

# Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute  
Silk Road Studies Program*



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# THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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**KEY ISSUE:** A short 75-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

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Those interested in joining *The Analyst's* pool of authors to contribute articles, field reports, or contacts of potential writers, please send your CV to: <scornell@jhu.edu> and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

## **Svante E. Cornell**

Research Director; Editor, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst  
Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program  
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University  
1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, USA.  
Tel. +1-202-663-5922; 1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785

# CHINA'S RECENT CENTRAL ASIAN ENERGY MOVES

Stephen Blank

*China has exploited the current global economic crisis to intensify and accelerate its previous strategy for obtaining energy security and political influence abroad. Exploiting other countries' and firms' distress, using its enormous cash reserves, and benefitting from the fact that its economy appears to be less adversely affected than others have been, China, through its oil companies CNOOC, CNPC, Petro China, SINOPEC, or through governmental agencies, is either lending afflicted firms and countries money to obtain long-term contracts, access to energy, and other commodities at below market prices if possible, and at the current low market prices where necessary.*

**BACKGROUND:** China's tactics are not new. Rather, they are the same tactics that China has successfully employed earlier. But presently, they have much greater effect given the current crisis and the availability of so many properties from countries and firms afflicted by the crisis.

minority holding in Kazakhstan's AO MangistauMunaigaz company from KazMunaiGaz. This deal enables Kazakhstan to continue its robust pace of exploration for oil, which finances its overall development plan whose long-range aim is its comprehensive economic diversification and modernization. Having received an estimated \$21.1 Billion in 2008 in investment for exploration and production, it needs to keep that up during this crisis to prevent an even more severe economic contraction. Kazakhstan's state news agency Kazinform said the \$5 billion loan would help pay for the MangistauMunaiGaz deal and the construction of the Beineu-Bozoi-Akbulak gas pipeline, which will serve southern Kazakhstan. Thus Kazakhstan's need for capital and reliable export markets plays into China's strategy, and China's victory was clearly facilitated by its deep pockets and cash reserves. But China's actions do not break with past Sino-Kazakh relations. Indeed, according to Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, at least since 2006, "economic cooperation has become the major motivation pushing the overall development of the Kazakhstan-China relationship."



China's economic activities abroad during this crisis are not tied exclusively to Central Asia or to energy alone. But its most striking recent moves have occurred in the energy sector. China's Export-Import Bank is lending the state-owned Development Bank of Kazakhstan \$5 billion, and CNPC is lending Kazmunaigaz National Co., Kazakhstan's state-run gas giant, another \$5 billion. Moreover, CNPC is buying a 49 percent

Nevertheless, this deal exemplifies the way in which China can now exploit the stricken condition of countries like Kazakhstan whose banking system is all but insolvent, and where foreign investment has fallen by half since 2008. Indeed, this deal gives China control over about 15 percent of Kazakhstan's total oil output, while other Chinese firms have already been there for some time. Furthermore, Kazakhstan's national nuclear power company, Kazatomprom, has begun mining uranium fields in southern Kazakhstan in a joint venture with Chinese nuclear power companies. Terms of the deal also call for Kazakhstan to provide China with more than 24,000 tons of uranium by 2020. More recently, the China Guangdong Nuclear Power Group (CGNPG) and Kazakhstan's state nuclear agency, Kazatomprom, have agreed to form a joint enterprise that would build atomic energy stations in China. Thus, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao recently outlined a four point proposal for enhancing bilateral partnership that emphasized first of all maintaining the growth of bilateral trade, and second, fulfilling previous agreements and giving priority to cooperation in the energy and resource sectors. Then comes cooperation in investment and finances to ensure the smooth implementation of construction projects. Finally, both sides are to promote cooperation in infrastructure.

Apart from lending Kazakhstan money, China is also building power plants in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and pipelines in Turkmenistan that will then go on to Uzbekistan so that it can buy gas from these countries at affordable prices. It also is mining iron ore in Kyrgyzstan from what is apparently Asia's largest source of iron. Not surprisingly, the Kyrgyz government is encouraging further Chinese investment in its coal mining, non-ferrous metals, precious metals, and infrastructure sectors. Kyrgyz officials also want

China to import electricity from the Kambarata power station that Russia is building in order to prevent surplus capacity and under-production. Buying hydropower makes sense for China, which has increasingly been pledging infrastructure assistance and cash to Central Asian states through the SCO, e.g. helping Tajikistan build dams and roads. Moreover, China can become a handler or middleman, e.g. wiring Central Asia into Pakistan and Afghanistan and picking up huge transit and construction fees. Likewise, in the past few years China has invested heavily in Afghanistan's energy and mineral resources, which it has found to be abundant, with a view to building pipelines either directly to China or possibly through the port of Gwadar and Pakistan to China.

**IMPLICATIONS:** China thus secures the long-term access to energy and commodities it wants at low prices, gains equity access to those energy fields or pipelines, and also obtains considerable influence and political leverage over the host government. In return, it allows these distressed firms to gain capital and access to China's consumer market, whose energy demand remains robust. Indeed, China's total oil imports hit a one year high in March 2009, indicating continuing strong demand. China thereby engenders a mutually profitable but dependency-inducing long-term relationship with these energy providers and their governments. The instruments of China's energy strategy are its major energy firms, banks, and state lending agencies and they clearly work together given the size and scope of recent acquisitions across the globe.

China's actions also bear all the earmarks of a global strategic plan of action for China to use its economic power to secure unchallengeable positions in Eurasia and elsewhere. Even though China's national oil and energy companies do not always see eye to eye with the government, and

even though much of the oil fields they buy produce oil that does not go to China, the confluence of energy buyouts of foreign assets and state lending to those governments as well as the breadth and duration of China's actions over time clearly indicates a considered policy and strategy. China's global shopping spree also reflects its persisting belief that it cannot ultimately rely upon the market to deliver energy, its determination to strike now while the iron is hot in terms of acquiring distressed properties, and its efforts to implement its concept of energy security. That concept is simple: energy security means having reliable, long-term, and diverse supply sources that cannot be interdicted, particularly in the Straits of Malacca, and tying suppliers to China both economically and politically through long-term deals.

China is merely extending its earlier strategy that was launched about a decade ago and that has continued despite unprecedented high energy prices through 2008. That strategy and ambivalence about relying on markets reflected the fundamental security orientation of China's thinking about energy supplies. Today, as energy prices have collapsed and many major state-owned producers are in crisis mode, China has huge cash reserves and remains relatively unhurt by the crisis. Therefore it can exploit this downturn with great alacrity to further its strategy under more auspicious conditions. Indeed, China's recent global investment activities show that China uses its economic power to lend money to distressed governments and/or firms and then uses that economic power and the dependency it generates to secure political influence with those states.

**CONCLUSIONS:** These investments and the accompanying strategy behind them are coming to



be seen both in China and abroad as portending China's rise to power and the development of the so called "Beijing consensus." In the past China has been able to influence Central Asian states' policies, e.g. prodding Kyrgyzstan to enact an "anti-extremism" law in 2004 because it may have believed that Uyghur underground parties existed there and in Kazakhstan. In the same manner, Kazakhstan may have sacrificed some of its own interests in 2005 to China to get it to make its first energy purchase there of Petrokazakhstan. More recently, Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse's study of Central Asian perceptions of China concluded that local governments perceive China as a uniquely powerful regime that could substantially hurt their interests. Thus they, too, are being forced into accommodating China. These investments could thus herald a new and eventful development in Central Asia's politics and economics.

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Professor Stephen Blank, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013. The views expressed here do not represent those of the US Army, Defense Department, or the US Government.

## RUSSIAN THINKING ON AMERICA'S ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN

*Dmitry Shlapentokh*

*Russian officials have recently sent contradictory messages in regard to American policies in Afghanistan. On the one hand, Moscow signaled that it is quite concerned with the possibility of a U.S. debacle and wishes the Americans to win the war. On the other hand, the very fact that the U.S. publicly entertained the idea of finding a friendly Taliban leader ready for compromise was displeasing. Russia also pushed the Kyrgyz government to close the Manas base, regardless of its importance to the NATO forces. These mutually exclusive messages are due to contradictory drives in Russia, implying that Russia's policy regarding Afghanistan and the Middle East could change in any direction and could preclude the continuation of a coalition policy in dealing with Afghanistan.*

**BACKGROUND:** The U.S. landed in Central Asia in the wake of September 11, 2001. Russia acquiesced to this development for a variety of reasons. One was that a U.S. presence, notwithstanding all its potential problems, would counter the Taliban who were seen by Moscow as a much more serious threat than the U.S.

