

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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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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NATO IN AFGHANISTAN – NEW COMMANDER, SAME CHALLENGES

Richard Weitz

NATO's mission in Afghanistan is reaching its home stretch. On February 10, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) held what will likely be its last command transition, with John Allen handing over command to fellow U.S. Marine Corps General Joseph Dunford, who will now lead the international effort to train and assist the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and to help achieve NATO's other objectives in the region.

BACKGROUND: Dunford, who serves concurrently as the head of all U.S. forces in Afghanistan, will now participate officially in the NATO debates over how many combat forces to leave in Afghanistan after 2014 and how rapidly the other forces must leave the country. At their November 2010 Lisbon summit, the NATO heads of government set 2014 as the date for transiting to an Afghan-led war and to increase their training, advising, and equipping missions to the ANSF to facilitate this transition. NATO also signed a strategic partnership agreement with the Afghan government that pledges some kind of collaboration beyond 2014. At their May 2012 Chicago summit, NATO leaders established an interim milestone of mid-2013 when ISAF's mission will shift, from predominately direct combat with the Afghan Taliban to almost entirely support for the ANSF, who are supposed to take the lead for security throughout the country, but NATO will retain sufficient assets through 2014 to resume direct combat. They also agreed on the rough size and cost of the ANSF and committed in principle to help the Afghan government pay for this force. The NATO members and their nonmember partners in ISAF also pledged to continue a NATO military role in Afghanistan beyond

2014, though with a different name than ISAF and focused on training, advising, and providing other support. Finally, the allied governments reaffirmed their support for an Afghan-led peace effort with the Taliban provided the rights of all Afghans, including women, were protected.

In his State of the Union address last week, President Obama announced his intention this year to remove 34,000 of the 66,000 U.S. troops currently in Afghanistan. More will leave in 2014. The United States would like to keep some forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014, but that depends on Washington and Kabul negotiating a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that would provide U.S. forces with legal immunity. The deadline for reaching the SOFA, also known as the bilateral security agreement, is one year after the signing of last May's Afghan-U.S. Strategic Partnership Agreement. In that accord, the U.S. pledges economic, security, and diplomatic assistance to Afghanistan for the decade after the 2014 withdrawal date, while Afghan officials pledge to improve accountability, transparency, rule of law, and the rights of all Afghans regardless of gender.

At the command transfer ceremony, General Allen said that the Taliban insurgency "will be defeated over time by legitimate and well-



trained Afghan forces.” The past two years has seen the ANSF assume responsibility for ensuring security in an increasing number of provinces, cities, and districts in Afghanistan. According to the U.S. government, Afghan forces began leading the majority of operations in July 2012 and now lead approximately 80 percent of operations. The reality of this transition is evident in the declining number of NATO casualties and the rising number of Afghan combat deaths. For example, ISAF did not suffer a single casualty in January 2013, whereas the ANSF lost 25 soldiers in combat. Meanwhile, the number of Afghan civilian deaths has begun to decline.

IMPLICATIONS: Despite several high-profile showcase attacks in Kabul and elsewhere, the ANSF has thus far been able to maintain overall security in these transferred areas. But coming months will see the Afghan forces assume responsibility for some of the country’s most insurgent-infested areas. The ANSF still suffer from inadequate logistics and intelligence, weak aviation and firepower, and a poor ability to detect and neutralize improvised explosive devices. The Pentagon concluded that, as of late September 2012, only one of the 23 ANSF brigades could operate independently of ISAF units, even with the help of ISAF advisers. The fact that a third of

the Afghan National Army (ANA) must be replaced each year makes it hard to build the force’s capabilities. Not only do one fourth of the recruits fail to reenlist after their three-year term is over, but ANA units suffer from high desertion and defection rates.

A more immediate problem is the surge in “insider” attacks, in which supposedly friendly Afghan soldiers turn their weapons on their ISAF advisers. These “green-on-blue” attacks represent a major problem since they exploit a crucial vulnerability by seeking to disrupt the vital ISAF partnership and training programs with their ANSF colleagues. In 2012, there were at least 60 confirmed cases of NATO advisers being killed in “insider” attacks by infiltrators, impersonators, or spontaneous action by ANSF members, who justify their attacks as retaliation for some obnoxious act committed by the Western countries, such as their burning Korans or showing anti-Islamic films. The Taliban tactic of claiming responsibility for all these attacks has unnerved ISAF advisers, who now keep the weapons loaded at all times while engaging in less social action with their Afghan counterparts. On several occasions, NATO has had to remove its advisers from Afghan work posts and suspend partnered operations in the field. The French government explicitly cited the insider attacks to justify withdrawing its combat forces earlier than originally planned.

Afghan and ISAF governments are attempting to tackle this problem by improving their vetting and screening of new ANSF recruits; enhancing their counter-intelligence efforts; and making ISAF personnel more culturally aware of Afghan sensitivities. NATO’s preferred technological approach to security problems will not yield a

solution to this problem. The foreign forces must rely on fellow Afghans to use their superior cultural knowledge and human intelligence to prevent such infiltration. Furthermore, NATO's plan to shift the ISAF mission from having coalition forces partnering and operating with similar ANSF units to their providing security assistance, in which small ISAF advisory units ("security force assistance teams") are embedded in Afghan units at the NATO brigade-level as enablers and trainers, should reduce the incidents of insider attacks. Most of the green-on-blue attacks do not involve soldiers who serve together on a constant basis. Instead, they naturally find it easier to kill people who they encounter on episodic or random contacts.

