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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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BACKGROUND: 300-450 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 300-450 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

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Field Reports: Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGO. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed has for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 700-800 words.

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JAPAN'S CENTRAL ASIAN DIPLOMACY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Timur Dadabaev

The first ever visit by the Japanese Prime Minister Koichiro Koizumi to Central Asia symbolizes the continuation of the Japanese effort to formulate its foreign policy towards this energy-rich and strategically important region. While the visit of the Japanese leader undoubtedly was welcomed by both the regional leadership and the public as historic, the success of the Japan's foreign policy in Central Asia also depends on a range of other factors such as the continuity of these efforts after the change of leadership in Japan, perceptions of the Japanese foreign policy by Russia, China and the U.S. and finally by the essence and outcomes of this policy.

BACKGROUND: The first visit by Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi to the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan during the last week of August 2006 is part of Japan's efforts to shape its foreign policy towards this resource-rich and strategically important region. This visit is not a single diplomatic effort as pictured by some analysts, but a continuation of the efforts by Japanese policymakers to find the most suitable and effective track for Japanese diplomacy in Central Asia.

Japan was late in asserting its influence in Central Asia. The initial Japanese interest towards the region, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, was mainly connected to Japan's Russian vector of diplomacy. This was clearly defined in the Eurasian Diplomacy concept formulated by the former government of Ryutaro Hashimoto in 1997, which had a three-layered structure: political dialogue, economic cooperation and cooperation in nuclear non-proliferation, democratization and maintaining stability. This mainly implied maintaining bilateral ties with Central Asian countries but more importantly dealing with Central Asia in a broader Eurasian context, taking into account Russian interests in the region. This policy engagement was continued by the

government of Keizo Obuchi, who previously played an active part in the formulation of the Hashimoto's policy towards Central Asia. The Koizumi administration attempted to change the patterns of Japan's involvement in the region. This happened largely against the background of the intensification of competing Chinese policy towards the region through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Chinese efforts to dominate energy-export related projects in the region, and growing Russian influence through the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Community.

A Japanese policy of engagement in Central Asia materialized firstly in the Japan's "Central Asia plus Japan Dialogue" initiative announced by Foreign Minister Yuriko Kawaguchi in 2004, the distinctive feature and competitive advantage of which is to encourage Central Asian regional integration and to enhance the capacities of these countries to deal with regional problems by regional means. This direction of Japanese foreign policy was further supported by Kawaguchi's successor in the post of Foreign Minister Aso Taro, who in a June 2006 speech stressed the regional holistic approach to Central Asia, support for regionalism and promotion of democracy and market economy in the region. Such attempts by Japan to

assert more active Central Asian diplomacy, under rhetoric of strengthening the capacities of the regional states in dealing with their own problems, are seen by many as a part of the Japanese efforts to limit Russian and Chinese attempts to subvert the Central Asian countries. Whether or not this is the intended Japanese policy or wishful interpretations remains uncertain. However, what is clear is that Koizumi's visit to Central Asia peaked all previous efforts of Japanese diplomacy and aimed to accomplish a breakthrough in relations with regional states.



Prime Minister Koizumi (BBC)

IMPLICATIONS: There are several areas of special interest to Japan in its relations with Central Asia. These include areas of cooperation in education, economic development of the region and political reforms. In terms of energy resources, Japan aims to compensate for its own lack of resources and overdependence on Middle East in supply of oil, gas and similar products. In addition, China's policy of securing major pipeline routes from Central Asia adds to Japan's motivations. This situation greatly predetermined the main themes of Koizumi's visit to Kazakhstan, where a memorandum on cooperation in peaceful exploitation of nuclear energy and uranium mine development was signed. This does not only symbolize the national interest of Japan to secure a stable supply of energy, but reflects on the desire of private Japanese corporations to have governmental

commitments on both the Japanese and Central Asian sides in securing access to energy resources.

In Uzbekistan, in addition to energy-related talks and the commitment of both sides to launch a framework for working-level talks on various issues, Koizumi emphasized two main themes. The first was Japanese aid for education projects involving increasing the number of students from Uzbekistan attending Japanese educational institutions, and the second was connected to political reform and improvement of the human rights situation. The first theme is seen as an attempt to enforce the plans made during the announcement of the Central Asia plus Japan forum in 2004, which envisaged provision of education to a considerable number of students and professionals from Central Asia in Japanese educational institutions. This step is also connected to the overall task of encouraging democratization, human development and various reforms in Uzbekistan through providing education and engaging the younger generations of policy makers.

The Japanese leader's visit to Uzbekistan was the first visit by a head of state from the industrialized world to Uzbekistan following the Andijan events of 2005, in the course of which the U.S. and other western countries heavily criticized the Uzbek government for its excessive use of force in dealing with riots in Andijan.

On par with the Japanese interest to the region, there is a considerable expectation of Central Asian leadership towards Japan. In particular, leaders of regional countries would like to see more active encouragement by the Japanese government of direct investments by Japanese corporations and companies, especially in the fields of energy resource development and transportation. In this sense, the interests of all sides coincide. Also, the hope for Japanese support through the Central Asia plus Japan scheme in strengthening regional integration and creating a common market in the region is very high. On their side, the Central Asian leaders continuously and consistently express their support for Japan's bid for permanent membership in the UN Security Council, and join in support of Japan's concerns about the situation on the Korean peninsula.

Japanese involvement in the region is accompanied by strong public support among Central Asia's population. In a poll conducted by the University of Tokyo throughout Central Asian countries in the autumn of 2005, the number of those who suggested that Japan has good and rather good influence on their country in Kazakhstan constituted 40% of those asked (10.4%-good influence and 30.3%-rather good influence), with even higher figures registered in Uzbekistan (15.9% and 36.3% respectively). Higher ratings in Kazakhstan are registered only for Russia (38.9% and 41.1% respectively), while in Uzbekistan Japan ranked third after Russia (56.8% and 34.1%) and South Korea (28.6% and 40.1%) which is attributed to close proximity, historical linkages and resident minority groups of Russians and Koreans. Japan is traditionally considered to be a non-threatening to the region because of its peace-forwarding foreign policy, its distance from the region and certain cultural and life-style similarities.

CONCLUSIONS: As is obvious from above, Central Asia-Japan relations have always had very promising potential. Yet just a fraction of this potential has materialized in the fifteen years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, with much more to be left to pursue. Throughout the years following their independence, Japanese diplomacy towards Central Asia, while considered important, lacked concrete policy objectives, political will and dynamism. In this sense, the first visit by a Japanese Prime Minister to Central Asia is an encouraging sign and, for the moment, the most significant attempt to break through the years of passive Japanese involvement in this region.

The ambitious task of intensifying the Central Asian direction of foreign policy is also challenging, with many obstacles and problems ahead. One of the tasks for both Japanese and Central Asian leadership is to provide for a continuity and dynamism of the process even after the expected change of leadership in Japan in September 2006. As many suggest, Koizumi's visit at a time when his term in office is effectively finished, offers little in terms of real outcomes. Another point of concern is that although Japan emphasizes a regional approach to Central Asia, only two, though undoubtedly the most important, countries of the region were given the privilege of a visit, while the remaining countries were simply put on hold.

In terms of international standing, Japan's Central Asian or Silk Road diplomacy attempts to send a message to its Chinese and Russian neighbors that its policy towards Central Asian region is not motivated by a competitive drive (for natural resources or geopolitical influence) but is boosted by Japan's desire to place its relations with regional countries into mutually beneficial realm. While such intentions of Japan are well-understood and welcomed by regional countries, whether China and Russia share these perceptions remains to be seen.

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SAID MAGOMED KAKIEV: CHECHNYA'S STRONGMAN IN WAITING?

Kevin Daniel Leahy

Writing in the August 15 issue of Novaya gazeta, the veteran Russian journalist, Anna Politkovskaya, suggested that a number of influential pro-Moscow figures in Chechnya are becoming increasingly exasperated with the antics of the republic's incumbent premier, Ramzan Kadyrov. Indeed, the journalist went so far as to claim that a mutiny, purportedly led by local pro-Moscow warlords, Said Magomed Kakiev and Movladi Baisarov, was already underway against Kadyrov. Observers have identified various tensions within the current pro-Moscow regime almost since its inception. However, it would seem that these nascent tensions are now coalescing into something resembling a "loyal opposition" to Kadyrov.