Still, other theories frequently presented in Russia view the relationship between the U.S. and radical Islamists from quite a different perspective. These build on the assumption that radical Islamists are not antagonists, but rather allies, of the U.S., and that they are quite similar to each other in spite of allegedly superficial differences. Alexander Dugin, a prominent proponent of Eurasianism/Neo-Eurasianism and a popular philosopher and political commentator, has propagated this theory with much passion. Dugin asserted that the U.S., the major representative of "Atlanticism," is rejecting the cultural multiplicities of the people of Eurasia and is trying to homogenize them. The same could be seen among the Jihadist/Wahhabis; for this reason, the Americans and Wahhabis actually gravitate to each other, despite their differences.

This assumption, however outlandish to Western ears, has been quite widespread among Russian pundits.

This approach is also incorporated in a broader theory, which sees the West and the East as forces equally hostile to Russia. It is assumed in the context of this approach that these forces could even work together at Russia's expense. In this case, the anti-Asian streak in Russian nationalism supplements the lingering suspicion and hostility toward America.

The proponents of this approach argue that the U.S. created Al Qaeda, and that September 11 was arranged by American elites to justify its "imperial policy". The Chechen resistance—both nationalists and jihadists—is seen in this context as being manipulated and used by the U.S. to weaken Russia. These views seem to penetrate to the very top; it is not accidental that in the wake of the Beslan terrorist attack on a school on North Ossetia in 2004, then president Vladimir Putin stated that the terrorists could well be just tools in the hands of forces who want to snatch the Northern Caucasus from Russia, a statement that was widely assumed to target America. The idea that the U.S. could reach an agreement with the



Taliban to simply redirect them against Central Asia and Russia was fueled by the potential abrupt changes in U.S. foreign policy.

The end of George W. Bush's presidency was marked by grand economic and geopolitical debacles. The implications could be manifold, ranging from a rapid U.S. geopolitical retreat – quite similar to what one saw in the collapsing USSR and later in Yeltsin's Russia, to a radical rearrangement of the country's geopolitical priorities. One of them is a possible rapprochement with the Muslim world, including the radicals, even if this would upset and marginalize Israel. A new trend was

pointed out by a Russian Muslim Internet publication. It claimed, with satisfaction, that resentment against Israel and the Jewish lobby is rising in the U.S.. The publication also alleged that Obama advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski is critical of the Jewish lobby, which in his mind is alleged to be sympathetic toward the “neocons.” Brzezinski, according to the site, had openly warned Israel that it would not always be able to use America for its own goals.

**IMPLICATIONS:** While these perceptions of U.S. policies that combine the U.S. geopolitical retreat from the Islamic world and an attempt to strike a new alliance with at least some

Islamic countries or movements were made not only in the beginning of the Obama presidency, this approach has grown in popularity since his election. For example, Shamil Sultanov, an influential analyst of Islamic affairs and until recently a member of the Russian Duma, noted in one TV interview that Obama understands that the U.S. could hardly subdue Iran or do anything in Afghanistan. Consequently, he concluded that the administration had already decided both to extend a hand to Iran and to abandon Afghanistan. The idea that the U.S. could both decrease its “imperial” presence in Asia and at the same time turn its “historical” enemies into friends could also be found in official and semi-official Russian media. *Izvestia*, for example, wrote that Obama has already decided to meet with Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the near future. The authors of other articles noted that Iran also took steps toward the U.S.



Alexander Dugin

at the possible expense of Russia. In a broader context, this implied that the U.S. would be contemplating significant concessions to the Muslim world. In Afghanistan, a possible agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban could be similar to the abortive concessions of the Pakistani government in the Swat valley, where the Taliban became largely institutionalized and were allowed free hands in Afghanistan. Russian pundits are afraid that the U.S. could do the same in Afghanistan. Such an arrangement would imply that U.S. interests would not be harmed, and at the same time the Taliban, or even al-Qaida, would be allowed to act in Central Asia, Russia's soft underbelly, and in the future, in Russia proper. Consequently, while Russian Muslims see the possibility of a Muslim-U.S. rapprochement as positive, Russian pundits observe with apprehension as they entertain the idea that the U.S. would use Muslims to bring Russia harm.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Russian fears about the possibility of a deal between the U.S. and the Taliban, and in relation to this a sharp turn in U.S. foreign policy, indicate a continuous fear of instability both in Central Asia and Russia proper, as well as an understanding of the limited span of Ramzan Kadyrov's "Chechenization" of the previously rebellious republic, despite announcements that the war in Chechnya is over. It also indicates an increasing sense of a dead-end scenario for NATO forces in Afghanistan, where additional contingents transferred from Iraq would still make NATO

forces much smaller than the Soviet forces were. Since in the last war Russia was unable to subdue the insurgency, Russian analysts see no reason to believe that NATO would be more successful. The Russian elite entertains a lingering fear that a U.S. debacle could also lead to a new realignment in the Middle East from Iran to Afghanistan where any solutions would come at Russia's expense. And these feelings have led to an increasingly muddled Russian policy toward Afghanistan and the U.S. presence in the country. On the one hand, there are concerns over possible attempts to find compromises with the Taliban. On the other hand, Russia itself entertains the idea of building a buffer zone in the North of the country, mostly populated by Uzbeks and Tajiks. Such a buffer zone would provide a cushion in case of an American failure, as well as a Russian stronghold in case of a U.S.-Taliban rapprochement. Russia seems ready to provide free passage for NATO supplies to Afghanistan, seeing the war as a danger to both Russia and the East. Yet, Russia's persuasion of Kyrgyzstan to close Manas created additional problems for the U.S. All of this indicates that cooperation between the U.S. and Russia in Afghanistan will be complicated, at least in the foreseeable future. The Taliban definitely stand to benefit from this discord.

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Dmitry Shlapentokh is Associate Professor of History, Indiana University South Bend.

# SHIISM IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GEOPOLITICAL FACTORS

Sebastien Peyrouse

*The vast majority of the population of Central Asia adheres to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam. But in addition to the Tajik Ismailis—who live in an autonomous region in the Pamirs and are followers of Aga Khan—the region also has a Twelver Shiite minority of Azeris and Ironis. They are only able to practice their faith under relatively difficult, sometimes illegal, conditions. Many factors—internal and external, political and religious—hamper the acknowledgment by Central Asian authorities of the existence of Shiism in the region: Shiia tend to be national minorities that are not recognized by the state, is equated with Islamism, and therefore the risk of terrorism, and is also seen as an agent of Iranian influence.*

**BACKGROUND:** The Azeri minority in Central Asia practices Twelver Shiism. According to the 1999 census, they numbered approximately 78,000 in Kazakhstan and 15,000 in Kyrgyzstan, and according to the 1989 census, there were 44,000 in Uzbekistan and 33,000 in Turkmenistan. Despite the relatively large size of this population, Kazakhstan has not officially authorized any Shiite mosques. However, many places of worship operate informally under a permanent threat of legal sanction. In Kyrgyzstan, only one Shiite mosque exists. Located in Bishkek and led by an Azeri imam, it falls under the jurisdiction of the Muslim Spiritual Board of Kyrgyzstan, which does not recognize Shiite institutional autonomy. Iranian businessmen and diplomats and members of the Azeri minority attend the mosque. In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where authorities are particularly suspicious in regard to religious matters, Shiia find themselves in particularly difficult situations. It is harder for them to make the *hajj* than it is for Sunnis.

More so than other minority faiths, Shiism is a major target of religious repression in Turkmenistan. Any cultural reference to

Shiism is punishable under the law. In 2004, the Turkmen author R. Esenov was imprisoned for depicting, in his novel *Bayram Khan*, a 16<sup>th</sup> century regent of the Mughal Empire as Shiia and for refusing to bend to the will of Saparmurat Niyazov, who believed he was Sunni. Severely strained relations between Ashgabat and Baku have added to the many difficulties facing Shiites in this republic. No Shiite mosques have been able to officially register and very few more or less clandestine prayer rooms in Sunni mosques are open to Shiites. There were only five such establishments in 2008. A Shiite mosque in the village of Bagyr, near Ashgabat, was demolished in 2005. The last Shiia imam of Turkmenbashi, a city that is home to a large portion of the Azeri community, was forced to leave the country that same year. With its protected diplomatic status, the Iranian embassy in Ashgabat does have its own mosque, but it remains inaccessible to citizens of Turkmenistan.

In Uzbekistan, Shiism is represented not only by the Azeri minority but also by Ironis, a Shiite population some of whom speak the Uzbek language and some Tajik. Although

there are no official figures, there are at least 300,000 in the country, mainly in Samarkand (200,000) and Bukhara (100,000). The delicate subject of Uzbek nationalism, and its promotion of Uzbek identity and Sunni Islam, further complicate the situation of the Irani minority, which is seen not only as a Shiite, but also “too Tajik” and/or too close to Iran. Shiia in Uzbekistan complain of government repression. The Muslim Spiritual Board does not recognize them as separate, therefore Shiia do not have any institutional autonomy. Three Shiite mosques are registered, two in Samarkand and one in Bukhara, but they remain subject to increased police and state administrative surveillance because they are suspected of maintaining ties with Iran. Shiia tend to practice their religion in private and therefore do not encounter a great amount of institutional difficulty. But processions associated with the Ashura or Muharram celebrations are the subject of tensions between the Shiite community and Uzbek authorities. The latter systematically reject applications to open new mosques or to create a Twelver madrasah. The question of religious education is particularly problematic. No Shiia are allowed to receive religious training abroad, but Twelver Koranic education is also prohibited inside the country.