The rapid increase in the ANSF's size has contributed to this insider problem since it invariably led to a relaxation of recruitment and supervisory standards. Between December 2009 and October 2012, the NATO Training Mission- Afghanistan (NTM-A) helped the ANSF grow by more than 140,000 personnel, to some 352,000 soldiers. Almost 5,000 NTM-A trainers serve in Afghan institutions, while some 400 ISAF military and police advisory teams deploy with ANSF units in the field. They have trained more than 3,200 ANSF instructors in a "train the trainers" program aimed to allow NTM-A to reduce its presence like the rest of NATO.

Last summer NATO confirmed its plans to reduce the ANSF to 230,000 troops after 2015 for affordability reasons. The costs of

maintaining the current force of 352,000 exceed the budget of the entire Afghan government. Nonetheless, some U.S. defense leaders and members of Congress want to keep the larger force until the Taliban threat is more clearly under control. The 230,000 troop figure was based on an analysis done by the Center for Army Analysis a few years ago. During his Senate confirmation hearings last year, Gen. Dunford said he would review that recommendation.

CONCLUSION: Despite generally hostile public opinion, NATO governments have proven surprisingly successful at sustaining their forces in Afghanistan because NATO leaders have defined keeping their Afghan commitment an issue of alliance solidarity. Nonetheless, although they have pledged to continue some kind of post-ISAF mission after 2014, NATO governments seem eager to remove almost all their combat forces in the next two years despite convincing evidence of substantially improved Afghan military capacity. This approach, while corresponding to political realities in the Western democracies, unfortunately feeds Afghan expectations that the West will once again abandon their country and emboldens Iran and Pakistan to make plans presuming a post-NATO security vacuum in Afghanistan that they are eager to fill.

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UZBEKISTAN WITHOUT THE CSTO

Farkhod Tolipov

On December 19, 2012, the summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization adopted a decision according to which Uzbekistan de facto completely ceased its membership in this organization. It seems that such a decision is to the mutual disadvantage of both Uzbekistan and the CSTO.

Uzbekistan lost one important, albeit weak, multilateral platform for international engagement; the CSTO lost one important, albeit stubborn, member. The strategic and geopolitical situation in Central Asia became even more uncertain than has so far been the case. Uzbekistan's bilateralism cannot be a panacea in face of security challenges, while the CSTO's multilateralism, in turn, cannot be efficient in the region without Uzbekistan.

BACKGROUND: Since the Collective Security Treaty of several former Soviet republics was signed on May 15, 1992, in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent, the country has remained a reluctant party to this Treaty. In 1999 Uzbekistan did not prolong the Treaty and for long remained outside the sole post-Soviet collective security arrangement.

The CST was transformed into an Organization – the CSTO – in 2002 and has since then functioned as the only full-fledged security institution in the post-Soviet space. After being exposed to an alleged “color revolution” attempt committed in May 2005 by the so-called “Akromiya” group – a splinter of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir Islamic organization – in its provincial Andijan city, Uzbekistan decided in 2006 to restore its membership in the CSTO, perceiving the events as allegedly plotted by the U.S. (see the 01/11/06 Issue of the CACI Analyst). Concerned with the survival of its regime, Tashkent turned to Moscow hoping for a tentative security umbrella, due to Moscow's support for authoritarian regimes in its neighborhood and its concern over the

possibility of color revolution scenarios in Russia itself.

However, Uzbekistan's newly established membership in the CSTO has remained nominal since 2006. Tashkent has not ratified any agreement adopted in the frameworks of this organization, has not attended its joint military exercises and has refrained from active involvement in other non-military spheres of cooperation. In June 2012, Tashkent finally announced officially that Uzbekistan suspended its participation in the CSTO. This ad-hoc situation lasted until December 2012. Between its suspension and its complete termination of membership in the CSTO, Uzbekistan adopted its new Foreign Policy Concept in September 2012 (see the 09/05/2012 issue of the CACI Analyst). The Concept asserts four “no's”, namely: no to deployment of foreign bases in Uzbekistan; no to membership in any military block; no to participation in international peace-keeping operations; and no to the mediation of any external power in the resolution of regional conflicts in Central Asia.



On the eve of the December 19 CSTO summit, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov made a visit to Tashkent during which it was stated that Russia and Uzbekistan remain strategic partners and maintain alliance relationships. This chain of events has reflected Uzbekistan's complete abandonment of the multilateral security arrangement and its bilateral preferences in this sphere.

IMPLICATIONS: The decision was adopted as international forces are being withdrawn from Afghanistan and all Central Asian countries express serious concerns about the possible exacerbation of the situation in Afghanistan by 2014. Interestingly, one of the official explanations for Uzbekistan's exit from the CSTO was that Uzbekistan disagreed with the organization's stance on the Afghan issue. In reality, however, it seems that Tashkent wants to stay free from geopolitically burdened obligations within this quasi-alliance and to prepare for any option regarding its security arrangements.

Meanwhile, it is symptomatic that President Karimov uses any occasion to express his apprehension with the imminent tension and instability in the region after the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan. Delivering his congratulations to Uzbekistan's Military Forces on January 14, 2013, on the occasion of the Day of Defender

of the Motherland, he underlined that the situation in the region is troublesome, that a number of non-traditional threats can spread in the region, such as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, political and religious radicalism and extremism, conflicts nearby our borders, activation of terrorist groups, exacerbation of socio-economic problems, political and inter-ethnic enmity as well as rivalry of external forces in the region – all likely to lead to a destabilization of the military-political situation.

The president also mentioned the recently adopted new Foreign Policy Concept of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The foreign policy, Karimov argued, is based on a strong strategic approach, especially in the security sphere, and requires among other things the utilization of all means to achieve vital ends. However, it also requires a prudent combination of unilateral, bilateral and multilateral instruments.