BACKGROUND: The first overt indication of tension within the pro-Moscow ranks came at the end of April, when troops loyal to Kadyrov and those of his nominal superior, President Alu Alkhanov, exchanged gun-fire in downtown Grozny. Then, in late May, reports surfaced about a confrontation that had taken place between Kadyrov's forces and those of another pro-Moscow stalwart, Movladi Baisarov, when the latter's guard deigned to detain a young relative of Ramzan's as he was leaving Grozny. The sour state of relations between these respective parties had previously been remarked upon. However, the novelty of these incidents lies in the way in which they were resolved; or rather, who resolved them. The April shoot-out ceased only when Said Magomed Kakiev's "Zapad" (West) battalion intervened in the fracas, thereby physically separating the protagonists. Also, the incident involving Kadyrov and Baisarov – at the height of which Kadyrov's militiamen actually laid siege to the latter's compound – was resolved thanks in large part to Kakiev's timely intervention. In both of these episodes, therefore, Kakiev emerged as a capable counter-weight to Kadyrov's characteristic impetuosity. In essence, his battalion functioned as a peace-keeping force during these incidents. However, if Politkovskaya's aforementioned

account is true, Kakiev might soon decide to confront, rather than simply restrain, the controversial pro-Moscow prime minister. Accordingly, Kadyrov is presently facing a mutiny of sizable proportions, with members of the republic's so-called "oil regiment", elements within the local Emergency Situations Ministry, members of the republic's OMON unit, as well as considerable numbers of servicemen in all four GRU-affiliated ethno-battalions now refusing to recognize his authority. In addition, Kakiev and Baisarov have reportedly been joined by another prominent dissident, the leader of the recently created "Yug" (South) battalion, Muslim Ilyasov. Kakiev's profile has been bolstered somewhat by the incidents referred to above, but he nevertheless remains something of an enigma. His past, although less checkered than some of his pro-Moscow colleagues, is certainly no less remarkable. Unlike many other contemporary pro-Moscow luminaries like Kadyrov and Sulim Yamadaev, Kakiev has never been associated with Chechen separatism. Indeed, he has remained an unflinching advocate of Russo-Chechen unity throughout his career, describing himself as a proud Russian army officer. In this respect, the contrast between Kakiev and Kadyrov could hardly be any starker. The latter is openly contemptuous of the Russian military, and is

said to be privately disdainful of Russia (and Russians) in general. With this in mind, and given the considerable domestic trials he is reportedly now facing, Kadyrov is fast coming to be regarded as an increasingly isolated figure within Chechnya's pro-Moscow political arena. While it would be quite premature to state categorically that President Putin has decided to dispense with Kadyrov as his point-man in the republic, it is safe to say that Ramzan's position is now considerably more ambiguous than it was six months ago.



Said Magomed Kakiev (Wikipedia)

IMPLICATIONS: Assuming that Kadyrov is becoming a spent force in Chechnya, would Kakiev's credentials suggest him as Moscow's strongman in waiting? First and foremost, his impeccable record as an opponent of separatism, coupled with his self-styled image as a Russian patriot would obviously endear him to Putin and his inner circle. Similarly, with respect to the Russian military, these qualities would certainly assure him the somewhat qualified status of being, in their view, the least untrustworthy "loyal" Chechen field commander. Also, Kakiev's tendency to eschew the political limelight might work in his favour. In

recent months, a series of political demarches from Kadyrov have caused some embarrassment for his handlers in Moscow. The young prime minister is floundering in his attempts to kindle his fledgling political career while simultaneously striving to retain his status as local strongman. In fact, his recent travails suggest that it may be impossible to reconcile these two roles. This realization would hardly perturb Kakiev, who seems content to project himself as a bluff military man, quite unconcerned with the inanities of political office. Should he at some point assume the role of Chechnya's gendarme, therefore, Kakiev would presumably be content to leave the political side of affairs to Alkhanov - something Kadyrov has resolutely refused to do. Indeed, if certain reports are to be believed, an Alkhanov-Kakiev axis (also including Sulim Yamadaev and the former mayor of Grozny, Bislán Gantemirov) is already in the process of being formed. An alliance between Alkhanov and Kakiev would seem eminently logical given their shared history as career opponents of separatism. Unlike the other three ethno-battalions, "*Zapad*" contains no known amnestied separatists. In fact, Kakiev is an avowed opponent of the amnesty process in general, asking: "How can those who have been fighting us be utterly forgiven?" In this respect, he is certainly more inflexible than Kadyrov who readily accepted former separatists into his security structures. Kakiev apparently shares the zero-sum mentality of the Russian Generals with respect to the war against the separatists. Indeed, his hatred for the separatist president, Doku Umarov, is visceral, and personal: Kakiev blames Umarov and the late Ruslan "Hamzat" Gelaev for perpetrating the so-called "Dagestanskaya Street massacre" during the rebel occupation of Grozny in August 1996, in which thirty *Kakievsty* were allegedly murdered despite a promise of safe passage from the rebels. Kakiev, it should be said, is himself accused of egregious human rights violations.

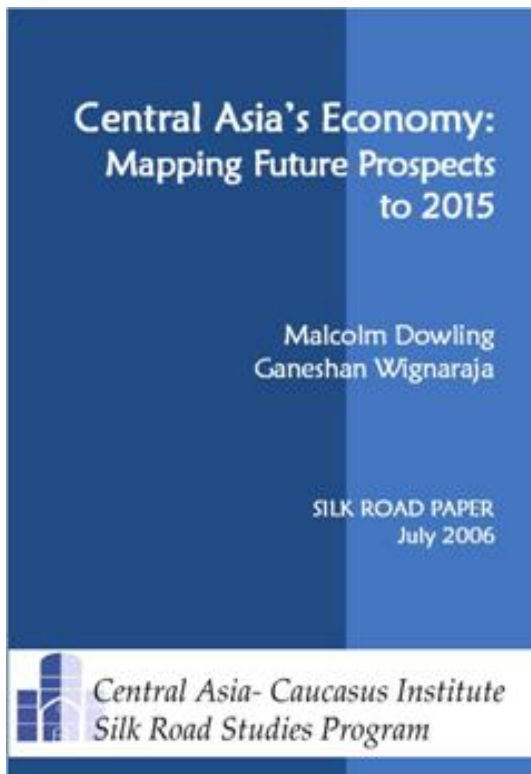
The prospect of negotiating with the separatist leadership is nevertheless as much an anathema to him as it is to Putin and the military. However, Kakiev does have some drawbacks as a potential

strongman. For one thing, he does not possess the same clan-connections enjoyed by Kadyrov – connections which have underpinned the Russian strategy of “Chechenization” over the past several years. Furthermore, should Kakiev at some point receive the Kremlin’s blessing as its Chechen enforcer-in-chief (either explicitly or implicitly), one might well expect certain other pro-Moscow field commanders to react with jealousy and suspicion.

CONCLUSIONS: While it would be fanciful to sound Kadyrov’s political death knell just yet, his long-term viability depends almost solely on how quickly he learns to temper his evolving political persona. His carefully crafted relationship with

Putin will doubtless buy him some time in this regard, but the indications from Chechnya itself are that Ramzan may well be ousted from “below”, as it were, before he is from “above”. The successive incidents catalogued at the outset show that there is, in fact, a loyal opposition to Kadyrov within Chechnya; and, perhaps more importantly, that there are others as capable of maintaining order as he. Mr. Kadyrov should perhaps hope that these apparent conclusions have escaped the notice of President Putin and his confidantes. Else, his political star could fall as spectacularly as it rose.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Kevin Daniel Leahy holds a postgraduate degree in International Relations from University College Cork, Ireland.



New Silk Road Paper!

Central Asia’s Economy: Mapping Future Prospects to 2015

by Malcolm Dowling
and
Ganeshan Wignaraja

This is a comprehensive though concise analysis of the economic development scenarios of Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Written by two ADB experts, it provides guidance to understanding the evolution of Central Asian economies in coming years.

This 105-page paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

SOCHI SUMMIT STRENGTHENS EURASEC

Richard Weitz

From August 15-17, the leaders of the Eurasian Economic Community (Eurasec) convened one of their most important sessions in the Russian Black Sea coastal resort of Sochi. The assembled presidents and senior staff addressed four main issues. First, they debated how to accelerate their long-delayed plans to establish a Customs Union while simultaneously managing their diverging relations with the World Trade Organization (WTO). Second, they extended membership to Uzbekistan. Third, they strengthened their ties with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Finally, they discussed how to cooperate on energy issues, especially hydroelectric and nuclear power.

BACKGROUND: Eurasec was established in 2000. Its membership roster includes Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and now Uzbekistan. Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine enjoy observer status. Its members account for approximately three-fourths of all foreign commercial transactions occurring among the twelve members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Eurasec's main function is to promote economic and trade ties among countries that formed a unified economic system during the Soviet period. Since the USSR's disintegration in 1991, however, these states have frequently diverged in their national macroeconomic policies and imposed various commercial restrictions on their fellow former Soviet republics. The CIS has had difficulties securing implementation of many of the economic, political, and security agreements its member governments have signed. Although the institution does provide opportunities for dialogue among its members, especially among government ministries and agencies dealing with common problems such as customs and migration, the lack of effective enforcement or oversight mechanisms severely limits effective cooperation. Even Russian lawmakers ratify only a small percentage of CIS accords, making it hard to reconcile members' conflicting legislation and policies. The problems of achieving consensus among twelve governments with increasingly divergent macroeconomic and

regulatory policies – combined with the organization's weak, opaque, and inefficient institutions – have led those states most committed to economic integration within the former Soviet space to seek other avenues for collaboration. With its smaller number of members, all favorably disposed toward Moscow's leadership, Eurasec represents a logical alternative.