**IMPLICATIONS:** The unwillingness of Central Asian authorities to come to terms with the existence of Shiite minorities is compounded by the strained relations between the states of the region and Iran. Very briefly in the early 1990s, Tehran tried to project regional influence through religious means, among others. The Mashhad office of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution managed the Khorasan region, as well as bordering states. The Iranian regime had financially and politically supported

the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, in particular its two leaders, Said Abdullo Nuri and Hoja Akbar Turajonzoda, even while participating in the reconciliation process that led to the 1997 peace agreement. However, Iran quickly reevaluated its strategy in Central Asia. From the second half of the 1990s, it no longer sought to use religion in a way that would harm regional relations or the development of economic cooperation.

While the dissemination of Shiite and pan-Iranian thought is extremely limited in Central Asia, Iran is still suspected of spreading these ideas by offering free religious education in Iranian cultural centers and through charitable foundations like the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, which has been present in Tajikistan since 1994. Tehran may not seek to influence or to interfere with the Sunni traditions of the Central Asian population. But the Iranian regime is concerned about the dissemination in the region of Salafi theories, which it sees as ideological Arabization and detrimental to its interests in the Middle East. It seems that some of Tehran’s policy moves, like the use of the Guardians of the Revolution, are meant to quietly support the most traditionalist groups in the hope that they will protect against Salafism; however, the Iranian regime’s room for initiative on this question is extremely limited.

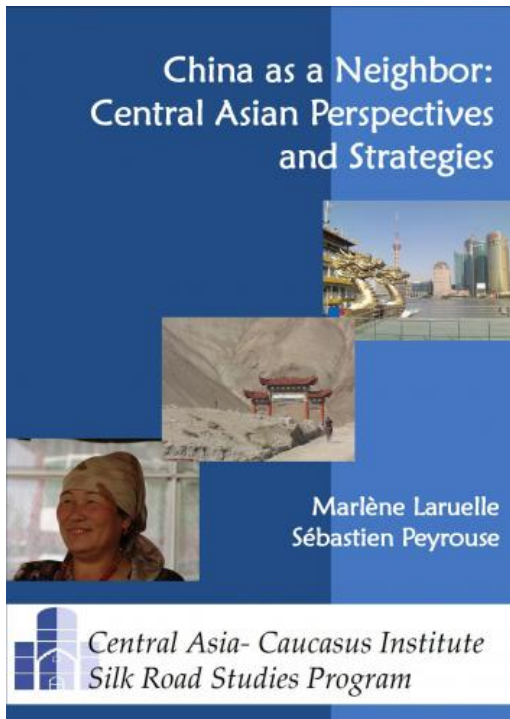
Iran also continues to maintain close ties with the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, which had an internal Shiite branch. The number of its activists grew in the region of Kulyab with the support of the party vice-chairman Saiduram Khusaini and especially with Nuri’s successor, Muhiddin Kabiri, who is more anti-Western than his predecessor and more open to Iranian influence. In addition, about 300 Tajik students are currently studying in religious

institutions in Iran. The development of radical Iranian Shiism in the mountainous parts of Kulyab is of particular concern to Dushanbe, which has very limited control over this area, where past tensions related to the civil war have not disappeared. However, Iran must proceed with caution, as Central Asian Sunnis whose views of Islam have become politicized do not necessarily “convert” to Shiism.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The political and religious pressures suffered by Shiia in Central Asia vary widely. Azeri minorities are not well tolerated, especially in Turkmenistan, while Ironis are subject to forced Uzbekization from Tashkent. More so than Sunnis, Shiia have been the victims of restrictions on religious education and the right to pilgrimage imposed by the Central Asian regimes. They also have repeatedly been suspected of forming a fifth column of Tehran, even as the link between

Shiism and Iran is not a given. Finally, the real political risk is constituted by the radicalization of Sunni Islam, not Shiite revolutionary theories that Tehran no longer tries to export to Central Asia. However, any strengthening of Salafism in the post-Soviet region could cause Tehran to increase its pressure not for conversion, but in order to maintain regional balance with the Sunni powers in the Middle East.

**AUTHOR’S BIO:** Sebastien Peyrouse is a Senior Research Fellow with the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center (Washington/Stockholm). He is the co-author of *China as a Neighbor: Central Asian Perspectives and Strategies* (Silk Road Monograph, April 2009) and the author, co-author or editor of seven books on Central Asia in French.



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Peyrouse

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# RELATIVITY IN WAR AND THE LEGACY OF WESTPHALIA: THE STRATEGIC OUTLOOK OF THE CAUCASUS EMIRATE

Kevin Daniel Leahy

*Recent developments in Pakistan's Swat valley have demonstrated how a government's policy of non-negotiation with those they term 'terrorists' can quickly come asunder in the face of overlapping political, socio-economic and military challenges. Given the comparable challenges it faces in the North Caucasus region, Russia's leadership has likely been closely monitoring the Pakistani government's somewhat unorthodox efforts to quell the Swat insurgency. For the Sharia-based administrative entity that emerged, however briefly, in Swat closely resembles the type of state Doku Umarov and his followers would happily establish in the North Caucasus if given the chance.*

**BACKGROUND:** During a recent interview he gave to a leading rebel website, Supyan Abdullayev, a leading ideologue and strategist of the Caucasus Emirate project, made some interesting observations regarding the nature of the rebels' campaign against Russian rule in the region. Abdullayev has been a champion of the merits of Sharia law for over two decades and has dedicated his political career to the realization of Islamic law in Chechnya, and later throughout the entire North Caucasus. As Doku Umarov's chief naib, or lieutenant, Abdullayev is in line to replace the Emir should something untoward befall him. This fact lends considerable weight to Abdullayev's political opinions, although it bears mentioning that these opinions are seldom, if ever, substantively different from those of other leading rebel ideologues, such as Abdullayev's long-time political collaborator, Movladi Udugov. Abdullayev's categorisation of the rebels' ongoing attempts to implement Sharia law in the region was particularly interesting. 'We establish the Sharia on the territory we control,' he explained. Acknowledging the transient nature of the control the rebels can currently

exercise over any given geographical space in the North Caucasus, Abdullayev deftly qualified his earlier assertion with a military truism: 'Control is always relative in war.' Certainly this is so in the case of the North Caucasus. While one cannot state that the Caucasus rebels are currently in secure possession of any significant parcel of territory in the region, there have been numerous cases in recent years of rebel detachments seizing control of urban centres for several hours, during which they invoke Sharia law as a pretext for executing alleged collaborators with the local pro-Russian administration. For many years now, this particular tactic has been utilized frequently, if irregularly, by rebels operating in Chechnya. By way of example, one might cite the rebel takeover of Alkhazurovo in Chechnya's Urus-Martan district in March 2008 when a sizable party of rebels entered the village, set fire to the local administrative headquarters and executed at least five government employees. The insurgents remained in control of the village for approximately three hours before finally deeming it expedient to take their leave. In this

instance control was indeed relative – the rebels’ control over Alkhazurovo was relative to the period of time they estimated it would take nearby pro-Russian forces to mobilize and respond to their takeover of the village. Interestingly, reports of this takeover, and others, carry no mention of the rebels’ overtly proselytising on the socio-economic utility of Sharia law. The object of such takeovers is to terrify local magistrates, administrative clerks, policemen, indeed anyone associated directly, or by association, with the local pro-Moscow administration. The Taliban-affiliated militants of the Swat valley placed an identical emphasis on intimidating functionaries of the ruling regime, beheading policemen en masse and assassinating government officials. As the Caucasus rebels are aware, the Swat militants

forced the Pakistani government to the negotiating table by steadily reducing the relativity of their own control over Swat to the point where, by early 2009, Taliban control over the region had become an objective reality.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Despite the government’s deployment of 12,000 troops to the region, the Taliban successfully organized what a recent Amnesty International report described as ‘a parallel justice system.’ This system, which earned a reputation among some Swat residents for the dispensation of ‘speedy and easy justice,’ contrasted favourably with the pre-existing, constitutionally mandated system, widely detested for its innate corruption and inertia. This shadow system of justice was officially recognised and mandated by the Pakistani government in February when it agreed a peace

deal with Taliban representatives, effectively clearing the way for the imposition of Sharia law in Swat. It is interesting that the insurgents did not demand that Islamabad recognise Swat as an independent, sovereign Islamic nation-state. Instead, they seemed content with securing authority over the mechanism of legal recourse in Swat, indicating that the realization of Sharia law is their principal political objective.

