

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING
VOL. 17 NO. 04
05 MARCH 2014

Contents

Analytical Articles

MAIDAN: LESSONS FOR THE SOUTH CAUCASUS	3
Huseyn Aliyev, Emil Souleimanov	
AZERBAIJAN'S EXPANDING STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE	7
Stephen Blank	
KYRGYZSTAN INCREASINGLY VULNERABLE TO MILITANT ISLAMISM	11
Jacob Zenn	
ASSESSING KAZAKHSTAN'S REVISED NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY	14
Richard Weitz	

Field Reports

UKRAINIAN SCENARIO IN KYRGYZSTAN	18
Arslan Sabyrbekov	
GEORGIAN PM MEETS WITH U.S. PRESIDENT, VP, AND SECRETARY OF STATE	20
Eka Janashia	
TAJIKISTAN BLOCKS RADIO OZODI WEBSITE	22
Oleg Salimov	
AZERBAIJANI JOURNALIST CHARGED WITH SPYING FOR THE U.S.	24
Mina Muradova	

THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASS ANALYST

Editor: Svante E. Cornell

Associate Editor: Niklas Nilsson

Assistant Editor, News Digest: Alima Bissenova

Chairman, Editorial Board: S. Frederick Starr

The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst is an English-language journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing Central Asia and the Caucasus. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports, however authors are encouraged to suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in *The Analyst*, described below.

The Analyst aims to provide our industrious and engaged audience with a singular and reliable assessment of events and trends in the region written in an analytical tone rather than a polemical one. *Analyst* articles reflect the fact that we have a diverse international audience. While this should not affect what authors write about or their conclusions, this does affect the tone of articles. Analyst articles focus on a newsworthy topic, engage central issues of the latest breaking news from the region and are backed by solid evidence. Articles should normally be based on local language news sources. Each 1,100-1,500 word analytical article must provide relevant, precise and authoritative background information. It also must offer a sober and analytical judgment of the issue as well as a clinical evaluation of the importance of the event. Authors must cite facts of controversial nature to the Editor who may contact other experts to confirm claims. Since *Analyst* articles are based on solid evidence, rather than rumors or conjecture, they prove to be reliable sources of information on the region. By offering balanced and objective analysis while keeping clear of inflammatory rhetoric, *The Analyst* does more to inform our international readership on all sides of the issues.

The Editor reserves the right to edit the article to conform to the editorial policy and specifications of *The Analyst* and to reject the article should it not be acceptable to our editorial committee for publication. On acceptance and publication of the edited version of the article, The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies will issue an honorarium to the author. It is up to the individual author to provide the correct paperwork to the Institute that makes the issuing of an honorarium possible. The copyright for the article or field report will reside with the Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst. However, the author may use all or part of the contracted article in any book or article in any media subsequently written by the author, provided that a copyright notice appears giving reference to the contracted article's first publication by the "Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University, Nitze School of Advanced International Studies."

Submission Guidelines:

Analytical Articles require a three to four sentence Key Issue introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples. The ideal length of analytical articles is between 1,100 and 1,500 words. The articles are structured as follows:

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.

Svante E. Cornell

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

MAIDAN: LESSONS FOR THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Huseyn Aliyev, Emil Souleimanov

The turmoil in Ukraine is followed closely not only in Russia, but also across the Caucasus. While part of the population and opposition activists have found a source of inspiration in the capacity of ordinary Ukrainians to topple the corrupt and unpopular regime, possibly paving the way for Ukraine's accession into Western structures, regional elites have demonstrated a more ambiguous approach, ranging from careful endorsement to acute concern.

BACKGROUND: The recent developments in Ukraine have potential implications far beyond the borders of this vast Eastern European country of 46 million. Concerned about the prospects of upheaval emanating from its own – largely silenced – opposition, Belarusian authorities have advanced a new bill that would free members of the country's special forces of any responsibility for casualties that might arise while deployed in operation. Russian sources suggest that apart from foreign political considerations, the Maidan events have caused concern in the Kremlin over the prospects of its own – currently largely fragmented – opposition movement. In the South Caucasus, too, elites are said to be alarmed by the "revolutionary mood" among anti-regime forces generated by the Ukrainian popular revolt. At the same time, as an Azerbaijani opposition activist put it, "people keep continuously reconsidering the prospects of a 'Maidan' in Azerbaijan," an option that seems to have drawn attention among Armenian opposition supporters as well.

The current situation has a clear precedent, however. It is reminiscent of the aftermath of the 2004 Orange Revolution. Back then, many experts and laymen both within and outside the post-Soviet space interpreted the events in Kiev as a continuation of what seemed to be an evolving trend among post-communist elites to break free from Moscow's firm embrace; move closer to the West economically, militarily and politically; and to introduce liberal economics. In 2011, what has come to be known as the Arab spring reinvigorated Azerbaijan's political opposition; yet their efforts to regain political freedoms, let alone to topple the current regime in Baku, eventually failed. An analogy of Maidan took place in Armenia in March 2008, when as a consequence of clashes between protestors and pro-regime armed units, at least ten protestors lost their lives. In clear resemblance to recent developments in Russia, every time mass demonstrations sought to protest authorities in both Armenia and Azerbaijan in an organized manner, Yerevan and Baku eventually managed to strengthen their control over the



population by means of resorting to violence, curtailing political freedoms, and limiting the freedom of media.

IMPLICATIONS: A closer look at the external effects of the Maidan events reveals that they have had a differentiated impact on South Caucasian societies. In Georgia with its extensive experience of largely non-violent anti-regime protests, the foreign political component of the Ukrainian events has drawn particular attention. In Tbilisi, periodical mass demonstrations in support of the Maidan protestors have taken place since November, in which thousands of Ukrainians and Georgians have participated. This has largely followed the idea of Ukrainian-Georgian solidarity that was cultivated in the aftermath of Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution and Ukraine's Orange Revolution the following year that brought to power Mikheil Saakashvili and Viktor Yushchenko, both pro-western leaders who had established close personal ties. Support for the Maidan protestors in Georgian society has been more unequivocal than for Georgia's political leadership during and after the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. As Georgian journalist Ilia Beroshvili has observed, when Russian tanks nearly entered Tbilisi in 2008,

there was no such unity in Georgian society as there is currently regarding the Maidan protestors.

