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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
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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.

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.

CONCLUSIONS: 100-200 words that strongly state your conclusions about the impact of the event or issue.

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed 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.

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.

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U.S. DRAWDOWN IN AFGHANISTAN STIRS REACTIONS

Stephen Blank

On June 22, President Obama announced a withdrawal of 33,000 U.S. troops from Afghanistan by 2012. According to the U.S./NATO strategy, these governments should withdraw all their forces by 2014. However, although NATO plans no bases in Afghanistan, the U.S. is negotiating with Kabul to preserve some unspecified bases and is conducting an extensive program of military construction of facilities for Central Asian militaries. Central Asia is becoming more important as a supply route as U.S. ties to Pakistan deteriorate. These linked developments have generated reactions from many if not all of the interested parties to the conflict, which reveal future perceptions of security trends in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

BACKGROUND: A U.S. government poll seems to indicate some measure of confidence among Afghans that they can handle security as the U.S. withdraws. But other reactions are more skeptical. The Indian government, which has made a huge investment in Afghanistan and thus aroused enormous Pakistani suspicions, is clearly alarmed at the prospect of a U.S./NATO withdrawal. Lacking direct access to Afghanistan, India will likely face a more intense challenge from the Taliban and its Pakistani-based supporters, including terrorist groups that strike directly at India. In Pakistan itself, secular political actors, fearing even more Islamization of politics and encroachment by the Islamist elements, are likewise distressed by this announcement.

Central Asian governments, though unwilling to discuss their alarm publicly, clearly fear a Taliban takeover and do not have much confidence in the Karzai regime or the Afghan army to defend Afghanistan. Indeed, many local analysts view a victory or stabilization in Afghanistan as a necessary precondition for the ongoing security of Central Asia. Many of these governments as well as some commentators believe that the indigenous

terrorist threats are growing or have been growing since 2008-09 and view a Taliban victory in Afghanistan as providing the basis for the spiritual and material encouragement of these groups that threaten their own domestic security. Fully grasping the neo-imperial motives behind Russian ambitions to create more military bases and postings for its troops there, they are reluctant to give Moscow that access but fear being left with no other choice. This particularly applies to Tajikistan. Moreover, given the importance of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) to their economic well-being, they certainly are reluctant to see it fade away. In view of the historic absence of regional integration among these governments, it would also probably be quixotic to expect them to produce a large-scale, coherent military alternative force to replace the US/NATO forces. Thus they fear that they might be abandoned to Moscow if not Beijing or left on their own to face what they believe to be a mounting terrorist threat.

Moscow's reaction is also quite predictable. Believing fully in Washington's ulterior motives as evinced by this program of military construction and an enhanced regional

diplomatic profile, Moscow is not unhappy to see the troops leave. But it too harbors no confidence in what comes next as its special envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov recently commented that the situation there deteriorates from day to day. It fears an advance of the Taliban, an explosion of terrorism in both Central Asia and the North Caucasus and a concomitant explosion of the drug trade that is already killing 30,000 young Russians annually. Meanwhile it is seeking more bases and lodgments for its troops in Central Asia under the CSTO's command auspices, but constantly reiterates that it has no desire to return to Afghanistan. Given the past record of the Russian military, there is good reason to wonder if the Russian and indigenous troops the CSTO might bring to the fray are really capable of defending Central Asia against a Taliban-like threat.

IMPLICATIONS: These reactions have at least two common themes that merit our attention. First of all, they all betray a lack of confidence in the ability of the Karzai government and the Afghan army to stabilize the country, bring about improved and legitimate governance, defend against the Taliban, and curtail the trade in narcotics. The Taliban and the reconstituted Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) have already conducted cross-border raids into Tajikistan. Many observers also argue strongly that the U.S. has failed to succeed at what used to be called nation building and it is doubtful whether the U.S. and NATO have succeeded in what the Soviets used to call state building. In the Northern Panjshir province bordering Tajikistan, the provincial security commander General Mohammad Qasim Jangalbagh calls for a huge force because the surrounding provinces are insecure. This suggests that U.S.

reports about the progress being made by the Afghan army may not in fact be accurate and that the optimistic premise of the U.S. withdrawal, that the Afghan Army can defend the country by itself, is unfounded.

Beyond this visible pessimism and lack of confidence in the capacity of Afghan authorities to take control of the situation as the U.S. leaves, is a second common denominator. Essentially, all these actors maintain that whether or not they have invested heavily in Afghanistan's stabilization, they do not possess sufficient resources or will to make the truly enormous investments needed to bring about stability in the country by their own efforts. Accordingly, we see a continuation of the fact that while promises of aid have been made dating back to the Bonn conference of 2001, they have not been fulfilled either due to a lack of will by various governments or their own paucity of resources, and that this situation is worsening. Just as NATO forces are increasingly looking for the exit, many states with important, even vital interests in Afghanistan are only willing to earmark limited quantities of assistance to it, and are probably skeptical that aid can be put to maximum benefit.

If these pessimistic reactions and judgments are well-founded, then Afghanistan and Central Asia face troubling and dangerous prospects. The fear of a vacuum or Taliban victory will lead external governments either to make accommodations with the Taliban or to improve their own position in Afghanistan. Indeed, these are not mutually exclusive options. But they restore much of the past tradition making Afghanistan the football of external actors. Indeed, the ISI is and remains the Taliban's sponsor as a sign of this continuing tradition.



(David Furst/AFP/Getty Images)

A second outcome is that as the U.S. withdraws from Afghanistan, its position in Central Asia is likely to erode commensurately, especially as its own fiscal woes demand attention. That trend in turn opens for increased foreign maneuvering to subordinate the region, most likely to Moscow or Beijing. But other actors like India, Pakistan, and Iran may well invigorate their efforts to attain strategic niches of influence, thus continuing or extending the new great game, in distinction to the Anglo-Russian rivalry of past centuries. It remains difficult to see viable prospects for successful Central Asian regional integration given the record of the last twenty years and the likely conditions as this withdrawal occurs. If anything, the existing competition for influence in Central Asia is likely to accelerate and become more localized as external actors like the U.S. and NATO, and possibly the EU, withdraw due to a lack of resources and compelling strategic interest.

CONCLUSIONS: None of this is in the interests of Central Asian states and they know it. But it remains to be seen how much they can do to escape this potential fate, especially if their pessimism about Afghanistan turns out to be justified. Conversely, if the Karzai regime can indeed stabilize Afghanistan, this could generate trends that may run counter to a pessimistic scenario and breed a virtuous circle. However, the international community must then finally step up to its responsibilities and help Afghanistan help itself. Given the past record of indifference, this is admittedly asking a great deal. But as we have also seen in the past, failure to accept this responsibility can only add to the costs in lives and treasure not only in Afghanistan and Central Asia but also far beyond their borders.

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CHECHNYA'S REBEL MOVEMENT REUNITES UNDER DOKU UMAROV'S LEADERSHIP

Kevin Daniel Leahy

After months of feuding the two rival factions within Chechnya's rebel organisation have been reconciled. Doku Umarov, the disputed leader of the Caucasus Emirate organisation, has somehow prevailed upon his opponents in the Chechen branch of the organisation to once again recognize his legitimacy as Emir. Following some deft political manoeuvring, Umarov has rescued his dwindling legitimacy. But it remains to be seen if there is a hidden price for Umarov to pay for this new affectation of political unity within the rebel ranks, and in that case, for how long Umarov will remain the leader of the rebel organization.

BACKGROUND: On July 23 the Kavkazcenter.com website announced that the self-styled Emir of the Caucasus Emirate, Doku Umarov, had been reconciled with a group of estranged Chechen field commanders who withdrew their oath of loyalty to him in late 2010. This reconciliation was reportedly achieved at a recent meeting of the Caucasus Emirate's Supreme Sharia Court. Video pictures accompanying the report showed Umarov flanked by the current chairman of the Sharia Court, Ali Abu-Muhammed al-Dagestani, and the leader of the group of dissident Chechen field commanders, Hussein Gakayev.

Before going any further, a brief explanation of the origins of this controversy is in order. From late 2007 Gakayev and several other leading field commanders based in Chechnya began to experience misgivings with Umarov's style of leadership, which they deemed to be excessively autocratic. Umarov's decision to announce the establishment of a Caucasus Emirate in October 2007, for example, was apparently arrived at without any consultation with senior field commanders in Chechnya. Matters did not come to a head until late 2010, however, when Umarov seemingly reneged on an agreement to relinquish his position as Emir of the Caucasus

Emirate. This volte-face led to Gakayev and several likeminded colleagues, including well-known field commanders such as Muhanned and Aslanbek Vadalov, to rescind their oath of allegiance to Umarov. The resulting split was acrimonious, with Umarov and his supporters blaming Muhanned, a fighter of non-Chechen origin, for damaging morale in the rebel ranks and Gakayev, Vadalov and their associates in turn accusing Umarov of provoking the controversy by ignoring the collective will of Chechnya's rebel organisation.

