

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING

VOL. 11 NO. 14

15 July 2009

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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SCIENCE IN TURKMENISTAN: HOW FAR WILL REFORMS GO?

Rafis Abazov

On June 12 2009, the President of Turkmenistan signed a decree establishing the National Academy of Science (NAS) of Turkmenistan, fully funded by the state budget. This refocusing of priorities toward re-establishing a national Research and Development (R&D) system has made a significant contribution to the systematic reorganization of the country's research and education. This move has also intensified the debates within Turkmenistan and in the Central Asian region about the future directions in adopting new approaches to research and science: should the government support and fund the establishment of its own innovative research and development potentials or should the state abandon attempts to build its own research base and fully rely on the private sector or an international transfer of know-how?

BACKGROUND: Turkmenistan's policy-makers follow in the footsteps of their colleagues in developing countries, where debates about the viability of creating an independent R&D base have continued for more than half a century. Many newly independent developing countries tried already in the 1950s and 1960s to establish their very own research base and to train their own scientific community. These countries poured billions of dollars into educating young talent, supporting their long endeavors in researching their PhDs and establishing national science and research facilities. Unfortunately the monetary returns from these investments were not high and had mixed outcomes. In some countries in Southeast Asia (notably in Singapore and to some degree in Indonesia) the established R&D system helped to launch a foundation for technological transfers from developed countries and contributed to the rise of the so-called South-East Asian "economic miracle." In many other countries in Africa and the Middle East, however, the outcomes were not as clear and positive. Although many developing countries established and built their science and research base from scratch, it did not translate into developing competitive skill-intensive industries and into the

expected high economic growth. Very often top-notch researchers from these countries ended up in the U.S., UK and other developed countries' laboratories and universities. Thus, the argument arose that investing large amounts of taxpayers' money, always scarce in developing countries, into research and sciences would be a waste of national resources and a form of subsidy of the "brain-drain."

Since independence in 1991, Central Asian policy-makers, including those of Turkmenistan, have been debating the merits of developing science and an R&D base at the national level. One camp of policy-makers argued that the governments should fully fund the Academies of Sciences, which represented the backbone of a national R&D base, as it was the only way to develop advanced industries in their respective countries and to escape being mere exporters of raw materials. This group advocated the importance of governmental support and government funding for research studies, which during the Soviet era were traditionally concentrated in the national Academies of Sciences in these republics.

The other group, supported by some experts from the Bretton Wood institutions, disagreed. They

believed that the newly independent states in Central Asia are so small and poor that it does not make sense for them to support the Soviet-era scale of development in science and to fund a full range of research. From their point of view it would be better to concentrate the existing resources into reforming the national institutions and creating investment-friendly environments in order to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and, with them, advanced technologies. Thus, it would be fully up to the market institutions to decide if there was a need for indigenous science and R&D, and it would be up to private investors to decide which R&D to support or not to support. The wisdom was, why support the self-indulging 2,500-people-strong bureaucratic NAS monsters, which missed both the IT and Internet revolutions and who were resisting any innovations for years?

In the end, the states of Central Asia followed different policies. In some them, (Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) the former school of thought prevailed and the governments continued the state funding of the NAS and R&D in their respective countries, though at a smaller scale. In other countries (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) the governments decided to abolish the NAS in the existing form, to withdraw full funding from them and to make them a sort of intellectual club. It has become completely up to individual researchers to acquire funding for their research and scientific experiments. Turkmenistan's government went even further. Not only did it close its Academy of Sciences in 1997 and abolished most of the research institutions, it also abolished the traditional research education programs such as PhDs (closing both *kandidat nauk* and *doctor nauk* programs). Even the national PhD Attestation Commission was closed down, thus no PhD candidates were trained in the country until 2007 (when the PhD programs were restored). Nearly all research programs in the country were closed,

as in the past traditionally they were concentrated in the Academy of Sciences.

IMPLICATIONS: The first decade of transition in Turkmenistan, as in other Central Asian republics, was very painful. Many institutions had been struggling to survive and therefore few of them noticed the disappearance of the Academy of Sciences. However, as the national economy began experiencing accelerated growth between 2001 and 2008, many public sectors felt the impact of the absence of the national R&D and science base. First, Turkmenistan faced a shortage of highly qualified local experts who could provide expertise and assessments of new and increasingly complex projects in the energy sector, intensive agriculture, communication infrastructure and in new large-scale investment projects and deals. Many highly qualified Turkmenistani scientists retired, moved to work in other sectors (like retail and catering) or left the country for Russia or Western states. Second, the country began experiencing a shortage in qualified educators who could teach and train at national universities and prepare a younger generation to replace the previous cohort of managers, civil service officials and engineers. It became an especially pressing issue after 2007, as the new leadership came to power after the sudden death of President Saparmurat Nyazov (Turkmenbashi). This new generation of leaders envisioned accelerating investments and developments in all sectors of the national economy and in education. Third, the global energy market proved to be volatile and the national energy resources are not unlimited, as according to various estimates Turkmenistan's gas reserves might run out within the next 50-60 years and its oil reserves might run out within the next 30-50 years at the current exploitation rate. The new leadership in the country were convinced that there was a need for diversifying the national economy by introducing new skill-intensive

industries, like energy-saving and environmentally clean technologies, alternative energy (solar, wind and thermal), biotechnologies, and others, and it even floated an idea to invest up to US\$ 4 billion in building a *technopolis* in Ashgabat (modeled after Education City in Qatar).

CONCLUSIONS: International experience, especially the experience of small states like Singapore, Taiwan and the Baltic states, indicate that there is a need for a national R&D base and for scientific studies, which would improve the competitiveness of the national economies, would help to diversify the nation away from excessive reliance on energy exports, and would help develop specialization and niches in the global economy. Therefore, Turkmenistan's government should support the re-establishment of its R&D and science base by supporting innovative research activities at the Academy of Sciences, universities and various research institutions. It should also identify priorities and most-promising projects that Turkmenistan's scientists will be able to accomplish successfully and utilizing local

potentials, facilities and resources. The government should also learn from the mistakes of the Soviet science and research systems and work on creating a lean, un-bureaucratized and competitive R&D system in which the public and private sectors would cooperate in funding and commissioning the most promising research and experiments through transparent and competitive selection process. It should also avoid isolation from the rest of the world and work on developing regional and international cooperation integrating the national R&D and science system into the regional and global research and scientific networks.

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New Book:

The Guns of August 2008

Edited By Svante E. Cornell and S.
Frederick Starr

M.E. Sharpe, New York, June 2009,
290pp

This book is designed to present the facts about the events of August 2008 along with comprehensive coverage of the background to those events. It brings together a wealth of expertise on the South Caucasus and Russian foreign policy, with contributions by Russian, Georgian, European, and American experts on the region.