In Azerbaijan, the political opposition has been vocally supportive of the Maidan protestors. However, a visit by Isa Gambar, the head of Azerbaijan's opposition party Musavat, to Kiev's Independence Square on December 15 in support of the Maidan activists was probably the most notable reaction of the Azerbaijani opposition to the Ukrainian events. Unlike Georgian mass demonstrations in support of Maidan and with the exception of several small-scale opposition-organized protests where calls for Azerbaijan's integration with the EU have been voiced among other demands, no Maidan-inspired large scale events have so far taken place in Azerbaijan.

The inability of Azerbaijan's opposition parties, fraught with internal fractions and disagreements, to overcome their differences and mobilize mass support, which in conjunction with the further entrenchment of Ilham Aliyev's regime also contributed to the opposition's weak results in last year's presidential elections, have eliminated all prospects for Maidan-inspired protests to occur in Azerbaijan at the time being. According to one senior opposition figure, Ali Kerimli, Azerbaijan will emulate Maidan-style protests "when we are ready to struggle peacefully." Official Baku's reaction to the events in Ukraine has been reserved and has largely focused on the need to maintain "friendly relations" with a "stable" Ukraine

regardless of the outcome of the Maidan protests. In fact, Baku's cautious policies towards rapprochement with Russia, combined with a generally positive attitude towards cooperation with the EU, offer limited opportunities for the Azerbaijani opposition to rally popular support along either anti-Putin or pro-European rhetoric.

In contrast, in Armenia's capital Yerevan, hundreds of pro-Maidan protesters participated in anti-Putin rallies which took place on December 2, 2013, and coincided with the Russian president's visit to Armenia. The demonstrators protested against Armenia's decision to pull out of signing an association agreement with the EU in favor of membership in the Moscow-controlled customs union. Over 100 were arrested when demonstrators tried to reach the headquarters of the presidential administration. A smaller rally of around 100 participants took place in Yerevan on January 24 to commemorate the victims of clashes with police in Kiev. However, similarly to their colleagues in Azerbaijan, Armenia's opposition has made no efforts to stage large scale protests against the regime. Scores of Armenian activists, however, traveled to support and participate in the Maidan protests in Ukraine.

In spite of the growing interest among the Armenian public in closer integration with the EU, demonstrations against Armenia joining the Customs Union were unsuccessful and failed to receive mass support among the population. The

Armenian government's reactions towards the Maidan events were similarly muted: the consensus among both government and opposition-leaning politicians remains in favor of closer Armenian ties with Russia. Some Armenian experts, however, have raised concerns that Ukraine's withdrawal from economic and political partnership with Russia and its rapprochement with the EU could negatively affect the future of the Kremlin-led Eurasian Union and therefore endanger Armenia's political and economic stability.

CONCLUSIONS: As for the impact of the Maidan events on the foreign political perspectives of all three South Caucasian counties, the victory of the Ukrainian opposition and the end of Yanukovich's rule, on the one hand, and the outcome of Russia's efforts to contain the damage of these events to its interests, on the other, may have significant implications for the region. For Georgia, Russia's efforts to retain its control over Ukraine by all means possible, as demonstrated by its actions in Crimea, may serve as a warning from closer integration with the EU and the West. However, if successful, Ukraine's integration with Europe would further enhance Georgia's chances of strengthening its own partnership with the EU and its political and economic independence from Russia. For Azerbaijan, the Maidan events can serve both as a lesson of caution for Aliyev's regime on the suppression of political rights and, similar to the Georgian case, can result in a continued cautious approach to Western integration.

Armenia, regardless of Moscow's failure in Ukraine, is still more likely to benefit from closer ties with Russia, which guarantees Armenia security and support in its unresolved conflict with Azerbaijan.

AUTHORS' BIO: Huseyn Aliyev is a Ph.D Candidate at the University of Otago, New Zealand. Emil Souleimanov is Associate Professor with the Department of Russian and East European Studies, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. He is the author of *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict: Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia Wars Reconsidered* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and *An Endless War: The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective* (Peter Lang, 2007).

AZERBAIJAN'S EXPANDING STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE

Stephen Blank

Azerbaijan is playing a growing strategic role, as confirmed by the 2013 Azerbaijan-agreement to build the Trans-Anatolian gas Pipeline (TANAP) to the Turkish- Bulgarian border and from there connect to the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) that goes through Greece to the Western Balkans and eventually to Italy. The TANAP-TAP program is the first and only genuine alternative to the Moscow-backed South Stream pipeline. In combination with the AGRI (Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector), Azerbaijan now has two instruments by which to become seriously engaged in European gas trade, and moreover recently suggested transit of Iraqi gas through these pipelines

BACKGROUND: For several years few took Azerbaijan's strategic capabilities seriously and the country was thought of in the U.S. largely as a stopover on the road to Afghanistan. However, these new moves underscore the vision behind Azerbaijan's energy policies and the possibilities offered by those policies, without directly confronting Moscow and Gazprom, to find alternative ways of providing Europe with energy. Azerbaijan profits thereby and gains considerable status as an investor in Balkan security and stability. Similarly for years there was virtually no movement by the U.S. on the "frozen conflict" over Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. Yet, Azerbaijan's press reports that Ambassador Morningstar has become increasingly active in working to find a political solution to this conflict and the U.S. Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, Ambassador James Warlick, has also called for full scale talks, apparently including the "government" of Nagorno-Karabakh in these talks.

All these moves signify a dawning realization abroad that Azerbaijan has now attained significant and influential capabilities in its own neighborhood as an investor and energy supplier. Moreover, foreign governments now see that they stand to benefit, not least economically, from an expansion of ties with Azerbaijan. From a U.S. standpoint, heightened ties to Baku not only make it harder for Russia to dominate the Caucasus and energy flow to Europe, or Russian machinations in the Middle East, they also provide a basis for moving forward on conflict resolution regarding Nagorno-Karabakh. And should the negotiations with Iran progress to a mutually acceptable agreement, we could see an easing of Iranian-Azerbaijani tensions, a potential end to the disputes preventing the realization of the Caspian Sea's legal demarcation, and even Iran's entry into the Southern Gas Corridor, possibly through the TANAP-TAP connection or through AGRI.