In the time since the quarrel between Umarov and the dissidents was made public, conditions within the rebel organisation in the Northern Caucasus have changed to a significant degree. The new set of conditions obtaining within the organisation arguably made it easier for Umarov and his opponents to arrive at some form of compromise.

In March, a Russian airstrike in Ingushetia resulted in the death of Supyan Abdullayev, Umarov's long-time deputy. Abdullayev was a member of the small cabal of advisors who encouraged Umarov to declare the Caucasus Emirate in 2007 and was therefore a polarizing factor in the standoff between Umarov and the dissident Chechen field commanders. Less than



one month later, pro-Russian forces in Chechnya eliminated the Arab field commander Muhanned, or Khalid Yusuf Muhanned al-Emirati. Umarov had blamed Muhanned for inciting the controversy through engaging in seditious and slanderous activity in order to undermine the Caucasus Emirate project.

It is likely that the elimination of these two polarizing influences paved the way toward reconciliation between the two factions.

IMPLICATIONS: One of the video clips of the proceedings at the reconciliatory meeting between Umarov and the dissidents shows Umarov, Gakayev and Vadalov embracing, with all three men admitting to unspecified “mistakes” before the later two re-affirm their oath of loyalty to Umarov. Another clip features Ali Abu-Muhammed al-Dagestani pontificating at length to a large gathering which includes Umarov, Gakayev, Vadalov and ‘Emir Khamzat’ (Aslan Byutukayev), one of the few Chechen field commanders who remained loyal to Umarov during the course of the recent controversy.

It has emerged that the re-unified rebel organisation in Chechnya will be bifurcated into two fronts covering the eastern and western sectors of the republic. Both of these fronts will be under the overall command of Doku Umarov. Responsibility for the eastern theatre rests with Gakayev while the western front

is the preserve of Emir Khamzat. This delegation of responsibilities would seem to reflect a new spirit of compromise among senior rebel leaders.

Gakayev and Vadalov are strongest in eastern districts like Gudermes, Kurchaloi and Vedeno. They will therefore be satisfied to cede responsibility for the western sector to Umarov and Byutukayev. Umarov and Byutukayev are natives of south-western Chechnya and the latter has recently bolstered his profile by laying claim to several high-profile attacks – the suicide attack on Moscow’s Domodedovo airport earlier this year, for example – in the name of the Riyad-us Saliheen Martyrs Battalion, which he leads. Umarov’s continued leadership of the Chechen front, and indeed of the Caucasus Emirate, was probably a greater point of contention between the two parties. It is possible that a secret timetable for Umarov’s resignation from one or both of these positions has been agreed upon, though there is no indication if his eventual successor has already been selected.

Despite these recent developments, some important questions remain unanswered. For

example, what is the position of another key dissident, Tarhan Gaziyeu? Has he also renewed his oath of loyalty to Umarov? Gaziyeu did not attend the reconciliatory meeting in July. Possibly this was due solely to logistical considerations, but Gaziyeu remains strong in south-western Chechnya and was arguably a more qualified candidate to lead the new western front than Byutukayeu. Moreover, will second tier field commanders like Mahran Saidov and Zaurbek Avdorkhanov follow Gakayeu's example by renewing their fealty to Umarov? Like Gaziyeu, these two individuals were conspicuous by their absence from the video materials released by Kavkazcenter.

The identity of Byutukayeu's lieutenant, or 'naib', when it becomes known in due course, will also be of interest. It is likely Umarov will award this post to someone who supported him throughout the controversy – Said-Emin Dadayeu, perhaps. Reportedly the pre-eminent field commander in Umarov's native Shatoi District, Dadayeu has been included by Umarov in a previous rebel shadow government. In contrast to the majority of Chechnya's field commanders, Dadayeu declined to publicly ally himself with Gakayeu and Vadalov during the recent dispute.

CONCLUSIONS: The healing of the rift between the rival Chechen factions has come at a timely moment for the rebel organisation in the North Caucasus. The respective organizations in Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria have been dealt a number of heavy blows over the past twelve months by pro-Russian security forces, and while the rebel organisation in Dagestan continues to go from strength to strength, its counterpart in Chechnya appears to have lost momentum in recent years. This state of affairs has not been helped by the quarrel between Umarov and

Gakayeu, which has naturally had a debilitating impact on the organisation's operational capacity.

While it would seem that Umarov managed to provoke the leadership controversy in the first instance with his high-handed style of management, it must be acknowledged that he has acted in a politically astute fashion since the breach. Umarov made Muhanned a scapegoat for the controversy, portraying him as an Arab nationalist who was trying to undermine the rebels' political agenda. Conversely, Umarov eschewed the use of excessively harsh rhetoric against the Chechen dissidents, repeatedly inviting them to renew their oath of loyalty to him. In short, Umarov resisted the temptation to burn all bridges with his opponents and has seemingly reaped the rewards of this far-sighted policy over the past month.

Umarov has clearly emerged victorious from this affair, which is remarkable because initially it seemed as though the controversy would destroy him. He remains the leader of the organization in Chechnya and is still the "Emir of the Caucasus Emirate". Umarov has also managed to advance the prospects of his closest follower (Byutukayeu) and has increased the prestige of his supporters in Dagestan by involving them, however superficially, in the reconciliation process.

Gakayeu, Vadalov and their followers, by contrast, appear to have gained nothing by their disobedience. However, the price for their submission may well become apparent in due course and it will be interesting to see if Umarov remains the leader of the organization for very much longer.

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AZERBAIJAN PONDERES LUCRATIVE OPTIONS FOR GAS TRANSIT TO EUROPE

Inessa Baban

The competition among European actors hunting for Azerbaijani gas has intensified. Political and commercial actors backing various gas pipeline projects for transporting Azerbaijani gas to Europe are aware that the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) has to make a final decision by October 2011, while Azerbaijan keeps them guessing. During the Caspian Energy Dialogue held on July 15, SOCAR's head Rovnag Abdullayev stressed that all European gas pipeline projects have been under consideration. Nevertheless, it seems that two such projects are in a highly favorable position to transport Azerbaijan's gas to Europe. The Nabucco and ITGI consortiums have made new proposals to Azerbaijan in order to persuade Baku of the attractiveness of their projects.

BACKGROUND: European interest in Caspian gas was revived in 2006 when the Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis rung the alarm bell and highlighted the importance of a diversified energy policy. The second Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis in 2009 confirmed the “wisdom of this policy”, as put by one European diplomat, because it “badly harmed” the reputation of both actors as reliable partners for Europe.

Under these circumstances, Azerbaijan has become the major attraction for Europe in the post-Soviet space, being the only country fulfilling all their criteria: a net gas exporter with a small domestic consumption, situated on the route of the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor, while also capable and willing to export its gas to Europe. The gas relationship between Europe and Azerbaijan started delicately with reciprocal and cautious diplomatic visits for exploring the prospects for cooperation and in order to avoid angering Russia. In January 2011, Baku signed a Joint Declaration with Brussels on the construction of the Southern Gas Corridor, which could be considered the official institutionalization of Azerbaijan's gas relationship with Europe.

Azerbaijan nevertheless had to choose between at least four alternative, and partly competing, official gas transportation projects named Nabucco, Italy-Turkey-Greece Interconnector (ITGI), Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector (AGRI) and Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP).

The Nabucco gas pipeline project was the most well known owing to its geopolitical and strategic implications, promising to bring a significant amount of gas to Europe, contributing to diversifying its energy routes and suppliers, and diminishing Russia's energy monopoly. The euphoria around Nabucco started to vanish after the construction of the pipeline had been delayed repeatedly. Initially scheduled to start in 2012 with the first deliveries expected by 2015, the implementation has been postponed for several reasons. These problems were related to a lack of financial resources available to the Nabucco consortium quoted to between € 7.9-13 billion, difficulties in Azerbaijan's energy dialogue with Turkey, and insufficient gas reserves in Azerbaijan to provide the 31 bcm requested by the Nabucco pipeline. However, while the Nabucco project was for a period deemed locked and frozen, it



has recently taken significant and promising steps forward.