Abandoning the CSTO, however, seems to have deprived Uzbekistan of a unique, albeit very inefficient, multilateral platform for watching, contributing, influencing, self-positioning, and if necessary deterring.

Uzbekistan's withdrawal from the CSTO is likely to have geopolitical implications for Central Asia's regional security architecture. The question of "who will protect Central Asia as a whole and individual countries of the region and against whom?" is actually a question of threat assessment and defining means and ways of responding to those threats. It nevertheless seems that Tashkent disregards the significance of permanent engagement with neighboring countries in security matters.

In this regard, Uzbekistan's choice – adequate with respect to the CSTO per se – is inadequate when it comes to neighboring countries. The latter have the CSTO at their disposal and can appeal to it at any time when they find it expedient for the solution of regional security problems but will do this without Uzbekistan. At the same time, without Uzbekistan any regional security problem will remain unsolved even with CSTO assistance. Interestingly, on one hand, should the regional security environment exacerbate in Central Asia, and not unlikely due to tension between CSTO members and Uzbekistan, the CSTO can be appealed to for security assistance. However, on the other hand, Tashkent's existing strategic and alliance relationships with Moscow – the pillar and motor of the CSTO – can preclude any responses.

The main strategic flaw in the behavior of Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states is their obsession with national interests and disregard of a common regional perspective. Hence, Uzbekistan could have discussed its decision with its neighbors, at least in order to demonstrate good will in the region. Yet, some new tokens of post-CSTO arrangements in Central Asia undertaken by Tashkent have also appeared. In September 2012, President Karimov met with Kazakhstan's President Nazarbaev in Astana and in October with Turkmenistan's President Berdimuhamedov in Ashgabat. Both meetings covered Afghanistan and underlined the need for joint efforts to meet anticipated challenges after the drawdown of ISAF. Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are strengthening their strategic ties with Russia. The Russian leadership recently decided to provide Kyrgyzstan's and

Tajikistan's armies with free military technology, worth US\$1.1 billion \$400 million respectively. Uzbekistan must take this into account.

Finally, the analysis of Uzbekistan's gains and losses from abandoning the CSTO must also consider possible NATO-CSTO contacts. Russia is eager to establish such contacts whereas the NATO (or the U.S.) is reluctant. Would-be interactions between these two organizations could create a new and unprecedented security and geopolitical environment in Central Asia in which Uzbekistan must find its niche. The expected activation of relations between Uzbekistan and NATO in the aftermath of the Afghan campaign will require a more cooperative security policy from Tashkent on the regional level, also implying cooperative interaction with the CSTO.

CONCLUSIONS: Uzbekistan's options regarding regional security arrangements and international security partners have turned into a geopolitical riddle. On one hand, the country avoids multilateralism in the security sphere and prefers bilateral arrangements. However, the CSTO's inefficiency can hardly be substituted with Uzbekistan-Russia bilateral strategic cooperation. The problem of national security in such a complex region as Central Asia cannot be solved without strong commitment to multilateral international and regional security arrangements.

On the other hand, even Uzbekistan's national security, narrowly defined, is best ensured by recognizing the importance of regionalism in Central Asia. The expected restoration of the NATO-Uzbekistan partnership will inevitably bring up the issue of multilateral regional security arrangements. Moreover, if cooperation

between NATO and the CSTO is to evolve, then Uzbekistan, in spite of its recent departure from the CSTO, cannot remain indifferent to such cooperation and continue insisting on its ambiguous bilateralism.

While it is doubtful that Uzbekistan's decision to leave the CSTO was a prudent one, the CSTO's loss is also evident. While there is no question that Uzbekistan was a

stubborn and difficult member, it remains an open question how the CSTO will now engage in Central Asia and deal with regional security problems without Uzbekistan.

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BAIKONUR AND RUSSIA'S DECLINING CLOUT IN KAZAKHSTAN

Dmitry Shlapentokh

In 2011, Kazakhstan's President Nazarbaev expressed strong support for President Putin's initiative of creating a Eurasian Union. In fact, Nazarbaev himself presented similar ideas almost 20 years ago, in 1994. While Putin implicitly sees the new Eurasian Union as a Russia-centered geopolitical entity with exclusive ties between Russia and other members, Kazakhstan regards its relationship with Russia as just one among several others. In many ways Kazakhstan is actually distancing itself from Moscow, which has increasingly lost its attraction as a center of science and technology in the eyes of Kazakhstan's elite. One recent indication of this is Astana's apparent decision in December 2012 to phase out Moscow's control over the Baikonur Cosmodrome.

BACKGROUND: Nazarbaev's declaration of his desire to form a Eurasian Union in the beginning of the post-Soviet era awarded him a special status among promoters of Eurasianism such as Alexander Dugin, who even published a book about Nazarbaev's providential role. Nazarbaev has never publically dismissed the idea and seemed most enthusiastic when Putin promulgated the creation of a Customs Union aiming to lay the foundation of a close Eurasian Union. The fact that the union is envisioned as not only an economic, but also a geopolitical entity has caused a considerable degree of apprehension in Washington policy circles. Secretary Clinton for example has described the Eurasian Union as the USSR in disguise with Moscow in the center.

Yet, despite its continuous praise for Eurasian Union and its strong existing ties with Russia, many of Astana's recent decisions imply that Kazakhstan has actually distanced itself from Moscow, especially by challenging Moscow's cultural and scientific predominance in the region. The most recent example in this regard puts into question

Russia's program of space exploration and is an indication of Astana's skepticism toward the prospect of a Moscow-centered Eurasian space.

