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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASS ANALYST

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

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

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

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

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

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ARMENIA'S INCREASING DEPENDENCE ON RUSSIA

Armen Grigoryan

Armenia's Russia-imposed self-isolation from the democratic international community continues and threatens to have economic and social consequences for the country. Russia is increasing its pressure in the South Caucasus, raising the specter of regional destabilization. While Russia already controls the most important sectors of Armenia's economy, it seems set to reinforce its interests in the country so as to ensure that a fully dependent, loyal Armenia can constitute a tool for the projection of Russia's political and military influence in the region. Russia's overt attempt to fulfill its expansionist ambitions endangers the sovereignty of its neighbors, as well as regional stability and energy security.

BACKGROUND: By deciding to join the Customs Union, Armenia's government has practically relinquished the country's sovereignty to Russia. Soon after President Sargsyan announced the decision in favor of the Customs Union, dim predictions were made about a de facto annexation to follow. Events in recent weeks show that such a prediction was not excessively pessimistic. There is practically no doubt that the decision to join the Customs Union will be rubber-stamped by Armenia's National Assembly: the Republican Party of Armenia has a majority of the votes while most of the opposition MPs are reluctant to vote against Russian plans.

Armenia's total dependence on Russia was bluntly demonstrated by the government's support for Russia's actions against Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. President Sargsyan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed the "referendum" organized at gunpoint by Russian troops, and Armenia was one of the 11 states that voted against the UN

General Assembly resolution declaring the Moscow-backed referendum invalid. It should be recalled that in 2008 Sargsyan not only refused to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia but also welcomed Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili in Yerevan a few months later and decorated him with the Medal of Honor despite Moscow's strong displeasure. Currently, Armenia's leadership acts as ordered by the Kremlin.

Although Armenian officials have stated on several occasions that they might want to sign the political part of the Association Agreement with the EU while refraining from the DCFTA, the EU has shown little interest in such an arrangement. And after the demonstration of loyalty to Russia by supporting the annexation of Crimea, Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt simply ruled out the possibility of signing the political part of the Association Agreement, saying that Armenia is "in a different league" and that it does not qualify for such a



degree of political affinity as a result of its support for Russia's policies towards Ukraine.

In mid-April, a publication by one of Poland's influential think tanks, the Center for Eastern Studies, stated that Russia has consistently taken over control of all aspects of Armenia's statehood, and that Armenia is becoming an instrument of the Kremlin's policy. Given such attitudes in Poland and Sweden, the two states that introduced the Eastern Partnership and have been its main supporters, the outline for the EU's future common policy vis-à-vis Armenia seems to be drawn.

IMPLICATIONS: The Armenian government has not only isolated the country from the West, particularly by making further development of cooperation with the EU improbable. Armenia's deepening dependence on Russia also compromises the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process. Mediation by the OSCE Minsk Group may practically come to a halt. If Armenia is de facto not a sovereign actor and all crucial decisions are made in Moscow, Russian mediation cannot lead to an agreement. It is also quite obvious that Russia will not start behaving in a constructive way in the near future. At the same time, the U.S.

and France do not seem to be ready to present a compelling resolution proposal that would trump the "security" argument of Russia's loyalists in Armenia.

Soon after President Sargsyan's decision to join the Customs Union, another expansive phase of Russia's military presence in Armenia began. Local and international experts alike have indicated that Russia's military presence in Armenia, together with the deadlock in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process, may put additional pressure on Azerbaijan, thus threatening the diversification of the EU's energy supply.

In addition, Russia could increase pressure on Georgia, particularly by demanding a military corridor across Georgia to the Russian bases in Armenia. The South Caucasus is an especially likely area for further Russian expansion because it is the only region where Russia has enough leverage for boosting the oil price. Taking over Georgia would allow Russia to control the pipelines supplying Azerbaijani oil and gas to Europe. An even more dangerous scenario would involve provocations leading to serious clashes between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces, with possible targeting of the pipelines and other infrastructure, followed by a Russian "peacekeeping" operation. Either scenario or variations of them would allow Russia to increase its oil revenues and at the same time to restore domination over the entire Caucasus region. In addition, Russia would be able to gain control over the

transit route from Afghanistan, and then to deny NATO access to Central Asia.

The probability of an overt Russian invasion in the South Caucasus may even grow if more decisive sanctions are implemented against Russia as it continues its subversive operations on Ukrainian territory. With an economy on the brink of collapse, Moscow would be desperate to boost the oil price. However, a lack of decisiveness on the West's behalf and further appeasement attempts would also most likely send a wrong signal to Vladimir Putin and induce him to believe that after taking over Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and now Crimea he may safely continue expanding his neo-empire in the area of "legitimate" Russian influence.

CONCLUSIONS: While the U.S., supported by NATO allies, could start increasing engagement with the South Caucasus in order to provide additional security guarantees to Azerbaijan and Georgia and to protect the transit routes, there is no guarantee of success. The U.S. president needs to convince the Congress, and then NATO's decision-making must be consensus-based while some NATO and EU members are reluctant to endanger relations with Russia. At the same time, Russia with its one-man rule is not restricted by democratic procedures and can take decisions and act fast; besides, Russian troops are already there – in the North and South Caucasus.