IMPLICATIONS: As demonstrated by the Ukrainian and Middle East crises, the status quo is ultimately not tenable across much of Eurasia without significant reforms. Russia's efforts to reinvigorate a new kind of neo-imperial policy have already proven to be beyond its objective capabilities though Moscow may not yet be reconciled to that fact. Likewise, new players are making their own regional moves. Turkey has done so for several years and now, albeit on a smaller scale, Azerbaijan is following suit.

Therefore it behooves the great powers to attempt to defuse points of conflict like Nagorno-Karabakh, Iran, and issues like Caspian demarcation. It also is equally important to continue to sustain Georgia economically and politically against ongoing Russian threats and pressure. Azerbaijan will not directly confront Moscow but it will pursue its own interests that cut against Russian imperial designs in the Caucasus and the Balkans if not the Middle East. And it clearly wants to be in the West.

Progress on resolving all the disputed issues discussed here is very much in the West's collective interest, for the U.S., Europe, as well as for Azerbaijan. The U.S. and Europe should therefore

welcome these initiatives and keep them going even if they encounter resistance. Only by displaying sufficient attention to resolving these problems can we enhance regional security and stability in the Balkans and the Levant even if doing so takes several years. Failure to seize the moment in these zones leads to outcomes resembling that of Ukraine, where failure to adjust to reality and to the superior attractiveness of the European choice has led to an unnecessarily bitter, protracted, and ultimately violent crisis whose end is only beginning to come into sight. Supporting Azerbaijani initiatives and conflict resolution is therefore strategically justified on several grounds even if we should not lose sight of the problems along the path.

Yet, if the West acquiesces in the detaching of Crimea from Ukraine, then this analysis will be vitiated as nobody will be able to trust Western guarantees or assurances. Russia has demonstrated that not only does it regard treaties as a mere scrap of paper and that the integrity and sovereignty of its neighbors is merely a contingent factor, it also has proven other gravely disturbing consequences. The invasion of Crimea confirms that for Putin and his entourage, their state cannot survive other than as an empire entailing the diminished sovereignty of all of its post-Soviet neighbors and also – and this is crucial – the former members of the Warsaw Pact.

It is equally clear that unless the West, acting under U.S. leadership and through institutions like the EU and

NATO, resist Russia forcefully (this does not mean using force preemptively but does mean displaying credible deterrence) the gains of the last 25 years regarding European security will have been lost and we will return to the bipolar confrontation that was the primary cause of the Cold War.

Moscow cannot induce consent except through force, it commands no legitimate authority beyond its borders, it cannot sustain an empire economically, and most importantly, the peoples it targets neither want a Russian empire nor will they accept it. For the U.S. whose main concern has hitherto been democracy and Azerbaijan whose main concern is security, the opportunity for a rewarding strategic dialogue and process is clearly within reach. But unless the U.S. and Europe stand up to Russia in Ukraine, this opportunity will be lost and Azerbaijan will, like other post-Soviet states, realize that it is essentially alone vis-à-vis Russia.

CONCLUSIONS: The strategic consequences of that outcome should be obvious. For both sides to draw maximum benefit from their relations, both sides must listen to the other side's concerns and move to respond to them. This means that Baku must take the lesson of Ukraine to heart and reform while it can. The growing unwillingness to reform can only harden internal socio-political and economic divisions, making it harder for Azerbaijan to realize its positive strategic vision and ultimately leaving it vulnerable to attacks from adversarial forces. For the U.S. and the

EU, this means a vigorous effort not only to bring about the full realization of the Southern Gas Corridor but to facilitate conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Only if both sides take account of the other's primary concern can they truly maximize the achievements that are possible in energy, conflict resolution, and the resolution of disputed questions that could still become a source of future conflict. Everything that contributes to growth, development, peace, security, and democracy from Vienna East is essentially in the interests of the U.S., the EU, and Azerbaijan. Moreover, a stronger Azerbaijan adds to the West's ability to ensure security in all of its multiple forms: economic, political, energy, etc. and peace throughout this expanse. This is not a call for a sweeping geostrategic vision but for practical progress on multiple lines in diverse regions to ensure security by states who have a growing common interest and growing capability to do so

One cannot say if and when we and Azerbaijan will get another opportunity to make progress on these issues that benefit even states like Armenia who suffers from the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Undoubtedly, there will be resistance from parties with interests opposed to such progress, but the West clearly has overwhelming resources if it can find the will to bring them to bear. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan is showing that will and is at the same time maximizing and expanding its capabilities to realize a more positive

vision for Eurasia. Failure to seize the opportunity that now lies before us would be an unconscionable mistake that will not be corrected for years and could lead to more unnecessary strife rather than to more security, prosperity, and peace.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Stephen Blank is a Senior Fellow with the American Foreign Policy Council.

KYRGYZSTAN INCREASINGLY VULNERABLE TO MILITANT ISLAMISM

Jacob Zenn

In 2014, U.S. troops are withdrawing from Afghanistan, despite that the Taliban and allied Central Asian Islamist militant groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), remain strong in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Complicating the security landscape in Eurasia, since 2011 Syria has become a front where hundreds of Central Asian Islamist militants are fighting. If Central Asians in Syria and Afghanistan carry out their threats to launch attacks against the secular countries of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan may emerge as a safe haven, if not also a target, for attacks.

BACKGROUND: On February 19, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* reported that a cell of militants from southern Kyrgyzstan's Osh Province who returned from Syria were arrested while preparing to "commit several acts of terrorism" in Kyrgyzstan. According to the report, the militants planned to finance their operations by using funds "remitted" from Syria and robbing wealthy citizens in Kyrgyzstan. They also hoped to use their funding to recruit up to 150 other militants to "combat the local authorities."