In the beginning of its existence as independent state, Kazakhstan was closely connected with Russia not only economically but also by cultural and ethnic ties. A large part of Kazakhstan's population consisted of Russian-speakers, which actually constituted a majority in the country's north. Russian, not Kazakh, had the official status of national language. This fascination with Russia, or at least with Russian culture, science and language, persisted throughout the early post-Soviet era. It fit nicely with Nazarbaev's early Eurasianism, or at least in his belief that Moscow would remain Kazakhstan's primary ally. As a result, the Gumilev University with instruction in Russian was established in Kazakhstan. Lev Gumilev, sometimes called "the last Eurasianist," advocated a harmonious "symbiosis" between the Russian and Turkic peoples of Eurasia while assuming that Russian would remain the major language of discourse.



However, as time progressed Nazarbaev's "Eurasianism" with its strong gravitation toward Russian culture, language and related technological prowess, started to decline. The Kazakh language was increasingly made a prerequisite for career prospects, especially in government. At the same time, Astana increasingly saw the general and often catastrophic degradation of Russian science and culture in spite of some improvement during the Putin era. This had direct implications for Astana's cultural and scientific policies.

IMPLICATIONS: One important implication was a change of Astana's educational policy. While Gumilev University continued to exist, new universities, including the recently opened Nazarbaev University, had a completely different linguistic and staff composition. Rather than Russian, English is the language of instruction. The university is staffed by western researchers and teachers who are attracted to Kazakhstan by extremely generous salaries.

The decline of interest in Russian culture is also evident in Nazarbaev's program to move from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin. Nazarbaev has certainly asserted that this step has nothing to do with geopolitical orientations and it should be underlined that

the ambition to introduce the Latin alphabet is no novelty in Kazakhstan. Yet, regardless of Nazarbaev's assertions, the move clearly indicates a decline of Russia's centrality as the focus of political and cultural discourse in Kazakhstan.

Russia's declining attraction is also manifested in Kazakhstan's questioning of Russia's technological prowess, which was demonstrated clearly in Astana's rethinking of arms imports from Russia. While Astana has by no means discarded its import of Russian weapons, it increasingly considers Russia to be just one among many suppliers, whose products are viewed as equal to or even better than those of Russia. Indeed, Kazakhstan is currently in the process of establishing joint production with or entering into purchase agreements from a variety of suppliers ranging from Turkey to China. Moreover, Astana increasingly believes that it possesses sufficient expertise to produce a range of weapons systems itself.

An even clearer manifestation of Astana's skepticism toward Moscow's technological prowess is Astana's reevaluation of Russian assistance in developing Kazakhstan's space program. The desire to find alternatives to Moscow in this respect emerged already in 2009 when Nazarbaev discussed the possibility of cooperation with France in developing the space program albeit cooperation with China is also not excluded. In December 2012 it was officially announced that Astana wanted to repossess Baikonur – the hub of the Soviet space industry and rocket launching – which is still under Russian control. The Kremlin was seemingly surprised by this move and termed the Kazakh side's statement "unjustifiably aggressive."

The desire to expel Moscow from Baikonur has a significant symbolic meaning in the context of the USSR's status as a great space superpower just a few decades ago and Moscow's self-understanding as the true successor of the USSR technological prowess. Yet, Astana evidently does not consider this to be the case anymore as it demonstrates its ambition to find other collaborators, most likely Western ones, or alternatively to manage the entire enterprise alone. Indeed, Kazakhstan does not seem intimidated by Moscow's assertions that Russian personnel could leave Baikonur and that Russia will cease payments worth millions of dollars for using the facility.

While Kazakhstan's decision on Baikonur holds significant symbolic importance in its own right, the developments also have broader geopolitical implications. Increasingly, Astana views Moscow as an equal partner at best; but hardly as the only and possibly not even as a major partner. It is also unlikely that Moscow would come to view Kazakhstan as an equal, especially due to the rising Russian nationalism and its generally condescending attitude toward Central Asians. In fact, Moscow is also skeptical toward the prospect of true integration with Kazakhstan and has according to some reports already started the construction of an alternative to Baikonur in Russia's Far East. It is becoming clear that Moscow is unwilling to accept the prospect of Kazakhstan's increasing scientific and technological independence from Russia and seeks to secure its complete control over space projects in case its relationship with Astana deteriorates.

While Nazarbaev's meeting with Putin in February 2013 created the impression that

problems are solved, such assurances should be taken with a grain of salt. Indeed Baikonur is only the most recent indication of problems arising in the relationship between Astana and Moscow, which risks becoming decidedly less harmonious in the future and could increasingly come to resemble that between Moscow and Minsk. Indeed, the fact that Belarus and Russia have been a part of a "Union State" for decades has not prevented mutual suspicion and in some cases hostility. Indeed, as Moskovskie Novosti correspondent Arkadii Dubnov has noted, "the space conflict is just the top of the iceberg of the general conflicts in the Russia - Kazakhstan relationship."

CONCLUSIONS: In the very beginning of post-Soviet era, Kazakhstan saw Russia as the cultural and scientific center of the post-Soviet universe and its elite had a genuine interest in Eurasian integration. Yet, as time proceeded, Moscow's attraction as one of the global centers of science and technology started to fade, a process that induced Astana to look elsewhere for expertise and to develop its own technological capabilities. Consequently, Astana increasingly regards itself as Moscow's equal, a notion that the Moscow elite will hardly accept. These developments provide bleak prospects for the geopolitical cohesiveness or even the existence of the Eurasian Union as a viable geopolitical body.

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DAGESTAN'S COMMISSION FOR REHABILITATION OF REBEL FIGHTERS: A FAILED EXPERIMENT?