Given the level of Russia's presence in the region, Azerbaijan and Georgia are bound to face a deteriorating security

situation unless Armenia's isolation and dependence on Russia are reduced. This is a critical and difficult task, as Armenia has been isolated from the outside – by Azerbaijan and Turkey, and from the inside – by its own government that prefers to give in to Russian demands rather than opting for cooperation with the EU. Moreover, the majority of Armenia's parliamentary opposition is also pro-Russian and hardly considers the possibility of becoming a real alternative to the incumbent administration without seeking Moscow's support.

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UMAROV'S DEATH AND THE FUTURE OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS INSURGENCY

Tomáš Šmíd

Federal authorities, the Chechen administration, and North Caucasian Islamist insurgents have confirmed the death of Doku Umarov, leader of the Caucasus Emirate. His successor, Ali Askhab Kebekov, is the first non-Chechen to lead the insurgents in the North Caucasus and is also the first leader who does not have a militant background. This change could signify a considerable shift in how the entire insurgency operates. As Kebekov is a Dagestani Avar, it may be expected that intensification of the "Dagestanization" of insurgents, which has already been underway for several years, will continue. In addition, he will influence operations as a religious leader and not as a fighter.

BACKGROUND: On April 8, FSB Director Aleksandr Bortnikov officially announced that Umarov, whose death had been rumored since January, was indeed dead. Chechnya's President Ramzan Kadyrov declared Umarov's death publicly in mid-January. However, Kadyrov could not be considered a credible source of information since he has already "buried" Umarov several times only for it to emerge later that Abu Usman, as he is known by his jihadist name, was still alive. Nevertheless, when the North Caucasian Islamist insurgents themselves confirmed Umarov's death, the information was considered to be credible. Bortnikov's declaration, which came three months after the first reports and three weeks after the insurgents officially confirmed the death of their leader, renders the news almost certainly true, although Umarov's body has not yet been discovered. The insurgents have also

already chosen Ali Abu Muhammad – the jihadist name of Ali Askhab (Aliaskhab) Kebekov, an ethnic Avar from Dagestan – as Umarov's successor.

Umarov's death marks an indisputable turning point in the history of the Caucasus Emirate and the overall North Caucasian armed resistance against the federal center. On the other hand, any truly strategic "shift" in the insurgency corresponding to the one taking place during Umarov's era, or more precisely his early period as the leader of the North Caucasian underground, should not be expected in the foreseeable future. Umarov was a veteran of the Chechen resistance, which was long characterized by an ethnocentric orientation towards the Chechen national element. A strong Islamist tendency was always present, however, which grew stronger after the First Chechen War primarily through radical and even extremist Salafi Islam.



While in charge of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Umarov took the decisive step to turn from Chechen ethnonationalism towards supraethnic Salafism when he announced the end of Ichkeria and the formation of the Caucasus Emirate, which is intended to become an Islamic state encompassing the entire North Caucasus.

Umarov was no theologian, however, and his religious education was very poor. He was, on the contrary, a relatively seasoned fighter, and his decision was motivated primarily by an effort to make it easier for ravaged Chechnya to spread the resistance to other Muslim republics in the North Caucasus, as well as by the realization that only a supraethnic idea could raise the collective resistance of Muslim nations more or less frustrated by the politics of the federal center and its local representatives.

IMPLICATIONS: Kebekov will not change this orientation if only because he, unlike Umarov, is a theologian and an ideologue of the North Caucasian resistance. Based on his origins and due to Kadyrov's brutal and unscrupulous counterinsurgency policies, it is possible that the insurgency will "Dagestanize," and that the process of shifting the center of the rebellion away from Chechnya will be completed. In a

certain sense, the insurgency will come full circle, as Dagestan was the original gateway of Salafi ideals to the North Caucasus, although the First Chechen War and the ensuing chaos fundamentally contributed to their popularization and diffusion, which were completed with the outbreak of the Second Chechen War.

According to local sources, Kebekov is also known to be an opponent of terrorist suicide attacks; and a change in tactical-operational approaches may therefore be expected. Although Kebekov himself does not have field command experience, it can be assumed that he will revert to tactics typically associated with classical insurgency and partisan warfare, meaning primarily acts of sabotage on military targets, checkpoints, bases, convoys, and machinery. The first such attack took place on April 3 in the Achkoy-Martan district of Chechnya near the border with Ingushetia, where a detonation destroyed an armored personnel carrier, killing four soldiers. This attack also highlights the fact that, although the center of the resistance has shifted to Dagestan, Chechnya will certainly not cease to be an arena for armed attacks against the state's power – regardless of Kadyrov's despotism and the state terror asserted over Chechen society.

According to reports from Chechen observers and humanitarian workers, it has been possible since Umarov's death to trace a paradoxical growth of insurgent activity, including the strengthening of personnel in the form of Chechen youth departing "for the forest." This is an important fact

because, through his terror against the population, Kadyrov has nearly managed to deprive the fighters of their social base. Chechnya thus features a relatively ambiguous situation, whose further development hangs in the balance.

The situation in Dagestan, however, is currently more favorable to the insurgency. The type of vertical power exercised by Kadyrov is not possible there, as Dagestani society is highly polyethnic compared to the nearly monoethnic Chechnya. There is also greater freedom of speech in Dagestan, which allows considerable opportunities for propaganda. Indeed, this is the only strategy possible in Dagestan, which has a historically stronger tradition of Islamic institutions and scholars. Religious ideology has therefore been utilized more extensively in Dagestan as it has not been possible to draw upon human resources from a war-torn and revenge-seeking society as has been done in Chechnya.