Firstly, in January 2011 the European Investment Bank confirmed its readiness to provide €2 billion for the Nabucco project while in March the European Commission decided to offer €200 million to the Nabucco consortium from the €1.5 billion allocated for projects aimed at improving the EU's energy infrastructure. Secondly, on March 4 the Turkish parliament ratified the Nabucco intergovernmental agreement which was signed in July 2009 between Turkey and the other four transit countries – Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania. Thirdly, on March 10, one of the Nabucco project's shareholders, Germany's RWE Supply & Trading, signed a memorandum of understanding with Azerbaijan to develop the Nakhichevan field in the Caspian Sea. The future gas production will probably be destined for Nabucco and will thus alleviate any doubts that the project is short on suppliers. RWE also proposed to SOCAR to extend Nabucco from the Georgian-Turkish

border to Baku. In June 2011, a consortium spokesman stated in Baku that the consortium had already conducted pre-engineering of a gas pipeline extension from the Georgian-Turkish border to Baku. Accordingly, the capacity of this “connecting strip” at 30 bcm corresponds to the capacity of Nabucco itself. Finally, on 8 June the legal framework for the Nabucco pipeline was finalized through the signature of the Project Support Agreements (PSAs) between the Nabucco consortium and five transit countries.

Nabucco thus has important advantages over its European competitors. However, the smaller ITGI project appears to gain traction, due to its lower cost and capacity (11.5 bcm; €1.5-2.5 billion) which makes it appear more realistic, and the already existing interconnector between Turkey and Greece commissioned in 2007. Moreover, the CEO of DEPA, one of ITGI's shareholders, has recently proposed SOCAR to participate in the privatization of the Greek state-owned company. This could be considered a strategic move that SOCAR will likely be considering seriously, since the company has become interested in playing a more active role on the European energy markets.

IMPLICATIONS: Both proposals seem highly favorable to Baku, which according to an Azerbaijani expert is “happy and relaxed.” Baku can be “happy” because it has many aspirants fighting for its gas, and “relaxed” because unlike in the 1990s, none of these projects is vital or crucial for its survival. Baku has so far successfully implemented its slogan of

“happiness is multiple pipelines.” Azerbaijan has diversified its gas export routes delivering gas by the Northern route to Russia and by the Western route to Georgia and Turkey, along with exports to Iran to supply the Nakhichevan exclave. Today Azerbaijan has many options; it “could even sell its gas to Russia if Moscow pays the European price,” as a member of Azerbaijan's parliament has suggested. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan has already decided to deliver its gas to Europe and paid its “ticket” of 2 bcm of gas to Russia, in the words of one European Ambassador in Baku.

Today Nabucco and ITGI both fully fill Azerbaijan's commercial and political criteria and appear to be considered by Azerbaijan's decision makers. But what will happen if Baku decides to go for both projects? Vitaliy Beylarbeyov, the deputy vice-president of SOCAR, stressed that the new version of Nabucco (the extension to Baku) together with the ITGI gas pipeline project has chances to become a “regional mega-project.” It would not be Azerbaijan's first participation in the construction of a “regional mega-project,” considering the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines, which changed the regional energy map.

The idea of merging the Nabucco and ITGI projects has been discretely promoted over the last months by European officials and experts. Joschka Fischer, the former German foreign minister and RWE consultant for the Nabucco consortium strongly advocated the “integration” of European projects (Nabucco+ITGI/TAP) at the 2011 Gas Conference in Vienna. If the Nabucco and ITGI pipelines merged, the Southern Gas Corridor could be built in two phases. Phase I

would supply the pipeline running from Turkey to Italy via Greece with the gas volumes from the Shah Deniz-2 field. Phase II would consist in creating a spur from the main pipeline north to Austria following the original route of Nabucco. The later could be supplied with gas carried from other Azerbaijani fields and/or the involvement of a second supplier after 2020.

CONCLUSIONS: Regardless of the final decision, recent advances suggest a positive sum game in economic, political and strategic terms for both Europe and Azerbaijan. On the one hand, Europe will enhance its energy security and will be less vulnerable to Russian gas disruptions and Moscow's use of its energy might to pursue political goals. Moreover, it will consolidate the political unity and solidarity among EU member states. On the other hand, Azerbaijan will make important economic and strategic gains by transporting its gas to European markets. Apart from the enormous gas revenues that are expected to pour into Azerbaijan's budget, SOCAR could penetrate the EU energy markets and increase its presence for a long period of time. This would bring Azerbaijan closer to Europe economically, but also politically. Finally, there is a geopolitical aspect related to the regional balance of power. By the construction of a new pipeline to Europe, Baku will strengthen its partnership with the EU and NATO member states and deliver a new message to its neighbors stating that Azerbaijan is not alone: it has friends and allies far beyond the Caucasus.

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BALUCHISTAN: PAKISTAN'S OTHER PROBLEM?

Rizwan Zeb

Baluchistan is the largest and strategically most important province of Pakistan and will play an important role especially in the country's economic future. Baloch culture is primarily tribal and its society is dominated by tribal sardars, nawabs and mirs. Since Pakistan's independence in 1947, Baluchistan has seen several phases of violence and insurgency including the most violent in 1974-77. Since 2005, a low level insurgency is fought in the province. One of its unique features is the target killings of mainly Punjabi, but also Muhajir settlers. Regardless of a persistent militant rhetoric, the insurgency has been largely contained in the last few months.

BACKGROUND: Geographically, Baluchistan is the largest province of Pakistan, constituting approximately 43 percent of Pakistan's territory. At the same time, it is the least populated province, housing 5.1% of Pakistan's population. Baluch culture is primarily tribal and its society is dominated by tribal sardars, nawabs and mirs (chieftains). Since Pakistan's independence in 1947, Baluchistan has witnessed several phases of violence and insurgency including the most violent in 1974-77. While there were reports of underground activity by the Baluch Liberation Army (BLA) since early 2000, the rape of Dr. Shazia Khalid, a company doctor at the Sui Gas plant, on 2 January 2005 can be identified as the event triggering the ongoing wave of violence in Baluchistan, although a number of other factors have also contributed to it over time.

The insurgent activities are focused in Dera Bugti, Kohlu, Jaffarabad and Naseerabad. The main insurgent groups are the Baloch Republican Army (BRA) led by Brahmadagh Bugti, the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) headed by Hyarbyar Marri, and the Baluch Liberation Front (BLF) which is the militant wing of the Baluch Student Organization (Azad). Bugti is currently based in Switzerland,

whereas Marri resides in London. One of the features of the current unrest in Baluchistan is the targeted killings of mostly Punjabi but also Muhajir settlers, which started after the death of Nawab Akbar Bugti in August 2006.

Although resentment against Punjabi settlers has existed in the past, they have never previously been targeted to the extent that has been the case in the current insurgency. Nearly 1,200 settler doctors, teachers, professors, barbers, laborers or police officials were killed between 2008 and 2010 and around 100,000 have left Baluchistan. The targeted killings are blamed on Baluch militants, with the BLA reportedly accepting responsibility for most of the deaths. In an interview, Bugti has justified these and other killings, stating that he agreed with an article he had recently read that encouraged the Baluch to conduct more target killings. When questioned about the killing of 20 Baluch policemen in the Naseerabad district and the targeted killing of Punjabi teachers, the BRP chief said he supported the actions of the separatists. However, Azad Baloch of the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) claims responsibility for the killings of the settlers, stating that they were spying for the intelligence agencies.

IMPLICATIONS: Baluchistan is strategically the most important province of Pakistan and will play a very important role especially in the country's economic future. It has witnessed another phase of low level insurgency over the last few years. However, the insurgency has largely been contained in the last few months. Consequently, the number of targeted killings has also decreased. According to Muhammad Amir of the Baluchistan Punjabi Ittihad, 10-12 such killings have been reported in as many months, which is significantly lower than the previous year. The chief minister of Baluchistan stated in a newspaper interview that the situation in Baluchistan is gradually improving: "Go around the province, visit different Baluch belts and you will see that the insurgency does not have much support." A similar view was provided by the speaker of the Baluchistan provincial assembly: "More people die in Karachi each day. When diplomats visit here, they urge us to tell the world more about the realities of Baluchistan, which is more normal than people expect."

Most Baluch analysts, journalists and politicians are of the opinion that the level of the current insurgency does not even come close to that in the 1970s, as this time, it lacks widespread support. Importantly, the targeted killing of settlers was a sign of weakness, not resolve, on the part of the insurgents: it implied that they were not strong enough to fight the security forces and hence were attacking soft targets. This strategy certainly made headlines, but at the same time negatively affected public opinion in Baluchistan and the country in general. While the insurgency has largely been contained, Baluchistan still faces the threat of sectarian violence. Another important problem is the presence of criminal gangs involved in all types of crimes, including kidnapping and

targeted killings. These groups are allegedly backed by influential locals and politicians.