The leaders of the Caucasus Emirate are in full agreement with this strategic emphasis. Public statements by Umarov, Abdullayev and their colleagues unfailingly reference the imperative of introducing Islamic law in the North Caucasus. By contrast, rebel representatives have received questions about the presumed geographical dimensions of the Caucasus Emirate with indifference



Supyan Abdullayev

and ambiguity. Unlike contemporary statesmen in Russia and the West, the leaders of the Emirate do not consider themselves encumbered by the legacy of Westphalia (it is generally accepted that the Treaty of Westphalia, signed in 1648, marked the reification of the nation-state as the principle actor in international relations). In their view, the writ of the Sharia (Allah's law) cannot be curtailed by temporal, man-made phenomena such as national boundaries, or indeed any other sort of earthly jurisdictional demarcation.

But faith in the metaphysical properties of the Sharia is not the only reason the Caucasus rebels refuse to define their territorial ambitions. There are also tactical considerations behind this reticence. While there are indications that the rebels may be willing to settle for a smaller parcel of territory than the entire North Caucasus, it is in their interest to conceal this inclination from possible Russian interlocutors; for in any set of negotiations, it is wise to begin by demanding considerably more of the opposing party than one may in fact require. It is also possible that the Emirate's leadership might at some point deem it expedient to conclude a short-term arrangement with the Russians on purely tactical grounds, temporarily accepting confinement to a defined geographical area in the interests of regrouping, or for use as an operational launching pad from which they might influence neighbouring, Russian-administered territories. In any case, it can be stated categorically that the acquisition

of territory per se is not an objective goal for the leaders of the Caucasus Emirate. In their view, the utility of territorial gain is absolutely relative to the viability of implementing Sharia law in the acquired territory.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The likelihood of the North Caucasus becoming another Swat in the near future appears remote. For one thing, the Pakistani government's break with neo-Westphalian perceptions of statecraft by granting Swat an unparalleled and unconstitutional – albeit short-lived – level of autonomy under Taliban rule is presently a quite unthinkable course of action for leading decision-makers in Moscow. While Pakistan's President Zardari may see the logic in selectively striking tactical bargains with insurgents, such recourse represents the height of folly to the majority of political and military observers in Moscow and Washington. There is also the fact that the variant of 'control' exercised by the rebels in the North Caucasus remains relative (as explained above) and does not appear – except perhaps in the case of Ingushetia – close to becoming an objective reality. Nevertheless, the Caucasus rebels will persist in their efforts to reduce the relativity of their control in the region, all the while eschewing the conventional, neo-Westphalian precepts underpinning the conduct of international relations.

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Kevin Daniel Leahy holds a postgraduate degree from University College Cork, Ireland.



## FIELD REPORTS

### KYRGYZSTAN: SAME OLD PLOT FOR UPCOMING ELECTIONS

*Erica Marat*

Preparations for the upcoming Presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan resemble any other in Central Asia. The incumbent President Kurmanbek Bakiyev has shown no sign of willingness to give up office, while the opposition is not able to create a viable challenge to the regime.

To date, 17 candidates have registered to run for president, with most of them seeing the presidential bid as an advancement of their own positions in local, as opposed to national, constituencies. The president, in turn, has visibly boosted his activity by coming up with a populist agenda for economic development and promising to increase pensions.

For a brief period, the Kyrgyz opposition parties tried to consolidate and choose one joint candidate. The long-time opposition leader Omurbek Tekebayev sacrificed his presidential ambition in favor of other candidates. After weeks of negotiations, Kyrgyz opposition movements nominated the leader of the Social Democratic Party, Almazbek Atambayev, as their candidate. Another opposition leader and former Defense Minister, Ismail Isakov, announced his candidacy in April, but withdrew this week in favor of Atambayev and the unity of opposition movements.

However, a few days ago yet another opposition candidate and leader of the Ak Shumkar party, Temir Sariyev, registered to run for president. Sariyev's wish to compete along with his fellow opposition leaders has weakened the ability of the opposition movements to challenge Bakiyev. It also shows that the opposition leaders are more concerned with their political ambitions of becoming widely known in the country, than with defeating the current regime.

Sariyev's recent move stirred discontent among other opposition leaders. Following Tekebayev's decision to give up his candidacy in favor of the larger opposition movement, his fellow colleagues cheered the opportunity to challenge Bakiyev by selecting a candidate possessing both political power and a strong financial base. Both Atambayev and Sariyev meet these criteria. But neither of them enjoys popularity among the masses to an extent comparable to Tekebayev.

A presidential candidate must be wealthy enough to organize mass rallies before and after the elections. Since most opposition leaders are convinced that the Central Elections Commission will falsify the elections, opposition movements are preparing to stage demonstrations. A few leaders have admitted that violent confrontation between the government and opposition is likely, should Bakiyev suppress the demonstrations.

In the meantime, Bakiyev has sought to secure support from Russia as well as tried to maintain stable relations with the United States. While accepting over US\$2 billion in loans from the Kremlin and promising to expel the U.S. airbase from Bishkek, Bakiyev seems ambivalent to ousting the U.S. base. While the president and parliament approved August 18 as the end date for the U.S. presence, the airbase still seems to function as normal, while the U.S. is allocating more financial aid to Kyrgyzstan.

Bakiyev announced early elections with the aim of being re-elected before relations with Russia and the U.S. become too intricate. The loyal parliament and government will support Bakiyev's bid. Bakiyev damaged his popularity during the first year of his

presidency, as he alienated his former supporters and suppressed NGOs and mass media in the country.

If elected, the opposition promises to change the constitution and reduce the president's powers. Yet, the majority of current opposition leaders have backgrounds similar to Bakiyev's. While all are former members of communist party, few genuinely understand – and can employ – democratic values in their policies. So far none of the leaders in Kyrgyzstan have gone beyond declaring that the constitution should change and parliament become more efficient. Often leaders mix ethno-centric ideas with their campaigns for democracy, calling “the Kyrgyz” to become a prouder nation. Issues of civil rights, freedom of the media or programs for

economic development are rarely mentioned in their agendas. The promise to fight the corruption of Bakiyev regime remains the major slogan for opposition leaders.

In effect, the difference between the president and his contenders is insignificant. As one political observer notes, “whoever comes to power from the current opposition candidates will be only one step ahead of Bakiyev”.

Bakiyev came to power in March 2005 as a result of mass protests organized by various opposition movements. Then, leaders of the opposition against former president Askar Akayev were equally divided and consolidated only weeks prior to elections.

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## NEW SUPPLY ROUTES TO AFGHANISTAN COULD BOOST DRUG TRAFFICKING

*Umida Hashimova*

Due to the likely closing of the U.S. airbase in Kyrgyzstan, announced in February 2009, and a worsening security situation on the main land route from Pakistan due to Taliban attacks on cargo vehicles, the U.S. stepped up its efforts to secure alternative supply routes for the NATO troops serving in Afghanistan. NATO and the U.S. did not have to look for new solutions but rather activate a framework agreement for transiting non-lethal cargo signed between Russia and NATO on April 4, 2008. Although at this stage it is unclear exactly which countries will be involved in the transit, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Latvia have already given their official consent. According to the Russian Foreign Minister, Russia's consent will be given as soon as it receives details on the cargos. As it has been announced that the goods will be delivered by railroad, the main transit route will likely be for the cargo to enter the European continent in Latvia, from there through Russia,

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Considering that Uzbekistan is the only Central Asian country with a rail connection across the Afghan border, at Hayraton-Termez, it will probably serve as the main entry point for the goods.

According to Ria Novosti, once the transit route becomes operational, 700 wagons will be sent weekly via this line, carrying commercial supplies such as construction materials, water, fuel and medicines. This development raises the issue of the capacity of the transit countries to inspect 700 wagons every week. Due to the commercial nature of the cargo, the U.S. and NATO forces will not be responsible for controlling the wagons' contents. Therefore, a high risk appears of increased smuggling of precursor chemicals needed to extract heroin from opium from Europe into Afghanistan and illicit drugs from Afghanistan into Europe in the returning freight cars. Acetic anhydride, the key chemical for the conversion of opium into refined

heroin has a commercial value of US\$1 per liter in Europe, but US\$600 per liter in Afghanistan.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that Afghanistan produces 90 percent of the world's opium and accounts for 82 percent of the global area under opium poppy cultivation. The route that the supplies will be traversing is part of the "northern route", which has been used by drug traffickers since at least the mid-1990s to smuggle drugs originating in Afghanistan to Russia and Europe via Central Asia. According to various estimates, about a third of all Afghan opiates are smuggled via this "northern route."