Considerable changes to the North Caucasian underground can still be anticipated, though they will be more of a tactical and operational character. The basic strategy of using Salafi Islam as an umbrella ideology in the fight for an independent region in the Russian Federation will continue.

CONCLUSIONS: Current events in the North Caucasus overlap in the long term with developments in Ukraine. However, this should not divert attention away from the changes taking place there. Indeed, Russian actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine are rather

risky given the fact that Moscow is using a rhetoric legitimizing separatism similar to that which it has long refused to acknowledge in the context of the North Caucasus. As a result, Russia has not hesitated to kill more than 100,000 people in both Chechen wars and the subsequent low-intensity counterinsurgency war. The right to national self-determination, which Moscow is now supporting in Ukraine, is in fact precisely what Chechens demanded at the beginning of the 1990s, which started the process that has not been resolved to date.

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RUSSIA FEARS JIHADISTS RETURNING HOME

Dmitry Shlapentokh

The Kremlin is facing a new set of terrorism-related challenges in the Middle East and Central Asia and has engaged in several moves to counter these threats. Russia's policy on Syria can partly be seen in this light – the risk of terrorists acquiring either chemical weapons or the skills to use them could have grave consequences for Russia itself. Accordingly, while continuing to support the Syrian regime, Moscow pressured its Syrian allies to comply in destroying their chemical weapons. Moscow is also increasingly concerned over the aftermath of NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan, and over the prospect of both Syria and Afghanistan transforming into training camps for terrorists who could then return to Russia.

BACKGROUND: For several years, the Kremlin has shown little concern over terrorists or potential terrorists from the North Caucasus or other Muslim enclaves of the Russian Federation going to Afghanistan to fight. The late Emir Seifullakh, one of the leaders of the North Caucasian resistance, even claimed that the Kremlin has supported such ventures in the past. The reason for such a calculation was quite clear: those who were training to fight in foreign countries would most likely never return to Russia. The Kremlin's chief concern was not the Russian Islamists who went abroad but the foreign jihadists, mostly of Middle Eastern and Pakistani origin of various ethnic backgrounds who came to Russia. The foreign fighters brought not only stamina, dedication and expertise but also weapons and funds. Some of the foreign fighters, such as Ibn al-Khattab, played an important role in the First Chechen War.

This situation, however, has recently changed. By the beginning of the Second Chechen War, the number of foreign fighters and funding declined considerably in Russia. At the same time, another trend emerged: increasing numbers of Russian jihadists went to foreign countries to fight, primarily to Afghanistan and later to Syria. While some of these fighters became fully engaged in foreign wars and the international jihad movement, others decided to return to Russia to proceed with the fight and apply the skills they had acquired abroad. Moscow has become increasingly concerned over this development, especially regarding the ability of returning jihadists to use acquired experiences or materials to engage in terrorist attacks using weapons of mass destruction.

Moscow's concerns were not groundless. Russian authorities have started to deal with jihadists who, upon receiving training and experience in



Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan, return to Russia. Their plans to use weapons of mass destruction either directly or indirectly are not just empty talk. In October 2013, Russian law enforcement arrested two young men from the North Caucasus who planned to blow up the Maradykovskii factory in the Kirov region.

The factory engages in the destruction of chemical weapons, and an explosion in the facilities could lead to mass casualties. The detained men had a map of the factory and possibly a helper inside among the factory personnel. They had passports for travel abroad and were planning to go to Syria. One local noted that such an alarm (*perepolokh*) had not been heard in the region in at least the last ten years. Alarmed by the event, the authorities increased security arrangements in the Kazan Gunpowder factory. Yet, they were not able to prevent another terrorism attempt. On November 16, an unknown individual fired a rocket at the petro-chemical plant in Nizhnekamsk, again a target against which a successful terrorist attack could have led to mass casualties.

IMPLICATIONS: What do these developments imply for Moscow's foreign policy? To start with, President Putin's interest in eliminating Assad's

chemical weapons is not a sham and cannot be reduced to a desire to provide his U.S. counterpart with an excuse for not launching a strike against Syria and a possible broader conflict with Iran. The Kremlin genuinely wants to eliminate chemical weapons that could, especially in the case of the Assad regime's collapse, fall into the hands of the jihadist insurgents who could then transport them to Russia. The same consideration also plays a role in the Kremlin's desire to keep Assad in power. The Russian government understands that the entire chemical weapon stockpiles might not be destroyed and that the regime's collapse could well help potential terrorists obtain chemical weapons for future use in Russia. Secondly, the Kremlin has now started to comprehend the danger that Russian jihadists who are trained to fight in foreign countries could return to Russia in the future. It has also begun to consider instability far from Russia's borders as a security problem for Russia itself and has ended its policy of implicitly encouraging jihadists from Russia to go abroad to fight, and Russian authorities now treat them in the same way as those who are preparing to fight inside Russia. For example, in May 2013 Russian law enforcement arrested the members of a terrorist organization in Astrakhan who recruited people to fight in the North Caucasus, as well as Afghanistan and Syria.

