible strategy of adaptation, of which the economic and energy dimension has now become key.

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