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## PANDEMIC POLITICS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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11.08.2020

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The Jamestown Foundation (10 August 2020)

Margarita Assenova

Central Asia is suffering a significant economic downturn precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic that will deepen during the coming months (The Astana Times, May 5; Imf.org, July 2020). The health crisis could also have a profound geopolitical effect in the region. As the United States and the European Union remain preoccupied with their own pandemic challenges, China and Russia may use this opportunity to increase their leverage over this corner of Eurasia.

Growing COVID-19 contagion in Central Asia has already led to a second lockdown in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in July and August (Primeminister.kz, July 2; The Tashkent Times, July 26). Kazakhstan has experienced the highest rates of coronavirus infections in the region, with nearly 100,000 positive cases; Uzbekistan currently has more than 31,000. Kyrgyzstan, with over 40,000 cases, considered initiating a second lockdown but decided against it as the economic impact would be too great (Coronavirus.jhu.edu, accessed August 10; Fergana News, July 5).

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