Baluchistan's provincial authorities have also started implementing the Aghaz-e-Huqooq Baluchistan Package, which promises more than 10,000 new jobs to Baluch youth. According to an official who is part of the team overseeing the implementation of the package, 5,000 federal government vacancies have already been filled up, while the provincial government is in the process of hiring for another 6,000 jobs. Each member of the Baluchistan assembly is allocated PKR 180 million (over US\$ 2 million) to be used in different development projects in their respective constituencies. It has been reported that in the next fiscal year, this amount is likely to be increased. It is now up to the people's representatives in Baluchistan to use these funds to improve living standards in their constituencies. The effects of such development projects are already visible in some regions, as in the Mastung area which is the constituency of Aslam Raisani, the current Chief Minister of Baluchistan, where health and education infrastructure is under steady development.

The Pakistani Army has for some time made a systematic effort to recruit Baluch youth in its various branches and services. It is also providing opportunities for better education to Baluch children by locating talented students and sending them to top schools across the country. The Punjab government has also started a scholarship program for Baluch children. Another important development which is often ignored in the media is that the Pakistani Army, which is responsible for security and takes part in the management of the Chamalang coal mines, has devised a system which earmarks revenues from the coalmine for development projects in the area.



(AFP)

CONCLUSIONS: A number of positive developments have thus taken place in Baluchistan in recent months. While this is a good beginning, much remains to be done. In order to address the roots of Baluchistan's problem, one must understand why a new violent phase started after 25 years of relative peace. In any ethno-political conflict the power elites play a decisive role, as ethnicity becomes a source of conflict when it is politicized by ethnic entrepreneurs. A closer look at the developments in Baluchistan clearly illustrates this point. With a single exception, the current leadership of the insurgency in Baluchistan, Bugti and Marri, come from families of tribal

sardars. A

Baluchistani member of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Ayatullah Durrani, raised a point which is at the heart of the problem: while he agreed with most of the Baluch complaints, he asked whether the tribal sardars had ever set up a single educational institution for Baluch children, instead of competing for driving the latest models of Japanese

cars. It is high time that the traditional Baluch leadership take steps to improve the situation of the Baluch masses. Baluchistan is facing a number of problems and the only realistic solution to all these problems is that all stakeholders should work together to address them.

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FIELD REPORTS

MOSCOW UNABLE TO AFFORD NEW DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR NORTH CAUCASUS

Olof Staaf

Moscow's efforts to undermine the North Caucasian insurgency by investing in the region continue to encounter difficulties. On July 25, the Ministry for Regional Development proposed a new federal program aimed at promoting socio-economic development in Russia's North Caucasus Federal District. The program is scheduled to run from 2012 through 2025 and would require a significant increase in Moscow's spending on the region. The total cost of the project amounts to more than US\$ 140 billion. Almost US\$ 90 billion of the funding would be taken from the federal budget. An additional US\$ 7 billion would come from the heavily subsidized budgets of the local republics and around US\$ 38 billion would be provided by extra-budgetary funds. Soon after the program was proposed, officials from the Finance Ministry and the Ministry for Economic Development expressed concerns about their ability to afford these new budgetary allocations. Moreover, on August 3, Deputy Finance Minister Tatiana Nesterenko announced that the Finance Ministry would not approve the new development program.

The decision, announced at a socio-economic development session held in Kislovodsk, was motivated by the Finance Ministry's inability to endorse the program as long as the costs exceed existing budgetary limits. This was an unexpected turn of events. Public display of discord is exceedingly rare in the Kremlin and the program in question has figured prominently in Moscow's official rhetoric about forthcoming progress in the North Caucasus for a long time. Prime Minister

Putin first declared the need for a long term development plan for the North Caucasus over a year ago. In September 2010, the President's envoy to the region, Aleksander Khloponin, outlined a set of ambitious objectives to be attained by 2025. These included farfetched aspirations such as an increase by a factor of 2.5 in the average monthly wage and the creation of 400,000 new jobs in the region.

The next step was taken in December 2010 when Prime Minister Vladimir Putin established a commission for the socio-economic development of the North Caucasus Federal District. In January, at the commission's initial session, Putin disclosed the Kremlin's intentions of replacing the federal development programs currently underway with a new all-embracing program for the whole region. Subsequently, the Ministry for Regional Development was assigned to prepare the new program. At the next meeting, which was held in May 2011, the Prime Minister was quoted as saying that the new program had to become the most important instrument for solving the socio-economic problems in the North Caucasus.

At the moment, there are three ongoing federal development programs in the region. The Socio-Economic Development in the Republic of Ingushetia began in 2010 and is set to end in 2016. The Socio-Economic Development in the Republic of Chechnya and Southern Russia both started in 2008 and will continue until 2013. The combined total cost of these three projects is around US\$ 10 billion. This means that the annual amount presently spent on socio-economic development in

the North Caucasus is only about one fifth of what it would be if the new program would be implemented.

Another particularity that might help to explain the Finance Ministry's inability to provide funding for the project is the fact that the estimated cost has constantly been on the increase. In January, Putin assessed the total cost of the entire program to less than US\$ 14 billion. Two and a half months later, the Minister of Regional development, Viktor Basargin, said that the costs may exceed US\$ 45 billion and when the final draft was presented the Ministry for Regional Development asked for three times as much.

This seemingly failed attempt to implement a new large-scale development program can be seen as archetypical for Moscow's efforts to stabilize the

North Caucasus by buying loyalty from the population. Over the last couple of years, numerous high-profile projects have been presented in spectacular fashion, but so far they have all failed to live up to their promises. On the one hand, economic development in the region is hampered by deep-rooted problems such as the lack of security and endemic corruption. On the other, Moscow's ability to provide federal aid is limited by a commodity-based economy sensitive to fluctuations in the world market as well as widespread reluctance towards subsidizing the Caucasian republics among the ethnic Russian population. Furthermore, the heavy dependence on finances for support means that Moscow and its local clients most likely cannot count on the loyalty of those currently on their side if they were to fail in providing federal aid in the future.

RUSSIA PRESSURES TAJIKISTAN ON MILITARY COOPERATION

Suhrob Majidov

In early July 2011, the Speaker of Russia's State Duma, Boris Gрызлов, made a statement to the Russian media concerning unresolved issues in military cooperation between Russia and Tajikistan. Gрызлов criticized Tajikistan's alleged inability to protect its own border with Afghanistan and to stop drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Russia. The statement provoked vigorous discussions between experts and politicians from both sides.

Gрызлов is one of the leaders of United Russia and his statement was perceived by experts as the position of the Russian presidential administration. He proposed to start fighting drug trafficking on locations distant from Russia. Gрызлов claimed that Tajikistan is incapable of protecting its long border with Afghanistan on its own, and that Russian border forces should return to the border. According to Gрызлов, drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Russia through Tajikistan has increased "by many

times" after the withdrawal of Russian border forces from Tajikistan in 2005.

Russian border forces were protecting the 1,300 kilometer border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan from the breakdown of the Soviet Union until 2005. After the withdrawal of its border forces, Russia keeps 60 advisors for the border forces only. They provide support for capacity building in Tajikistan's border forces. Russia also maintains a military base in Tajikistan containing 7,000 service personnel.

Gрызлов proposed to use labor migration as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Tajikistan. In his opinion, Russia should restrict or completely block labor migration from Tajikistan if Tajikistan would refuse the return of Russian border troops to the Tajik-Afghan border. As a first step, Gрызлов proposed to introduce a visa regime between Russia and Tajikistan.

Gryzlov's statement touched upon a highly sensitive issue for Tajikistan. According to unofficial data, over one million of Tajikistan's able-bodied population has migrated to Russia for work, out of a total population of seven million. Remittances from labor migrants account for about 40 percent of Tajikistan's GDP. Close to every family in Tajikistan has at least one labor migrant member and up to 60 percent of rural households rely on remittances from Russia as their major source of income. Consequently, most experts predict that the expulsion of Tajik labor migrants from Russia would result in a serious social downturn in Tajikistan. Some analysts go even further, predicting the collapse of Emomali Rahmon's regime in case of a Russian ban on labor migration from Tajikistan.

Importantly, Gryzlov made the statement after several recent unsuccessful visits of high level Russian officials to Tajikistan, including the Head of Russia's Presidential Administration Sergey Naryshkin, Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov and the Secretary General of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Nikolay Bordyuzha. According to experts, all these high-level officials sought to persuade President Rahmon to agree on expanded military cooperation with Russia.

Gryzlov's announcement was perceived by experts and politicians in Tajikistan as an act of pressure. For instance, the independent analyst Nurali Davlatov claims that the statement constitutes simple blackmail from the Russian authorities, and that the Russian government is trying not only to persuade its Tajik counterparts to agree to a Russian presence on the Tajik-Afghan border, but also to solve other unsettled issues like agreeing to the

deployment of a Russian military base at the military airport Ainy not far from Dushanbe. As a way out of the situation, Davlatov proposes that Tajikistan's authorities should start looking for other destinations for its labor migrants.