Finally, the Kremlin's desire to increase its influence in Central Asia is not due exclusively to its interest in reaping economic benefits or preventing the U.S. and China from increasing their

influence in the region at Russia's expense. It is also due to a genuine fear of an influx of jihadists from Afghanistan with experience in handling all types of weaponry. Indeed, already at the May 2013 CSTO summit in Bishkek, Putin expressed concern over NATO's planned withdrawal from Afghanistan. It is clear that the Kremlin, while pleased with the decline of U.S. influence in many parts of the world, views the abrupt end of the U.S.-led venture in Afghanistan as deeply concerning. The Kremlin understands the risk that jihadists could well move north – to Central Asia and Russia proper.

There is no doubt that Moscow's anxiety will increase when the actual withdrawal starts. While the common interest in curbing the spread of jihadism outside Afghanistan and Syria is a factor that could provide a ground for cooperation between Russia and the West, such prospects do not seem overly optimistic, as demonstrated by the experience of the Sochi Olympic games where Moscow rejected broad U.S.-Russian intelligence cooperation against the terrorist threat. Although limited cooperation on these issues is possible even in the perspective of current developments in Ukraine, the Kremlin remains deeply suspicious of Western intentions.

CONCLUSIONS: Moscow desire to limit U.S./Western influence is just one of one of the variables determining Russian foreign policy in the Middle East and Central Asia. The Kremlin is increasingly concerned that increasing numbers of jihadists from Russia could

return home after receiving training and combat experience in Syria and elsewhere. It especially dreads the potential use of weapons of mass destruction by these fighters and has already experienced a handful of such attempts. While the Kremlin understands that the West is facing a similar problem, the development of deeper cooperation to counter international terrorism is unlikely due not just to events in Ukraine but also because of a general Russian distrust of Western intentions.

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AFGHANISTAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS EXCEED EXPECTATIONS

Richard Weitz

Compared with the disastrous 2009 national elections and this year's pre-ballot worries, the first round of voting in Afghanistan's presidential elections went much better than forecast or feared. Turnout so exceeded expectations that many localities lacked sufficient ballots on hand, while the Taliban was unable to conduct any spoiling attacks even in its traditional strongholds. Nonetheless, several key uncertainties remain unresolved that will determine the success of what should still be Afghanistan's first peaceful presidential transition in its history.

BACKGROUND: Some seven million votes were cast for one of the 11 men on the April 5 ballot, yielding a respectable 60 percent turnout. Of those votes cast, 36 percent were by women and 64 percent by men. The two frontrunners, Abdullah Abdullah, who received the most votes, and Ashraf Ghani are headed for a runoff next month. The results confirm Afghanistan's status as a functioning electoral democracy in which multiple candidates compete for the highest offices in elections whose outcome cannot be predicted in advance.

Yet, ethnicity could play a more delicate role in the current voting than in 2009. The absence of strong political parties leads Afghans to vote on the basis of ethnicity (Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks are the four largest groups). Although Abdullah is half Pashtun, he is commonly seen as an ethnic Tajik leader from the north. The Pashtuns, who divided their vote in the first round, comprise 43 percent

of Afghanistan's population. They will likely rally behind Ghani, perhaps enough for him to overcome his second-place finish in the first-round ballot. If he loses, more Pashtuns might support the Pashtun-dominated Taliban. If Afghanistan's national minorities and other interest groups feel they lack legitimate opportunities to express their views through the political process, they will more likely take up arms against the government or stand aloof as the country descends again into civil war.

Whatever the outcome, a critical issue is whether the losing candidate will accept the results with grace or challenge them as fraudulent. Since avoiding shame is important in Afghan culture, the losers have an incentive to claim fraud as the reason for their defeat. Even before this year's ballot, Abdullah had called fraud his main opponent. His claim that fraud cheated him of victory in his 2009 race against



incumbent President Hamid Karzai marred Karzai's second term in office.

Unlike in 2009, on this occasion the members of the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) have been selected by civil society groups and others rather than being all Karzai's men. Karzai either limited his efforts to manipulate the results this time or was ineffective in doing so. Whatever fraud occurred in April appears to have little impact on the outcome, since Abdullah and Ghani received many more votes than the other candidates but fell well short of a majority. Still, the eventual winner would be wise to offer losers government posts or other concessions to keep them satisfied.

There are already fears that neither man will prove strong enough to govern the country effectively in the face of powerful regional warlords. Abdullah has even called for reforming the political system to give more power to regional and local officials. Afghanistan's constitution gives the president considerable powers, including authority to appoint most national and even local officials. Karzai was originally chosen with expectations that he would be a weak president that

would not establish the power centers, but he soon grew in office. It seems likely that, if elected, Abdullah would break from his rhetoric and exploit his powers to the fullest.

IMPLICATIONS: One hoped for result of next month's final round of voting is that the both presidential frontrunners have said that they will quickly sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the U.S.. For reasons really know only to him, Karzai has declined to sign the negotiated text. The U.S. needs the BSA, effectively a status-of-forces agreement, in order for the Pentagon and its NATO partners to keep troops in Afghanistan beyond the end of this year. Meanwhile, the Obama administration still has not announced how many U.S. troops it intends to keep in Afghanistan after 2014 if the BSA takes effect. The resulting uncertainty is deepening Afghan fears of abandonment, encouraging the Taliban to wait to see if the ANSF will lack any direct foreign combat support, and making it harder to induce fence-sitting third parties like Pakistan to side with Afghanistan's new government and armed forces.