IMPLICATIONS: At the August summit, the leaders agreed to strengthen the legal basis for their planned customs union. The envisioned arrangement would eliminate duties and taxes on both imports and exports among Eurasec members. Although Eurasec Secretary General Grigoriy Rapota thought that the members would establish a legal framework for the customs union by the end of this year, he acknowledged that the union's establishment might not occur until early 2008. Given the difficulties that Belarus and Russia alone have had in negotiating a possible currency union, the attendees prudently ignored proposals to establish a Eurasec currency union.

Second, the summit attendees decided to offer full membership to Uzbekistan. For several years, Uzbekistan has been deepening its ties with the pro-Moscow bloc of former Soviet republics. This process accelerated last year after the May 2005 military crackdown at Andijan led to a rupture of relations between Uzbekistan and Western governments. Whereas Western countries

criticized and subsequently sanctioned the Uzbek government for employing excessive force against demonstrators, Russian officials endorsed the Uzbek crackdown as a justifiable response to a foreign-inspired terrorist attack. Tashkent accused the United States and certain European governments of encouraging anti-incumbent “colored” revolutions in the former Soviet republics and required almost all NATO forces to stop using its military facilities.

Third, the Eurasec leaders resolved to strengthen ties with the CSTO, which includes all Eurasec members as well as Armenia, a Eurasec observer. Russian President Vladimir Putin stressed the functional nexus between the two organizations when he observed: “You cannot advance the economy without having ensured security first.” Since the CSTO contains the same members as Eurasec, plus Armenia, their leaders often hold sessions of both organizations when they assemble at regional summits. This pattern repeated itself at Sochi, where the subsequent CSTO session approved Uzbekistan’s complete integration into that institution as well as Eurasec. Although Uzbek President Islam Karimov raised the idea of merging the two bodies, such integration could prove problematic given that both institutions are still developing their internal structures. From Moscow’s perspective, however, a merger would create an organization whose functional responsibilities would potentially rival and, at least in the realm of military security, exceed that of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in which China holds a preeminent if not dominant role.

Finally, the summit participants agreed to strengthen energy cooperation, especially in the areas of hydroelectric and nuclear power. In the near-term, the members are assessing how to regulate Central Asia’s unevenly distributed water resources and exploit the region’s potential to generate hydroelectric power. Experts at the International Crisis Group and other institutions have long warned that the continued lack of an effective region-wide mechanism for managing

water supplies could engender further conflicts among Central Asian countries. At the summit, Putin proposed using the recently created Eurasian Bank of Russia and Kazakhstan, which is scheduled to begin operations by the end of the year, to fund the establishment of a regional hydropower consortium.

Putin also used the meeting to raise once again his vision, first laid out at the Eurasec summit in St. Petersburg in January 2006, to establish a network of international centers for enriching, selling, and storing nuclear fuel. Central Asian countries could supply natural uranium for the proposed facility in Russia. The Russian nuclear industry has been seeking deals with Central Asia’s uranium mining firms to supplement its domestic production. Russian analysts fear that their country’s own sources of natural uranium will prove insufficient to meet the government’s ambitious plans to expand use of nuclear power. At the January 2006 Eurasec summit, the governments of Russia and the Central Asian members agreed to conduct joint exploration and mining of the region’s uranium deposits.

Both the nuclear and the hydroelectric proposals could yield considerable economic and nonproliferation benefits for the parties. They would, however, further extend Moscow’s influence over Central Asia’s energy resources in the face of American efforts to deepen energy cooperation between Central and South Asia, including in the hydropower sector. A novelty at the Sochi summit was the presence of Viktor Yanukovich, who attended the summit in his new capacity as Ukrainian Prime Minister. Widely considered pro-Russian, Yanukovich met with Putin and Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov, reportedly discussing Russia’s natural gas tariffs.

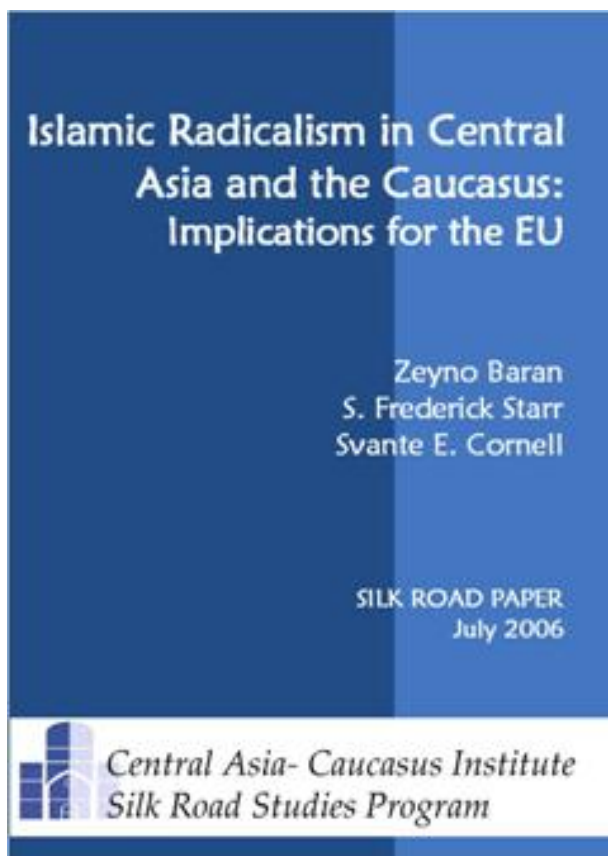
CONCLUSIONS: The members’ diverging status with respect to the WTO remains a major factor complicating their efforts to establish a customs union. Whereas Kyrgyzstan has been a WTO member since 1998, Belarus has not even begun formal accession negotiations. Russia, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan are negotiating their terms of entry. Russia’s efforts to join the WTO remain blocked by

several unresolved disagreements with the United States, which Moscow and Washington proved unable to resolve at bilateral meetings during the July 2006 G-8 summit in St. Petersburg. Economics Minister German Gref, presidential aide Sergey Prikhodko, and other Russian officials have made statements suggesting that they see a Eurasec customs union as an alternative, at least for a while, to WTO membership. Prikhodko explained: “We can’t sit in the waiting room at the door of the WTO forever and limit ourselves to these matters.”

At the beginning of the Sochi summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin insisted in his opening remarks that “It is extremely important for virtually all of us to ensure an information exchange on our plans to join the World Trade Organization, which means our intention to step up integration processes in Eurasec, including the creation of a

customs union, should be coordinated with progress at WTO talks.” Although the attendees agreed to harmonize their WTO and Eurasec integration processes, such a strategy risks slowing progress in both institutions to that of the lowest common denominator. Perhaps even more disruptive would be the possible emergence of a multi-level Eurasec—an institution in which changing coalitions of states would accept, depending on the issue, different degrees of economic integration and cooperation. A worrisome sign is that only Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia have thus far officially committed to joining a customs union since they alone have made substantial progress towards harmonizing the relevant legislation.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Dr. Richard Weitz is a Senior Fellow and Associate Director of the Center for Future Security Strategies at the Hudson Institute.



New Silk Road Paper!

Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU

by Zeyno Baran, S. Frederick Starr, and Svante E. Cornell

This 55-page report analyzes Islamic radical movements in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the reasons for radicalization, and implications for Western and European interests in the region covering Central Asian republics, the North and South Caucasus.

This 55-page paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

IRAN AND TURKMENISTAN: WHAT BROUGHT AHMADINEJAD TO ASGHABAT?

Muhammad Tahir

The President of Turkmenistan, Sapamurat Niyazov, is a man full of surprises. He again got the attention of many western observers by hosting one of the most criticized leaders in the world, Iranian President Mahmood Ahmadinejad at a very critical moment.

Ahmedinajad paid an official visit to Turkmenistan on July 24-25, 2006, while his foreign policies, including alleged support of the Lebanon-based paramilitary group Hizbollah, was being strongly criticized by the international community, especially major Western powers. The intentions behind this two-day, unannounced, official visit with no concrete agenda, raised many questions among western observers since there was also no major agreement reached during this surprise visit.

BACKGROUND: The relationship between Iran and Turkmenistan officially began shortly after the Turkmenistan's independence in 1991, when they officially inaugurated diplomatic missions. Since then, Iran has become an important player among nations fighting to increase their influence in Central Asian countries. Iran, despite its reputation of being a repressive Islamic regime, had an advantageous position to take this struggle one step ahead of the others, since it was also welcomed by Turkmenistan, because, in contrast to western countries, Tehran had no interest in the political system of Turkmenistan.