At the same time, Tajik officials stubbornly adhere to their position concerning Russia's presence on the Tajik-Afghan border. They believe that the state border should be protected only by Tajikistan's border forces. Otherwise, Tajikistan would be considered a failed state. The position was reconfirmed by a recent statement by the Tajikistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Hamrokhon Zarifi. The Minister ruled out any possibility of a return of Russian border troops to Tajikistan.

Moreover, Zarifi raised the question of payment for Russian basing rights in Tajikistan. According to the current agreement on military cooperation between Tajikistan and Russia, Tajikistan allows the deployment of a Russian military base without any rent payment. Tajikistan now wants to reconsider the agreement and demand payment from Russia.

In sum, Russia is seeking a rapid resolution of issues related to military cooperation in Tajikistan in light of the increased influence of the U.S., China and Iran in the Central Asian region. Therefore, experts believe that the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Tajikistan planned for September 2011 is aimed to speed up the process of solving all the outstanding issues between the two countries.

RUSSIA AND AZERBAIJAN NEGOTIATE NEW LEASE OF THE GABALA RADAR STATION

Mina Muradova

At the height of discussions between the U.S. and Russia on potential collaboration on an anti-missile defense system, Russia's Defense Minister visited Baku to renegotiate a lease for Azerbaijan's Gabala radar station. Although over a year remains before the current lease agreement expires, official Baku gave a clear message to Moscow that it is ready to extend the lease in return for more cash.

Built in 1985, the Gabala radar station was an element of the Soviet anti-missile defence system. Located in a mountainous area in northern Azerbaijan, it is designed for ballistic missile early warning, including tracking, coordinate measuring and computation of trajectory parameters. Its range capability on targets is 6,000 kilometers, which allows monitoring of Iranian, Turkish, Indian, Iraqi, Pakistani, and partly Chinese airspace, along with several Asian and African countries.

Russia's 10-year lease on the Gabala radar station will expire in December 2012. Baku will set new terms for extending the agreement, in particular raising the annual fee that Russia currently pays for using the radar station, which is now US\$ 7 million. At the same time, Baku allegedly wants to revise the price of electricity supplied to the station. Referring to diplomatic sources, the APA news agency reported in June that Baku wants to increase the electricity price and switch tariffs from the one normally applied to commercial organizations to the tariff for "exported" electricity. Last year, Baku wrote off Russia's electricity debt accumulated before 1997, which was estimated to several million US\$. Another matter the sides are negotiating is an increased number of Azerbaijani personnel at the radar station, as well as the employment of Azerbaijani citizens at shops, cafes and other facilities servicing the Russian personnel operating it and their families. In addition, Azerbaijan will ask for compensation for the financial losses

incurred by the limitations on tourism in the Gabala region.

During a July visit to Azerbaijan, Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov claimed that Russia plans on upgrade the radar station. "Over the next few days, Russia will set up a working group to visit Baku for two weeks to work out all technical issues. Already after August 15 we can discuss with my Azerbaijani counterpart in detail each of the points of an agreement to extend the lease of the Gabala radar station," he said.

The Russian minister was received by President Ilham Aliyev and his Azerbaijani counterpart Safar Abiyev. "Our countries have quite good relationships in the military and military-technical cooperation. Almost everything we planned for 2010 has been done and we are on schedule in plans for 2011. We proposed Azerbaijan to increase the quotas for training the armed forces of Azerbaijan. Now the application will be considered," Serdyukov informed.

The question is whether Russia really needs the Gabala radar station. Opinions are divided between those who consider it a purely political issue and those who think the radar station is still important for defense purposes. From a political point of view, experts note that Russia wants the station in order to keep a military presence in Azerbaijan. Others think that the radar station is an important element of Russia's anti-missile system for defending its southern borders adjacent to Iran and Turkey.

AFP reported in June that two key U.S. senators expressed concerns about a possible agreement to base a missile shield radar in Turkey, citing the NATO ally's strained ties with Israel and relations with Iran. Republican Senators Jon Kyl and Mark Kirk wrote to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that the South Caucasus is "the optimum placement" if the system

is designed as defense against a potential Iranian ballistic missile attack.

The recent intensification of negotiations between the U.S. and Russia on a unified European antimissile framework has increased the importance of the Gabala radar station for Russia. While Washington and other NATO members are convinced that the system is intended to counter an emerging Iranian missile threat, Russia is concerned that the scheme would undermine the credibility of its own strategic deterrent. In 2007, Moscow offered the U.S. and NATO to use the radar station in the development of the European missile defense network. U.S. and Russian experts visited the radar station but no agreement was reached.

However, the U.S. does not rule out a future dialogue with Azerbaijan on the Gabala radar station, Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Andrew Shapiro told a press conference in Baku on June 24. The diplomat noted that the U.S. was discussing missile defense cooperation with Russia and Azerbaijan within the framework of a partnership with NATO. "Negotiations on the missile defense are held both

between the U.S. and Russia and within the U.S.-Azerbaijan dialogue on security problems," Shapiro emphasized. The U.S. may continue negotiations on the format for using the Gabala station with Azerbaijan and Russia in the future.

In turn, Azerbaijan's Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov pointed out that this radar station plays "an important role in providing security for Russia," and that the question of rent will be raised again after the term is completed. "Russia's negotiations with the U.S. and NATO on missile defense issues, particularly issues of security in this area, are of importance as well. That is why we consider that these negotiations will be continued in the future," Azimov said.

Experts predict that Baku and Moscow will continue hard bargaining throughout next year. While Azerbaijan uses Russia's interest in the radar station as a means for increasing the rent, the Kremlin will instead seek a deal involving non-cash compensation, such as modernization of the station and expanding the education program for Azerbaijan's soldiers.

CONTINUED INTERETHNIC TENSIONS PLAGUE UZBEK-KYRGYZ RELATIONS

Erkin Akhmadov

After more than a year after the interethnic clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan, the situation is far from resolved. Local observers report that the situation on the state border and in the Sokh enclave of Uzbekistan is deteriorating. Moreover, the Committee on protection of the state border of Uzbekistan reports that "certain representatives" of the Batken region authorities in Kyrgyzstan seek "to aggravate the situation artificially."

It should be recalled that in September 2010, an agreement was reached between the heads of

Kyrgyzstan's and Uzbekistan's border authorities to resume the operation of the customs border posts Devayram in Uzbekistan's Sokh region and Gazprom in the Batken region in Kyrgyzstan. Both points operated according to the agreement. However, from May 1 the Kyrgyz point "Gazprom" was unilaterally closed. It was not opened for three months, in spite of numerous requests of the Uzbek side. Consequently, from August 1 the Uzbek point "Devayram" was also closed.

The press service of the abovementioned Uzbek border committee noted that measures taken in

relation to the Kyrgyz side's failure to comply with the provisions of the agreement were perceived negatively by the residents of several border villages of Kyrgyzstan. For example, several residents of the Apkan and Boz-Adyr villages of Kyrgyzstan organized protest actions, blocking the transit road between Rishtan and Sokh. The Committee requested that the Kyrgyz side refrain from unilateral decisions on issues which should be handled on an intergovernmental basis and to take measures to stop and prevent the activities of certain individuals.

Relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in general are far from cooperative and friendly. Thus, as reported by Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Energy, Uzbekistan has again raised the price for importing gas to Kyrgyzstan; this time by 14 percent, from US\$ 244 to US\$ 278 per thousand cubic meters of gas.

Furthermore, the economy of southern Kyrgyzstan still suffers significantly from the interethnic conflict. One of the largest markets of southern Kyrgyzstan and the Ferghana Valley, Karasu, suffers great losses. For many years Uzbek citizens were among the major customers of this market. With the border to Uzbekistan closed after the events of June 2010, the number of visitors halved. However, locals report that some Uzbek citizens try to cross the border illegally, aiming to get to this market. The head of the regional administration apparently allows this due to the income brought by these merchants to the city budget.

Another sign of continued tensions is continuous reports from the residents of border villages about unsanctioned activities by the border guards or other representatives of the authorities on the basis

of ethnicity. Ethnic Uzbek residents of towns in southern Kyrgyzstan have reported incidents where local policemen of Kyrgyz ethnicity subjected them to detention, torture and extortion. Several Uzbek citizens have also reported harsh treatment on the border from Kyrgyz border guards. In both cases the victims report being mistreated solely on the basis of ethnicity.

It is reported that the incident on the border between the Batken region and the Sokh enclave is now settled, and the road between Rishtan and Sokh is open. However, as the head of the defense and law enforcement department in Batken region Arstan Hodjaev stated: "the decision to close the Gazprom point on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border was taken by the border service of the State Committee on National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic, and therefore the local administration has no authority to take decisions concerning the state border, including issues of opening or closure of checkpoints." Furthermore, Hodjaev noted that during the blockade of the road by Kyrgyz villagers, local authorities held information meetings and sought to persuade people to refrain from panic. According to representatives of the Kyrgyz authorities there were no individuals with special interests within the Kyrgyz authorities, who would instigate such provocative actions by the population.