Another uncertainty is how the Russia-West split over Ukraine will affect regional security dynamics. On the one hand, neither NATO nor Russia want to see the Taliban return to power. On the other, Russia might retaliate for Western sanctions by reducing its support for NATO's Afghan mission. For now, Moscow has found common cause with Karzai, who is also alienated from the Western powers. Karzai's government was one of the few that

backed Moscow's annexation of the Crimea. Russia has also recently reached a deal with India under which New Delhi would pay Russia to provide Kabul's government with weapons, allowing both countries to exert greater influence on the Afghan war despite their shared refusal to send combat troops to Afghanistan.

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) performed better than expected in maintaining Election Day security. Doing so again in June, during the second ballot, could prove more difficult since the Taliban, while harboring its strength in the hopes of seeing the departure of most if not all foreign troops, will make a greater effort to disrupt the ballot. The layered security concept, which looks good on paper, has yet to prove its value in practice.

As confirmed by the most recent semi-annual Report of Security and Stability in Afghanistan. The ANSF still suffers from serious weaknesses in such critical enablers as maintenance, logistics, air support, and intelligence. One reason NATO wants to keep some 10,000 troops in Afghanistan after this year is to fill these gaps through additional training, equipping, and advising. With its new Resolute Support Operation, NATO would transition from providing direct combat support, and more recently unit-based security force assistance, to assistance concentrated in several basic functions. NATO personnel would also work with the main Afghan government security ministries to improve their managerial procedures.

Afghanistan's current "Decade of Transformation" envisages moving the country from corruption and dependency to societal renewal and economic integration and prosperity. In its Tokyo Mutual Accountability Commitments, the Afghan government pledged to conduct free elections, advance human (especially women) rights, combat corruption, and expand private sector-led growth while reducing national dependence on foreign assistance. Afghanistan experienced exceptionally rapid GDP growth last year but that was partly due to good weather leading to a good harvest. This year could see a sharp drop due to the ongoing withdrawal of foreign troops and aid workers. International aid levels are falling rapidly, as they have in earlier conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere when the foreign military presence was sharply curtailed. Years of wasted and misused aid are also making it hard to persuade donors that need to spend more now to avoid paying badly later. Congress looks like it might authorize only half of the US\$ 2.1 billion in aid that the Obama administration originally requested. Developing Afghanistan's natural riches requires achieving greater integration with the rest of Central and South Asia, but for this to happen Afghanistan needs improved security and a better business climate – lower corruption, more transparency, improved regulations, and so forth – to attract more foreign capital and entrepreneurs. The resurgent drug trade exacerbates these problems.

CONCLUSIONS: Thus far Afghanistan looks to be holding

elections sufficiently free and fair to produce a government that has enough domestic authority to mobilize the Afghan nation against the Taliban and sufficient international legitimacy to continue receiving vital economic and security assistance. Political reality means that Western governments would find it harder to sustain their high level of support to Afghanistan if the country experienced yet another flawed election. Nevertheless, the new Afghan government and its partners still need to overcome critical security, economic, and diplomatic challenges to finally turn the tide on Eurasia's longest twenty-first century conflict

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TAJIKISTAN'S PRESIDENT OUTLINES PRIORITIES FOR 2014

Oleg Salimov

On April 23, Tajikistan's President Emomali Rakhmon gave his annual address to parliament, summarizing the 2013 year and outlining priorities in Tajikistan's development for 2014.

Tajikistan's economy was the primary and most detailed part of the speech. Rakhmon called for higher participation in world trade processes, stressing the need for export increases. He outlined his vision of improving export through government assistance and fees reassignment. Rakhmon announced the state support to private production enterprises in 2014-2020, establishment of new free economic zones, and introduction of export fees on raw cotton, silk, and other raw materials to stimulate production manufacturing inside the country. Rakhmon is concerned with the lack of interest to production enterprises from Tajik entrepreneurs which are the engine for export increase in any country. In spite of similar statements in his previous address, the actual environment for entrepreneurship in Tajikistan worsened in 2013. The hopes of private sector for self-regulation and open dialog with the government were lost with the dismissal of its Coordination Council and arrest of its leader Zaid Saidov in May 2013.

The perspectives of export in Tajikistan depend greatly on the country's ability to deliver its products to prospective consumers. The development of

Tajikistan's transporting infrastructure is the foremost task in expanding its export potential. Still, the address lacked detailed overview and particular means for resolving Tajikistan's transporting isolation. Rakhmon referred to the Dushanbe - Kulma, China highway and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railroad as critical for the country's economic development. At the same time, the president failed to mention that the highway to China, in fact a reconstruction of a Soviet-era motorway, evolves slowly and depends on financial assistance from China's Export-Import Bank. Also, while Turkmenistan has entered active stages of railroad construction process, the Tajik part is still in its technical-economic substantiation phase of development. The railroad Dushanbe - Kurgan-Tube has stalled due to financial difficulties with Tajikistan once again placing its hopes on China's investors. Moreover, the 2011 report on transportation and communication in Tajikistan prepared by the Asian Development Bank indicates the loss of 80 percent of Tajik transporting infrastructure system after independence. Among other shortcomings the report points out the low quality of existing roads and bureaucratic obstacles which force transit transport to seek alternative routes bypassing Tajikistan.