There are a number of factors that will make the new freight route appealing to drug traffickers once it is activated. First, the weak Afghan government and its law enforcement bodies have almost no capacity to fight drug trafficking effectively or discourage smugglers from using the trains to hide and smuggle drugs or precursors. Second, the returning trains will likely be going to Europe directly, without stops en route to load cargo and be subjected to inspections. This will appeal to the traffickers, since Europe is their main and most profitable destination. Third, the railroad is the cheapest way of smuggling drugs, offering large volumes and no middlemen. This could even increase the traffic on the northern route since it can bypass the tough enforcement of the Iranian route as well as the controls in place at other points on the Central Asian borders.

Since Central Asian countries have become a major transit route for Afghan drugs, crime and corruption has increased in the region, along with significantly increased drug abuse and related diseases, such as HIV/AIDS. Use of intravenous drugs in the region is causing one of the fastest growing HIV/AIDS rates in the world. In addition, crimes such as drugs and weapons trafficking, money laundering and terrorism are interrelated and pose a threat to the stability and development not only in Central Asia but to all the countries on the trafficking routes from origin to destination. Therefore, it is reasonable to question the logistical, political and human preparedness of the institutions in the transit countries to avert potentially negative consequences. The volume of the planned freight transit will definitely overwhelm the personnel at the border checkpoints of the transit countries and - lacking modern scanning equipment - reduce the capacity of customs officers to make a detailed search of each wagon without seriously impeding the movement of the goods. That is why it is crucial for the transit countries to step up their counter-narcotics capacities through their own resources or, if such resources are lacking, through donor assistance, by means of raising this issue with the U.S. Government and NATO. It is necessary to reinforce surveillance capacity throughout all checkpoints and plan counter-narcotics operations in advance. Ignoring this issue at this stage could turn the supply transit route into a main supply line for opiates to Europe, and precursor chemicals to Afghanistan.

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## COMMEMORATION OF 'ANDIJAN EVENTS' IN UZBEKISTAN

*Erkin Akhmadov*

For many, in Uzbekistan and abroad, May 13 is the day of commemoration of the tragic events taking place four years ago in Andijan. The official version of what happened in Andijan suggests that state forces defeated an uprising by a small group of radicals. The exact number of victims is still

unknown. State official estimates suggest that about 187 people were shot dead, while local and international NGOs claim much higher figures. While the conducted independent investigations of what happened in Andijan did not satisfy local and international human rights activists, the fourth

anniversary of the event nevertheless displayed some significant progress.

During the 'Andijan Events' in 2005, some of the city residents fled to neighboring Kyrgyzstan, and on to European states and the U.S. Thus, today over 400 former Andijan citizens reside in different parts of the world. This year a forthcoming feature of the commemoration was actions and demonstrations organized by these people. Pickets were organized in Stockholm in front of the Swedish parliament; in the U.S., Russia and Kyrgyzstan, meetings took place in front of Uzbekistan's Embassies.

In Stockholm, about fifty representatives of various Uzbek and international organizations, including former residents of Andijan currently living in Sweden, took part in a picket named "We Will Not Forget Andijan". The organizers aimed at persuading Swedish parliamentarians to reconsider attitude of the European Union to the government of Uzbekistan ahead of the Swedish EU Presidency in July 2009. Thus, they again demanded an independent international investigation, the liberation of political prisoners, and resumption of EU sanctions towards Uzbekistan.

In Kyrgyzstan, local human rights activists gathering in front of Uzbekistan's Embassy organized a commemoration of the Andijan events. The meeting participants brought a wreath and tied black ribbons on the fence of the Embassy. As one of the organizers of the meeting, the coordinator of the "Gandhi" public organization Diana Makenbaeva said: "We will never forget these tragic events and public attention should always be drawn to it, so that such bloody events will not take place anywhere else in the world".

Perhaps the most significant development marking the fourth anniversary of the 'Andijan events' took place in Germany. Witnesses of the events currently residing in Europe set up the international non-governmental organization "Andijan - Justice and Revival". The organization's press release states that its main objective is "to establish justice for all the victims of the Andijan massacre and all citizens of Uzbekistan deprived of their rights; to revive

Andijan and the Motherland". The organization plans to realize its objective by calling on democratic governments, specifically of the U.S. and EU member states, to support their goal. They state that they are ready to cooperate with EU governmental bodies and other international intergovernmental organizations to reveal the truth about the events in Andijan. One of the organization's representatives, Nurillo Makhsudov, communicated they plan to publish a newspaper with stories about themselves and their lives in Uzbekistan. He also said the creation of the organization is supported by the eighty native Andijanis who escaped the massacre and now live in six different European states.

The newly initiated organization is not alone in voicing complaints. Several international human rights organizations have for a long time been lobbying for an independent investigation of the Andijan events. This year, Amnesty International sent an open letter to the European Union once again insisting on an independent international investigation. It claims that the two negotiation rounds between EU experts and the authorities of Uzbekistan, which took place in December 2006 and April 2007, cannot be considered independent international investigations. Still, it remains to be seen whether the persistence of international and local organizations will eventually bring about any results.

In spite of the international community's increased attention towards the commemoration day, local sources report that residents of Uzbek cities had few opportunities to express their sorrow. The state security forces interrupted a meeting that was planned by human rights activists near the Monument of Courage in Tashkent. In the city of Jizzakh, however, those willing to commemorate were allowed to bring flowers to the Monument of the Mourning Mother.

Perhaps a common effort by international human rights organizations and the newly formed organizations of the Andijan victims to draw the attention of the international community will be more successful in achieving their goals. However,

even though the EU sanctions on Uzbekistan were lifted and other forms of discontent within the international community are no longer displayed, the issue seems far from settled.

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## ANOTHER MISFORTUNE FOR TAJIKISTAN'S AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

*Suhrob Majidov*

In the first weeks of May, Tajikistan suffered from continuous heavy rain falls. The cotton sector, which was already on the brink of ruin due to the financial crisis and the huge debts of cotton farms, is threatened by a natural disaster. Experts claim that due to the continuous heavy rain falls, there is a risk that cotton crops will not even start growing. Furthermore, farmers cannot reseed the crops due to continuous rain.

According to the State Committee on emergency management and civil defense, the total financial loss caused by the natural disasters in April-May is more than US\$ 1 million. Heavy rain falls also caused mudslides, which wiped out more than 100 households, roads, transmission facilities and bridges in different districts of the country with 19 human deaths including 6 children. On 7 May, a mudslide covered the construction site of the Rogun hydro power station, burying two workers alive.

The country's capital, Dushanbe, was also heavily affected by the natural disaster. A mudflow in Dushanbe covered the streets with mud and paralyzed the operation of public transport. After the heavy rains, Dushanbe became a Venice, but instead of canals the streets were filled with muddy water. Even the main avenue of the city, Rudaki Avenue, where the Parliament, the President's Residence, and ministries are located, was covered with mud. This was not the end of the hardships, however. Over the next few days, the city suffered from heavy hail of huge size.

The Ministry of Agriculture is concerned over the natural disaster's consequences for the agricultural sector, particularly cotton crops. According to the

Ministry's experts, the whole sowing season is under threat. The most affected sector is cotton, where 40,000 of the sowed hectares need to be reseeded. But even if farmers manage to reseed the cotton, the risk of crop setback remains. Most of the country's southern districts cannot even start sowing, which is usually done by the end of May. Heavy rain falls also destroyed huge already sowed areas of crops, potatoes and orchards. The Government decided to establish 'emergency headquarters' with special working groups to monitor the consequences of the disaster at the local level. The Ministry's experts are counting the losses while none of the officials can explain how they are going to solve the problem and help the affected farms.

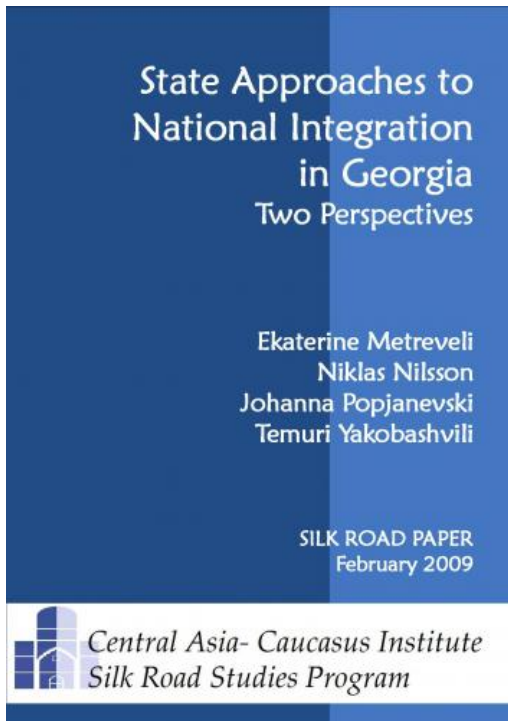
Independent experts claim that this natural calamity will worsen the situation in the agricultural sector, which is already suffering from the financial crisis and mismanagement. According to Farruh Abduvasiev, a senior expert with the Institute of Economic Research, such unusual precipitation can negatively impact the food security of the country. "Although it is almost impossible to avert such negative consequences, it is possible to predict such situations and to arrange measures for softening the consequences for the agriculture sector," he continues.