In sum, the tragic events of the summer 2010 still have evident consequences for everyday life in southern Kyrgyzstan. For many, this tendency is particularly troubling as the abovementioned animosity between people that used to live together and share ideological and religious views is a sign of deep interethnic hostility between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks that emerged relatively recently.

NEWS DIGEST

TAJIKISTAN BANS MINORS FROM ENTERING MOSQUES

3 August

Tajikistan's authoritarian leader has approved a law barring minors from praying in mosques as his secular government seeks to minimize the rising influence of Islam in the Central Asian nation. President Emomali Rakhmon signed the bill Wednesday despite vocal resistance from rights activists and the opposition Islamic Revival Party. The law also requires people under the age of 18 to study in secular schools thus barring thousands of students from attending mosque schools seen by authorities as a breeding ground of Islamism. The impoverished and predominantly Sunni Muslim nation shares a long and porous border with Afghanistan. (AP)

FOUR PEOPLE KILLED DURING ANTI-NATO PROTEST IN AFGHANISTAN

5 August

Afghan officials say Taliban fighters opened fire on Afghan police at an anti-NATO rally in southern Afghanistan today, sparking a gunbattle that killed three civilians and a police officer. Officials said the insurgents infiltrated the protest in the town of Qalat in the southern province of Zabul and fired at police. Police responded by firing at the insurgents in the crowd. The demonstrators had gathered to protest the reported deaths of civilians during a NATO operation overnight. (RFE/RL)

TAJIKISTAN, RUSSIA SEEK BASE LEASE DEAL

10 August

Talks on continued use of a base in Tajikistan by the Russian military are still in progress and agreement on a new, market-based lease of the facility will strengthen ties between the two countries, an adviser to Tajikistan's president said Wednesday. "Negotiations between the two sides on extending the [Russian military] presence in Tajikistan beyond 2014 are currently being held at

the working-group level," Sukhrob Sharipov, director of the presidential Center for Strategic Studies in Dushanbe, told RIA Novosti. He said both sides agreed that it was time to review the terms of Russia's use of the base and now only the details of a new agreement had to be worked out. "Russia pays Armenia and Kyrgyzstan for its military bases and it is a normal practice in the world to pay for the services provided," Sharipov said. He denied earlier Russian media reports that Tajikistan was seeking \$300 million from Russia to extend the use of the base, saying that "this figure was taken from nowhere and no one knows who the official was who cited it." A total of 7,000 Russian troops are serving at three Russian military units in Dushanbe, the southwestern city of Qurgonteppa some 100 km from Dushanbe, and Kulob, about 200 km to the southwest of the capital. Russian troops in Tajikistan constitute the Moscow's largest ground force deployed abroad. (RIA Novosti)

UZBEK COURT JAILS TAJIK CITIZEN FOR ESPIONAGE

11 August

A military court in Uzbekistan has sentenced a Tajik citizen to 12 years in prison on espionage charges, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Obloql Rizoiev told RFE/RL by phone from the northern town of Panjakent that his brother, Saidqul Ashurov, had been sentenced in a closed trial. Rizoiev said Ashurov was detained in March and accused of violating Uzbek laws relating to state secrets. Rizoiev said his brother is a gold-mining professional with experience working in South Africa but is not a spy. Ashurov was employed by the British company Oxus Gold, which has a joint venture called Amantaytau Goldfields in which Oxus Gold and the Uzbek side each hold a 50-percent stake. Until his arrest, Ashurov was employed as Amantaytau Goldfields' chief metallurgist at its mining operations in Zarafshan, Uzbekistan. Oxus Gold's lawyer, Robert Amsterdam, said the conviction of Ashurov is a clear violation of human

rights by the Uzbek authorities, and there is no legal basis for his arrest. Suhrob Ismoilov, a human rights activist and legal adviser to Oxus Gold, said Uzbek authorities have assessed as "classified" certain information found on a flash disk and Ashurov's personal computer. But he said the information is publicly available on Oxus Gold's website and is not classified. Ismoilov said the only classified information found in Ashurov's possession was a 2009 document about transporting gold. Ismoilov said the information is no longer of any relevance. He suggested two motives for jailing Ashurov: an ongoing dispute between Oxus Gold and the Uzbek authorities for control of the company or the so-called "spy war" between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The two countries have in recent years detained several of each other's citizens and charged them with espionage. (RFE/RL)

UZBEKISTAN EXPELS 8 US MISSIONARIES

11 August

Uzbekistan has expelled eight American nationals from the Central Asian country on charges of making "unlawful" attempts to convert local Uzbeks to Christianity. Under the guise of businessmen or English language teachers, the eight US nationals "carried out unlawful missionary activity to attract Uzbek students" to Christianity, AFP reported, citing a report on the state-run Uzbek website, gorizont.uz. "Notably, the foreigners were fluent in Uzbek and called themselves with Uzbek names such as Jahongir, Husan, Jasur, Farhod," the report said. The US Embassy in the Uzbek capital Tashkent declined to comment on the incident. Uzbekistan previously deported another US citizen and seven South Koreans on similar charges. All religious missionary work is banned in Uzbekistan, which is a predominantly Muslim nation with 90 percent of its 28 million citizens practicing the Islamic faith. (presstv.ir)

STRIKING KAZAKH OIL WORKERS QUIT RULING PARTY

11 August

Thousands of striking oil workers have gone to the ruling Nur-Otan party's headquarters in western Kazakhstan to officially quit the party, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Striking OzenMunaiGaz company worker Roza Toretaeva told RFE/RL that nearly 3,000 workers went to the party offices in the town of Zhanaozen and filed papers to quit the party on August 11. The workers -- who have been on strike since May -- told RFE/RL that they had

been forced to join the party anyway and since none of their strike demands have been met, they decided to quit it. The oil workers are demanding equal rights with foreign workers, a pay raise, no restrictions on independent labor unions in the region, and the immediate release of their lawyer, Natalya Sokolova. Sokolova, who provided legal support to employees at the Qarazhanbas oil and gas fields in the Manghystau region, was found guilty on August 8 of "igniting social unrest" and jailed for six years. Meanwhile, the leader of the Nur-Otan party branch in Zhanaozen, Koshbai Qyzanbaev, told RFE/RL that only 1,089 official applications to quit the party ranks had been registered. He said every application would be "researched separately and individual talks will be held with every person who decided to quit the party." On August 8, the striking workers gathered in front of Zhanaozen's administrative building and announced their decision to quit Nur-Otan, which is led by President Nursultan Nazarbaev. Nur-Otan officials announced the next day that reports about the workers' mass quitting of the party were false. They said that on the contrary, 882 people had joined Nur-Otan since the massive strike began in May. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJAN ARRESTS THREE MEN SUSPECTED OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

12 August

Azeri special services have detained three men suspected of attempting to destabilize the situation in the country through propagating ideas of religious radicalism and other unlawful actions, the Azeri National Security Ministry and the Prosecutor General's Office said in a joint statement. Abgul Sulaymanov, Ramil Bayramov, and Arif Ganiyev are suspected of aiding and abetting hostile activities against Azerbaijan in favor of a foreign state, organizing clashes in the country, violating public security, and instigating disobedience. Security services have determined that Sulaymanov established the radical religious group Jafari, which is not registered with the state, and became its leader, with financial support from the Iranian cultural center in Baku. Members of this group promoted religious radicalism, printed leaflets calling for religious divisions and discord, and circulated them among believers, the joint statement says. To propagate its activities, the Jafari group also launched the website www.islam-azeri.az and tasked Bayramov with supervising it. The statement says that Sulaymanov and the members of the Jafari

radical religious group maintained close relations with the Iranian culture center in Baku, religious communities, pro-Shiite radical groups and their leaders acting in Azerbaijan. Sulaymanov also maintained close ties with Iskandar Huseynov, the leader of the educational and cultural organization Haqq Yolu, who has been on the international wanted list since 2008 on charges of terrorism and high treason and who is currently staying in the Iranian city of Qom. These people received instructions to organize the Jafari group's activities, the statement says. The group was financed by its religious affiliates operating in Azerbaijan, who regularly attended meetings of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, which is not officially registered in the country, and openly called for setting up a state governed by the Sharia law in Azerbaijan. Sulaymanov also organized unsanctioned protests in front of the embassies of some Western countries in Azerbaijan. The criminal case against the three has been opened on charges of the illegal storage and carrying of firearms and illegal acquisition, storage, and transportation of illegal drugs. The court sanctioned their arrest. (Interfax)