Reports like this are becoming increasingly common in Kyrgyzstan. In September 2013, Kyrgyzstan announced that it arrested a cell of returnees from the Syrian civil war in Osh in the Fergana Valley. This cell was planning to attack Kyrgyzstan's Independence Day celebrations on August 31 and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in Bishkek on September 11. In addition, the authorities reported that this cell included one Kazakh and

two Kyrgyz nationals, who were members of the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU). The IJU is mostly active in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the North Caucasus as well as in Turkey, and it may play a role in funneling in Central Asians to Syria.

On February 10, 2014, Kyrgyzstan's State National Security Committee (known by its Russian acronym, GKNB) confirmed that at least five Kyrgyz men have already been killed fighting in Syria and that more than 50 Kyrgyz citizens may be fighting in Syria with the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). Kyrgyz authorities have also acknowledged that Kyrgyz families, including single mothers with children, are part of the Central Asian "family jihad" trend. One Kyrgyz lady from Osh, Nargiza Kadyraliyeva, "disappeared" from Kyrgyzstan with her three young sons in 2013 and reportedly texted her husband, "We've left for the jihad in Syria. Don't look for us."

In some cases, Kyrgyz families may seek to escape unemployment in



Kyrgyzstan and receive “welfare” in the forms of housing, food and stipends from militant leaders in Syria. In other cases entire families may be motivated by the chance for an adventure in Syria and to support what they perceive as the just cause of rebels. The religious appeal of a “jihad” is likely also a factor, with many Kyrgyz who have a low level of religious education believing it is their obligation – or becoming convinced by local imams – to fight in Syria.

IMPLICATIONS: Unlike Uzbekistan or Tajikistan, which have since the break-up of the Soviet Union seen the rise of violent extremist jihadist groups in their countries, such as the IMU in Uzbekistan and Jamaat Ansarullah in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan has avoided that trend. Even Kazakhstan suffered terrorist attacks, including suicide bombings, by the Afghanistan-based Jund al-Khilafah in 2011, while Xinjiang, China saw more than 100 people killed in violence since 2012, often involving perpetrators who are influenced by jihadist ideology. Jihadism in Kyrgyzstan has always been minimal, which may be because Kyrgyzstan’s reforms since 2005 have allowed a more open environment for Muslims

to practice their religion and because traditional Islamic practice in Kyrgyzstan is characterized by moderation and tolerance.

However, Kyrgyzstan cannot avoid being affected by regional geopolitics. During the U.S. war in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014, the U.S and NATO pressured Kyrgyz and other Central Asian militants in the IMU to such an extent that they were forced to find a base in Pakistan’s tribal areas. They had insufficient mobility to return to Kyrgyzstan and radicalize locals or carry out attacks.

Syria is a different case, however, because the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) controls increasing large swathes of territory in its neo-Caliphate in northwest Syria and northeast Iraq. ISIS allows Kyrgyz and other Central Asian militants to train, fundraise, and recruit back home. It also easier for Kyrgyz militants who trained or fought in Syria to transit Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, Iran or other countries to return to Kyrgyzstan than it has been for Kyrgyz fighters in Pakistan or Afghanistan. As a result, the first signs that Kyrgyz Syrian war veterans were operating the Fergana Valley began to emerge in late 2013 and 2014.

Finally, there is increasing distrust in Kyrgyzstani society between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks. Some Uzbeks who feel they are excluded and marginalized from power and opportunity in the country may be inclined to join groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir, whose notion of a pan-Central Asian Islamic State is more preferable to them than Kyrgyzstan. Hizb ut-

Tahrir may also serve as a conduit for their travel to Syria or entrance into more violent jihadist groups in Central Asia.

Poverty in Kyrgyzstan, coupled with few government programs to help individuals find jobs is also a problem that is connected to the jihadist current. Groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir often provide services to families – and particularly women whose husbands are labor migrants in Russia – as long as they accept to Hizb ut-Tahrir’s extremist ideology. Hizb ut-Tahrir can also focus asymmetrically on rural or marginalized communities, which may be vulnerable to their ideology, while the Kyrgyz government has the more difficult task of being responsible to serve the entire country.

With growing domestic influence of extremist groups and increasing opportunities for Kyrgyz to train in Syria, Kyrgyzstan is likely going to be less insulated from jihadist violence in upcoming years than any time since 2001.

CONCLUSIONS: There are two likely scenarios in Kyrgyzstan’s security environment in the upcoming years. First, Kyrgyzstan may host extremists and jihadist groups connected to both Syria and Afghanistan and to groups operating locally like Hizb ut-Tahrir, but these groups may prefer Kyrgyzstan as a safe haven for attacks or operations to proselytize in neighboring countries. Alternatively, these groups may use Kyrgyzstan as a base because of the country’s relatively weak internal security, but carry out attacks on “enemy” targets in the country, which could include

Chinese or Western interests or government offices or security forces personnel.

The notion that Kyrgyzstan will remain impervious from jihadist trends in Central Asia is becoming less viable. President Atamabayev’s administration is aware of impending threats and may seek to emulate the more authoritarian controls on religion of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. This may reduce the likelihood of jihadist operations and proselytization, but also alienate some non-violent Islamists and force them underground and then into the hands of more violent actors.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Jacob Zenn is an analyst of Eurasian and African Affairs for the Jamestown Foundation and non-resident research fellow of the Center of Shanghai Cooperation Studies (COSCOS) in Shanghai. He testified before the U.S. Congress on Islamist Militant Threats to Central Asia in February 2013.

ASSESSING KAZAKHSTAN'S REVISED NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Richard Weitz

In his annual State of the Nation address on January 17, President Nursultan Nazarbayev reaffirmed the vision of stable economic development found in the Kazakhstan-2050 national development strategy, while adding important details and refinements. He and the Foreign Ministry have since clarified the international dimensions of the strategy. Nazarbayev and other experts acknowledge the economic and other challenges in transforming Kazakhstan into one of the world's 30 most developed countries, but can point to Kazakhstan's exceptional past performance as an indicator of its future potential.