Iran also received credit from the Niyazov administration, because of its humanitarian assistance while Turkmenistan as a young nation was facing a tremendous shortage of food and other daily needs. Niyazov still occasionally recalls this support, as he did in this meeting, sending especially warm regards to former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, whom Niyazov calls 'brother Hashemi'. Over the last several years, Iran has worked hard to increase its cultural influence by opening cultural houses not only in the Turkmen capital, Ashgabat, but also in the Mary region. Besides these activities, the two countries not only share a 992 km-long border, but also both have

autocratic regimes, and made important progress in bilateral trade that reportedly surpassed US\$1 billion in 2005. Iran, which is today the second biggest buyer of Turkmen natural gas, electricity, liquefied gas and polypropylene after Russia, purchased some 5.8 billion cubic meters of gas from Turkmenistan in 2005. The two leaders indicated their intention of increasing this volume to more than 13 bcm in coming years.



Presidents Niyazov and Ahmadinejad (Farsnews)

Yet most observers believe the relationship of these two countries is more about politics than about trade and economics. Iran and Turkmenistan are two isolated nations in a region that have a common

ground of understanding in such fields as strict control over civil and human rights issues. Moreover, the Iranian Government has additional reasons to be interested in cooperation with Turkmenistan. From the day Tehran increasingly became a target of Western powers, it had to increase monitoring the activities of ethnic minorities inside the country, whom Tehran views as potential threats to the central regime. Hence, from the Iranian point of view, Turkmenistan is important since more than four million ethnic Turkmens live in Iran. The Turkmens have a history of resistance against the Iranian regime, and also follow the Sunni faith of Islam, while Shi'a Islam is Iran's state religion. After recent developments in neighboring countries, the ethnic Turkmen factor seems to gain importance. After Saddam Hussein's regime fell in Iraq, Iranian Kurds and Arabs have increasingly been inspired by developments which made minorities an important part of that country's governmental structure. Aside from these, Baluchis and Azeris have grown more restive as well. But so far no signs of open dissatisfaction have been demonstrated by the ethnic Turkmens. Tehran attributes this to their lack of external support.

In addition to increasingly high levels of dialogue with Ashgabat, Iran has also been seen taking practical measures to separate the two societies, by encouraging the resettlement of non-Turkmen communities on the Iranian side of the Turkmen border, thereby blocking direct contact between Turkmen societies living on both sides. In addition, Iran this Summer signed an agreement of non-interference in internal affairs with Turkmenistan.

IMPLICATIONS: Western observers connect Ahmadinejad's visit to Turkmenistan as part of a confidence-building measure between the two countries, which could help Tehran make sure that in the event of foreign aggression toward Iran, the territories of Turkmenistan will not be used against it. Besides the declaration indicating non-interference in each other's internal affairs and sovereignty, the sides also agreed on a document which says that the 'sides will not allow its territories to be used against each other'. This was

one important section of the document signed during the meeting of the Iranian and Turkmen leaders, which was previously expected by many to be focused on the legal status of the Caspian sea, as it remains an important issue between these two countries. In a situation like this, this visit was seen by many political observers as a kind of political show by Ahmadinejad, as part of his wider spread of propaganda directed against the allegations of Western countries toward Iran, and, in particular, related to recent developments in the Middle East.

In some respects, this intention of Ahmadinejad was reflected in the meeting as well, since not only he but Turkmen President Niyazov have been seen calling Western countries to use dialogue to solve international disagreements, though naming any particular conflict. According to a semi-official Turkmen news source, *Turkmenistan.ru*, both leaders agreed with a document that states the importance of the central role of the UN in resolving international problems, as well as solving conflicts through political dialogue, not through the use of force'. The Turkmen President expressed his support for Iran's stance towards solving international problems with peaceful means as well as the orientation of Iran's foreign policy. The last paragraph especially – the expression of support for Iranian foreign policy by the Turkmen government, raises eyebrows since Iran is criticized by the international community on issues such as its support of Hizbollah, its nuclear policy, and its position rejecting the state of Israel's right to exist, and allegations of its involvement with terrorist groups. But some former high level officials in the Turkmen government say that from the Turkmen point of view, this phrase likely contains no message of real support for Iranian policy regarding the Middle East conflict.

Niyazov does not have a deep knowledge of international diplomacy, said former Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan Avdi Kuliyeu. 'Sometimes he can make mistakes, which, if made by another leader, could create a major political scandal'. As an example, Kuliyeu cited the occasion where Niyazov expressed support for Pakistan's

Kashmir policy at a meeting with Pakistani officials, following which he also expressed support for India's Kashmir policy while meeting with Indian officials. The former diplomat also said many international leaders do not take such comments made by Niyazov seriously.

CONCLUSIONS: Despite minor agreements, this previously unannounced official visit, more than anything else, seems to constitute a political show by the Iranian President on an occasion when he is widely criticized internationally regarding Iran's alleged support of Hizbollah, and the country's nuclear program. But the question of what Turkmenistan intended to gain by hosting Ahmedinejad, remains unclear. However, some local experts say that Turkmenistan wants to find

an alternative transit route for its natural gas and other goods, as it looks for energy export options that could bypass Russia. But such intentions also would have little chance in practice, since this will be opposed by world powers. In a situation like this, aside from an opening ceremony of new buildings at the 'Gudan-Bajirgan customs point' on the border, no major progress has been made during these two-day official meetings. The reaction of the international community to this visit is still in question since the entire world was busy following the Israel-Palestine and Israel-Lebanon conflict.

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Terrorism

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New issue of the

China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly

The May 2006 issue of the China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, edited by Dr. Niklas Swanström, is online, with a theme focus on terrorism.

The issue contains articles by Michael Scheuer, Rensselaer Lee, Yitzhak Shichor, Stephen Blank, Michael Mihalka, and many others.

The issue is freely available online through www.silkroadstudies.org or www.cacianalyst.org

FIELD REPORTS

WAR IN LEBANON STIRS IDENTITY ISSUES IN CENTRAL ASIAN STATES

Erica Marat

As the Israeli offensive in Lebanon was rapidly turning into a humanitarian disaster, the Central Asian states found it difficult to formulate a unanimous opinion about the conflict. Across the region, academics, journalists, diplomats, businessmen, and opposition leaders have been engaged into heated debates on what does Israeli-Hezbollah conflict mean for them, and whether they should respond.

The Israeli-Hezbollah conflict provoked a mixed reaction for a number of reasons. What began as a conflict at a long-distance location, quite unexpectedly developed into an issue of identity for these post-Soviet Muslim nations. While living peacefully side by side with the Jewish diaspora for thousands of years, there is an evident revival of religious and nationalist feelings following the collapse of the Soviet communist ideology in 1991.

The possibilities of sending peacekeeping troops and humanitarian aid to Lebanon were discussed in the Azerbaijani, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz parliaments. This is rather an unprecedented political mobilization in reaction to international developments that do not have an immediate geographical link to the region. Experiencing a plethora of their own economic problems, the Central Asian nations treat humanitarian assistance to Lebanon as a question of

religious identity and cultural interconnection with the Muslim world.

Yet, with sympathy towards human casualties in Lebanon, the Central Asian nations have not rushed to openly take an anti-Israeli stance. According to various estimates, some 250,000 Jews resided in various parts of the region at different time periods. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Central Asian Jewish diaspora emigrated to Israel, Germany and the U.S. Many locals still keep in touch with their Jewish friends and former neighbors.

A mild anti-Zionism was imported to the Central Asian societies through the Russian Tsarist and Soviet colonization, mainly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Despite this imported bias against the Jews during the Soviet era, all Central Asian states recognized Israel in the early 1990s. There is a great degree of social and political tolerance toward Jews, as the diaspora produced many renowned specialists in humanities, social and natural sciences.

Today, the Russian influence still impacts the region's public judgments towards Israel's offensive in Lebanon. Through Russian mass media outlets, the Central Asian public was mostly exposed to the perspective that considered the Israeli military actions as a disproportionate response and not a

U.S.-driven understanding of Israel's deterrence strategy.

The Tajik Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), the region's only recognized religious party, called the government to take a firm position in favor of Lebanon. The IRP, whose political agenda only covers cooperation with Iran and Afghanistan, sees cooperation with Lebanon as an incremental advancement in its own scope of actions.

In Azerbaijan, another post-Soviet Islamic country with both Shi'a and Sunni populations, the political opposition organized a protest in front of the Israeli embassy in Baku. But the Azerbaijani government, a regional U.S. ally, banned the protest. According to Azerbaijani expert Fariz Ismailzade, one of the reasons why official Baku found it difficult to express open support for Lebanon is Lebanon's links with its archrival Armenia. Lebanon, being home to a significant Armenian diaspora, has recognized the massacres of Armenians in 1915 as a genocide. By contrast, Israel has been refusing to acknowledge the event. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan sent humanitarian aid to Lebanon.