UZBEKISTAN AND BELARUS REVEAL SERIOUS DISAGREEMENT WITHIN THE CSTO

Tamerlan Vahabov

On June 14, member countries of the Collective Security Treaty Organization signed a document on the establishment of CSTO Rapid Reaction Forces. Due to its economic and military potential, Russia will provide the main and virtually the only viable component of these forces. This treaty is symbolic as it seals Russia's political-military aspirations in the CSTO area. Surprisingly, Uzbekistan and one of Russia's closest allies, Belarus, did not sign the document. Such developments make the mere existence of the CSTO RRF futile. Uzbekistan possesses the strongest military potential and the greatest strategic importance in Central Asia. Moreover, its decision not to sign the document is critical for considering potential U.S. engagement in the region.

BACKGROUND: The decision to establish the CSTO RRF was taken on February 4, 2009, during the summit of CSTO member countries. It was designed to fight terrorism, extremism, illegal drug trafficking, and provide for effective participation of CSTO members in maintaining regional and international security.

Belarusian President Lukashenko was not present at the CSTO Summit on June 14, 2009, and did not sign the document, thus boycotting the event. This decision was caused by the ban on Belarusian dairy products and meat from the Russian market, a serious blow to the Belarusian economy.

Russia, through its Federal Service for the Supervision of Consumer Rights and Welfare (Rospotrebnadzor) banned the import of almost 500 items of dairy products from Belarus, and then a further 800 because the Belarusian producers had not redrafted documentation in accordance with the requirements of the technical regulations relating to milk. And the republic refused "to discuss collective security issues in circumstances in which its economic security finds itself under threat."

Uzbekistan's motivation is far less obvious and Islam Karimov, unlike Lukashenko, did not completely boycott the Summit. Uzbekistan outlined four conditions for signing the CSTO RRF document: firstly, that the CSTO RRF can only be used based on a consensus of CSTO members; secondly, that the CSTO RRF document cannot enter into force before it is signed by all CSTO members; thirdly, that the CSTO RRF can only be deployed on non-CSTO territory and only if such deployment does not contradict internal legislation of the host country; fourthly, that the CSTO RRF cannot be used to resolve conflicts within the CSTO. In addition, Uzbekistan refused to permanently avail its troops for deployment as part of the CSTO RRF. Such conditions aim to prevent Russia from meddling with Uzbekistan's internal affairs, which is especially important in light of the current chill in relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan on the one hand and the unstable situation on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border on the other. Inconsistencies in Russia's Central Asia policy could further destabilize the situation.

Russian President Dmitri Medvedev's reaction to the decisions of Belarus and Uzbekistan was

tempered and he stated that both countries are welcome to join the CSTO RRF.

IMPLICATIONS: Uzbekistan's conditions are reasonable in terms of regional security in both Central Asia and the broader non-CSTO region. By outlining these conditions, Uzbekistan will prevent two major precursors for destabilization of the situation in the entire greater Caspian region. Firstly, it will eliminate the CSTO's and mainly Russia's direct involvement in any potential crisis between Uzbekistan and its immediate neighbors. Problems between the Central Asian states, which are largely caused by water distribution issues, would hence be managed without outside interference. Secondly, it contributes to security in the Caucasus, because Uzbek conditions would prevent the CSTO RRF from being used in the Russian-Georgian and Armenian-Azerbaijani conflicts.

Russia has a history of destabilizing behavior in the region and it currently has a highly volatile

stance on such sensitive issues for Central Asia as the distribution of water resources and the construction of hydropower plants. Russia initially endorsed the Rogun hydropower plant project in Tajikistan. However, this changed when President Medvedev suddenly denounced Russia's support of the Rogun agreement with Tajikistan and instead supported collegial decision-making on this project, which would involve other regional countries like Uzbekistan. To aggravate the situation further, Russia embarked on constructing the Kambarata hydropower plants in Kyrgyzstan. As a result, the already tense situation around water distribution was further fueled by Russia's inconsistent actions.

If Uzbekistan's decision not to sign the treaty is driven by such considerations, then its concerns over the CSTO RRF are quite reasonable, because such forces could legitimate Russian interference and thus further escalate the situation. An interesting pattern is revealed in

Uzbekistan's recent foreign policy course. The first element is related to its decision to abstain from the CSTO RRF. By doing so, Uzbekistan distances itself from unnecessary involvement in

CSTO affairs which are contradictory to its interests, be it

Russia-led deployment of CSTO troops or losing command over parts of its troops deployed within the CSTO.



(EPA)

This move certainly demonstrates Uzbekistan's cautious and weighed approach to Russia. The second element is Uzbekistan's behavior toward NATO and the U.S. – President Karimov allowed non-military supplies to be shipped through the territory of Uzbekistan. Tashkent's two-sided moves reveal Islam Karimov's eagerness to balance between the U.S. and NATO on the one hand and Russia on the other. Unlike Belarus, Uzbekistan did not demonstratively reveal its opposition to the CSTO RRF, but rather quietly submitted its reservations. Uzbekistan is also stressing the importance of improving its relations with foreign investors in the energy sector. Through attracting more foreign investment, Uzbekistan hopes to diversify its foreign policy options even further. On May 13, during the annual oil and gas conference, the chairman of state giant Uzbekneftegaz Ulugbek Nazarov said the country was expecting foreign companies to help in optimizing technical efficiency, processing deep natural gas, enhancing energy efficiency and new technologies.

Belarus' decision not to sign the document is mainly dictated by its economic interests in Russia, but there is more to the decision. Belarus has not yet recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia; a move one would otherwise expect from such a reliable partner to Russia as Belarus has been until recently. Belarus seems to be changing its strategic route right before our eyes. Nevertheless, it is still too early to speak of a total u-turn of Belarusian policies. Its boycotting of the last CSTO summit is a reaction to concrete Russian policies with regard to Belarusian goods entering Russian markets. Belarus termed this move economic discrimination against Belarus by the CSTO country Russia. The fact that Belarus linked

economics to political-military issues is especially revealing.

It is obvious that these complications are dictated by independent calculations of CSTO members and these calculations do not necessarily go in line with those of Russia. An equally important factor is that both Belarus and Uzbekistan realize that Russia strongly desires to establish a political-military presence throughout the former Soviet space in case NATO moves eastward. The actions taken grant both countries improved security and room for maneuver in the face of such demarches.

Russia's over-reliance on hard power further polarizes Central Asia, the South Caucasus and other regions of the former Soviet Union. If establishing the CSTO faces so many contradictions and obstacles, one could question the organization's purpose. The current situation brings opportunities for the U.S. to engage in the region.

CONCLUSIONS: Considering the current situation in Afghanistan and Western energy security concerns, it is becoming increasingly important to pay attention to Central Asia. The resurgence of the Taliban and the threat of the conflict spilling over into to Central Asia add validity to the claim. The Uzbek military, despite its large size and relatively superior armaments, is still lagging far behind NATO troops and it is doubtful whether it will be able to meet the challenges of insurgency if it reoccurs. For the U.S., this could be a great opportunity to start engaging the Uzbek leader and give him an alternative to the shaky CSTO.