Rakhmon called for a shift of attention from agrarian to industrial sectors, whereas he has previously praised the progress in the country's agrarian segment of economy. The improvement of socioeconomic conditions for farmers is seen as the primary objective for the Tajik government in 2014. Yet, Rakhmon avoided reporting on the progress of two key government acts, from 2007 and 2009, which define agrarian reform in Tajikistan. In 2013, Rakhmon spoke about required improvements in land rehabilitation, melioration system renovation, and seeds selection, the results of which were not mentioned in the current address. The proposition on higher export fees on raw cotton, which should stimulate manufacturing and industrialization, terminates the provision on simplifying raw cotton export as outlined in the 2007 act.

Another new step is the preparation for state enterprises involved in the exploration of natural resources to enter world financial markets in 2014. Rakhmon ties these hopes to the country's potential in coal, gas, and oil extraction. However, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, in the period 1992-2013 Tajikistan's consumption of petroleum, gas, and coal was continuously exceeding the country's production capabilities. Also, according to a 2011 investment outlook report prepared for Tethys Petroleum, the largest investor in Tajikistan's gas and oil industry, by Halyk Finance, an affiliate of the National Bank of Kazakhstan, the exploration of major oil and gas deposits in Tajikistan is still in its early

stages of development and presumably outweighs risks over profit. Rakhmon's expectations towards state enterprises stock trade potential hence seem unsubstantiated and premature.

Regarding Tajikistan's foreign policy, the turmoil in Ukraine produced an ambiguous situation for a number of post-Soviet republics. The Tajik regime is still contemplating the appropriate reaction to the intensified West-Russia confrontation. The continuous silence on the crisis in Ukraine was present also in Rakhmon's address to parliament. Rakhmon noted the difficulty of defining the course of the foreign policy for Tajikistan due to the increased complexity of international relations among world leaders. However, the calibrated advances towards Russia are visible in Rakhmon's call to consider Tajikistan's geopolitical location and the country's reliance on its closest long-term partners. Rakhmon noted valuable spiritual-cultural and economic connections with Russia. Russia holds a leading position among foreign investors in the Tajik economy. The past year also saw the finalization of Russia's military base extension in Tajikistan in exchange for privileges for labor migrants and tariff-free fuel supply to Tajikistan.

The relationships with Iran and Afghanistan were singled out into a separate group due to common ethnical heritage. The Tajik president also pointed out China as its main economic partner in Asia and the role of the U.S. and the EU as partners in fighting

terrorism and drug trafficking in Tajikistan.

The general notion of the president's address is the continuous growth of the country's economy, ongoing socioeconomic improvements, improving business conditions, the progressive reduction of poverty, and overall prosperity in the conditions of a persistent world economic crisis. In a number of ways, the 2014 address is a paraphrased version from the year before. Both speeches are a compilation of the same general ideas, recurrent prospects, and motivational calls for action. Rakhmon's address lacks a review of failures of the previous year

and a sense of accountability. Accountability needs to be established through a system of control over the implementation of directives delivered in the annual address, while the results, whether negative or positive, should be presented and explained and relevant conclusions formulated. Otherwise, the address will remain the routine out-of-touch speech having little to no effect on the country's developmental processes.

AZERBAIJANI JOURNALIST ACCUSED OF SPYING FOR ARMENIA

Mina Muradova

The arrest of an Azerbaijani journalist and political analyst involved in public dialogue between Azerbaijan and Armenia could endanger people's diplomacy within the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process.

Rauf Mirgadirov has been a correspondent in Ankara for the Baku-based newspaper Zerkalo (Mirror) for the last three years. His press accreditation was suddenly cancelled and he was asked to leave Turkey immediately. Mirgadirov arranged to leave Turkey by bus for Georgia, but was forced off the bus and deported to Baku, where he was arrested upon arrival. He is now under investigation by the Ministry of National Security.

According to Rachel Denber, Deputy Europe and Central Asia Director at Human Rights Watch, "The possible coordination between Turkey and Azerbaijan to return Mirgadirov to Azerbaijan without due process should be immediately and thoroughly investigated ... Turkish officials brazenly snatched Mirgadirov up without cause and unlawfully returned him to Azerbaijan. These shameless violations should be investigated and those responsible should be held to account."

Mirkadirov's arrest three days after Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Baku raised suspicions among many in Azerbaijan that the journalist's arrest was the

result of an agreement between Ankara and Baku. Some analysts believe the action is part of Erdoğan's campaign against the leader of the Islamic Hizmet movement, Fethullah Gülen. In early 2014, another Azerbaijani journalist of Turkish newspaper Today's Zaman, Mahir Zeynalov, was deported from Turkey.

Yet, the difference between two cases is that Mirgadirov is suspected of spying for Armenia and the charges brought against him are high treason and espionage, which envisages a punishment from 10 years in prison to a life term sentence.

Mehman Aliyev, Director of the Turan news agency, said that Mirgadirov was forced to leave the country because of his government-critical articles. "Recently, he has criticized both Azerbaijani authorities and Erdoğan's government for violations of human rights and democratic freedoms," Aliyev said.

Mirgadirov promoted public dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which have not had diplomatic relations since the early 1990s due to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijani prosecutors state that Mirgadirov is suspected of having transferred classified information about Azerbaijan's political and military sectors to Armenian intelligence between 2008 and 2009, "including photos and schemes to be used against

Azerbaijan.” They claim that these supposed meetings occurred in Armenia, Georgia and Turkey.