BACKGROUND: The Kazakhstan-2050 Strategy, first introduced in 2012, establishes several long-term goals: create new sources of economic growth; strengthen small and medium-sized entrepreneurship; entice high levels of foreign investment; diversifying exports beyond oil and gas; develop innovative public-private partnerships; expand Kazakhstan's transportation, communications, information, and other critical infrastructure; and promote technological innovation and cutting-edge industries.

In his speech, Nazarbayev offered a clearer timetable than previously regarding how Kazakhstan could attain these objectives. He provided short-term and intermediate-range targets as well as longer-term goals. One reason for the short-term objectives was to provide Kazakhstani policy makers with regular milestones for their indicative planning, allowing them to assess progress on a regular basis. In addition, Nazarbayev presumably wanted to offer constant, clear, and continuous benefits to

sustain support for executing a strategy whose end goals will take decades to achieve.

Furthermore, Nazarbayev for the first time broke down the longer-term goals of Kazakhstan-2050 into two development phases. During the first stage, which ends in 2030, Kazakhstan should exploit what Nazarbayev sees as a "window of opportunity" from rising global demand for Kazakhstan's energy products to construct a strong manufacturing sector and follow the successful modernization paths of Singapore, South Korea, and the other already successfully industrializing states. After 2030, he wants Kazakhstan to strive for "sustainable development" by creating new industries, particularly in niche markets; transitioning to a knowledge-based and green economy; and making Kazakhstan a transportation and trade hub between Europe and Asia. Nazarbayev advocated using targeted five-year national economic plans to develop priority sectors throughout this process. Whereas the first five-year plan has focused on



expanding transportation industries, he suggests future five-year plans aim to develop mobile, multimedia nano, space, robotic, biotech, and future energy technologies.

On January 29, the president approved the new Foreign Policy Concept of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2014-2020. According to Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov, the main goal of the Concept, which calls for continued adherence to a multivector foreign policy and supports regional integration and conflict resolution, is to create a favorable environment for executing the Kazakhstan-2050 strategy. During his February 5 annual meeting with the senior foreign diplomats accredited to Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev prioritized foreign economic cooperation in support of the Kazakhstan-2050 strategy, which sees foreign investment, technology transfer, and collaboration with international experts as providing critical contributions. He pledged to establish an even more favorable environment for foreign businesses to attract more inward investment, technology transfer to improve local innovation, and foreign skills that can promote local entrepreneurship.

IMPLICATIONS: Kazakhstan past record of socioeconomic achievement

confirms its potential to realize these goals. The country has experienced rapid economic growth, declining poverty rates, and rising per capita income and education levels. At present, GDP growth, inflation, and unemployment all range from 4-6 percent, good figures for any country and certainly within the parameters defined by the strategy. Kazakhstan's scores high on the Heritage Foundation's economic freedom index, being well above the world and regional averages. Kazakhstan has also performed very well in rankings of the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report. The country continues to attract more foreign investment than all the other Central Asian republics combined and its businesses are already prominent investors in many foreign countries even beyond Eurasia.

Nonetheless, in his January 17 speech, Nazarbayev acknowledged the challenges Kazakhstan faced in realizing its ambitious long-term development goals. The president said that, "There will be no 'easy ride' in the 21st century" given the vagaries of the world economy and the competitive potential of rival aspirants for the top 30 position. Indeed, a major challenge for achieving the newly revised strategy remains that it defines success in relative terms — Kazakhstan does not only have to achieve certain unilateral socioeconomic benchmarks such as growth and productivity rates, but must do better than other countries, which is not entirely in Astana's control.

To win this competition, Kazakhstan must diversify its economy beyond resource exports to more sustainable economic sectors to surmount the “middle-income trap” that has ensnared so many other developing states whose growth plateaus after they can no longer realize gains from adding low cost inputs to national production. Achieving further major increases in aggregate and per capita GDP will require decreasing dependence on natural resource exports. The Kazakhstan-2050 Strategy emphasizes the importance of defining new international markets where Kazakhstan can become a leading global competitor and thereby generate future sources of economic growth. Several initiatives within the Strategy-2050 framework therefore aim to promote national diversification through innovation, cluster projects, and niche development.

Improving the quality of Kazakhstan’s human resources through enhanced education and training will also be important. The country has benefited in the past from sending some of its best students and scholars abroad on government-supported fellowships. In the future, it will need to ensure that these foreign-trained workers impart their skills domestically and that Kazakhstan’s own national education system continues to improve. The multi-decades timeframe of the national strategy should help sustain this focus even after its authors retire from directing its implementation.

An international group of prominent independent experts recently published a book-length

study, *Kazakhstan 2050: Toward a Modern Society for All*, that assesses Kazakhstan’s potential to achieve its development goals. They find that the government’s current policies are generally correct but require strong execution, monitoring, and evaluation to determine and expand those practices that work best. Implementing these reforms will require considerable time, persistence, and resources and must overcome the likely opposition of stakeholders with a vested interest in current practices. For example, to move beyond oil and gas and develop a knowledge-based economy, the government must attract foreign companies with an improved business environment; develop research universities and “knowledge hubs” in principal cities; invest in broadband connectivity to accord with the country’s huge size and low population density; and be selective in allocating government support.

The study sees promoting better public institutions and good governance as Kazakhstan’s most important priority and challenge in realizing the Kazakshtan-2050 goals. In their view, the government must reverse its recent trend toward greater state intervention in the national economy that, continue the transition to a civil service based solely on merit, intensify its drive against corruption; promote accountability, transparency, civil society and rule of law; and end the practice of prioritizing economic over political reform and instead develop both economic and political institutions in tandem. They recognize that this new approach must overcome

severe implementation issues, manage strong special interests, rising public expectations, broader public participation, and more accountability; and better preserve short-term stability while pursuing the long-term benefits of having predictability in the public sector

CONCLUSION: It is important not to underestimate the importance of the foreign-policy dimension of the Kazakhstan-2050 strategy. Like its neighbors, Kazakhstan needs a benign regional and global environment to thrive. In particular, Kazakhstan cannot achieve its development goals unless it joins the World Trade Organization, does not face an escalating war in Afghanistan, makes further progress in promoting regional integration, completes its east-west transcontinental transportation networks, and is a member of an open rather than closed Eurasian Union. All these goals are in the revised strategy, but Kazakhstan can best achieve them if it receives support from regional and global partners that can often exert greater influence on these issues than Astana.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Richard Weitz is a Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Political-Military Analysis at the Hudson Institute.