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CHINA, RUSSIA, AND THE RISK OF EXPLOSION IN CENTRAL ASIA

Dmitry Shlapentokh

Recent events suggest increasing Sino-Russian military cooperation, with the participation of several Central Asian countries. Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov proclaimed that Russia and China would hold up to 25 joint military maneuvers this year, plans that have are materializing. In May, Russia, China and three Central Asian countries engaged in military exercises in Tajikistan. This emerging military and geopolitical cooperation seems to indicate that Russia and China are in the process of building an alliance, with the U.S. as a potential target. Still, the U.S. presence in the region is not the main reason for the Russian-Chinese rapprochement. Rather, the decline of this presence makes Russia and China apprehensive, for it could well create a geopolitical vacuum in Central Asia.

BACKGROUND: Historically, one could observe continuous improvement of the Russian/Chinese relationship for the last 20 years, after a decisive step for the better after Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to China in 1989. China and Russia became even closer in the beginning of the Yeltsin era. In the beginning, Russia saw its dealings with China in a purely economic perspective. As time progressed, another dimension was added to this relationship: China began to emerge as a possible geopolitical counterbalance to the U.S. at a time when the relationship between Russia and the U.S. started to sour, among many other reasons due to NATO's eastward expansion. NATO's attack on Serbia/Yugoslavia in 1999 was a turning point for both the Russian and the Chinese elite. Consequently, the 2000 treaty and the military maneuvers of 2005 and 2007 were indeed directed toward the U.S.

The consensus among the Russian and Chinese elites seems to be that a weakening of the U.S. would lead to a much-desired "multi-polarity", beneficial for both Russia and China. The weakening of the U.S., increasingly clear since the end of the Bush administration, seems to

confirm Russia's and China's anticipation of the emerging "multipolarity". Still, it is becoming clear to the elites of both countries that a weakening of the U.S. could also bring serious problems for both Russia and China.

For a long time, the Russian elite in many ways related American might, in the holistic meaning of the word, with the U.S. economic standing. This was especially clear during the Yeltsin era when the dollar ruled supreme in Russia. The decline of the dollar in the late Putin era was a huge blow to the image of the U.S., regardless of the dollar's recent rise vis-à-vis the ruble.

In the beginning of the U.S. troubles, the Russian elite were quite pleased with the American decline. The assumption was that Russia would benefit from the U.S. predicament. Still, the crisis spilled over into Russia and reinforced in the minds of the Russian elite the notion that not only is the U.S. weak but its weakness could be a source of trouble to others. This change of paradigm, from the idea that the U.S. should be a cause for concern because of its strength to the notion that it should be feared because of its weakness,

could be seen in the minds of the Chinese elite as well. Indeed, China recently expressed concern that Obama's spending spree could undermine the value of the dollar and T-bills that China holds. This change of paradigm clearly indicates that the U.S. decline is not always seen as beneficial for either China or Russia and that the transition to "multipolarity" entails not just benefits but also dangers. And developments in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan are among these potential dangers.

The Russian press increasingly presents the situation in this part of the world as extremely dangerous, deeming the rise of the Taliban and general chaos in the region as almost unavoidable. Some Russian pundits still believe that the Americans just use the Taliban threat as an excuse to establish military bases in

Russia's proximity and that these bases are the actual threat for Russia. But increasing numbers of Russian observers see the events in a different light. They argue that both the Taliban and Al-Qaida are creations of the U.S. but that the genie is now out of the bottle and is beyond the control of its creator. Others see Islamic extremism as largely independent of the U.S. from the start. In any case, all of them regard the U.S. situation in Afghanistan and Iraq as quite difficult or even hopeless. This hardly pleases the Russian elite, who in this case understand that "the enemy of my enemy" is my enemy as well. A collapse of Afghanistan would lead to a spread of insurgencies not just to Pakistan and other countries of the region but also to Central Asia, housing oil and gas supplies crucial to Russia.



(RIA Novosti)

IMPLICATIONS: In order to prevent trouble in Central Asia, Russia has recently engaged in several actions. Most important is the recent creation of Special Forces, besides Russians including soldiers from various Central Asian



(Asianews)

states. Yet, the viability of these forces and the general cohesiveness of alliances are quite questionable. Tajikistan serves as a primary example: Tajikistan has become increasingly unstable and vulnerable. The country's vulnerability is underscored by the fact that it is located just north of Afghanistan. It would thus seem that the Tajik elite would have been strongly supporting a close relationship with Russia and other Central Asian states. Yet, the opposite has happened. Tajikistan's relationship with nearby Uzbekistan has soured; and even the relationship with Russia became tense when the Tajik press accused Russia of causing all types of problems for the country. Russia is even accused of fomenting civil war in the 1990s. In this situation, Russia doubts that its allies in Central Asia are viable and has turned to China as the last option. China reciprocates,

for it also receives a considerable amount of oil and gas from Central Asia. The region's proximity to restless Chinese Uighurs and other Muslim minorities caused additional potential problems. All of this created incentives for China to engage in military maneuvers in Central Asia either under the umbrella of the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO) or on bilateral grounds.

CONCLUSIONS: While both Russia and China have vested interests in maintaining a modicum of stability in the region, it remains questionable whether the two countries could cooperate effectively. Mutual suspicion continues to be high. Russians still worry about China's economic, military, and especially demographic clout and fear, not without grounds, that in the future they could lose the Far East and Siberia to China. Some Russian pundits believe that China and the U.S. could forge a global alliance and divide the world at the expense of others, Russia included. China, on the other hand, regards Russia as competition for Central Asian resources. Moreover, Russia's war with Georgia and plans to engage in "regime change" in Tbilisi; as well as Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remind China of the 1960s-70s, when Russia and China were close to war, with the Chinese expecting a preventive strike from the North. All of this hardly helps smooth cooperation and opens for questioning of Russia's and China's abilities to act in unison as guardians of Central Asian stability if Afghanistan and the adjacent region would explode.

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KAZAKHSTAN'S CEREAL POWER AND ITS REGIONAL IMPACT

Sebastien Peyrouse

Since 2006, food security has become a major preoccupation for the states of Central Asia. The situation is particularly bad in Tajikistan, but cases of malnutrition are also multiplying in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. In this context, the Kazakhstani cereals market, in constant development, has acquired a strategic character for the whole region, which is largely dependent on exports from Astana. Kazakhstan hence continues to be torn between two goals: achieving greater returns on world markets and diversifying its export incomes away from hydrocarbons, and using its cereal production to pacify and stabilize its neighborhood.