Prosecutors pointed out Laura Bagdasarian, an Armenian journalist who is known for her cooperation with the well-known Azerbaijani human rights activist Leyla Yunus, as an Armenian “intelligence agent.” Mirgadirov's lawyer, Fuad Agayev, predicted that “other local journalists and civil society activists who cooperated within the Bagdasarian-Yunus joint project could also be prosecuted.” On April 30, prosecutors began questioning journalists with connections to Mirgadirov as well as the Institute for Peace and Democracy led by Yunus.

A few days after Mirgadirov's arrest, Yunus and her husband Arif Yunus were stopped at the airport when they were departing for an international conference in Brussels. The prosecutor-general's office said the Yunus couple was detained on April 28 because they “tried to flee the country” after being summoned as witnesses in a criminal case. Yunus was released from detention after questioning by investigators and the office of her institute was searched. The prosecutor-general's April 30 statement did not elaborate on the criminal case, but it said the criminal investigation would continue. Yunus says investigators asked her about her ties with Mirgadirov.

She noted that Mirgadirov took part in projects that were supported by Germany's Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the British and Polish embassies, the

EU and other international organizations and foundations and that were aimed at encouraging the peace process between two countries.

Yunus said, “I do not accept any charges against Mirgadirov and if he was arrested for contacts with Armenians within our projects, then let the government arrest me ... The treason and espionage charges brought against Mirgadirov, an active participant of conferences and the projects implemented jointly with Armenian NGOs, are putting an end to visits of civil society activists of Azerbaijan to Armenia and to the enhancement of public diplomacy and civil society in Azerbaijan ... It makes participation in ‘citizen diplomacy’ dangerous.”

The Azerbaijani government is deeply skeptical about the possible contribution of citizen diplomacy to resolving the long-lasting conflict. “People's diplomacy is an important but not decisive element of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,” Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov remarked on the sidelines of the Second Global Forum of open societies in Baku. “That is, if the people's diplomacy plays the role of an impulse, then it will be possible to speak about the importance of its role in resolving the conflict. However, at the moment, we do not see any steps in this direction.”

Agayev, Mirgadirov's lawyer, stated that his client did not have access to classified information and that the charges are therefore groundless. “Maybe investigators have some photos

or videos where Rauf sits with Armenians at one table. But it is not serious to arrest a prominent journalist based on that," the lawyer said. Mirgadirov acknowledged his participation in various conferences hosted by international organizations in Armenia and other countries, where he represented Azerbaijani civil society groups and presented the interests of his country, but he said that his participation was legitimate. Agayev noted that Mirgadirov considered the charges to be bogus and intended to intimidate other human rights activists and journalists in the country.

The arrest comes just weeks before Azerbaijan assumes the rotating chairmanship of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers. According to CPJ research, Mirgadirov is the ninth journalist behind bars in Azerbaijan.

MOSCOW DISTRIBUTES PASSPORTS IN GEORGIA

Eka Janashia

On April 22, Georgia's ministry of foreign affairs (MFA) dismissed information about the mass distribution of Russian passports to ethnic Armenians residing in Georgia's Samtskhe-Javakheti region. Armenians constitute 54 percent of the population in the region, which borders Armenia and Turkey to the south and southwest.

Georgian media reported in April that lines of people were queuing to obtain Russian passports outside the former Russian embassy in Tbilisi. The rising demand for obtaining Russian citizenship was triggered by the amended law on citizenship that came into force in Russia recently. The law envisages fast-track procedures for granting Russian citizenship to foreign citizens or persons without citizenship, who or whose families live within the borders of the former Russian empire or the Soviet Union, and speak fluent Russian. The special commission will determine the applicants' eligibility through interviews conducted in Russian consulates across the post-Soviet area. Approved candidates must renounce their prior citizenship, according to the law.

Allegedly, the amendment encouraged applications from Russian-speaking Georgian citizens, especially those who seek jobs in Russia to provide for their families through remittances.

However, Georgia's MFA said the reports about distribution of Russian passports have been overstated. According to Deputy Foreign Minister David Zalkaniani, the Georgian government is studying the amendments cautiously to elaborate corresponding legal mechanisms, and reminded that Georgian legislation rules out multiple citizenships.

Whereas Russia's new citizenship legislation could be considered a cause for concern, the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) coalition has reacted calmly. President Giorgi Margvelashvili said Georgia should remain alert but must not overstate the danger. Margvelashvili does not believe that isolating Moscow is a right choice, "because alienating Russia makes Russia even more aggressive, unpredictable and dangerous."

There is "nothing special" about the law facilitating the issuance of Russian passports, according to Zurab Abashidze, Georgia's special envoy to Russia, who put the Russian legislation in relation to the developments in Ukraine and doubted that it had any relevance to Georgia. Abashidze's comment came after he met with Russia's deputy foreign minister for a sixth round of talks in Prague on April 16. According to Abashidze, Karasin assured him that Russia did not plan to prevent Georgia from signing an

Association Agreement with the EU this summer.

Whereas GD is downplaying the issue, one of its leaders, Minister of Defense Irakli Alasania, declared that the Kremlin intends to split public opinion on foreign policy to increase its leverage in Georgian society. This method has already been tried in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States, and is now actively being carried out in Ukraine, Alasania said. According to Alasania, the distribution of Russian passports to Georgian citizens is not alarming because the situation is under control. However, anti-state organizations have been appearing like mushrooms recently in Georgia and the government needs to confront it through consolidating its resources and enhancing its counterintelligence services, the minister said.