Indeed, political opposition forces in Tajikistan and Azerbaijan attacked their governments by using the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict as a pretext for advancing their own political ambitions. Likewise, ruling regimes used the oppositions' arguments against them, accusing them of religious fundamentalism.

Despite such accusations, regional political forces that call for distancing from the Soviet past and building new national identities, see it incremental to find historical references in the Arab world. In this search, Lebanon stands as the closest Arab country as regards to the interplay of traditionalism and modernity. The Central Asian states are secular formations, but a cluster of more traditionalist and religious communities call for integration of Islam into domestic politics.

Furthermore, as national histories are being revised after the end of Russian colonialism, the Central Asian intellectual elites emphasize the fact that before Stalin introduced Cyrillic script in 1924, and Latin before that in the case of Azerbaijan, the locals

used the Arabic alphabet. Indeed, ongoing "purification" of the national languages involving the removal of Russian words is undertaken with a solemn reliance on Arabic. Few realize that a great part of the terminology related to religion, education, and politics are borrowed from Arabic, as Islam was first brought into the region by the Arabs in the eighth century.

The activity of the radical Hizb-ut-Tahrir movement is another fuzzy link to the Arab world in the Central Asian context. Since late 1990s, the party has been a major security threat regionally and domestically. In order to adapt to the moods in the Central Asian region, Hizb-ut-Tahrir was bound to shift away from one of its foundational ideological goals to destroy Israel. Instead, the party promotes changing secular political governments in the Central Asian states into Islamic ones. Hizb-ut-Tahrir is banned across the region.

The Muslim world's reaction to the Danish cartoons against the prophet Mohammad was another example when Central Asians felt connected their religious counterparts in other countries. Although compared to other Muslim states in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, the Central Asian public's reaction was rather mild to the cartoon controversy, it was yet another step away from Soviet secularism toward a more global identity based on religion.

The Middle Eastern political developments are often used as a source for political metaphors in the Central Asian intra-regional relations. Kyrgyz ombudsman Tursunbai Bakir, for instance, called the activity of the Uzbek security forces against Islamic radical movements in southern Kyrgyzstan to be reminiscent of Israel's offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Realistically speaking, Central Asian official protests or support for Israel's security policy will not make a difference in the Middle East's peacemaking or peacebuilding processes. The states simply lack any sizeable international weight in voicing their concerns with the Israeli-Hezbollah war. Domestically, however, the war in the Middle

East reverberates in the formation of political and cultural identities among state officials and population. Although not taking sides in favor of Israel, Hezbollah, or the Arab world at large, the Central Asians are rethinking their own

relationship to the processes in the Middle East. The relationship may be psychological, rather than political. Yet, as time passes, it might grow into a stronger bond.

UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT YUSHCHENKO'S UPCOMING VISIT TO BAKU: PLANS AND IMPLICATIONS

Fariz Ismailzade

The long-expected and repeatedly delayed visit of Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko to Azerbaijan will finally take place on September 7-8. Both sides have much to expect from the visit. The local media outlets in Azerbaijan, however, have stated that oil export and pipeline projects will be the most important item on the agenda.

Having witnessed severe pressures from Russia in the field of energy supplies last winter, Ukrainian authorities are keen to diversify the list of their energy partners and thus better prepare for the upcoming winter. The issues of energy security and cooperation in the field of energy refineries have topped the agenda of the inter-governmental meeting, which took place in Baku last week. Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Andrey Kluyev, who headed the Ukrainian delegation, met with President Ilham Aliyev and discussed the points of interests for the Yushchenko's upcoming visit. It is expected that during the visit, Azerbaijan's State Oil Company (SOCAR) will sign an agreement with "NAFTOGAZ Ukraina" on bilateral investments, the construction of new enterprises, the organization of exploration works in the energy field in the territories of both countries, an increase of the volume of Azerbaijani oil exported to Ukraine, and cooperation in the field of agriculture and environment.

In the context of the oil exports, Yushchenko is also expected to raise the issue of the Odessa-Brody pipeline, which until very recently has been operating as an export pipeline for Russian oil. The Ukrainian President is eager to reverse the flow of oil and make it an export outlet for Caspian oil to European markets. This would require the extension of the pipeline from Brody to the Polish city of Gdansk, something which was on the agenda of discussions between Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and his Polish counterpart last year. If implemented, this pipeline project will reduce the energy dependence of Ukraine, Poland and other EU countries from Russia.

Azerbaijan does not seem to be against the Odessa-Brody-Gdansk pipeline, yet is cautious about promising immediate supplies of oil. The recently constructed Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) main oil export pipeline still needs significant amount of oil to be used to its maximum extent. Kazakhstan has joined the BTC pipeline, yet the lack of an agreement on the legal status of the Caspian Sea prevents the construction of a pipeline under the Caspian sea, thus limiting the volumes of the export of Kazakh oil. Last week, SOCAR officials stated that Azerbaijan planned to stop using Baku-Novorossiysk (Russia) pipeline for the export of Azerbaijani oil for exactly the same reasons.

Nevertheless, Azerbaijani experts are optimistic. Gubad Ibadoglu, the chairman of the Economic Research Center and Sabit Nagirov, head of the FAR Center, stated in their interviews to the Echo newspaper that Azerbaijan might agree to transport its oil through the Ukrainian pipeline should the tariffs and economic conditions be favorable.

Meanwhile, another issue that drew much attention among local analysts regarding the visit of the Ukrainian President is democracy. Prior the Orange revolution, Yushchenko has had warm relations with the Azerbaijani opposition, and even signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Musavat party. Many Azerbaijani opposition leaders, such as Ali Kerimli, Isa Gambar and others, traveled to Ukraine during the Orange revolution to support Yushchenko and his coalition.

The news about Yushchenko's upcoming visit to Baku and his refusal to meet with opposition leaders was portrayed by many as a betrayal to democracy. "Oil is more important for Yushchenko than

democracy," exclaimed opposition dailies. Others have tried to justify his actions by the pressures coming from the Azerbaijani government.

Nevertheless, some opposition groups put much hope to the visit of the Ukrainian President. The committee for the protection of the rights of Mirza Sakit, the satirical poet and journalist of the opposition newspaper Azadliq, arrested several weeks ago on drug possession charges have sent an appeal to President Yushchenko seeking his support in the liberation of the journalist. They believe that Mirza Sakit was arrested on false charges and that the Ukrainian President will be able to influence his Azerbaijani counterpart to stop the wave of harassment of opposition-minded journalists that has been taking place lately in Azerbaijan.

ASTANA SEEKS SOLUTION FOR ITS CHINESE DILEMMA

Marat Yermukanov

Good-neighborly relations with China are one of the cornerstones of Kazakhstan's foreign policy in maintaining a delicate balance in the Central Asian geopolitical game between the great powers. Beneath the carefully worded diplomatic phraseology used by Astana are apprehensions related to unresolved disputes over trans-border rivers, and the discriminatory policy pursued by Chinese authorities towards Kazakh ethnic minorities.

On the surface, it may appear that Kazakh-Chinese partnership could serve as a perfect model of fair and equal treatment of a small and weak country by a mighty neighbor. Unlike troubled borders with Uzbekistan, hardly an incident worth mentioning has occurred along the Kazakh-Chinese border over the last fifteen years. More than that, Beijing actively supported confidence-building measures initiated within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and fostered military and security cooperation with Kazakhstan.

The recent Tianshang-2006 military exercises composed of Chinese and Kazakhstani border troops and involving fighter aircraft, artillery, armored tanks and sophisticated weapons, was assessed by the deputy chairman of the Kazakh National Security Committee (KNB) Vladimir Bozhko as indicating the willingness of both countries to join forces in fighting terrorism. According to the scenario of the drill, a group of terrorists were located, surrounded and destroyed after a short resistance, and passengers of a bus taken hostage by terrorists were successfully released. The head of the Chinese delegation, Zhan Jun De, praised the skills of the Kazakh airborne troops.

But military cooperation between Kazakhstan and China, for all intensity of contacts and joint exercises, contributes little to raise the defense capabilities of Kazakhstan. Kazakh military purchases from China are insignificant, and China's strategy in dealing with its northern neighbor is geared almost exclusively towards reinforcing its economic security in this vital region rich in energy resources. On August 26, at the second session of the Kazakh-Chinese subcommittee for energy cooperation in Beijing agreements were reached to complete the feasibility study of the gas pipeline from Kazakhstan to China. Beijing ardently supported the construction of the second phase of Kenkiyak-Kumkol oil pipeline, as well as the cooperation in deep processing of oil and gas.