UKRAINIAN SCENARIO IN KYRGYZSTAN

Arslan Sabyrbekov

On February 27, a special roundtable entitled “Ukrainian scenario in Kyrgyzstan” took place in Bishkek. The participants included government representatives as well as civil society activists and opposition politicians, who expressed their diverging views on the possibility of a “Kyrgyz Euromaidan” in the spring, usually cited as the season of great political turmoil in Kyrgyzstan.

The events in Ukraine are under close scrutiny in Kyrgyzstan and have become a source of public debate. Local experts and politicians are keen to draw parallels between the two countries that to some extent have similar recent political histories. According to opposition MP and leader of the recently created United Opposition Movement Ravshan Jeenbekov, anticipations of a repeated Ukrainian scenario in Kyrgyzstan are not groundless. “Ukraine’s Yanukovych and Kyrgyzstan’s Atambayev have seized power in their own hands and presidential institutions are in both cases unaccountable to anyone but the Kremlin, which exercises full political and economic control over the countries, pressuring them to join the Customs Union,” Jeenbekov stated during the roundtable. An opposition MP proceeded by stating that “Yanukovych came to power in Ukraine when the country had a semi-presidential system and turned it into a strong presidential one and Kyrgyzstan’s President Atambayev

came to power with the same political system and within two years managed to turn the country into an authoritarian state.”

Another participant of the round table, Kyrgyzstan’s Vice Prime Minister for Law Enforcement, Security and Border related issues Tokon Mamytov called on the MP to refrain from drawing direct parallels between the two presidents. According to him, Kyrgyzstan’s President Atambayev did not concentrate power to himself and his regime cannot be described as authoritarian. He proceeded by stating that “As a Vice-Prime Minister, I am not as accountable to the President or the Prime Minister as I am to the Kyrgyz Parliament. Ukraine’s President Yanukovych made the same mistakes as our previously ousted two presidents did, namely their family members de facto controlled the country’s financial resources and had a direct influence over the country’s political course.” Indeed, the Kyrgyz public is not aware of Atambayev’s family members and their occupations, which was previously the case with the two ex-Presidents. This, in turn, does not leave much room for opposition politicians to accuse the President of establishing family based rule.

During the course of the roundtable, Sergei Ponomarev, advisor to the Kyrgyz Prime Minister Jantoro Satybaldiev stated that a Ukrainian scenario will not take place in

Kyrgyzstan under normal circumstances, arguing that the leaders of the recently formed United Opposition Movement are interested in taking power by organizing the same social turbulence as in Ukraine and called an opposition MP Ravshan Jeenbekov “an instrument of external powers in big politics,” citing his recent visit and participation in the Ukrainian Euromaidan. In interviews to local sources of mass media, Jeenbekov, the new face of the Kyrgyz opposition, confirmed his visit to Kiev and his meetings with then Ukrainian opposition politicians, whom he called “partners and friends.” An MP dismissed the claim that his movement had any plans or willingness to destabilize the socio-political situation in Kyrgyzstan and repeating the Euromaidan events in Bishkek and called on the country’s president to start a dialogue with them to discuss all the gaps in the country’s current political and economic direction and come up with joint decisions. The Kyrgyz opposition asserts that dialogue can take place with the President only due to their firm belief that the country’s executive as well as the legislative are under his direct control. Kyrgyz political analyst Marat Kazakpaev believes that before making parallels between the two countries, it is necessary to analyze the internal and external factors in the region and in the global arena that affected these processes and gave rise to the events occurring in Ukraine. Kazakpaev concluded that Kyrgyzstan is one step ahead of Ukraine since the country

underwent its second revolution since independence already in 2010.

Euromaidan is foremost a value-oriented wave of citizens’ uprisings, calling for democratic values and integration with Europe. Kyrgyzstan, due to its geographical location is not in a position to seek European integration but this of course does not exclude the possibility of mass movements in the country in response to a deteriorating socioeconomic situation and a recently created united opposition movement to mobilize the masses. The country’s leadership has publicly announced the creation of a new special division regiment, which in the words of the Minister for Internal Affairs “has the primary task of managing public order in accordance with the principles of democratic policing and exists in almost all the neighboring states.” Experts have already started comparing the new Division with Ukraine’s “Berkut,” which has brutally used force against the demonstrators in Euromaidan and perceive it as preparations by the country’s leadership for possible mass demonstrations in the spring.

Regarding the current situation in the Crimea, the Kyrgyz political leadership as well as analysts did not make any official statements or comments.

GEORGIAN PM MEETS WITH U.S. PRESIDENT, VP, AND SECRETARY OF STATE Eka Janashia

Georgia's Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili met with U.S. President Barack Obama during his negotiations with Vice President Joe Biden at the White House on February 24. President Obama joined the meeting for about 20 minutes. The parties discussed the U.S.-Georgia strategic partnership, the prospects for Georgia's integration with the EU and NATO, the necessity of continuing reforms in Georgia, as well as the perspective of closer U.S.-Georgia trade relations.

Georgia's Foreign Minister Maia Panjikidze said that the PM's meeting with President Obama was pre-planned but not announced upon the request of White House. After the meeting, Gharibashvili said that "Georgia is moving actually to a new stage of relations with the United States."

Both Obama's readiness to meet with the Georgian PM and Gharibashvili's statements that the US is Georgia's "number one ally" can be taken to reflect recent developments in Ukraine.

President Obama and Vice President Biden praised Georgia for conducting its first peaceful, democratic transition of power, but also urged PM to cooperate with all of Georgia's leaders and civil society to enhance the rule of law and consolidate

Georgia's democratic accomplishments.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry made the same points in a meeting with Gharibashvili on February 26: "We urge all Georgians to unite in looking forward and to leave the past in the past," he said at the fourth plenary session of the U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission.