Huseyn Aliyev

The escalation of insurgency-related violence in Dagestan, in conjunction with the inability of law enforcement and the military to deal with the increase in militant attacks, were among the reasons for the government of Dagestan to establish in 2010 a commission aimed at rehabilitating rebel fighters. Yet, despite scores of processed applications and a number of successful cases claimed by the commission during the last three years, conflict-related violence continues to increase in Dagestan. Created by the government of Dagestan as the first effort to implement a "soft" form of counter-insurgency, the rehabilitation commission nevertheless lacks legal and social mechanisms to ensure fair treatment of former militants and to re-settle them in civilian life.

BACKGROUND: The commission for rehabilitation of former members of the militant underground was created by a decree of Dagestan's president Magomedsalam Magomedov on November 2, 2010. The main goal of the commission is to ensure the return of rebel fighters to civilian life by guaranteeing them safety and fair treatment by the law enforcement, with follow-up assistance in their adaptation to normal life. Since its establishment, the commission has held 17 meetings, processed 46 applications (31 positively) and addressed 150 complaints. The commission reports that although some of its applicants are currently serving prison terms, 23 former members of Dagestan's insurgent

groups were successfully rehabilitated and presently live and work in urban or rural areas of the republic.

Apart from the assistance to those militants who wish to surrender and need a guarantee of fair treatment from Dagestan's president, the commission also works on discouraging potential rebel recruits from joining the insurgency by holding seminars and working on awareness campaigns. As stated by a key member of the commission in an interview to the Caucasian Knot: "The commission serves as a platform of an ideological struggle. We seek for people who were only recently members of the insurgency and are ready to convince others not to repeat their mistakes."



From 2011 onward, the commission members were also taking part in negotiations for the surrender of militants besieged during counter-terrorism operations conducted by the law enforcement agencies in Dagestan. After ensuring that the former militants are cleared of criminal charges or have served their sentences, commission members provide support for their applicants' resettlement and stay in touch with them on a permanent basis. As of 2013, there were no cases of rebels rehabilitated by the commission re-joining their former comrades in arms. Praised by the republic's authorities as a success, Dagestan's rehabilitation commission has served as a role model for the establishment of a corresponding institution in Ingushetia, where the separatist insurgency is also on the rise.

The creation of a rehabilitation commission in Dagestan represents the first effort to implement a "soft" form of counter-insurgency, markedly different from the brutal military-centered tactics employed by Ramzan Kadyrov in Chechnya. In contrast to previous approaches involving seasonal amnesty campaigns for rebel fighters in the region, particularly implemented in Chechnya and to a lesser degree in Dagestan, Dagestan's commission is designed as a permanent

institution with branches operating in all administrative districts of the republic.

IMPLICATIONS: As reported by the Caucasian Knot, Dagestan in 2012 saw the most intense conflict-related violence across the North Caucasus. Not only did more conflict-caused deaths among security personnel, civilians and rebels occur in Dagestan than elsewhere in the region during the last three years, but the scale of violence in the republic also continues to increase at an alarming rate. In contrast to 378 people killed as a result of the insurgency in 2010, 413 deaths occurred 2011 and 405 in 2012. The armed resistance in Dagestan lost 231 of its members in 2012, compared to 173 in 2011. The same year, 110 law enforcement personnel were killed, in comparison to 111 members of security forces in 2011.

These data decisively dwarf the modest numbers of militants who surrendered to the rehabilitation commission over the last three years – 46 applications. Moreover, comparing the commission's reports for 2011 and 2012 it appears that only six militants applied to the commission in 2012. A more detailed analysis of the applications to the commission reveals that the predominant majority of ex-rebels were either recent recruits or rebel collaborators with no combat experience. As observed by a co-chairman of the Dagestan's NGO Territory of Peace and Development, not a single "real" insurgent yet approached the rehabilitation commission.

A number of local observers also emphasized that apart from the lack of trust among insurgents, Dagestan's commission is also not particularly popular with the law enforcement officials. As a result, seven members of the armed underground who surrendered to the commission in 2012 were handed over to the

criminal court and delivered prison sentences – a development that will hardly serve as an encouragement for future rebel applicants to the commission.

The commission members are clearly aware of the shortcomings of their institution. As lamented by the commission's representative, Bagir Malliyev, Dagestan's siloviki (law enforcement) are positive only towards those members of the armed resistance who admit their guilt, testify, cooperate with the investigation, and preferably surrender voluntarily rather than being captured as the result of a counter-terrorism operation. Thereby, the role of the rehabilitation commission, as envisioned by the republic's officials, is limited to assisting the law enforcement in persecuting the militants rather than ensuring their return to civilian life.

Furthermore, the commission's treatment of its applicants are clearly counterproductive; the commission practices televised public appeals during which former rebels are expected to repent and condemn the armed resistance. This not only puts them in danger of retribution from former fellow insurgents but is also humiliating. Such an approach will most likely deter rebel recruits from dealing with the commission in the future – an implication suggested by the low turnout of applicants in 2012.

In addition, far from offering its applicants employment opportunities, the commission encourages them to seek jobs on their own. According to Mallayev, rehabilitated ex-militants usually end up working in private logistics, construction or farming; low paid

part-time types of employment with few prospects of earning a decent income. According to residents of the North Caucasus, this difficulty of finding employment is among the primary reasons why young people join the rebels in the first place.