China cannot afford to neglect the security of its oil transportation facilities in areas bordering with Kazakhstan, and would like to see Kazakh security forces on its side in fighting what Beijing categorizes as Islamic extremists and separatists in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region. It appears, however, that Astana, having enough to deal with in its Caspian backyard, prefers to steer clear of what it regards as China's domestic problems. Almost simultaneously with the Kazakh-Chinese exercises, the armed forces of Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan carried out a large-scale military exercise in the Caspian region codenamed Rubezh-2006 with the same stated objective of eliminating presumptive terrorist foes.

For all its importance as a "strategic partner", China's next moves in Central Asia are unpredictable for Kazakhstan and Chinese military might poses an open threat to the Southern parts of the country. Therefore it is in the interests of Astana to use its expanding relations with other Asian countries and the West as a counterweight to deter the Chinese drive in the region. The warm welcome given to Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi during his two-day visit to Kazakhstan on August 28-29 carried this subtext. The first ever visit of a Japanese Prime Minister, which was assessed by President Nazarbayev as an event of "historic importance", took place against the background of continuing strained relations between Beijing and Tokyo. The Japanese leader noted that his country is set to develop cooperation with Kazakhstan above all in the energy sector, particularly in joint development of nuclear energy. Obviously, with shrinking opportunities to profit from Middle Eastern oil resources, Japan will play a greater role in the Caspian, which is definitely not to the taste of Beijing.

The Kazakh government also faces growing pressure from nationalist forces to pursue a more cautious policy towards China. On August 25, the Zhas Qazaq independent newspaper carried a lengthy open letter to President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev. It alerts the government to the fact that Chinese authorities subject ethnic Kazakhs in the Xinjiang and Altai regions to religious and racial discrimination, barring Muslim believers from government offices and enforcing the Chinese language in the public service sector. The authors of the letter view the wide-spread practices of forced assimilation of the Kazakh population with the Hans, and distortion of historical facts in history textbooks intended for Uighur and Kazakh schools, as an attempt by the authorities to destroy ethnic languages and culture.

At the same time, Beijing does not show open enmity towards ethnic minorities, and carries out the policy of ethnic assimilation with extreme caution, not to provoke protests. In many Kazakh-

populated regions, 18-hour radio broadcasts, and two TV channels in Kazakh create an impression of racial equality. This seems to be a part of Chinese

policy to maintain friendly relations with Kazakhstan and rein in mounting ethnic sentiments in a volatile environment.

THE U.S.-KYRGYZ MILITARY BASE NEGOTIATIONS

Joldosh Osmonov

Negotiations between Kyrgyzstan and the United States on the American deployment at Manas airbase were held successfully in July. The U.S. Government agreed to increase the payments for the rent and other services to the base. However, the agreement on these new terms was subject to approval by the US Congress.

On July 14, 2006, Kyrgyzstan and United States issued a "Joint statement of the U.S. and the Kyrgyz Republic on coalition forces airbase at Manas airport", resulting from the final round of negotiations on the continued presence of the American airbase on Kyrgyz territory. The statement emphasized the importance of the airbase in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and in fighting international terrorism. The U.S. government is ready to pay reasonable compensation to the Kyrgyz government and to Kyrgyz businesses for goods, services and support of U.S. operations, the statement said. Kyrgyzstan's Security Council Secretary Miroslav Niyazov and U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary Defense James MacDougall signed a Protocol confirming the agreement.

According to this agreement, the United States intend to hand over \$150 million in the form of assistance and compensation over the next year, pending approval by the U.S. Congress. In his

interview to the Kyrgyz office of the BBC, Niyazov stated that the Kyrgyz side is satisfied with the results of the negotiations. "We have agreed that total payments by American side will make up over \$150 million per year". Concerning the rent, Niyazov said that the U.S. will pay \$20 million a year instead of \$2.5 million as was earlier the case.

The "Ganci" airbase was deployed in the "Manas" international airport in December 2001, under a United Nations mandate to support coalition efforts in Afghanistan. Military personnel of 11 states were represented including France, Spain and South Korea. Currently, only U.S. military personnel and technical equipment remains at the airbase. The airbase has gained more importance since the United States military was forced to leave the Khanabad air base in neighboring Uzbekistan in 2005.

The issue of the U.S. airbase in Kyrgyzstan was raised at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in Astana in July 2005. The summit's Final Declaration, signed by the presidents of SCO states, included an article on determining the dates of the withdrawal of military bases from SCO members' territories in view of the accomplishment of the active phase of anti-terrorist operations in Afghanistan.

The same month, U.S. Minister of Defense Donald Rumsfeld visited Kyrgyzstan in order to negotiate the American military presence in the country. As a result of the visit, it was decided to keep the airbase until the situation in Afghanistan normalizes. This decision was nailed down by a joint U.S.-Kyrgyz statement as a result of negotiations between Kyrgyz authorities and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on October 11, 2005, in Bishkek.

At the same time, during Rumsfeld's July 2005 visit, Kyrgyz President Bakiev proposed to sign a new agreement on the airbase. Thereby, Bakiev created a special interdepartmental working group, under the President Administration, to develop new terms of the agreement. After several months of work, the special group came up with new terms, including a significant increase in the rent to be paid, compensation for environmental damage, security issues, taxes, and a list of other provisions reflecting the national interests of Kyrgyzstan. A note with the new terms of the agreement was handed to U.S. Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch on January 24, 2006.

On December 8, 2005, President Bakiev stated at a meeting with the heads of national TV/Radio companies that the agreement on the airbase was up for review as a result of which Kyrgyzstan would be getting a hundred times more rent payments than it did so far. He emphasized the fact that the American government is willing to pay. Later, in an interview to the Russian newspaper "Kommersant" in February 2006, he stated that the U.S. would pay around \$207 million, about 100 times more than previously. At the time, the American side was stating that it will pay more than it did before. But

at the same time, Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, told Itar-Tass in April that the U.S. government was not intended to pay an excessive sum.

In view of delaying the negotiation process, President Bakiev made a statement on national television on April 19, that escalated U.S.-Kyrgyz relations. He said if the negotiations would not be completed by June 1, 2006, Kyrgyzstan would retain the right to abrogate the earlier bilateral agreement of December 2001.

Despite this statement, the first round of negotiations was held only on May 31-June 1, 2006. In order to achieve a mutually beneficial agreement, the two sides agreed to hold another round of final negotiations in July 2006. An incident with two American diplomats expelled from Kyrgyzstan put this last stage at risk. According to an official statement by the Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated July 11, 2006, two diplomatic officers of the U.S. Embassy were declared *persona non grata* in the country. This decision was taken on the basis of facts presented by the Kyrgyz security services about the involvement of these diplomats in actions incompatible with their diplomatic status and the norms of international law. The two diplomats were accused of being U.S. intelligence agents, something U.S. officials deny. In return, the U.S. expelled two Kyrgyz diplomats. While this cast a cloud over negotiations, the stakes involved ensured that an agreement was reached.



Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
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NEWS DIGEST

KYRGYZSTAN, UZBEKISTAN REPORTEDLY AGREE NO-VISA CROSSINGS

25 August

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have reached an agreement that will allow citizens of those two countries to spend up to 60 days in the other country without obtaining a visa. The agreement was reached during a visit by Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Alikbek Jekshenkulov to Tashkent on August 24-25, and it is expected to be signed when Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev visits Uzbekistan in the fall. (akipress.org)

CHINESE-KAZAKH POLICE EXERCISE ENDS IN CHINA

26 August

A two-stage Chinese-Kazakh counterterrorism exercise ended in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region on August 26. The second phase of the exercise, which followed a first phase in Kazakhstan, involved 700 policemen and 100 observers from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Vyacheslav Kasimov, head of the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, said the exercise demonstrated regional leaders' commitment to fighting the "three evils" of separatism, terrorism, and extremism. SCO member states (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) plan to hold counterterrorism exercises in Russia in 2007. (Xinhua)

IRAN'S HEAVY-WATER PROJECT COULD SPARK REGIONAL ARMED CONFLICT

27 August

The inauguration of a heavy-water plant in Iran could bring closer a military action against Teheran by the United States and Israel, Geopolitical Problems Academy Vice President, retired Col. Gen Leonid Ivashov, told Interfax on

Sunday. "Undoubtedly, this could make a military action against Iran by the United States and Israel, and possibly the United Kingdom, more imminent, said Ivashov, an ex-head of the Defense Ministry's Main International Military Cooperation Department. "But Iran has picked a right moment for demonstrating its achievement in nuclear technology," he said. "Iran is convinced that no military action will follow. Israel has been losing its prestige in its aggression against Lebanon, while the U.S. is bogged in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the current setting a military action against Iran would be tantamount to a political suicide for U.S. President George W. Bush," he continued. In this situation Russia must assume "a clear, but restrained position that would prevent a new conflict." "A military operation against Iran would not only upset stability in the region, but also have a negative impact on Russia's interests," Ivashov said. Reports circulated on Saturday said that Iran had launched a heavy-water plant in Arak. Iranian media, citing Iranian officials, claimed it is a major step in Iran's efforts to acquire nuclear technology to meet its civilian needs. (Interfax)