Kerry stated that the bilateral "strategic partnership is stronger than ever" and proclaimed a plan to provide Georgia with "additional assistance" to help its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations - specifically through visa-free travel with the EU - and to mitigate the heavy outcomes caused by the process of "borderization" in the occupied territories (see the [02/10/2013 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)).

On February 25, at an event hosted by the Washington-based think-tank Atlantic Council, PM Gharibashvili said that six years ago at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Georgia obtained the outstanding promise that it would become a member of the alliance. The pledge was reiterated at the 2012 Chicago summit when NATO underlined the importance of conducting free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections in Georgia. At the upcoming Summit in the UK in September,

NATO should grant Georgia a Membership Action Plan (MAP) as a reward for fulfilling this task properly, Gharibashvili stressed.

He also called on the EU to open a membership perspective for the successful Eastern Partnership's countries. "It is obvious that unless the European Union gives a clear promise of membership to the successful countries of the Eastern Partnership, crises similar to Ukraine will happen again and again," he said. Gharibashvili then recalled that February 25 was the 93rd anniversary of the Bolshevik occupation of Tbilisi and urged that all efforts should be made to eschew such a tragedy in the 21st century.

The Georgian Dream ruling coalition as well as the opposition United National Movement party assessed the PM's U.S. trip positively.

There are several reasons to assess Gharibashvili's U.S. visit positively, as it reflects a deepening institutionalization of the U.S. - Georgia Strategic Partnership. At the same time, U.S. statements make clear that reconciliation between Georgia's political forces and looking forward rather than dwelling on the past is essential to augment more political support from the U.S.

The U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership draws upon the charter signed by the two countries in January, 2009, to deal with the priority areas of democracy; defense and security; trade and economy; people-to-people and cultural exchanges. In 2012, then Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili requested a U.S.-Georgia free trade

agreement (FTA) and President Obama promised to explore the possibilities for such an agreement. At the recent meeting with the Georgian PM, the U.S. president suggested that the two countries should boost trade and deepen economic cooperation. In this context, the Georgian PM met with the U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman to discuss the issue in detail.

However, the most important issue raised during the tour was that, given Ukraine's' ongoing tensions with Moscow, Washington might become more motivated to again raise the issue with other NATO members of granting Georgia a MAP. Meanwhile, the declaration of "additional assistance" for Georgia to smooth the progress of European integration also represents a tangible outcome of the visit.

On the other hand, the course of events in Ukraine may push Tbilisi to revise its normalization policy with Russia. Georgia's new government has never previously made such clear and principled statements on this issue as it did during the U.S. trip. In addition, Tbilisi was quick to welcome the formation of a new government in Ukraine and strongly condemned the developments taking place in Crimea. "The distribution of [Russian] passports, reinforcing military infrastructure and units by Russia on the territory of another state, as well as the decision to protect with armed forces the 'interests of compatriots' living in Ukraine, represent flagrant interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state," president Giorgi Margvelashvili's statement reads.

Meanwhile, parliamentary speaker David Usuphashvili called on the international community not to allow a new conflict in Europe and apply all measures to avert a possible aggression.

On March 3, Georgia's Foreign Minister Maia Panjikidze had a telephone

conversation with her acting Ukrainian counterpart, Andriy Deschytsya. They discussed the Crimean crises and agreed on the necessity of providing Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova an explicit perspective of EU membership.

TAJIKISTAN BLOCKS RADIO OZODI WEBSITE

Oleg Salimov

Internet users in Tajikistan were unable to access the website of [Radio Ozodi](#) (Freedom) for about a month in February this year. Access was blocked by Tajik internet providers following the request of Tajik State Communication Services, as was announced by the administration of the radio. Radio Ozodi is the Tajik bureau of the nongovernmental nonprofit news agency Radio Free Europe/Radio Freedom, broadcasting from Czech Republic. It covers local news in the countries of the former Soviet Union with a particular focus on the development of democratic, economic, human rights, and social institutions. The on-air broadcasting of Radio Ozodi is banned in Tajikistan for political reasons. The radio offers an alternative to official information on events, analysis, and opinions. It also conducts anonymous polls on political, economic, and social issues in Tajikistan and abroad.

The recent blockage of Radio Ozodi website in Tajikistan is not a single occurrence. The internet access to opposition or government-critical websites is usually limited during various political events in the country. Among the most recent, it was reported that Radio Ozodi and a few other websites were blocked before Tajikistan's parliamentary elections in the winter of 2010, during Tajikistan's military operation in the Autonomous region of Badakhshan in the summer of 2012, after the President's son Rustam Emomali's wedding in the spring of 2013, before the presidential election in the fall of 2013, and during political protests in Ukraine in the winter of 2014. Radio Ozodi was live-streaming the protests in Kiev when the website became unavailable to Tajik internet users. Radio Ozodi states that, in their effort to create an illusion of technical difficulties rather than governmental control, Tajik officials frequently practice partial cutoff of

internet access to the website, while it remains accessible in some regions of the country.

The last blockage of the Radio Ozodi website prompted a note of concern from the U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan, posted on the embassy's website on February 24. In its note, the Embassy highlighted the repeated practice of Tajikistan's government to limit internet access and block mass media websites, and expressed its support for freedom of expression and exchange of information. According to Radio Ozodi, the official response from the Tajik government stated that the government is unaware of any limitation or blockage of the website. However, shortly after the statement of the U.S. embassy, full access to the website was restored.

Due to the heavy control of TV, radio, and print media by the Tajik government, internet remains the main platform for uncensored expression of public concerns, complaints, and opinions as well as the only source of alternative and reliable information for Tajiks. However, as of 2012, only a little over a million out of 7.9 million Tajiks had access to the internet, according to Internet World Stat. Low income and underdevelopment are some of the main causes of internet unavailability. Regardless of a relatively small number of users, the Tajik government regularly blocks certain websites. Alongside Radio Ozodi, the list of frequently blocked websites also includes Facebook, Youtube, Russian social network "VKontakte," and

various foreign and local news websites.