While the Government is trying to calculate losses, ordinary farmers are desperate. Rukiya Rahimova, who heads a small farm in the Yavan district, says "Recently, I do not even want to open my eyes so I do not see the rain". Her small farm has already lost about US\$2,500 from the rainfalls, while the total return from the last year was about US\$3,000. "We

have been suffering from heavy rains for almost one month. This is the height of the sowing season, but we cannot do anything, seeds just decay in the ground!”

Isroil, who is the bookkeeper, and at the same time worker, tractor driver and guard of another farm in the Yavan district, claims that “last year we had a good crop, but the profit was just \$3,000. This profit is for 23 households, because our farm consists of 23 shareholders”. He continues, “we were lucky last year, most other farms had even less profit. But I cannot even imagine what to expect this year after such rains”. Isroil doubts that his farm will manage to survive this year.

In sum, the continuous heavy rainfalls caused significant losses for the country, particularly for the cotton sector. The Government is more concerned with fulfilling the cotton harvest “plan” and laments that only 70 percent of the irrigable land “planned” for cotton production is currently being exploited. Experts claim that the natural disaster just worsens the situation of the system, which needs long-term serious reforms. Furthermore, experts warn that continuous problems in the agricultural sector put farmers on the brink of ruin and threaten the country’s food security at the time of financial crisis.



New Silk Road Paper:

***State Approaches to National Integration in Georgia: Two Perspectives***

**By Ekaterine Metreveli, Niklas Nilsson, Johanna Popjanevski, and Temuri Yakobashvili**

This Silk Road Paper examines Georgian national integration policies, with a view to identify key prospects and problems in Georgia’s efforts to become a unitary state.

The Silk Road Paper can be downloaded free at [www.silkroadstudies.org](http://www.silkroadstudies.org). Hardcopy requests should be addressed to

## NEWS DIGEST

### ONLY TAJIK-CHINESE BORDER CROSSING REOPENS

**7 May**

The only border crossing between Tajikistan and China has reopened for the spring, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Mirafzun Mirafzunov, chief of the custom's service in Tajikistan's mountainous Kohistan-Badakhshan Province, told RFE/RL that the Kulma border post was reopened on May 5 but that deep snow on roads in the Murghob and Shughnon districts will prevent Chinese traders from transporting goods into Tajikistan. On the eve of the Summer Olympic Games last year, China closed Kulma and all Tajik merchants had to go to the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, and fly to China in order to conduct business. The Kulma border post was established in 2004 and is usually open from spring until the end of autumn. Provincial customs officials say that last year Tajik businesses imported \$7.5 million worth of goods from China, including some 5,000 Chinese-made cars. (RFE/RL)

### ARMENIA CASTS SHADOW OVER REGIONAL ENERGY

**8 May**

Turkish moves to mend relations with Armenia may harm the European energy sector as resource-rich Azerbaijan eyes moves toward Russia in response. Turkey moved toward normalizing relations with longtime foe Armenia following a visit to Ankara by U.S. President Barack Obama. The situation bodes well for Ankara's ties to the European community but could have a ripple effect on relations with oil-rich Azerbaijan. The Czech presidency of the European Union on Friday hosted a major summit in Prague to hammer out energy security in the region, calling for implementation of measures on the long-awaited Nabucco pipeline "as soon as possible." The Prague summit brought together energy giants from the Middle East and Caspian region to work in harmony in the regional oil and gas sector, but with Azerbaijan deeply offended by Turkish moves toward Armenia, efforts toward unity could unravel, Britain's *The Daily Telegraph* noted. Azerbaijan sits on some of

the richest resource fields in the world, notably the Shah Deniz gas field and the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil complex. The EU puts considerable weight on those resources, particularly as Prague urges swift action on Nabucco. The Prague summit brings delegates from Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan together on energy-security issues, but securing gas from the Caspian region may require additional diplomatic efforts beyond oil and gas contracts. (UPI)

### U.S. DRONE ATTACK KILLS AT LEAST FIVE IN PAKISTAN

**9 May**

Missiles fired by suspected pilotless U.S. drone aircraft have struck a compound in a Pakistani region on the Afghan border, killing at least five militants, intelligence and Taliban officials said. Four missiles fired by two drones hit a compound in the village of Sarorogha in the South Waziristan tribal region, a stronghold of Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud and a known Al-Qaeda and Taliban hotbed, one of the intelligence officials said. "We have reports of at least five militants killed in the missile attack," said the official. The same figure was given by a Taliban official in the region. Another intelligence official put the death toll at as high as 20, and said one of the missiles also hit a vehicle carrying militants. The United States began increasing the frequency of drone attacks in Pakistan a year ago. There has been no let-up since President Barack Obama's administration took office in January, despite complaints from the Pakistani government. The United States carried out about 40 drone air strikes since the beginning of last year, most since September, killing more than 300 people, according to a tally of reports from Pakistani intelligence agents, district government officials and residents. Including the May 9 strike, there have been 15 attacks this year, with five in April. (Reuters)

## **DOUBLE SUICIDE STRIKE ON AFGHAN POLICE KILLS FIVE**

**10 May**

At least five people were killed on May 10 when two suicide bombers attacked a convoy of police in Afghanistan's volatile southern province of Helmand, a provincial police chief said. Despite increasing numbers of foreign forces, violence has surged in the past year to its worst level since U.S.-led troops overthrew the Taliban government more than seven years ago. In the latest incident, two suicide bombers, each riding on a motorcycle, blew themselves up near a group of police who had just parked their vehicles in the Girishk district of Helmand Province, provincial police chief Assadullah Sherzad said. "So far, I can say that five people, including civilians, have been killed and 10 more wounded," Sherzad told a Reuters reporter by phone in the south. Helmand is one of the main bastions for Taliban guerrillas and is the biggest drug producing region of Afghanistan, the world's top supplier of heroin. The Taliban often rely on suicide attacks and roadside bomb blasts as part of their insurgency against the Afghan government. The attack came just three days after a suicide bomber in the same district killed 20 Afghan civilians and two British soldiers from a NATO-led force. Girishk straddles a main highway across the restive province and has seen fighting in recent months. The spread of Taliban attacks in Afghanistan as well as in nuclear-armed neighboring Pakistan have raised alarm worldwide. The new U.S. administration is sending 17,000 soldiers to Afghanistan in the next few months, about half of whom will be deployed in Helmand. The new troops are part of a wave of reinforcements that will see the total U.S. force increase from 32,000 at the start of this year to 68,000 by year's end. (Reuters)

## **ERDOGAN IN IRAN ON NABUCCO?**

**11 May**

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan plans to visit Iran to discuss energy cooperation, possibly on the Nabucco pipeline, Iranian media reports. Erdogan told Turkish television Friday he would include a visit to Tehran as part of a broader regional energy tour that includes Azerbaijan and Russia, Iran's Press TV reports. "I intend to visit Tehran after my near-future visits to Baku and Moscow, where I hope to talk about the future of Tehran-Ankara cooperation with Iranian leaders," he said. Press TV said the Turkish premier

considers Iran as a potential supplier to the planned Nabucco natural gas pipeline for the European Union. Nabucco would bring natural gas from Central Asia and the Middle East, and possibly Iran, to European markets, sidelining Russia. A summit held Friday in Prague, Czech Republic, brought renewed declarations from potential Nabucco suppliers on the so-called Southern Corridor, though Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan failed to sign a final statement on the package of energy transit projects. Iran could emerge in a stronger position in the wake of the declaration boycott as Nabucco critics continue to point to potential supply shortfalls for the 2,050-mile pipeline. (UPI)

## **SAAKASHVILI-OPPOSITION TALKS END**

**11 May**

"Perception of the crisis by us and by Mikheil Saakashvili absolutely differ," Levan Gachechiladze, an opposition figure, said in a brief comment made after two-hour talks with President Saakashvili. "He believes that everything is all right in the country and we believe that everything is very bad; that is the only result of this meeting;" he told journalists and added that the opposition negotiators would now meet with other leaders to inform about the details of the talks. He also said that detailed statements would be made at a protest rally outside the Parliament at 6pm local time on Monday. Irakli Alasania, leader of Alliance for Georgia, who was among the group of four opposition negotiators, said that the sides had exchanged views on the political crisis in the country. "There are serious differences," he said, "but the fact in itself that the meeting took place is a positive step." "We had an open conversation, a very open conversation," Salome Zourabichvili, leader of Georgia's Way party, told journalists after the meeting. "But we assess the crisis absolutely differently." Kakha Shartava, leader of the National Forum, said that the opposition negotiations put forth the opposition's major demand about President Saakashvili's resignation and also listened to the authorities' position about the current situation in the country. "Our views mostly do not coincide with each other. We have listened to what steps they are planning to take in future," he told reporters. "If there are some acceptable proposals we will decide at a joint meeting. Our today's mandate was limited by informing them about our vision, pushing the most important issues and listening to their options. (Civil Georgia)