CONCLUSIONS:

Post-conflict rehabilitation initiatives are a crucial feature of successful conflict resolution. Therefore, the creation of Dagestan's commission for rehabilitation of insurgency members, the first of its kind in the North Caucasus, is unboundedly a unique phenomenon for the region. Its emphasis on the necessity for a "soft" counter-insurgency approach is an aspect of conflict resolution that has long been neglected by Russian and local authorities alike. Yet, both the simmering violence in the republic and the markedly low numbers of rebel fighters applying to the commission suggest that the rehabilitation initiative has failed to decrease the intensity of the conflict. Having achieved only a handful of modest accomplishments in the rehabilitation of former insurgents, the commission can hardly serve as a platform for peace-building. Its achievements in terms of "soft" counter-insurgency measures are dubious as well: the public humiliation of surrendered rebels and their handover to criminal investigations, which often result in prison sentences and bleak prospects for future, are hardly an incentive for young rebels and even less so for more experienced fighters to seek a return to normal life.

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FIELD REPORTS

EU EXPRESSES CONCERNS OVER DEVELOPMENTS IN GEORGIA

Eka Janashia

In mid-February, EU officials issued a warning to Tbilisi that the EU's Association Agreement with Georgia, including visa liberalization and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, might not be signed at the upcoming Eastern Partnership (EaP) Vilnius Summit in November 2013.

The incident taking place in front of the Georgian National Library on February 8 exacerbated the EU's apprehensions over the "deterioration of the power-sharing arrangement" between PM Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream (GD) coalition and President Mikheil Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM) party.

The tensions began on February 6 when the parliament discussed the constitutional amendments offered by GD lawmakers, implying a restriction of presidential power through depriving the president of the right to dismiss the government and appointing a new one without parliamentary approval.

The UNM MPs agreed to vote for the amendments only on the condition that a pro-Western foreign policy course in incorporated in the constitution as a binding clause and to raise the requirement for endorsing constitutional amendments from two-thirds to three-fourths of the MP votes. The GD

parliamentary majority, however, did not accept the proposal arguing that the issue could be discussed separately but not as part of the same package.

Failing to secure the UNM's support for approving the constitutional amendments, the GD postponed president's annual state of the nation address in parliament scheduled for February 8. "The president will of course be given an opportunity but it will only happen after the president and his political team explicitly express their position on this concrete issue [on the constitutional amendments related to the presidential powers]," Parliamentary Speaker David Usupashvili said on February 7.

In response, Saakashvili decided to address the public from the National Library in the presence of foreign diplomats, journalists, UNM party members and activists. Protesters aiming to thwart the event had gathered outside the National Library before the scheduled time. The chaos started when UNM lawmakers and Tbilisi's mayor Gigi Ugulava appeared in the vicinity of the crowd. As a result of the confrontation, several UNM MPs including Chiora Taktakishvili, Sergo Ratiani and party activist Giga Nasaridze were assaulted and injured by

protesters while trying to approach the main entrance of the Library.

Whereas police had been mobilized at the site, it failed to prevent the incident. Minister of Internal Affairs Irakli Gharibashvili, who arrived at the scene during the clash, asserted that the UNM members had been offered alternative routes to get inside the Library but they rejected the proposal and entered into open conflict with demonstrators. Saakashvili expressed “regrets” over the clash and eventually delivered the address to the nation from the presidential palace.

With reference to the incident, Štefan Füle, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood policy and the spokesperson for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, released a statement on February 10 saying that “the EU considers it of paramount importance for the future of Georgia’s democracy that all political actors and institutions in Georgia be accorded due respect, in line with our shared European values.”

Two days later Füle met with Saakashvili while visiting Tbilisi as part of the Informal Eastern Partnership (EaP) dialogue. In the course of the meeting, the president expressed hopes that at the upcoming Vilnius Summit in November, Georgia would obtain a declaration conferring the country a status of potential candidate for EU membership. However, Füle stressed that the best outcome Georgia can expect from the Summit is the finalization of negotiations on the Association Agreement.

Meanwhile, the European People’s Party (EPP), the largest and most influential European-level political party, declared on February 15 that the violence taking place in front of the National Library “shocked the European public opinion” and could

“undermine Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration process.” The EPP said that “it is impossible to finalize and sign an Association Agreement with a country that does not respect [European] principles anymore.”

Commenting on this statement, Parliamentary Speaker Usupashvili said that the EPP is composed of various parties including the UNM. Hence, it might not be surprising that sometimes the EPP makes subjective assessments, Usupashvili said. In turn, the State Minister of Georgia for Reintegration, Paata Zakareishvili, ironically suggested that the EPP should be more critical towards Saakashvili and “notice things beyond Chiora’s nose,” with reference to MP Taktakishvili, one of the UNM leaders.

President Saakashvili stated that given the EPP’s political clout, it would be able to block any issue considered relevant. It would thus be irresponsible to downplay the importance of the statement and Georgian politicians should instead address existing shortcomings to avoid unwanted consequences, he said.

While the GD coalition’s representatives claim that Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration is an indispensable process that could never be invalidated by a statement from the EPP, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Cecilia Malmström, who leads the visa liberalization related negotiations with Georgia, has three times delayed her scheduled visits to Georgia. Currently, she is expected to arrive in late February to present an action plan to advance visa liberalization deliberations.

The warnings sent by EU officials to Tbilisi indicate that not only the progress attained in implementing the action plan but also the overall success of the cohabitation process will have a considerable impact on Georgia’s chances at the Vilnius Summit.

KYRGYZSTAN'S FORMER PRESIDENT SENTENCED TO 24 YEARS IN JAIL

Joldosh Osmonov

Kyrgyzstan's former President Kurmanbek Bakiev and his brother have been found guilty of murdering a former presidential chief of staff and two other people by a Kyrgyz military court. While many local observers are pessimistic about the impact of the court decision on the prospect of Bakiev's extradition from Belarus, some claim that the ruling still holds political importance.