The systematic blockage of internet websites resulted in an open letter to Tajik head of communications, Beg Zukhurov by Reporters without Borders in 2012. Also, the internet blockage and suppression of press were addressed by OCSE free media representative Dunja Mijatovic in a letter to Tajik Foreign Minister Khamrokhon Zarifi in July of 2012. However, the continuous practice of limiting access to news and social network websites demonstrates the Tajik government's indifference to such appeals. The website blackouts are frequently carried out under the pretense of technical difficulties, scheduled maintenance, or unawareness of such problems.

Based on the frequency and selectiveness of website cutoffs, it can be concluded that the Tajik government is highly interested in establishing internet censorship in the republic. Lessons from the Arab Spring demonstrate the efficiency of masses collaboration and coordination against regimes via the internet and social networks. Radio Ozodi and other similar websites provide Tajik internet users with information and services which would otherwise be unavailable. While Tajikistan, under pressure from Western partners and human rights organizations, abolished the criminal penalty for defamation in 2012 which was perceived as a threat to journalists, the freedom of expression and free media is still suppressed and intimidated by the government. Tajik

officials monitor information and sources thought to be malicious to the regime and employ administrative tools of control when necessary. The government realizes that although not comprehensively developed in

Tajikistan, internet usage is a potential tool for fanning political upheaval and as a result, the reoccurring blockage of Radio Ozodi in Tajikistan is likely to persist.

AZERBAIJANI JOURNALIST CHARGED WITH SPYING FOR THE U.S.

Mina Muradova

Azerbaijani investigative reporter Khadija Ismayilova, well-known for her reporting on high-level corruption, is again under prosecution charged with spying for the U.S.. The U.S. Embassy has expressed its “deep disturbance” by “the ongoing, targeted harassment” of Ismayilova and described as “absurd” claims that she was passing along intelligence information to two American officials who met Ismayilova in late January.

Ismayilova works with the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and hosts a daily analytical talk-show on Radio Azadliq, an RFE/RL channel in Azerbaijani. According to OCCRP, her award-winning investigations uncovered high-level corruption in Azerbaijan, including lucrative business deals of the Azerbaijani president’s family members, hidden interests of the president’s siblings in national contracts and mismanagement in the state financing sector.

In early 2012, she was targeted by a smear campaign in which an explicit video appeared on the Internet containing intimate and illegally obtained images of the journalist. In 2012 the Zeit Stiftung and Fritt Ord Foundation awarded Ismayilova with the Gerd Bucerius Free Press of Eastern Europe Award, while the Washington-based International Women Media Foundation gave her the Courage of Journalism Award.

The campaign intensified in August 2013 before the October Presidential elections when a new video appeared on the Internet and on February 13, Haqqani.az, a pro-governmental website, accused Ismayilova of passing information discrediting Azerbaijan’s opposition members to two congressional staffers who allegedly gather intelligence in Baku. The article was picked up by other pro-government media and amplified by parliamentarians, who demanded an investigation of Ismayilova and

referred to RFE/RL as a "spy network of the U.S. in Azerbaijan."

The situation escalated when Ismayilova posted a scan on her Facebook page that appears to be evidence that the Ministry of National Security (MNS) hires an informer inside opposition circles. "On Feb 16 following the statements by government and pro-government media propaganda that I am involved in espionage, I posted on FB the picture - the scan of a so-called report leaked to me by a former employee of MNS," Ismayilova said in her Facebook statement under the headline "Prosecutor is calling - Ministry of National Security is in trouble". According to Ismayilova, the paper was an "alleged report by an MNS employee to his chief about the guaranteed cooperation with one member of a small opposition party." Stipulating terms and threatening blackmail, the document suggests an active government effort to infiltrate the political opposition. The paper reads that the informer receives 600 AZN as a monthly fee from the MNS Internal Intelligence Department for informing and creating conflicts within the opposition. Besides, the paper alleged that the MNS has additional means for pressuring the informant in the form of intimate videos.

"If the prosecutor's office opens this case, it means that the document is authentic and that the MNS has been spying on the private lives of opposition members and blackmailing them with the video," - Ismayilova said in her Facebook statement.

On February 18, Ismayilova was summoned as a witness to the Prosecutor's Office within an investigation into the leaking of state secrets. The U.S. Embassy dismissed the espionage charges and stated that "congressional staff delegations routinely visit Azerbaijan to meet with embassy staff, Azerbaijani officials, and civil society representatives. They do so to better inform our government's legislative efforts regarding Azerbaijan and the rest of the region."

Ismayilova confirms that she had a routine meeting with congressional staffers, but nothing more. She noted that the Prosecutor's Office was focusing "mainly on my dinner in Baku's Art-Garden restaurant with two visiting U.S. Senate staffers in late January. The prosecutor told me that they have information that I allegedly passed some kind of state secrets to the visiting Americans. I said that it is impossible, since I don't have any state secrets in my possession. This is an absurd allegation."

Ismayilova was charged under Article 284 of Azerbaijan's criminal court for "revealing a state secret".

This case was officially initiated after a Member of Parliament from the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan party, Jeyhun Osmanli, submitted an audio recording to prosecutors that he claimed to have secretly in a Baku restaurant, when Ismayilova was talking to "foreign nationals." On his Facebook page, Osmanli declared that "betrayal of the Motherland will not be forgiven." Eldar Sultanov, a spokesman for the Prosecutor General's Office, confirmed that Osmanli provided prosecutors

with the audio recording of Ismayilova's conversation in the restaurant. "This audio recording is under thorough investigation and a relevant decision will be taken," he said.

On February 22, another RFE/RL journalist, Yafez Hasanov, posted on Facebook that he had received death threats over his critical reporting on human rights violations in Nakhchivan and appealed to the Interior Minister and General Prosecutor provide him with necessary security measures.

In an open letter, U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (MD), Chairman of

the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (U.S. Helsinki Commission) called on the Government of Azerbaijan to stop its harassment of all journalists and to respect freedom of the media, a commitment it has undertaken. Cardin noted that this harassment is a part of an "unfortunate string of politically-motivated arrests of Azerbaijani's who are exercising their rights to free speech." He termed the list of those jailed on criminal charges in the period prior to the 2013 presidential election, as "troubling".