## **TAJIKISTAN'S AGRICULTURE SUFFERS \$10MLN WORTH DAMAGE AFTER RAINS**

**13 May**

The damage caused to Tajikistan's agriculture by heavy rains and mudflows exceeds 10 million U.S. dollars, the head of the Agricultural Ministry's press service, Narzullo Dadabayev, told a news conference on Wednesday. "These estimates are not final. The damage may be much higher after the governmental commission sums up the results of its work," he said. Last week's heavy rains hit Tajikistan's cotton fields hard. Almost 5,500 hectares or 4 percent of the planted areas were washed away. Hundreds of hectares were partially destroyed. Agricultural experts say farmers can re-sow the fields until June 1. "Of course, this will affect the yielding capacity, but it is better to have less than nothing," Dadabayev said. Cotton along with aluminum remains the main source of foreign currency in the country. Lower prices for cotton amid the global economic crisis forced the government to correct the cotton policy, but cotton still remains the major export item in the agricultural sector. This spring over 200,000 hectares were sowed with cotton as against 240,000 hectares in 2008. (Itar-Tass)

## **BURJANADZE SAYS AGAINST TALKS WITH SAAKASHVILI**

**13 May**

Nino Burjanadze, leader of Democratic Movement-United Georgia, said that she was against of holding talks with President Saakashvili on proposals, which he had proposed after talks with the opposition leaders on May 11. "There is one part [of the opposition], which believes that it is possible to resolve problems through dialogue [with the authorities] and there is another part which believes that it won't help and more active steps are required - I am in this latter part [of the opposition]," she told journalists. "Path of those will be more successful, which will lead to the joint goal sooner," she said. "If some one else wants to continue a dialogue and talk on other issues except of [President Saakashvili's] resignation, they can do that and they can continue moving on that path of dialogue. I personally believe that the only topic of discussion should be terms of President Saakashvili's resignation. I am in favor of taking concrete actions," Burjanadze said and added that it was a mistake that the opposition had not been holding active protest rallies in recent days, including picketing of the public TV. "I am sure

that 'corridor of shame' should resume from tomorrow outside the public TV," she said. (Civil Georgia)

## **AZERBAIJANI OFFICIAL: MINSK GROUP FAVORS ARMENIA IN KARABAKH DISPUTE**

**13 May**

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's foreign-policy adviser has said he sees double standards and clear evidence of "Christian solidarity" by the Minsk Group members in talks over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Novruz Mammadov told RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service that the Russian, French, and U.S. co-chairs of the Minsk Group might also be manipulating the talks on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for professional reasons. "The co-chairs are interested in prolonging the conflict so they can travel to and fro and maintain their positions," Mammadov said. "Or maybe [U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and Minsk co-Chairman] Matthew Bryza himself is interested in ensuring his career and his job by misinforming [Secretary of State] Hillary Clinton and [President] Barack Obama" by suggesting progress is being made in the talks. Mammadov said Armenia's position at the meeting between Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian and Aliyev in Prague on May 7 was "not constructive," and accused the Minsk co-chairs of supporting the Armenian position. He added that the Minsk co-chairs are falsely portraying the talks as positive, but said the Azerbaijanis "are not going to give [their] territory to Armenians. This will never happen. Let the co-chairs, even the whole world support Armenia. [It will not matter], it will never happen." Bryza has said the Prague meeting was "the most substantive exchange of views" between the two leaders and a "conceptual breakthrough." The Minsk Group was created in 1992 by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to mediate a peaceful settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Along with Bryza, the current co-chairmen are Bernard Fassinier of France and Yuri Merzlyakov of Russia. (RFE/RL)

## **KAZAKHSTAN SIGNS RUSSIA PIPELINE LAW**

**14 May**

In a modest blow to Nabucco, Kazakhstan signed a measure approving the construction of a natural gas pipeline with Russian gas giant Gazprom. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed a law granting construction of a 994-mile pipeline to carry

domestic and Turkmen gas, the Financial Times reports. The pipeline will carry 700 billion cubic feet of regional gas each year in a move that solidifies the position of Gazprom in the Central Asian energy sector. The European Union and regional leaders gathered in Prague, Czech Republic, last week for a conference on the Southern Corridor of energy transit networks, including the long-heralded Nabucco gas pipeline. Turkmenistan had signed onto agreements with Germany's RWE, a Nabucco partner, in what was seen as a blow to Gazprom following a pipeline disruption earlier this year. Europe sees Nabucco as the answer to its plans to move away from Russian energy reliance. Nabucco would bring gas from suppliers in the Caspian region and the Middle East along a Turkish route north to European markets. The leaders emerged from the Prague summit with a declaration of support from key parties to Nabucco, including Azerbaijan. However, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan did not sign the final declaration. (UPI)

#### **GEORGIAN OPPOSITION STAGING 'CORRIDOR OF CONSCIENCE' ACTION**

**14 May**

The Georgian opposition is staging "a corridor of conscience" action in front of the entrance to the Public Television (OTVG) building in Tbilisi. The action began at 09:00, Moscow time. Two ropes stretching toward the building make a narrow passage for OTVG personnel, who the opposition claims are giving a biased coverage of their protests. Leader of the New Rightists party David Gamkrelidze (a former presidential hopeful and one of the leaders of the Alliance for Georgia political association), said "the purpose of the "corridor of conscience" action is to protest the biased information policy by the OTVG." Earlier, Georgian opposition leaders decided to remove kiosks and cages from the road in front of the OTVG building in order to reopen it to traffic. "The suspension of traffic in front of the Public Television building created more problems for the population of Tbilisi than for the authorities of the country," Gamkrelidze said. The opposition has set up pickets and 'corridors of conscience' several times before, last time on May 5. The opposition continues to insist on Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili's resignation and on an early presidential election. On Wednesday, former speaker of the Georgian parliament Nino Burdzhanelidze said she did not believe a dialogue

with Saakashvili would do any good. Burdzhanelidze called for "active and drastic Constitutional actions" aimed at securing the resignation of Saakashvili. "I have a plan of actions of my own – it's a plan of active, drastic, but absolutely Constitutional actions, and I intend to act together with the supporters of this plan," said Burdzhanelidze, who now leads the Democratic Movement – United Georgia opposition party. "The forces who are intent to pursue other way and other plan of actions will be acting in accordance with their plan," she said, implying the part of the radical opposition which calls for "continuing dialogue with Saakashvili and securing his resignation through dialogue." On Wednesday, Georgian media outlets claimed the "differences in the opinions in the ranks of the Opposition are becoming more and more pronounced." Several opposition parties -- the Alliance for Georgia and the National Forum party -- called for "phased resignation of Saakashvili and phased concessions on his part." Another part of the Opposition is demanding more radical moves for quick resignation of the president. Burdzhanelidze and secretary general of the For United Georgia party Eka Beselia belong to the hardliners, who demand Saakashvili's unconditional resignation. Reports from Tbilisi earlier this week indicated that Georgian authorities might cancel the military parade in Tbilisi on May 26, when Georgia marks its Independence Day, to avoid possible unrest in the city. (Itar-Tass)

#### **OPPOSITION UNBLOCKS TRAFFIC OUTSIDE PUBLIC TV**

**15 May**

Opposition activists removed improvised cells from Tbilisi's one of key thoroughfares and unblocked traffic outside the public TV overnight on Friday. Kostava Street outside the public TV was blocked since April 14. Opposition leaders decided to unblock the street on May 13, but they had to put off the move after the objections from activists camped in improvised cells. Opposition said that the mocked-up cells would now be installed closer to the public broadcaster, which they accuse of biased coverage of the ongoing protests. Opposition activists will resume four-hour long picketing of the broadcaster's premises at 9am on Friday. (Civil Georgia)

## **U.S. STRIKES KILLED 140 VILLAGERS, AFGHAN PROBE FINDS**

**16 May**

U.S. air strikes earlier this month killed 140 villagers, an Afghan government investigation has concluded, putting Kabul starkly at odds with the U.S. military's account. The official death toll, announced by the Afghan Defense Ministry, makes the bombing the deadliest incident for civilians since U.S. forces began fighting the Taliban in 2001, and is likely to worsen anger over the presence of foreign troops. A copy of the government's list of the names, ages, and father's names of each of the 140 dead was obtained by Reuters earlier this week. It shows that 93 of those killed were children -- the youngest 8 days old -- and only 22 were adult males. "No other news makes me as sad and sorrowful as incidents of civilian casualties during military operations," the Defense Ministry statement quoted President Hamid Karzai as saying. The Afghan government paid the relatives of victims the equivalent of about \$2,000 for those who were killed and \$1,000 for 25 others wounded, it said. U.S. aircraft bombed villages in the Bala Boluk district of Afghanistan's western Farah Province on May 3 after U.S. Marines and Afghan security forces became involved in a firefight with Taliban militants. According to villagers, families were cowering in houses when the U.S. aircraft bombed them. The incident has prompted anger across Afghanistan toward Western troops, and caused Karzai to demand a halt to all air strikes, a plea that Washington has rebuffed. (Reuters)

## **THIRD KAZAKH LENDER HALTS DEBT REPAYMENTS**

**19 May**

Kazakhstan's Astana Finance has become the third local lender to halt debt repayments and seek a restructuring of its loans, as the financial crisis tightens its grip on the oil-producing Central Asian state.