BACKGROUND: With 20 percent of the Soviet Union's arable land, Kazakhstan was always one of the motors of the Soviet cereals market. Even if the famous virgin lands campaign launched at the end of the 1950s by Nikita Khrushchev resulted in failure, cereals still accounted for a third of the Republic's GDP upon independence. According to the official figures of the Ministry of Agriculture, the country has 222 million hectares of agricultural lands, principally in the country's North and East. The majority (85 percent) is used as pasture lands and 10 percent as ploughed lands. Two-thirds of these agricultural lands are used for cereals and one-third for fodder crops.

Although cotton production is reported to have nearly tripled between 1998 and 2003, the country continues above all to be an exporter of cereals. Kazakhstan is seeking to become one of the world's largest "breadbaskets" and has been continuously increasing its rates of production. In 2004, production levels stood at 9 million tons and reached 19 million tons in 2007, an increase of 22 percent as compared with 2006. The statistics from 2008 showed a slight decrease, with production dropping to 17 million tons. While Kazakhstan was only the 14th largest world exporter in 2006, today it

ranks as the world's 6th largest producer of cereals and hopes to become the 5th largest in the next two or three years.

To improve productivity and diversify the national economy, which is too dependent on hydrocarbons, the Kazakhstani authorities in 2000 set up a support system for cereal producers: for example, subsidies are available to assist farmers for input materials and the purchase of equipment, and for raising quality standards to comply with international and European norms in order to increase export capacity. With the privatization of the agricultural sector, today there are more than 100,000 farms managing the market, often of immense surface areas. The country's continental climate constrains it to extensive agriculture, which provides yields considerably inferior to those of many western regions. As such, its 2007 record of 1.3 tons of cereal per hectare remains less than half that of Canada (2.7 tons of cereals per hectare). However, thanks to its dry climate, the country can grow many varieties of wheat in combination, durum wheat as much as bread wheat. Kazakhstani wheat is considered as being of superior quality, and is therefore easily exported, even during periods of crisis.



(AsiaNews)

Kazakhstan's export capacities are thus destined to increase. In 2008, the country exported close to 6 million tons of wheat. However, its main clients, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Iran are rather poor countries and therefore often not very solvent. Hence the importance for Astana of attaining the European certification norms for cereal products so that it can target more profitable markets and ensure guaranteed payments. However, the financial issue is not the only stake of Kazakh cereal exports; there are geopolitical stakes that relate to the fact that the southern republics are largely dependent on it.

IMPLICATIONS: The four other states of Central Asia find themselves in more complex situations. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan refuse to prioritize their food self-sufficiency, even if their official discourses endorse the contrary, and continue to privilege cotton as

one of the state budget's principal resources of foreign currency. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are continuously increasing the surface of their arable land—particularly reduced given the altitude of the two countries—for cotton but also for vegetables. The local economies are therefore not self-sufficient when it comes to cereals. Tajikistan, for example, needs 1.2 million tons of cereal per year, and, in the best of cases, produces slightly more than half. The country is thus almost certain to remain largely dependent on humanitarian aid and Kazakhstani cereal imports.

Uzbekistan, with a production of 5 million tons per year, is supposed to be self-sufficient and even exports part of its production (it ranks as the world's 20th largest exporter). However, wheat shortfalls have become more frequent in recent years, especially in 2008 when Tashkent announced a moratorium on exports to combat

the rise of food prices in the country. If these measures each time aim at protecting the national market, they also contribute to the upsurge of prices. The price of bread, for example, skyrocketed throughout Uzbekistan and there was a shortage of flour in Khorezm and Karakalpakstan. The trafficking of wheat across the Uzbek-Kazakh border has taken on tremendous proportions. On the Kazakhstani side, the districts of Dostyk and of Zhartyboe in the Saryagash region are known for their trafficking of flour towards the Uzbek capital of Tashkent.

The upsurge of the prices of oil and cereals at the beginning of 2008 affected Tajikistan even more than its neighbors. In all the Central Asian states, although the base prices fell at the end of 2008, they remained just as high in Central Asia, a sign that the region is still artificially integrated into the fluctuations of the world market because the prices there have not fallen. The UN's food program declared that, for 2009, 2.2 million Tajik citizens (out of a total of less than 7 million) are in a situation of food insecurity, including 34 percent of the rural population and 37 percent of the urban population, and that 800,000 persons are directly threatened by famine. The most affected Tajik regions are the traditionally poor ones (the regions of Khatlon in the South and Pamir) but also, and paradoxically, that of Sogd in the North, including the regional capital of Khodjent, historically one of the country's richest regions. In Kyrgyzstan, the number of persons subject to food insecurity is reported to



be one million. In Turkmenistan, no reliable figures are available, but local observers report numerous cases of malnutrition in some remote provinces of the country.

CONCLUSIONS: During the World Cereal Forum in Saint Petersburg on June 6-7 2009, the Russian Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Alexander Petrikov, maintained that Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan could together control up to 25 percent of the world cereal market. If Astana desires, as is its right, to target western and Middle-Eastern markets, its Central Asian neighbors will still depend on its exports for some time to come. Kazakhstan is therefore destined to play a key role, in the years to come, in the food stabilization of the other Central Asian states.

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FIELD REPORTS

UIGHUR UNREST IN URUMQI: CHINA'S BLEEDING WOUND

Roman Muzalevsky

After last year's riots in Tibet, China yet again faced unrest on July 6, this time in the Muslim and Turkic-speaking northwestern province of Xinjiang. While somewhat different from the case of Tibet, the developments illustrate China's inability of substituting the fruits of economic modernization for political benefits both for Han Chinese and oppressed ethnic minorities, some of which have called for separatism. As China rises and global conscience spreads, Uighurs and Chinese appear to be in a tug of war. Two vivid forces are at play in this regard: a rising desire of Uighurs to assure their cultural and religious autonomy, including through full independence, on the one hand, and China's equally strong intention to consolidate its integrity and power, on the other.

The July 6 unrest was spurred by the deaths on June 25 of two Uighur toy factory workers accused of raping a Han Chinese. The rioters demanded justice from the authorities. The riot resulted in 1,400 people arrested, 156 killed and 1,080 injured, with the Chinese suffering the most, *the Economist* reports. Calling for retaliation, thousands of Han Chinese took to the streets the next day. *The Economist* cites one Han putting it this way: "This is no longer an issue for the Government. This is now an ethnic struggle between Uighur and Han." Li Zhi, Urumqi communist party leader, stressed that those who used "cruel means" would be executed. The turmoil continued on July 8 as China's President Hu Jintao left the G-8 Summit in Italy to address more pressing matters at home. The neighboring Central Asian states of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan started evacuating their citizens from Xinjiang.