On February 11, the military court of the Bishkek garrison sentenced former Kyrgyz President Bakiev to 24 years in jail in absentia and confiscation of his property for his involvement in the triple murder of Medet Sadyrkulov, the former head of his presidential administration, Sergey Slepchenko, a former director of the Strategic Research Institute under the Kyrgyz president, and the driver Kubat Sulaimanov. The former president, who has escaped to Belarus after the change of government in April 2010, was found guilty of abuse of power and "engagement with an organized criminal group which has inflicted huge damage on the state." The court also sentenced the president's younger brother Janysh Bakiev, the former head of the Kyrgyz State Guarding Service, who was accused of several crimes including the murders of two or more people, to life imprisonment and stripping him of his military rank lieutenant general.

Sadyrkulov was considered to be Bakiev's closest ally and an influential power broker until his voluntary resignation in January 2009 due to disagreement with the president's policies. He was believed to be the architect of

the pro-presidential Ak Zhol political party, which controlled the parliament during Bakiev's regime. Immediately after his resignation, Sadyrkulov allegedly succeeded in uniting most of the opposition leaders and was preparing to launch mass anti-governmental protests across the country. In March 2009, he, along with Slepchenko and Sulaimanov, was found dead in a burned-out car at the outskirts of Bishkek. At the time, the incident was officially termed a car accident.

The sentences were announced in the absence of both Kurmanbek and Janysh Bakiev, who currently reside in Minsk, Belarus, under the protection of Belarusian President Alexandr Lukashenko. The Kyrgyz authorities have made numerous appeals to Minsk demanding the extradition of the two suspects; however, the Belarusian side has refused to comply claiming that the accusations are politically motivated. Moreover, Minsk has granted both individuals Belarusian citizenship.

In the meantime, the former president and his brother are both defendants in the ongoing trial related to the April 2010 events, which led to the ouster of Bakiev's regime and his family, where they are accused of killing over 90 protesters. According to the public prosecutors, Kurmanbek and Janysh Bakiev gave the order to open fire on opposition protesters. Due to its political nature, the trial has dragged on for more than two years and it is still unknown when it will conclude. Nevertheless, it seems obvious that the

Bakievs will be found guilty and sentenced to additional prison terms.

The announced court verdicts against the two brothers gave rise to widespread discussion in Kyrgyzstan. The opinions of political experts and analysts are divided regarding what significant impact these sentences will have on the attempts of Kyrgyzstan's authorities to have the Bakievs extradited from Belarus. Former Kyrgyz Justice Minister Mukar Cholponbaev said that the court's decision is the main prerequisite for demanding the extradition of a suspect from another country; therefore, the verdict will definitely increase the chances of bringing the former president to Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, many analysts claim that the Belarusian leadership is firm in its position on this issue, which is unlikely to change due to any official court decision. Moreover, Bakiev's family has been granted Belarusian citizenship and hence cannot be extradited.

Local political expert Mars Sariev says that this court decision signals the start of a political housecleaning by the country's current leadership. He claims that the current leaders want to draw a clear line between the previous and current regimes and plan to launch a political purge against the former president's allies who are still in power or plan a return to the political scene.

Russian journalist and expert Arkadiy Dubnov termed the court's verdict unprecedented, claiming that this is the first case in the history of the CIS countries when a former president is officially termed guilty. A number of criminal investigations have been conducted against former CIS presidents, but these have never produced actual verdicts. Dubnov noted that the chances of having former president Bakiev extradited are minimal, but that the ruling holds political significance in itself.

ARMENIA REELECTS PRESIDENT SERZH SARGSYAN

Haroutiun Khachatrian

Armenia conducted its sixth presidential elections on February 18, 2013. According to the unofficial results published by the Central Electoral Commission early on February 19, the incumbent president Serzh Sargsyan won the election by obtaining 58.64 percent of the votes in the first round. California-born Raffi Hovannisian came in second with 36.75 percent of the votes. The results of the exit poll performed by Gallup Organization, which were published at 8pm on the same day, gave Sargsyan and Hovannisian 58 percent and 32 percent respectively. The

results imply that Sargsyan has won his second five-year term as Armenia's president and will rule the country for another five years. The future plans of Hovannisian, who is the founder of Heritage party, and his team are still unknown.

Some 60.5 percent of registered voters, including Armenian citizens who are in the lists but were unable to vote since they are out of the country, were reported to participate in the ballot-casting.

Seven candidates competed in the sixth presidential vote, of which primarily

Hovannisian managed to mount a challenge to the incumbent, finishing second. Former Prime Minister Hrant Bagratian came in third with 2.15 percent of the votes, and the Soviet-era dissident Paruir Hayrikyan fourth with 1.23 percent. As noted above, the results largely corresponded with those of the Gallup exit poll. Hence, Sargsyan secured another five years to implement the modernization program pursued by his Republican Party.

While Sargsyan's victory was largely anticipated, Hovannisian's relative success is perhaps the main news story of these elections. Hovannisian, 54, was born in Fresno, California, and is the son of the renowned historian Richard Hovannisian, now a professor of the University of South California in Los Angeles. Hovannisian lives in Armenia since 1988, and served as independent Armenia's first Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1991-92. Hovannisian is founder of the Heritage party, which has a faction in the National Assembly and helped him greatly during the elections, though Hovannisian was formally nominated as an ordinary citizen and not a party leader. Early on February 19, Hovannisian asserted that he received significantly more votes than was reported, and that he was going to make a statement at an upcoming rally. Other than this, Hovannisian's plans are unclear.

Bagratian has also stated that he intends to challenge the election results.