KAZAKHSTAN TAKES STOCK OF MIGRANT-LEGALIZATION PROGRAM

28 August

Some 24,000 migrant workers have profited from a Kazakh program to legalize the status of unregistered migrant workers that got under way earlier this summer. The program, which will continue until the end of the year, is expected to legalize 100,000 workers, mainly from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Russia. Under the program, recently arrived illegal workers are able to receive migration cards and work legally. (RFE/RL)

FORMER AMBASSADOR SLAMS JAPANESE PREMIER'S VISIT TO CENTRAL ASIA

28 August

Outgoing Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi left on August 28 for a four-day visit to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the first-ever trip by a Japanese leader to Central Asia. The Japanese international broadcaster cited recent remarks by Aleksandr Panov, one of Moscow's former ambassadors to Tokyo, to the effect that Koizumi is seeking to "confront" Russia and China in Central Asia on behalf of the United States. Panov argued that Koizumi will achieve nothing. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH OFFICIAL SAYS U.S., BRITAIN WARY OF OSCE BID

29 August

Deputy Foreign Minister Rakhat Aliev, who is also President Nazarbaev's son-in-law, told a meeting of a state democratization commission in Astana on August 28 that Britain and the United States have reservations about Kazakhstan's bid to chair the OSCE in 2009, Interfax-Kazakhstan reported. "Certain countries, among which the United States and Great Britain stand out, while generally welcoming Kazakhstan's initiative [to chair the OSCE], at the same time view critically the prospects for its chairmanship in 2009," Aliev said. The OSCE is expected to make a decision on Kazakhstan's bid by the end of 2006. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

UZBEKISTAN TOPS LIST OF REMITTANCE RECIPIENTS FROM RUSSIA

30 August

Data from the Russian Central Bank suggests that Uzbekistan was the largest recipient of remittances from Russia in the second quarter of 2006. Uzbekistan and Ukraine each received some \$210 million, followed by: Tajikistan (\$187 million); Armenia (\$129 million); Moldova (\$115 million); Kyrgyzstan (\$102 million); Azerbaijan (\$94 million); Georgia (\$81 million); and Kazakhstan (\$22 million). (ferghana.ru)

SOUTH KOREA JOINS UZBEK GAS CONSORTIUM

31 August

South Korea and Uzbekistan have signed a production sharing agreement that gives South Korea's state-run Korea National Oil Corp. (KNOC) a 20-percent stake in an international consortium to develop gas resources on the Aral Sea, Yonhap reported on August 30. Other members are state-owned oil and gas company Uzbekneftegaz, Russia's LUKoil Overseas, Malaysia's Petronas, and China National Petroleum Corporation. Consortium members will put up \$100 million for exploratory drilling over the next three years. Production on the field, which is believed to contain 8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, will not start until 2012. (ITAR-TASS)

KYRGYZSTAN INSISTS THAT FREEDOM HOUSE PAY BACK TAXES.

31 August

Taalaipek Tatkulov, deputy head of Kyrgyzstan's Social Fund, which is responsible for coordinating tax payments that fund social services, told a news conference in Bishkek on August 30 that his agency is in talks with U.S.-based NGO Freedom House about the payment of back taxes the fund says it is owed. The fund has estimated the back taxes owed by Freedom House, which says it is tax-exempt under a 1993 agreement, at \$1 million. Tatkulov said that while his agency insists that Freedom House pay the back taxes, it is willing to give the organization time to do so. (RFE/RL)

170 MILITANTS NEUTRALIZED IN INGUSHETIA SINCE JUNE 2004

31 August

More than 170 militants involved in the June 2004 raid on Ingushetia have been neutralized, the republic's interior chief Beslan Khamkhoyev told reporters in Nazran on Thursday. "More than 250 participants in the attack have been identified since it took place in June 2004. Ninety militants were killed in special operations, more than 80 were arrested, 34 were sentenced, and 30 remain at large. Also, more than 60 people involved in subversive and terrorist acts in Ingushetia have been identified this year. Twenty-five of them have been liquidated during special operations conducted over recently, 17 were arrested and 17 are on the federal wanted list," Khamkhoyev said. More special operations are being carried out by

interior troops, traffic police and OMON special task units, he said. "These operations are bearing fruit and we will continue them," Khamkhoyev said. (Interfax)

IRAN-ARMENIA GAS PIPELINE TO BECOME OPERATIONAL BY DECEMBER

31 August

A senior Iranian oil ministry official said Wednesday evening in Yerevan that Iran-Armenia gas pipeline will become operational by year-end. The announcement was made by Iran's Deputy Oil Minister for International Affairs Hadi Nejad-Hosseinian in a meeting with Armenian Energy Minister Armen Movsisyan. Nejad-Hosseinian, heading a delegation of experts from oil, energy and foreign affairs ministries arrived in Yerevan yesterday. According to an agreement reached between the two sides, the 160-km gas pipeline will transfer some 36 billion cubic meter of Iran's gas to Armenia in the next 20 years. (IRNA)

REPORT SAYS THIRD GROUP OF ANDIJON REFUGEES TO RETURN TO UZBEKISTAN

1 September

A group of 55 Uzbek refugees from Andijon is preparing to return to Uzbekistan from the United States, Uznews.net reported on August 31. The report said the group includes Yodgora Yoldosheva, the wife of Akrom Yoldoshev. Uzbek authorities charge that Yoldoshev, who is currently serving a 17-year prison sentence in Uzbekistan, provided the ideological inspiration for the religious extremists they say were behind May 2005 violence in Andijon. A refugee contacted by Uznews.net said that homesickness was their main reason for wanting to return home. Another said that he believes the Uzbek authorities' guarantees that the returnees will not face prosecution or persecution in Uzbekistan. Two other groups of Uzbek refugees, consisting of 12 and 41 people, have already returned from the United States. As in those cases, the latest return is being organized by the Uzbek Embassy in the United States. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJAN, ARMENIA TO HOLD TALKS ON NAGORNO-KARABAKH

1 September

The foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia may meet in mid-September to outline principles

for resolving a long-running territorial dispute, the Azeri media said Friday. The conflict between the two former Soviet republics over Nagorno-Karabakh, a region in Azerbaijan with a largely Armenian population, first erupted in 1988 when it claimed independence from Azerbaijan to join Armenia. Over 30,000 people were killed on both sides between 1988 and 1994, and over 100 died following a 1994 ceasefire. Nagorno-Karabakh remained in Armenian hands, but tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia have persisted. Azeri Foreign Minister Elmar Mamedyarov said Thursday he spoke by telephone with Bernard Fasier, the French co-chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, who suggested the next round of conflict-resolution talks could be held in Paris September 12-13, or in London September 14-15. The OSCE Minsk Group was created in 1992 to encourage a peaceful resolution to the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. The group is co-chaired by U.S., Russian and French representatives. Mamedyarov said he agreed to meet with his Armenian counterpart, Vardan Oskanyan, and was discussing the format to be adopted for the talks. "We will contact Fasier again later and coordinate the time and place of the meeting," the Azeri FM said. Azerbaijan and Armenia held the latest round of Nagorno-Karabakh talks June 13 in Paris. (RIA Novosti)

GUAM WANTS UN TO TAKE UP 'FROZEN' CONFLICTS IN CIS

1 September

Members-states of GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) have again appealed to the UN General Assembly to include on the agenda of the 61st session an item on frozen conflicts in GUAM and their effects for international peace, security and development. "The continuing conflicts in GUAM, namely in Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan, have been affecting the lives of over 16 million people for over 15 years and endangering international peace and security, threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of three UN member-nations," they say in a letter published in New York as a General Assembly document, the UN news service reported on Friday. The letter says that the situation is leading to the loss of control over

significant parts of territories in the sovereign states ceasing the exodus of millions of refugees and forced migrants and obstructing the economic and social development of the nations. The four nations suggested that the 61st General Assembly session discuss the issue as a priority matter.

(Interfax)

RUSSIAN ISLAMIC LEADERS CALL FOR 'MULTIPOLAR WORLD'

1 September

A two-day conference entitled "Russia and the Islamic World" opened in Kazan on August 31 with calls for a "multipolar world" and "partnership," RFE/RL's Tatar-Bashkir Service reported.

Delegates from 15 members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and from Russia, which has observer status in that body, attended the conference. About 20 million of Russia's 142 million people are of Islamic heritage. Tatarstan's President Mintimer Shaimiyev told the conference that "the world has divided into Christians, Jews, and Muslims. There is a gap that may become an abyss. The world can be united only by new values, and they cannot be purely liberal. But neither can [these values] be traditionally Islamic." In a reference to Iraq, he added that "values cannot be imposed by force." For his part, Council of Muftis of Russia Chairman Ravil Gainutdin argued that "for the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the whole world, it is a priority to seek a way toward a multipolar world, a way of unity in the international community through the mutual enrichment of religious and ethnic cultures."