Uighurs feel that China's economic rise and vigorous Han immigration policy in the province will end their autonomy for good and that China will impose even harsher restrictions on their religious and cultural practices. Uighurs now constitute only 45 percent of the provincial population as opposed to 75 percent in 1949. The Chinese, in turn, view Uighurs as a backward people. They accuse the World Uighur Congress and its exiled leader Ms. Rebiya Kadeer of abetting the unrest and separatism in Xinjiang. The latter is home to significant energy reserves and a transit route for Central Asian oil and gas. Furthermore, China seeks to maintain an integrity that is questioned as well as threatened by Tibet and mocked by Taiwan. It also attempts to uphold legitimacy in light of its growing global economic and political clout without being portrayed as an advancing Han Chinese-dominated empire.

Unlike in Tibet's case, the Chinese allowed foreign journalists into Urumqi to report on the riot, perhaps to convince the world of the Uighur's own militancy against the Han. However, internet and telephones lines were blocked elsewhere across the province, not only due to the closed regime but also because China learnt what social internet networks could do and did in Iran. On balance, China has made some modest progress by opening up to the world, which should be further exploited and recognized as China's increasing awareness of its own responsibilities as a legitimate state within the international system.

The unrest drew mixed reactions from various capitals. Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc was highly critical, saying: "Unfortunately,

China is trying to conceal those events [in Urumqi] by using its economic and political power as well as its population.” Turkey’s Trade and Industry Minister Nihat Ergun called for a boycott of Chinese goods. Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, somewhat hypocritically given its own recent repression, voiced support for “the rights of Chinese Muslims.” The Organization of Islamic Conference urged China to address the problems of Muslim groups, while the President of the EU parliament Hans Gert Poettering called on Chinese authorities to respect human rights.

But not all were openly critical. U.S. spokesman Robert Gibbs called on all in the province for restraint. While voicing concern over the plight of fellow Muslims, some of the Muslim Gulf states have not been particularly vocal, not least because of their trade and oil export deals with China. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon underlined that “all the differences of opinion, whether domestic or

international, must be resolved peacefully through dialogue.” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, beset by its own separatist trends, stressed that the events are an internal matter of China. The Kazakh Foreign Ministry concurred.

The Uighur unrest in Xinjiang, which will most likely be blamed on Uighurs for its immediate causes, reveals several trends. Nationally, it demonstrates China’s failing attempts to integrate its minorities and consolidate Han Chinese-based monolithic national identity, while also pointing to the effective measures China readily employs to suppress dissent of any kind. Internationally, it illustrates the worn-out debate about sovereignty, on the one hand, and human rights, on the other. China’s impressive economic growth and global interdependence thus far have failed to tear down the walls of an oppressive state. They have also not ended, so it seems, the still alive dictum of “might is right.”

ARMENIA RECEIVES ENOUGH AID TO KEEP BUDGET COMMITMENTS

Haroutiun Khachatryan

The Armenian economy declined by 15.7 percent during January-March 2009, compared to the same period the previous year. This recession, which is one of the deepest among the CIS countries, has also created a shortage in budgetary incomes. These were 13.7 percent lower in January-May 2009, compared to the revenues one year ago, meaning that the budgetary revenues were some 25 percent below the planned value. This has led the government to revise its initial economic performance predictions to a worse scenario, predicting that by the end of the year, the GDP will decrease by at least 9.5 percent from 2008 levels. In addition, private remittances, an important source of foreign exchange in Armenia, have fallen to some 35 percent, mainly due to the deterioration of the Russian economy, the source of 80 percent of these

remittances. Finally, the American Millennium Challenge Corporation has announced that it would not provide US\$67 million of its funding for rural road construction, as Armenia has failed to meet democratic criteria. Under these conditions, the Armenian government faces the danger of insufficient budgetary funding, which is especially crucial this year when the economy needs additional support due to the crisis.

Armenia had serious concerns that its 2009 state budget of 940 billion drams (nearly US\$ 2.6 billion) would not be fulfilled. The government has even re-scheduled its budget plan to move many of its planned expenditures from the first or second quarters to the end of the year.

Under these conditions, the Armenian government has succeeded to gain additional funding from foreign sources, all as concession loans. Of these, the largest is the IMF standby arrangement, which was increased on June 22 to US\$ 822 million from the initially approved sum of US\$ 540 million. This 28-month loan will be used for supplementing the Central bank currency reserves, and for covering the budget deficit. US\$ 264 million of this sum have already been provided to the Armenian government, of which US\$ 150 million will be used for covering the budget deficit.

The second largest source of external funding is a US\$ 500 million credit from the Russian government. It was provided in June and the government has decided to use it mostly for crediting institutions and some companies. Only US\$ 66.7 million of these funds will be used for covering budgetary expenditures, namely, for housing construction in the zone of the 1988 earthquake. The rest will be given as loans. In some cases, the government will provide direct loans to enterprises. These are the so-called system-forming

enterprises such as big metallurgical factories in the south of the country, as well as companies which the government would like to stimulate (e.g. tourism development). Meanwhile, the bulk of the Russian loan will be given as loans to commercial banks, to the recently created mortgage agency and to the agency for developing small and medium enterprises. These loans are expected to stimulate the country's credit market.

Another foreign donor, the World Bank, has just provided a US\$ 60 million loan to help the Armenian government cover its social protection program. The government has also stated it expects a loan of around US\$ 80 million from the Asian Development Bank.

These funds are sufficient for the government not only in fulfilling its current budgetary commitment. They also provide the government with additional leverages to stimulate the economy under the current crisis situation. Moreover, the Armenian government also expects that the money is enough for balancing the budget for the year 2010, where a modest GDP growth of 1 percent is expected.

POROUS TAJIK-AFGHAN BORDER REMAINS A MAJOR SECURITY CHALLENGE

Alexander Sodiqov

On July 2, 2009, Tajik border guards discovered a large Afghan drug camp in an isolated area called Shpilob in Shurobod District on Tajikistan's southern border with Afghanistan. According to the Tajik state news agency Khovar, the border troops attacked the camp, killing two and forcing about 200 suspected drug smugglers to retreat across the Panj River to neighboring Afghanistan. In numerous caves on a rough mountainside, Tajik border guards found roughly 350 kg of various drugs, 11 firearms and 6,500 cartridges. In addition, 100 sets of civilian clothing, over 200 sets of kitchen appliances, and numerous tents and blankets were found in the camp. About 11,000 bushes of Indian hemp grew

around the camp. The Tajik news agency Asia Plus, citing an unnamed source in the Chief Directorate for Border Troops under Tajikistan's State Committee on National Security on 4 July, said the camp was used to support large-scale trafficking of Afghan narcotics through Tajikistan.

This recent example demonstrates that the porous Afghan border remains a major security challenge for Tajikistan as well as for other countries in the region. Much of the 1,344 km Afghan-Tajik border lies in exceptionally rugged mountains, making it very difficult for the Tajik border guards to police it. Following the Russian border troops' withdrawal in 2003, Tajikistan did not immediately have sufficient

capacity to effectively control its borders. The national border guards' capacity still remains very limited despite massive assistance in the form of training, equipment and material support from Russia, the U.S. and the European Union.