The election was monitored by over 600 foreign observers, in addition to domestic ones. Most observers noted that the February 18 elections were conducted in a calm and orderly manner. The opposition lacked a prominent leader and the general attitude seemed to be that people voted to elect a leader, not a savior of the nation, as candidates have sometimes presented themselves in previous and more polarized Armenian elections. The voting itself was largely conducted in accordance with the legislation. In the pre-election environment, media have provided a balanced coverage of all candidates. This said, several cases of double voting and other violations have been recorded, and these are currently under investigation. However, initial observer reports state that the number of violations was lower than in any previous election in Armenia, including the parliamentary elections of May 6, 2012. Hence, there is good reason to believe that Armenia's election culture is improving by each election conducted, and that the promise made by Armenian authorities to make the February 2013 elections the cleanest in the country's independent history was likely kept.

AZERBAIJAN RESTRICTS NGO FUNDING

Mina Muradova

Azerbaijan's parliament has adopted legislation amendments that will restrict donations to political parties and public organizations. Civil society organizations

consider the new regulations to be crackdown on critical voices in the country ahead of the October Presidential Elections.

On February 15, the parliament approved amendments to some bills regulating grants and donations, the activity of local non-governmental and representative offices of international organizations, political parties and religious organizations, as well as to the Code of Administrative Offences.

According to the amendments, either public organizations or political parties receiving donations in any form of a value greater than AZN 200 (approximately US\$ 255) have to present a copy of a signed agreement on the donation to the Ministry of Justice for registration. In addition, the new amendments will ban all cash donations; donations must be transferred to a bank account and an additional report should be sent to the financial institutions. The new regulations will not be applied for grants allocated by the government.

NGOs could face large fines and confiscation of their property if they fail to send reports on donation amounts and donors to the relevant executive authorities. Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences impose fines on leaders of organizations from AZN 1,500 (US\$ 1,900) to AZN 2,500 (US\$ 3,185), and on legal entities from AZN 5,000 (US\$ 6,370) to AZN 7,000 (US\$ 8,900) if they refuse to send a copy of the grant agreements to government institutions. Before the amendments, fines amounts were between AZN 1,500 and AZN 2,500.

If financial and other aid is received without the signing of an agreement, responsible persons will be fined between AZN 2,500 (US\$ 3,185) and AZN 5,000 (US\$ 6,370), and legal entities between AZN 8,000 (US\$ 10,200) and AZN 15,000 (US\$ 19,100) along with confiscation of their property. In addition, fines between AZN 1,500 and AZN 8,000 will be imposed accordingly to leaders

of political parties and NGOs, and legal entities themselves if information about donations is not mirrored in their financial reports.

Presenting the amendments at a parliament session, MP Chingiz Ganizade said the measures aimed to increase the transparency of the non-governmental sector and religious organizations. "The government has to know where these funds are directed. We have international commitments to prevent financing of terrorism and money laundering. We want NGOs to be transparent. There is nothing to be prohibited. The issue is related to accountability and transparency," Ganizade told journalists.

According to Ganizade, the amendments were elaborated based on experiences of the United Kingdom, Russia and the U.S. "These countries have taken such measures for a long time and relevant governmental agencies have control over funds coming to the country," he said and mentioned the Beslan school terrorist attack as an example. "The investigation ... found that armed groups received financial support from abroad. We want NGOs and religious organizations to receive funds via bank accounts." The amendments will prevent "financial assistance of foreign forces to religious organizations and communities ... which, in many cases, are used for dirty purposes," - he said. Azadliq Radio quoted Ganizade presenting the amendments as a means for controlling funds from Iran.

Only three MPs objected to the amendments. One of them, Gudrat Hasanguliyev said that before fines are increased, there is a serious need to improve the NGO registration process by the Ministry of Justice. "Regarding the number of NGOs per 1,000 persons, Azerbaijan lags behind Georgia by three times, and South European countries by eight

to nine times. I am against the amendments,” he stated. Another MP, Fazil Mustafa, said that many NGOs would not be able to pay fines because the amounts could be much higher than the received grants or donations: “The court system could face an increase of cases where NGOs will be unable to pay their fines and as another consequence, these amendments can lead to an increase in appeals from Azerbaijan to the European Court of Human Rights.”

In response to the amendments, about 60 NGOs issued a statement where they Many NGOs, including international organizations, have recently reported on an informal ban imposed by the authorities against conducting workshops and meetings in the regions. The Institute for Reporters’ Freedom and Safety (IRFS) reported that on February 12, two officers of the Center for Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies were detained in Khachmaz, northern Azerbaijan, when local police raided the venue of their workshop on citizen participation in public policy as part of an initiative funded by the European Union and USAID.

IRFS have called on “the political authorities” to refrain from putting the amendments into force and expressed their willingness to engage in constructive dialogue with the parliament and government in order to liberalize the legislation on freedoms of association, assembly and expression. They

considered the recent actions a deliberate crackdown of the authorities on alternative voices in society. “Azerbaijani authorities have developed a sophisticated repressive system that tightens the political atmosphere and stifles the freedoms of association, assembly, and expression. Bans on the freedom of assembly, huge fines for organizers or participants of public gatherings, mass arrests, preventing NGOs from organizing events in both the regions and Baku are all part of the vicious cycle of pressure on civil society,” the statement reads. also called on international organizations and diplomatic missions operating in Azerbaijan to facilitate “citizen-government dialogue.”

“As the government’s crackdown on critical voices continues, fewer and fewer NGOs remain willing to work on issues related to democracy and human rights. These amendments could serve as the final nail in the coffin for independent civil society in Azerbaijan,” said Emin Huseynov, Director of IRFS.

Youth leader Bakhtiyar Hajiyev stated that legal ways to gather donations still exist and started a non-traditional protest. He and another youth leader, Emin Milli, announced they would sell their autographed photos in order to collect money. “Let’s unite, share our resources, become strong and develop!” Milli posted on his Facebook page promoting the sales.