On April 23, the NGO Eurasian choice of Georgia held a meeting at Tbilisi's international press-center. The head of the organization, Archil Chkoidze, strongly questioned Georgia's pro-Western course and insisted that Georgia's foreign policy priorities must be determined by a referendum. The restoration of territorial integrity and economic prosperity is only possible through rapprochement with Moscow, he said.

Such opinions may indeed reflect the approaches mentioned by Alasania. Likewise, Georgian analysts claim that the threats coming from Russia are real and should be countered adequately.

Many Georgian residents hold both Georgian and Russian passports, often illegally, to simplify travel to Russia.

Migrant workers constitute a considerable share of these, though some also seek Russian citizenship in order to obtain a state pension – which is higher in Russia than in Georgia – or other economic benefits.

The distribution of passports in Georgia may reach out to vulnerable segments of the population and incentivize them to obtain Russian citizenship, which may be what Alasania implied by the division of society and potential threats coming from the Kremlin. This is especially true for the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, densely populated by ethnic Armenians who hardly know Georgian but speak Russian fluently. The “passportization” of compactly settled ethnic minorities may well enable Moscow to repeat a Crimean scenario in Georgia. The government's immediate task should thus be to better explain the advantages of the Association Agreement and the visa liberalization policy with the EU.

The Ukrainian case demonstrates that the Kremlin can use its proclaimed right to protect its citizens as a reason to invade any post-Soviet country. Notably, the 2008 Russia-Georgia August war was preceded by a process of intense “passportization” in Georgia's breakaway regions.

KYRGYZSTAN'S NEW PRIME MINISTER VISITS MOSCOW

Arslan Sabyrbekov

On April 29, Kyrgyzstan's newly nominated Prime Minister Djoomart Otorbaev paid his first official visit to Moscow. During his two days in the Russian capital, Otorbaev met with his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev, and held talks with Gazprom's Chief Executive Officer Alexey Miller and the new deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov. After his official meetings, Otorbaev held a press conference with representatives of Russian media and met with Russian Central Asia experts to discuss the state of bilateral relations.

Kyrgyzstan's entry into the Russia-led Customs Union was the main subject discussed between the Prime Ministers. In his meeting with Medvedev, Otorbaev stressed that Russia is and will remain Kyrgyzstan's strategic partner and that joining the Customs Union is a right step that will help his country tackle a number of economic and social challenges. Talking to Russian journalists, Otorbaev stated that Kyrgyzstan's products, except for its gold, are mainly being exported to the Customs Union member states, i.e. Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan and that it would therefore be wrong to close the borders to those countries. In his turn, the Russian Prime Minister welcomed his Kyrgyz colleague and expressed Moscow's readiness to be flexible and if necessary, further negotiate Kyrgyzstan's terms of entry into the Union.

As part of his official visit, Otorbaev met with representatives of the Eurasian Economic Commission to finalize the "road map" for Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Customs Union. As a result of these talks, the new head of Kyrgyzstan's government stated that the road map is practically completed and expressed his hope that it will be soon approved by the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission. Only afterwards will Bishkek take further actions to finalize the entry into the Union.

At this stage, no one questions Bishkek's accession to the Russia led Customs Union. Agreements have been reached, the road map is being finalized and Bishkek's preferences are being met. But despite of all these developments, opposition politicians and experts continue to express their concern over Kyrgyzstan's membership. For them, the Customs Union is primarily a political project and a part of Moscow's continuous effort to strengthen its influence over the former Soviet Republics or in its zone of "privileged interest," as Medvedev once described it.

During his Moscow visit, Otorbaev also met with key representatives of the Russian business community and held talks with Gazprom CEO Miller, whose company has recently purchased the KyrgyzGaz Natural Gas Corporation for US\$ 1. Miller

reconfirmed his Company's full responsibility for the timely supply of gas to Kyrgyzstan. Besides its business activities in the country, Gazprom intends to engage actively in supporting and implementing social programs in all the country's regions. In turn, Otorbaev expressed his government's full support for Gazprom and all other international companies willing to invest and do business in Kyrgyzstan.

It should also be mentioned that Russia's state oil company Rosneft recently refused to purchase a majority stake in Manas International Airport. Shortly before this announcement, Kyrgyzstan's United Opposition Movement held its first rally and heavily criticized the government's deals with foreign companies to sell the country's strategically important assets.

In his address to the population, President Atambayev blamed the opposition for damaging Kyrgyzstan's investment climate and stated that the country has no other choice. "Those screaming that no shares can be given to Rosneft, they in fact want to put an end to the future of Manas," said Atambayev. Indeed, with the U.S. shortly leaving the Airbase, the Kyrgyz government is preoccupied with replacing the financial loss, which is according to all estimates a substantial share of the country's budget. Otorbaev's visit to Moscow is yet another effort to assure that Kyrgyzstan is a safe place for Russian investments.

Kyrgyz experts and analysts express varying opinions of selling the country's strategic assets to companies

owned by a foreign government in return for promises of investment, modernization, and development of natural resources. According to Bishkek-based political analyst Marat Kazakpaev, "to abstain from these developments Kyrgyzstan should improve its investment climate and attract private foreign investors. The fact that both Gazprom and Rosneft are state owned companies and are purchasing our country's strategic assets gives a political connotation to the situation. This is not business, but politics," stated Kazakpaev.