The combination of a long and ill-protected border and Tajikistan's convenient transport links to Russia have made the Tajik-Afghan border a favorite route for narcotics traffickers, smuggling heroin and opium out of Afghanistan. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that despite a 19 percent decrease in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan in 2008, Afghanistan is still responsible for more than 90 percent of the world's illicit opium production. An estimated 15 percent of opiates and 20 percent of heroin produced in the country are smuggled through Central Asia – mainly Tajikistan – en route to Russia, Europe and China. According to UNDP estimates, up to 100 tons of Afghan heroin is smuggled through Tajikistan every year. Narcotics seizures by Tajik law-enforcement agencies have been steadily increasing since 2001. Over six tons of drugs were interdicted in Tajikistan in 2008, and the volume of seizures is likely to reach seven tons this year.

Experts suggest that the Afghan narcotics traffickers are becoming increasingly audacious in their tactics in Tajikistan. They frequently kidnap Tajik citizens and use them as ransom to force their relatives to traffic narcotics. Moreover, Afghan smugglers occasionally attack Tajik border guards as retaliation for foiled attempts to smuggle drugs. This is believed to be a reason of a bold attack by some 30 Afghan militants on a Tajik border checkpoint in an area called Sari Mazor in Shurobod District in late February 2009. Two officers from the Tajik Drug Control Agency (DCA) were killed in the attack and three border guards were seriously injured.

Tajikistan is not just a transit route for Afghan narcotics. The country has a higher than global average rate of opiates abuse. UNODC estimates the number of drug addicts in the country to be around 70,000 people, most of whom are heroin addicts. In addition to causing drug addiction and

associated HIV/AIDS among injecting drug users, the Afghan narcotics that remain in Tajikistan increase the level of crime, corruption and the rich-poor divide, although these effects of narcotics trafficking remain largely unreported.

The security implications of the porous Tajik-Afghan border for Tajikistan and other states in the region are not limited to narcotics trafficking and its social effects. An ill-protected border makes Tajikistan an easy destination for civil war-era militants who found refuge in Afghanistan, as well as for terrorist and extremist groups. Over the recent years Uzbek officials frequently stated that the banned Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) militants, allegedly responsible for numerous terrorist acts across the country, infiltrated Uzbekistan after crossing the Tajik-Afghan border. More recently, in early July 2009, local and regional media reported that a Tajik civil war-era field commander Abdullo Rakhimov (also known as Mullo Abdullo) returned to Tajikistan with a large group of militant supporters after allegedly spending the last nine years with Taliban allies in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although the Tajik authorities have repeatedly denied that the warlord had returned to the country, an ongoing large-scale military operation in Mullo Abdullo's home region in eastern Tajikistan with unexplained casualties among the Tajik military seems to support the claims of the rebel's return.

Thus, Tajikistan's porous border with Afghanistan continues to pose a major security challenge for the country and other states in the region, as well as for Russia and Europe which remain preferred destinations for Afghan-based narcotics smugglers. The cross-border movement of militants through the Tajik-Afghan border also represents a serious threat to China with its volatile western Xinjiang region and the to the United States' efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. To curtail the destabilizing effects of uncontrolled flow of narcotics, arms and militants through the Tajik-Afghan border, China, the European Union, Russia and United States should step up their commitment to enhance Tajikistan's border security.

UZBEKISTAN AND THE CSTO: WHY NOT COLLECTIVE FIRST RESPONSE FORCES?

Erkin Akhmadov

On July 2, 2009, the legislative chamber of Uzbekistan – Oliy Majlis – discussed the results of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Council’s session held in Moscow on June 14. One of the key issues discussed at the session was the creation of Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF) under the CSTO. The President of Uzbekistan did not attend the session in June. However, he promised to consider the issue and provide an answer later. In fact, Islam Karimov did not support the idea from the very beginning. The Oliy Majlis fully supported the President’s position, providing several sound arguments explaining Uzbekistan’s position. It seems that there are several good reasons to withhold participation in the CRRF, however, none of the other member states of the CSTO save Belarus had similar or other problems with the project. In light of Uzbekistan’s changing attitude towards one of the major actors in the CSTO, Russia, and to the organization per se, the last Uzbek decision once again raises issues of the state’s effective participation in the organization that deals with the issues of security in the CIS.

The decision to form the CRRF was adopted at the special session of the Collective Security Council on February 4, 2009, by the heads of the CSTO member states. Among the main goals of the CRRF is strengthening security in the CSTO member states in light of existing or potential security threats such as terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking, prevention and elimination of emergency situations as well as effective participation of the CSTO in preserving international peace and security. All these issues are of immediate concern to Uzbekistan, as it has always been a target for all kinds of security threats. That could make its decision to reject the project seem unexpected.

In fact, the Treaty on the Creation of the Collective First Response Forces was the only document that

was not signed by the Uzbek delegation at the summit in June. Then, the position of Uzbekistan stated that the CRRF should be used only for countering external threats and security challenges to the CSTO members. The parliament representative explained that Uzbekistan takes the assumption that each member state of the CSTO is capable of resolving its internal conflicts without help from outside. Thus, the CRRF should not become a tool for solving disputed issues, either within the framework of the CSTO or in the larger CIS region. Specifically, Uzbekistan is concerned with certain “frozen” conflicts in the CIS, and fears even the hypothetical use of the CRRF for “resolving” those.

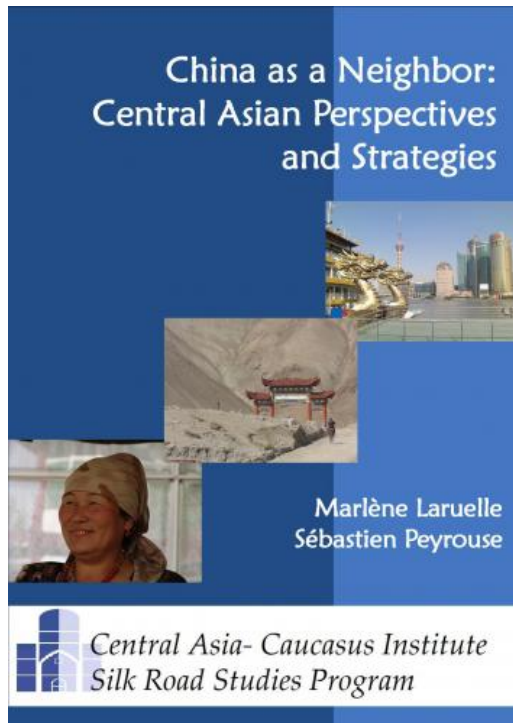
Another key issue of discontent concerns the decision-making procedure. Uzbekistan insists that in accordance with article 12 of the CSTO Charter, all decisions of the organization – except for procedural ones – should be based on the principle of consensus. However, some of the member states proposed that the decision to use the CRRF should be adopted upon agreement between the parties for which the present treaty entered into force.