Astana Finance, which has a license to lend but does not take retail deposits, said it froze payments after its financial position deteriorated and some loan schedules were accelerated due to credit-ratings downgrades.

The company is an active player in the mortgage and leasing sectors and has total foreign debt of \$1.2 billion. Lenders in Central Asia's biggest economy borrowed heavily abroad before the credit market boom ran out of steam in mid-2007. Investors have viewed local banks' efforts to cope with tougher

debt conditions as a barometer for market sentiment since the country's biggest bank, BTA, as well as Alliance suspended repayments and announced plans to restructure earlier this year. The government, now worried about possible rising social discontent in the mainly Muslim country, has allocated \$25 billion to help the \$100 billion economy weather the storm. Astana Finance, in which the government holds about 25 percent, said auditors would prepare a report on its first-quarter performance within the next 12 weeks and that JP Morgan and Clifford Chance would advise it on restructuring. Astana Finance said the devaluation of the national tenge currency by 18 percent in February and a slump in property prices had hampered its asset quality. Analysts said the economic slowdown may cause further trouble in the sector. Property prices in Kazakhstan's largest city, Almaty, have halved after reaching their peak in 2007 and many analysts think the economy will shrink this year after growing by 10 percent a year, on average, between 2000 and 2007.

The Kazakh finance minister said that debt-restructuring talks between BTA and its creditors were proceeding well and both sides were hopeful of reaching a deal. "Many creditors have said that they are largely ready to accept restructuring.... So their position is quite positive," Bolat Zhamishev told reporters.

Few details have emerged from the talks, but the state's Samruk-Kazyna welfare fund said this week BTA would complete restructuring by the end of July. BTA -- in which Samruk took a 75.1 percent stake in February -- has defaulted on \$550 million in bilateral loans and stopped paying the principal on its wholesale borrowings. BTA owes about \$15 billion in total. A restructuring would pave the way for Russia's Sberbank to decide in August on a possible acquisition of the lender. Sberbank has been in talks since February. (Reuters)

## **RUSSIAN RECOGNITION OF S-OSSETIA, ABKHAZIA GUARANTEES ABSENCE OF NEW ATTACKS**

**19 May**

The Russian recognition of independent South Ossetia and Abkhazia guarantees that no one will ever attack them, Russian State Secretary - Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin told a Tuesday press conference in Geneva. He visited Geneva to attend the fifth round of the consultations on Caucasian security and stability. "The decision to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia was not easy

for Russia. For 16 years Russia had been honestly fulfilling its peacekeeping commitments and settling regional conflicts. Yet the taboo on the use of force was breached in August 2008. That buried Georgia's territorial integrity," he said. (Itar-Tass)

### **KYRGYZ HIGH COURT UPHOLDS CONVICTIONS FOR RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM**

**20 May**

Kyrgyzstan's Supreme Court has upheld verdicts against 32 people convicted of spreading ethnic and religious hatred, although it slightly reduced their sentences, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. The defendants, from the southern Osh region, were accused of organizing a mass gathering in October in the town of Nookat to protest a government decision not to allow a religious celebration for the Muslim holiday Eid al-Fitr. On November 27, the Osh Regional Court sentenced the defendants to prison terms ranging from nine to 20 years. The Supreme Court reduced the sentences to between five and 17 years. The defendants complained that they were severely beaten and tortured while in detention. Public defenders Dmitry Kabak and Aziza Abdyrasulova say many of those convicted -- the majority of whom are ethnic Uzbeks -- are uneducated and that two of them are women who were under 18 when they were arrested. Additionally, most are not fluent in Kyrgyz or Russian, the two official languages in which all the court hearings were held. (RFE/RL)

### **OFFICIAL: KAZAKHSTAN BANK DEFAULTS NOT ENCOURAGED**

**20 May**

Kazakhstan will not interfere in local banks' foreign debt policies or encourage them to restructure their debt, a senior state official has said, a day after a third Kazakh lender halted debt repayments. State-run BTA, Kazakhstan's largest bank, and No. 4 bank Alliance defaulted on their debts last month. Astana Finance, a lender which does not accept retail deposits, also suspended debt servicing this week. The string of announcements has prompted worries about the prospects of other banks meeting their obligations at a time when the government is keen to make sure that money is used domestically to prop up the shrinking economy. Kairat Kelimbetov, chief executive of Kazakhstan's state welfare fund Samruk-Kazyna, which acts as the government's agent in bank bailouts, said the state was not behind those decisions. Asked if investors

should expect similar steps from other Kazakh banks, Kelimbetov said: "If the question is whether this is a systemic approach by the state, this is not true." He said there were different reasons behind each borrower's decision to restructure. Samruk bought a 75 percent stake in BTA in February and has appointed new managers at Alliance. The state owns about 25 percent in Astana Finance. Samruk also owns stakes of about 20 percent in Kazkommertsbank and Halyk, Kazakhstan's second- and third-largest lenders. "The deal [with Kazkommertsbank and Halyk]...is that the policy on foreign debt servicing is decided by the management," Kelimbetov said. He added Samruk was "snowed under" dealing with BTA, Alliance, Halyk, and Kazkommertsbank and had little time to look into problems at Astana Finance. (Reuters)

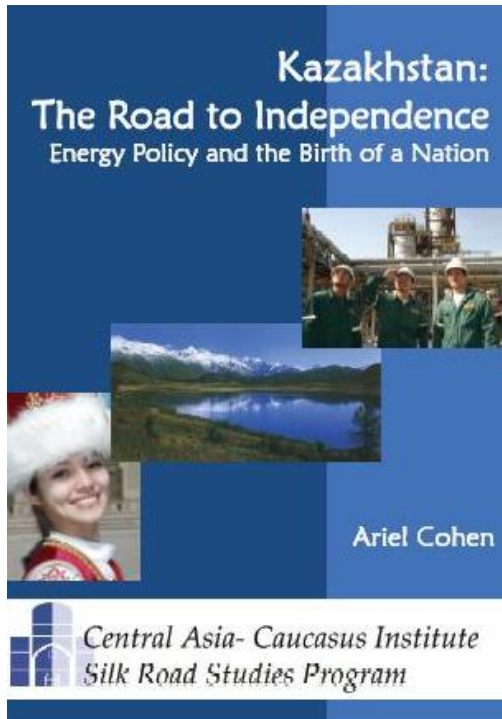
### **TURKEY 'SHOULD NOT LINK' ARMENIA THAW TO KARABAKH: NEGOTIATOR**

**20 May**

Turkey should not link its efforts to normalize ties with Armenia to a settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, a French negotiator has said. Ankara and Yerevan have been engaged for months in high-level talks aimed at establishing diplomatic relations after a century of hostility and last month announced a "road map" to reopen their borders. But after Turkey's Muslim ally Azerbaijan condemned the reconciliation moves, Ankara said there would be no progress until the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was resolved. Turkey closed its border with Armenia in 1993 in solidarity with Azerbaijan, which fought a war with ethnic Armenian separatists in the 1990s over the Caucasus enclave. Last week, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan promised Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev during a visit to Baku that Turkey would not open the border with Armenia until the "occupation" of Nagorno-Karabakh ended. "Normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations and the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute are two separate processes which should continue in parallel but along their own paths," the French Embassy in Ankara said in a statement after a visit earlier this week by Bernard Fassier, a co-chairman of the Minsk Group. The Minsk Group -- set up in 1992 and co-chaired by Russia, the United States, and France -- is seeking a solution to Nagorno-Karabakh, one of the most intractable conflicts arising from the Soviet Union's collapse. A thaw between Turkey and Armenia, who trace their dispute to the mass killing of Christian Armenians

by Ottoman Turks during World War I, would shore up stability in the Caucasus and boost Turkey's drive to join the European Union. U.S. President Barack Obama has urged Ankara and Yerevan to reach a solution soon, but Turkey has been careful not to harm energy projects with Azerbaijan.

The two countries, which share linguistic and cultural ties, are in talks to sign energy deals, including the purchase of Azeri gas which could be used for the planned Nabucco pipeline to transport Caspian gas to Europe. (Reuters)



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