GOLDEN HORDE-ERA MAUSOLEUM DISCOVERED IN KAZAKHSTAN

12 August

Archeologists in Kazakhstan have discovered a large mausoleum dating back to the 14th century, the expedition leader said on Friday. The 20-meter high Golden Horde-era mausoleum is one of the largest historic buildings in the territory of the Saryarka (Yellow Range) steppe in central Kazakhstan, Timur Smagulov said. A skeleton of a man believed to have been a representative of the local ruling elite was found inside the mausoleum. Archeologists also discovered golden and copper coins from Eastern Europe and China, a number of medieval workshops and an irrigation network at the site. "One of the most interesting things is the decorative tiles on the mausoleum walls," Smagulov said. "They are decorated with a geometric ornament consisting of mysterious symbols, which have yet to be decrypted." (RIA Novosti)

UZBEKISTAN EASES INTERNET BLOCKADE

12 August

Internet users in authoritarian Uzbekistan say some international news websites that had been blocked this week are now accessible. Several major news sites, including those of Reuters and Bloomberg, had been blocked for two days. But three Uzbeks

contacted by The Associated Press on Friday said the sites had been opened. They asked their names not be used due to concern over official retaliation. Information is strictly controlled in Uzbekistan, where many people rely on foreign online resources for independent reporting. A handful of Russian news sites made unreachable this week could still not be accessed. Uzbeks have been barred for several years from visiting the websites of the BBC and German broadcaster Deutsche Welle, which produces programs on Central Asia. (AP)

SUICIDE BOMBERS, GUNMEN KILL 22 IN CENTRAL AFGHANISTAN

14 August

Taliban suicide bombers killed at least 22 people in a bold attack on a governor's compound in central Afghanistan during a security meeting Sunday, officials said, with gunbattles and several blasts heard before the assault was put down. A Reuters witness and others nearby reported hearing at least five explosions as Afghan security forces inside the compound of Parwan governor Abdul Basir Salangi fought back. Afghanistan's Interior Ministry said 22 people were killed and 34 wounded. The dead included 16 government employees and six police, it said in a statement. Parwan lies about an hour's drive northwest of the capital, Kabul, another worrying sign of the reach of the Taliban and other insurgents. Eight days ago, a rocket-propelled grenade fired by the Taliban brought down a NATO helicopter in another central Afghan province near Kabul, killing 30 U.S. troops and eight Afghans in the worst single incident for foreign forces in 10 years of war. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the Parwan attack. Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Islamist group, said the assault began when a suicide car bomber detonated his explosives at the gate of the compound. He said five other bombers made it inside the compound, where he claimed U.S. officials were taking part in a meeting. "Many people were killed, including Americans, but we still don't have the exact information," Mujahid said by telephone from an undisclosed location. The Taliban often exaggerate incidents involving Afghan government targets or foreign troops. The twisted wreckage of what appeared to have been the car bomb lay outside the gate of the compound as Afghan police and soldiers swarmed around the scene. Sharafuddin Rahimi, an adviser to the Parwan police chief, said a meeting involving the police chief, the governor "and some foreign

advisers" was under way when the attack was launched but said the attackers did not reach the meeting room. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul confirmed several of its members were attending a shura, or meeting, in Salangi's office at the time of the attack but said none was injured. Rahimi said one of the police chief's bodyguards was among those killed, as well as women and children. (Reuters)

TURKMENISTAN SETS FEB DATE FOR PRESIDENTIAL VOTE

15 August

Turkmenistan has set presidential elections for Feb. 12 in the rigidly-controlled, energy-rich nation in Central Asia.

Turkmen state media published a parliament decision Friday setting the date for the vote. The elections will be a mere formality extending the rule of authoritarian President Gurbanguli Berdymukhamedov. Last month, he challenged exiled opposition leaders to return and take part in the vote, but the law only allows those permanently residing in Turkmenistan for the past 15 years to run for president. Berdymukhamedov has led the ex-Soviet nation since the 2006 death of his eccentric autocratic predecessor Saparmurat Niyazov. Berdymukhamedov has introduced some reforms, but Turkmenistan remains a one-party state. (AP)

IRAN DECLINES COMMENT ON BAKU'S ISLAMIC ACTIVIST ACCUSATIONS

15 August

The Iranian Embassy in Baku has declined to comment on Azerbaijani allegations that Islamic activists arrested last week had set up a radical religious group with financial support from Baku's Cultural Center of Iran, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. A court in Baku on August 13 remanded the three members of the banned Islamic Party of Azerbaijan in pretrial detention for two months on weapons- and drug-possession charges. The three men -- party Deputy Chairman Arif Qaniyev, party member Abgul Suleymanov, and Ramin Bayramov, editor of the news website *islam-azeri.az* -- were arrested on August 11. They have been charged with illegal possession of weapons and drugs, crimes that are punishable by up to three years in prison. But according to a joint statement on August 12 by the National Security Ministry and the Prosecutor-General's Office, they are also suspected of unspecified "hostile activity against

Azerbaijan." According to the National Security Ministry, Suleymanov created a radical Islamic group called Jafari with financial help from the Baku-based Cultural Center of Iran. The ministry alleged that "members of this unregistered group promoted religious radicalism and distributed leaflets among believers. Those leaflets encouraged hostility towards adherents of other faiths." A spokesman for the Iranian Embassy told RFE/RL on August 15 that the ambassador has "no comment on the issue." The men's lawyer, Anar Qasimov, told RFE/RL that the three are currently being held illegally at a National Security Ministry detention facility. Qasimov said that detention there is against the law because investigating drugs and weapons charges is the prerogative of the police, not of that ministry. Qasimov also noted that the joint statement refers to charges other than those formally brought against the three men. He said separate investigators have been assigned to each case. Qasimov linked the arrests to statements made in court by Islamic Party of Azerbaijan Chairman Movsum Samadov. Samadov and six other party members went on trial on August 4 on charges of calling for the overthrow of Azerbaijan's secular government. Natiq Karimov, chairman of the Committee to Defend Believers' Rights, told RFE/RL on August 12 that "detaining believers on such fabricated charges does not befit a state." The arrests and accusations of Iranian involvement came the same week that Baku summoned the Iranian ambassador to protest "irresponsible" comments attributed to Major General Hassan Firouzabadi, the chairman of Iran's joint chiefs of staff. Firouzabadi was quoted as saying on August 6 that Baku's government had taken measures "that go against Islamic principles." (RFE/RL)

BEATEN KAZAKH TOURIST DIES IN KYRGYZ HOSPITAL

15 August

A Kazakh tourist who was robbed and severely beaten near Kyrgyzstan's Lake Issyk-Kul has died in Bishkek while undergoing surgery, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Health Ministry spokesman Shabdan Ryskulov told RFE/RL that Erlan Balmakhaev's body was given to his relatives, who transported it to Kazakhstan on August 14 for burial. Interior Ministry officials told RFE/RL that Balmakhaev's attackers have not yet been found. Balmakhaev, 32, was severely beaten by a group of men on August 7. He was hospitalized but fell into a coma and underwent brain surgery in a clinic in the

resort town of Cholpon-Ata. Following consultations between Kyrgyz and visiting Kazakh doctors, Balmakhaev was transported to a hospital in Bishkek on August 13. He died of cardiac arrest on August 14 while undergoing a second brain operation. On August 10, Interior Ministry spokesman Rakhmatillo Akhmedov told RFE/RL that 129 attacks on foreigners were registered in Kyrgyzstan during the first six months of this year. The total number for 2010 was 100. President Roza Otunbaeva told Interior Minister Zarylbek Rysaliev last week to personally monitor the investigation into Balmakhaev's case. Most of the foreign tourists who visit Issyk-Kul are from Kazakhstan. (RFE/RL)

AZERI PRESIDENT WILL NOT ATTEND CIS SUMMIT IN DUSHANBE

15 August

Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev will not attend the forthcoming CIS summit of the heads of state in Dushanbe, said Novruz Mamedov, chief foreign affairs official in the Azeri presidential administration. "At this summit, our country will be represented by Azeri Prime Minister Artur Raszade," Mamedov told the republic's official media outlets on Monday. The summit is due to be held in early September. (Interfax)

CASPIAN STATES REVIEW OIL SPILL RESPONSE

16 August

Five littoral states to the Caspian Sea agreed to new mechanisms for responding to and monitoring potential environmental pollution, the United Nations said. Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan, which border the Caspian Sea, agreed during a meeting in Kazakhstan to new protocols regarding potential oil pollution. The U.N. Environment Program described the step as a "milestone" for the region. Once the mechanisms are ratified, littoral states will work to introduce an emergency response system for addressing potential oil spills.

UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner said environmental stewardship is one of the foundations of international relationships. "Addressing concerns related to potential adverse environmental trans-boundary impacts is the best recipe for preventing such impacts and safeguarding peace and stability," he said. The Caspian Sea holds some of the largest oil and natural gas deposits in

the world. It also is the largest enclosed body of water in the world. (UPI)

FM: IT WOULD BE LOGICAL TO HEAR IRANIAN ARMED FORCES STAFF CHIEF'S CALL TO ARMENIA TO WITHDRAW OCCUPYING FORCES FROM AZERBAIJANI TERRITORY

16 August

The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry has not received an official response to a note of protest delivered to Iranian ambassador in connection with the statements of the Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Seyyed Hassan Firouzabadi. He spoke about the Azerbaijani leadership and people through the Iranian news agency FARS, the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry official representative Elkhan Polukhov told Trend. Commenting on Firouzabadi's statements, Polukhov said that it was strange to hear the military's political appeals toward the country, which he calls a friendly country. It is also strange to see how his ministry cooperates with Armenia, which holds 20 percent of the Azerbaijani territories under occupation. "It would be logical to hear Firouzabadi's call and demand to Armenian militarists to withdraw occupying forces from Azerbaijani territory and to restore the violated rights of more than one million Azerbaijani refugees and internally displaced persons," Polukhov said. He said that in this case, Firouzabadi would perform a role more corresponding to his position. Azerbaijan delivered a note of protest to Iran due to unreasonable statements made by the Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Seyyed Hassan Firouzabadi toward the Azerbaijani leadership and people posted on Iranian Fars news agency's issue, Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry said. Iranian ambassador to Azerbaijan Mohammad Bagher Bahrami was summoned to the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry. Receiving Bahrami Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Nadir Huseynov delivered the Azerbaijani side's protest note to him. The Foreign Ministry's note expresses strong protest against Iranian official's irresponsible slanders and notes that publication of statements on the Iranian press against the Azerbaijani people and government, which are contrary to Azerbaijan's national interests and security and distort domestic and foreign policy, contradicts the existing friendly relations between the two countries and their mutual obligations.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry demanded the Iranian side to prevent further spread of such slanders, take the necessary steps so that such a situation was not repeated any more, and demanded an explanation on the matter. (Trend)

PROTEST ACTION AGAINST JUDGES SELECTION COUNCIL IN THE CAPITAL OF KYRGYZSTAN

16 August

Members of the social movement are holding a protest action against the work of the Judges Selection Council in the capital of Kyrgyzstan. 10-15 people are holding posters staying near the building where the Council will hold a meeting, news agency "24.kg" reported. They are speaking against corrupted judges and members of the Council. "We are demanding re-election of members of the Judges Selection Council and express distrust in its work. Contenders they chose to the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Chamber don't have spotless reputation and cannot work in the judiciary," think members of the movement. Recall, the Judges Selection Council approved 11 candidates for the Constitutional Chamber and 29 for the Supreme Court. Yesterday, August 15, the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic approved two candidates for the Constitutional Chamber - Emil Oskonbaev and Klara Soronkulova. (24.kg)

EIGHTY-THREE CANDIDATES DECLARE FOR KYRGYZ PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

16 August

More than 80 people have put themselves forward to take part in Kyrgyzstan's upcoming presidential election, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. The Central Election Commission announced on August 16 that 83 individuals expressed their intention to run in the October 30 election by today's deadline. Only 16 candidates were nominated by political parties by the end of the nomination period, while the rest nominated themselves. The candidates must now collect at least 30,000 signatures, pay a deposit of 100,000 soms (\$2,239), and also pass a live, televised state-language test for their name to go on the ballot. The commission will announce the shortlist of candidates in late September. Among the most prominent are Prime Minister Almazbek Atambaev, opposition Ata-Meken (Fatherland) party leader Omurbek Tekebaev, former Emergency Situations Minister Kamchybek Tashiev of the Ata-Jurt (Native Land) party, and former Prosecutor-General Kubatbek Baibolov. Others include former

Supreme Court chief Kurmanbek Osmonov, former Bishkek Mayor Nariman Tuleev, former parliament speaker Marat Sultanov, and former State Security Council Secretary Adakhan Madumarov. The October election will determine a successor for Roza Otunbaeva, who became president following the ouster of Kurmanbek Bakiev in a popular uprising in April 2010. Meanwhile, activists with the Progress Foundation movement urged Prime Minister Atambaev today to temporarily step down from his post before the official start of the presidential campaign on September 25. The activists say Atambaev's current activities can be seen as using administrative resources to promote his candidacy. Atambaev told RFE/RL on August 14 that he would step down temporarily as prime minister for the duration of the election campaign. The election law requires government officials running for public office to do so. Since Atambaev's candidacy was proposed by his ruling Social Democratic Party on August 14, he has made several public statements regarding his programs to raise monthly salaries to secondary-school teachers and increase pensions. (RFE/RL)

STARTING IMMEDIATE CONSTRUCTION OF ROGUN HPP IS NOT RECOMMENDED - WB

17 August

The Panel of Experts of the World Bank says that starting immediate construction of an initial stage of the proposed Rogun HPP is not recommend, Asia-Plus reported. A World Bank Team of experts has completed its 10-day visit to Tajikistan to review the progress of the Assessment Studies for the proposed Rogun Project. The team was accompanied by the two independent Panels of Experts - the Engineering and Dam Safety Panel and the Environment and Social Panel, whose role is to ensure that international standards of design, risk evaluation and impact assessment are met, the WB said in its press release posted on www.worldbank.org. Among other findings and discussions, the international consultants undertaking the Techno-Economic Assessment Study concluded that starting immediate construction of an initial stage of the proposed Rogun HPP with an intermediate height dam of 120 meters (up to El. 1110 m) is not recommended, primarily due to the heavy sediment load carried by the Vakhsh River. "The Panels of Experts and the Bank Team concurred with this assessment and recommended to move forward expeditiously with

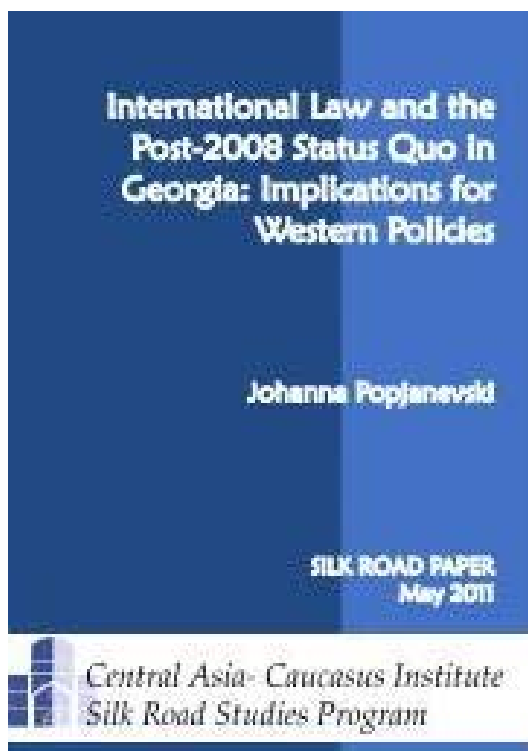
the comprehensive technical, economic, environmental and social assessment of the full-height dam. In this regard, the good progress of the on-going assessment studies provides a solid basis for comprehensive assessment of the full height dam, which could take from 6 to 8 months to complete," the WB said in the release. "The Bank Team has concluded that the Assessment Studies, which started in March 2011, are making notable progress. In a period of about five months, the international consultants have collected and analyzed a large amount of available data and studies, and have produced several initial assessments and reports," the release says. The work on the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment has, in general, progressed well and disclosure of the full assessment is expected during the first half of 2012 for further discussion and consultation. The Bank Team acknowledged the Government's commitment and efforts in relation to resettlement, noted several elements of good practice in this work, and looks forward to continued progress to meet international standards. This visit was part of the process to carry out the two Assessment Studies for the proposed Rogun

HPP - the Techno-Economic Assessment Study and the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment. (Asia Plus)

FEMALE AFGHAN GOVERNMENT WORKER, FOUR SECURITY GUARDS KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

17 August

Officials say a female employee of the local administration and four Afghan security guards were killed in two separate incidents in the southern city of Kandahar. Provincial government spokesman Zalmai Ayoubi said Radia Sadat was gunned down as she left home in central Kandahar to go to work early today. There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but the provincial spokesman blamed the killing on "enemies of Afghanistan," a phrase often used by officials to refer to insurgents. Separately, police said three suicide bombers attacked a private security company on August 15, killing four Afghan security guards and injuring eight. The Taliban claimed responsibility for that attack. (RFE/RL)



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