Delegates attending the Kazan conference passed a declaration on August 31 that called for, among other things, "partnership between various cultures and religions, each being a unique contribution to world history." The declaration also warned against "Islamophobia," which will "help nobody." The text also called for "swift and peaceful settlement of conflicts, which will help...defeat terrorism." The participants agreed that "educational institutions must include the history of religions in their programs." Also at the conference, Russian Middle East expert and former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov told delegates that "nobody is trying to justify those who carry out terrorist acts against civilians [in Israel]. But can one turn a blind eye to the terrorism of the other side when whole districts in Lebanese towns are cruelly destroyed by Israeli

bombardments?" He also noted that "the Middle East conflict has never had a religious nature. Whether somebody wants to admit it or not, this is a confrontation not between two religions, but between two [forms of] nationalism." (RFE/RL)

UN WARNS OF SOARING AFGHAN OPIUM **2 September**

Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is expected to soar by 59% this year, providing 92% of the world's supply of opium, the United Nations says. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime predicted a 6,100-tonne harvest of opium, with much of the rise coming in Taleban strongholds in the south. The US is the main backer of a huge drive to rid Afghanistan of opium. But a top US drugs official warned on Saturday Afghanistan could be "taken down by this whole drug problem". The \$2.7bn drugs trade accounts for about a third of Afghanistan's economy. (BBC)

CENTRAL ASIA TO BE DECLARED NUCLEAR-FREE ZONE - SOURCE

3 September

A treaty on turning Central Asia into a nuclear-free zone is expected to be signed in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan, on September 8, a military-diplomatic source in Moscow told Interfax-AVN. "The treaty will be signed by the foreign ministers of the five Central Asian states - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan," the source said. The treaty consists of two parts. "The first part is the treaty itself and the second - a protocol, which is an integral part of the treaty and is a pledge by the five nuclear powers - the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China - to guarantee the signatory-countries' security and not to use nuclear weapons against them," the diplomat said. "But the protocol, by all accounts, will not be signed, since the Western members of the nuclear five want the Central Asian states to ban the transit of nuclear weapons through their territory, as well," he said. "Russia supports the Central Asian states' position," the source added. There are five nuclear-free zones in the world, involving some 100 countries and covering nearly half of the earth's surface. The formation of nuclear free zones began in the middle of the 1960s with the United Nations and the world community's full

backing," the diplomat said. Nuclear free zones are "an essential element of the effort to make our planet a safe place to live in, since the signatory states voluntarily give up plans to create and locate nuclear weapons in their territory," the diplomat said. (Interfax-AVN)

RUSSIA TRYING TO DESTABILIZE SITUATION IN GEORGIA – MINISTER

4 September

Georgian State Minister for Conflict Resolution Merab Antadze has accused Russia of attempts to destabilize Georgia and of escalating hostilities in the Tskhinvali district. "Yesterday's shooting at a Georgian helicopter was further proof that the Russian political administration, which fully controls the peacekeeping operation in the Tskhinvali district, does not assist the comprehensive peace settlement of the conflict, and instead tries to retain real mechanisms for provocative acts in Georgia, destabilization and a resumption of the hostilities," he told a Monday press briefing. "Statements by Russian officials who accused Georgia of a provocative act in the helicopter shooting incident, are totally unacceptable," Antadze said. "It seems Russia has taken measures to implement its plan and accuse Georgia of a provocative act," he said. Georgia will abstain from yielding to provocations. It will ask the international community to assist in ensuring a peaceful settlement to the conflict in the Tskhinvali district, he said. (Interfax)

RUSSIA CLAIMS GEORGIA PREPARING NON-PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO OSSETIA CONFLICT

4 September

Steps similar to a Georgian helicopter's recent inspection flight over the territory of the breakaway province of South Ossetia show that the Georgian authorities are openly engaged in preparations for a non-peaceful solution to the conflict, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mikhail Kamynin said. "Monitoring reports suggest that helicopters of the Georgian Air Force entered the airspace of the Georgian-[South] Ossetian conflict zone without permission on 12 occasions in July-August alone. The Foreign Ministry of Russia regards such moves by the Georgian authorities as a provocation," he said. "They [Georgia's actions] are evidently aimed at

derailing the Georgian-Ossetian peace process and indicate that Tbilisi is beginning to openly lay the foundation to put alternative settlement options into practice," Kamynin said. (Interfax)

NAZARBAYEV CONSIDERING DIVERTING SIBERIAN RIVERS TO CENTRAL ASIA

4 September

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev is studying the possibility to deliver water of Siberian rivers to the Central Asian region. "I have been raising the issue recently," Nazarbayev said at a joint press conference with Uzbek President Islam Karimov in Astana on Monday. Diverting Siberian rivers will not have a negative impact on the environment, he said. "Populist statements [of the Soviet era] that this is dangerous were wrong," the Kazakh president said, adding that it was calculated in the USSR that "the bogs of the Ob river will not be drained" as a result of diverting Siberian rivers to Central Asia, he said. "This will only affect 8% of Siberian rivers," Nazarbayev said. (Interfax)

KAZMUNAIGAZ TO LIST ON LONDON EXCHANGE

4 September

Kazmunaigaz Exploration and Production, a subsidiary of Kazakhstan's national oil company Kazmunaigaz, says it plans to list about 40 percent of its capital on the London and Kazakhstan stock markets. "I am very pleased that Kazmunaigaz Exploration and Production is today announcing its introduction on the stock market," managing director Askar Baljanov said Monday. A company statement did not disclose the amount of money the group hopes to raise. But the Financial Times newspaper in its Monday edition, citing banking sources close to the transaction, said the listing could be worth up to one billion pounds (1.9 billion dollars, 1.5 billion euros). Kazmunaigaz Exploration and Production is the third largest oil producer in Kazakhstan, with average output of 188,000 barrels a day and reserves estimated at 1.5 billion barrels. (AFP)

KADYROV PLEDGES TO BRING KONDOPOGA SITUATION INTO LEGAL FRAME IF LOCAL GOVT FAILS

4 September

Chechen Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov, concerned about the situation in Kondopoga in the Republic of Karelia, has reproached the local authorities for inactivity. "Massive disturbances, triggered off by conflict between a company of drunk young men with a criminal record, and a barman of Chechen origin, who had reprimanded them for an unruly conduct, are continuing in Karelia's Kondopoga. A brawl has evolved into an ethnically motivated conflict with a clearly anti-Chechen and anti-Caucasus bias," Kadyrov said in an official statement on Monday. "The unrest is continuing against a backdrop of massive abuses of constitutional rights and looting of retail outlets," Kadyrov said. People directly interested in redistributing the spheres of influence and in upsetting the political situation in Kondopoga could stand behind these ethnic feuds and so-called spontaneous disturbances," the Chechen prime minister goes on to say. "But the local authorities have been inactive, yielding to those who breached public peace. This can be seen from the fact that the Kondopoga authorities accepted the local residents' demands, while a resolution passed by a rally, was signed by individual deputies of the city legislature and representatives of the public. The principle of supremacy of law must be absolutely observed in Kondopoga and in the rest of Russia, while emotions and the nationalistic sentiment must be relegated. The local authorities' weakness points to their helplessness," Kadyrov said. "I declare, aware of the entire responsibility, that if the Karelia authorities fail to find forms and methods of settling the situation, we shall manage to find law-based methods to bring the situation back into a legal arena. If the Kondopoga police had been

more efficient in curtailing serious crimes, including massive fights, the current crisis would not have erupted, while the nationalists would not have scored new points in their campaign," the Chechen prime minister said. (Interfax)

MUSLIMS CALL TO AN END TO AZERBAIJAN HEADSCARF BAN

5 September

Religious activists in predominantly Shiite Muslim Azerbaijan on Monday called for officials to change rules barring headscarves in ID photos, saying the law violated observant women's civil rights. Women who refuse to remove their headscarves for passport and other identification photos have unequal access to everything from jobs and health care to travel and their right to vote, members of the Centre for the Protection of Freedom of Conscience and Religion said at a gathering in Baku. "In reality their rights are limited though the constitution and number of international documents give them the right to cover their heads," the centre said in a statement read at the meeting. Ilgar Ibrahimoglu, a banned opposition cleric with a sizeable following in Azerbaijan, urged the secular state's head of the committee for relations with religious groups, Hidayat Orujov, "to address the issue quickly." "For nine years thousands of observant women have been barred of most of their rights," Ibrahimoglu said. Some of the 30 women wearing the Hijab, or religious headscarf, at the meeting said many of them could not receive identification documents needed in daily affairs because of the rules and that they continued to use Soviet-era documents that were no longer valid. One woman, who gave her name only as Jefer, told AFP she was not able to register her marriage or receive a birth certificate for her son because she lacked proper identification. (AFP)