Uzbekistan’s first major concern about the possible use of the CRRF for resolving internal conflicts among or within the organization’s members has little rationale, as it was outlined that these forces cannot be used as military forces in the CIS or CSTO countries for the resolution of conflict that would arise within or between these states. The second concern – about the decision-making procedure, seems more reasonable, as it may indeed go against the norms of the CSTO Charter. Nonetheless, the other states may still argue that it is fair, as they would bear the costs of creating and sustaining the forces, and that the right to decide how, when, and where these forces would operate should be their “privilege”.

Uzbekistan's decision concerning the creation of the CRRF once again underlined its slack participation in the CSTO. Moreover, it once again emphasized Uzbekistan's anti-integration attitude. Parliament deputies noted that among other problems, creating the CRRF would touch upon the most important elements of each state's sovereignty – the whole block of national legislation that regulates security issues. Thus, Uzbekistan proposed that the CSTO members can send troops that are part of the CRRF and allow foreign troops on its territory only if this does not contradict its national legislation. In other words, Uzbekistan is well aware of the powers that may be lost upon the creation of common military

forces and therefore by refusing membership, it supposedly preserves its own sovereignty.

An important question remains – is sovereignty that important in the face of the kind of security threats which the CRRF are designed to counter? Past experience shows that in such moments the CIS states, and especially the states of Central Asia, have tended to unite against the common threat or enemy. Therefore, the present position of Uzbekistan on the creation of the CRRF suggests either that the state has developed strong enough military might to deal with such problems alone, or that even more paramount issues are at stake.



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NEWS DIGEST

KIDNAPPERS FREE 16 AFGHAN DEMINING WORKERS

6 July

Sixteen Afghans working for a United Nations-sponsored demining agency who were kidnapped at the weekend have been freed unharmed, an agency official has said. The Mine Detection and Dog Center (MDC) personnel were seized by gunmen on a highway in eastern Paktia province on July 4. The MDC is part of the overall UN mine-clearing agency in Afghanistan known as UNMACA. Sherin Agha Ahmad Shah, head of the MDC in Paktia, said tribal chiefs in the province made contact with the kidnapers and were able to secure the release of the men late on July 5. "The kidnapers were thieves and the tribal chiefs negotiated the release of the workers without any ransom or any deal," he told reporters, without giving further details. The Interior Ministry said in a statement police were also involved in securing their release. Kidnapping of Afghans and foreigners has become a lucrative business both for Taliban insurgents and criminal gangs in recent years. Some captives have been killed while others have been released after ransoms were apparently paid. Separately, no further information has emerged about two Afghan employees working for Dutch aid agency HealthNet TPO (HNI) who the Afghan Health Ministry said were abducted in neighboring Khost Province on July 4. HNI is a Netherlands-based aid agency specializing in rehabilitating health-care systems in war zones and disaster areas. No one has claimed responsibility for their abductions. (Reuters)

GEORGIA TO MULL BUDGET FINANCING VIA IMF LOANS

6 July

The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) mission will visit Georgian on July 7-8, Georgian Premier Nika Gilauri said. The premier said the IMF implements a new program, which envisages budget financing. "The Monetary Fund determined the cost of the program. Negotiations will be held in July to grant some part of tranche to the 2010 budget," Gilauri said. During the visit, the parties will hold the talks to allocate the second tranche loan and determine amount of financing for the country's

budget, he said. "This tranche is expected to be approved in August," Gilauri said. (Trend Capital)

CHINA SUSPENDS VISAS TO KAZAKHS FOR XINJIANG

7 July

Chinese and Kazakh officials have agreed to suspend Chinese visas for Kazakhs wishing to visit Xinjiang, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Kazakh Foreign Ministry spokesman Erzhan Ashikbaev said that those planning to visit China's northwestern Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Province should postpone their trip. He did not elaborate on a time frame for the suspension. According to Ashikbaev, Kazakh citizens are welcome to visit any other Chinese provinces. Weekend clashes between ethnic Uyghurs and ethnic Han Chinese in Xinjiang's capital, Urumqi, left at least 150 dead and thousands injured and arrested. Ashikbaev said that there were no Kazakh citizens among the casualties. (RFE/RL)

BLAST OUTSIDE SCHOOL IN AFGHANISTAN KILLS 15

9 July

An explosion outside a school south of the Afghan capital on July 9 killed at least 15 people, including 12 students, an official said. The blast happened as a police convoy patrolled in Mohammad Agha district of Logar province and was caused by explosive materials in a truck, the district chief said. "So far I can tell that 12 students, three police and several civilians have been killed," Abdul Hamid told Reuters by phone. The age of the students was not immediately known. The truck, which was carrying explosive materials, had rolled over into a stream overnight, Hamid said. It was not clear whether the blast was a sabotage act amid increasing violence in Afghanistan or was an accident. Afghans use explosive materials for construction, mining works and even for hunting. Some people were also wounded by the blast, Hamid said. (Reuters)

GUNMEN ATTACK POLICE POST IN TAJIKISTAN

9 July

Unidentified gunmen have opened fire on a police post in Tajikistan near its border with Afghanistan, a senior Tajik security source said Thursday, the latest in a string of attacks across Central Asia.

Authorities have linked the recent attacks in the impoverished Muslim region, formerly part of the Soviet Union, to growing instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The source said a group of up to 15 men attacked a checkpoint near Tavildara, a town tucked away in the Pamir mountains just 20 km (12.5 miles) from the Afghan border. "We don't know who they were," the source told Reuters. "They could be criminals, drug smugglers and also they could be militants from certain extremist organizations, but we cannot say for sure which ones." Tavildara was at the heart of Islamist-led resistance to Tajikistan's Russia-backed government in the 1990s during a brutal civil war which left more than 100,000 people dead. Asia-Plus news agency reported earlier that several attackers were injured but managed to escape. Tajikistan's interior ministry said it could not immediately comment on the report. Governments in Central Asia have blamed the latest surge in violence on the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, a group whose militants have long fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan. In one of the latest attacks, Kyrgyz security forces killed three men they said were members of the group in a gun battle in Ferghana valley, Central Asia's most densely populated area. (Reuters)

TURKMENISTAN READY TO JOIN NABUCCO PIPELINE: PRESIDENT

10 July

Turkmenistan is prepared to supply gas to the European pipeline project Nabucco, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov said Friday in a report carried by the national news agency. "Turkmenistan, consistent with the principles of diversifying its energy transport network on world markets, is considering all existing possibilities to participate in major international projects, as for example the Nabucco project," he said. The 3,300-kilometre (2,000-mile) pipeline is expected to pump as much as 31 billion cubic metres of gas from the Caspian Sea to Austria via Turkey and the Balkans, bypassing Russia. It is a rival to Russia's South Stream project, developed by Russian gas giant Gazprom and Italy's Eni, which will channel Russian gas through Bulgaria to Western Europe under the Black Sea. Relations between Turkmenistan, a former Soviet republic in central Asia, and Russia have been strained in recent weeks, notably following an explosion in April on a pipeline linking the two countries. While the line has been repaired, Turkmenistan has refused to

resume gas deliveries to Russia. Industry analysts have raised questions about the Nabucco project, noting that its suppliers were uncertain.

Turkmenistan, along with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, have been seen as key potential providers of gas to the pipeline. (AFP)

FOUR U.S. SOLDIERS KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

12 July

Four U.S. soldiers were killed by roadside bombs in southern Afghanistan, the latest casualties in an escalation of insurgent violence. The military reported on July 12 that the bombings had taken place a day earlier. Another soldier serving with NATO-led forces in the south died on July 10 from wounds received in June, the alliance said in a statement. Thousands of U.S. Marines and hundreds of British troops have been fighting major new offensives in the past 10 days in Helmand Province, a Taliban stronghold and Afghanistan's biggest producer of the opium, which helps fund the insurgency. "The four killed in two IED attacks were U.S. service members," said U.S. military spokeswoman Lieutenant Commander Christine Sidenstricker, referring to improvised explosive devices, or roadside bombs, one of the most common weapons used by insurgents to attack Afghan and foreign security forces. The loss of the four Americans was one of the biggest casualty tolls since the Marines launched their latest assault, Operation Strike of the Sword, on July 2. The British military earlier launched its own offensive in the area. Seven U.S. soldiers died in attacks across Afghanistan on July 6, including four in a single bombing in northern Kunduz. British troops mounting their biggest operation of the campaign in Afghanistan have also had casualties at the hands of the Taliban, with 15 killed in a 10-day period, including five in two separate roadside bomb blasts on July 10. Britain has now lost 184 soldiers in Afghanistan since it joined the U.S.-led war, more than the 179 killed in Iraq since 2003. (Reuters)

FIVE KILLED IN GUNFIGHT IN RUSSIA

12 July

Russian security officers Sunday shot and killed five men who opened fire on them with automatic weapons, officials say. Officials at a Federal Security Service public relations center branch in Khasavyurt said the deadly gun battle in the Republic of Dagestan began when the security officers stopped a vehicle carrying the gunmen in order to check the travelers' documents, ITAR-

TASS reported. Three of the gunmen were wanted for crimes of a terrorist nature and were members of a Khasavyurt gang, the officials said.

The identities of the other two slain suspects were unknown. None of the security officers involved were injured, the Russian news agency said. ITAR-TASS said a search of the gunman's vehicle uncovered four submachine guns and ammunition. (UPI)

US DOES NOT OBJECT TO RUSSIAN BASE IN KYRGYZSTAN: DIPLOMAT

12 July

The United States has no objections to Russia opening a second military base in Kyrgyzstan, a senior US diplomat said Sunday during a visit to the Central Asian nation. The comments came two days after a Kyrgyz government source said the country had agreed to let Russia open a new military base, a move that has been seen as a response to Kyrgyzstan's decision not to close a US airbase. "Any such decision is obviously the sovereign right of the government of Kyrgyzstan," US Undersecretary of State William Burns told reporters, when asked about the possibility of a new Russian base. "Our view is that any step that strengthens the sovereignty and independence and security of Kyrgyzstan is a sensible one," Burns said at a press conference in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek. A Kyrgyz government source told AFP on Friday that Russia had won permission to open a base in Osh, a city in southern Kyrgyzstan, which would operate under the auspices of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). The decision to host a new Russian base came shortly after Kyrgyzstan agreed to let US forces remain at the Manas airbase outside Bishkek, used to support operations in Afghanistan, effectively reversing a previous decision. In February, Kyrgyzstan ordered the Manas airbase to close in a decision widely believed to have been made under Russian pressure. Moscow has long been uncomfortable with the presence of US troops in ex-Soviet Central Asia. Some media reports have suggested that Moscow was angered by Kyrgyzstan's reversal, and Russia's Kommersant newspaper wrote Saturday that the Kremlin hoped to save face by opening the new base in Osh. "Moscow's ambition to open a new base in Kyrgyzstan is something of a response to the actions of the United States, which recently managed to maintain its military presence in Manas," Kommersant wrote. If Moscow opens a new base in Osh, it would be the second Russian

base in Kyrgyzstan, after the Kant airbase outside Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan is the only country in the world to house both Russian and US bases. (AFP)

U.S. TELLS UZBEKISTAN IT WANTS BETTER TIES

13 July

A top U.S. diplomat told Uzbekistan on July 13 Washington wanted to repair relations with the Central Asian state, strained since a dispute over human rights in 2005 and the closure of a key U.S. military base. The mainly Muslim former Soviet republic had ceased contacts with Washington but has since allowed transit of nonmilitary cargo to neighboring Afghanistan and welcomed President Barack Obama's address to Muslims calling for a new beginning in ties. U.S. Under Secretary of State William Burns, in the Uzbek capital Tashkent on a tour of the region, spoke to journalists before a meeting with Uzbek President Islam Karimov. "I believe our visit and our discussions are a positive step in our relations. I'm convinced that we have an opportunity before us in a new administration to strengthen ties between our two countries," Burns told reporters, according to a transcript of the briefing provided by the U.S. embassy in Tashkent. "I think we do have a very real opportunity before us to do that [strengthen ties with Uzbekistan]," he said. "We see this visit as a first step in that direction." Karimov told Burns he welcomed the new U.S. approach. (Reuters)

SIX DIE IN COPTER CRASH, AFGHAN WAR TOLL MOUNTS

14 July

Six Ukrainians supplying British troops in Afghanistan were killed in a helicopter crash and two U.S. Marines and an Italian soldier were killed in what could become the bloodiest month in the eight-year-old war. Authorities in Moldova said the cargo helicopter, owned by an aviation firm there, was brought down by a missile. The Taliban also claimed to have shot down the chopper, a rare occurrence. Western forces confirmed a helicopter had crashed bringing supplies to a British base at Sangin in Helmand Province and six foreigners were killed. In Brussels, a NATO spokesman said the cause of the crash was under investigation but he could not confirm details of passengers on board. A total of 43 foreign soldiers have already died this month as U.S. and British troops simultaneously launched the two biggest operations of the war to seize Helmand Province, the Taliban's opium-producing heartland. The highest death toll for

Western forces in Afghanistan since 2001 is 46 for an entire month. The mounting death toll among Western troops in Afghanistan is fulfilling commanders' predictions that the deployment of large-scale U.S. reinforcements would mean higher casualties. Commanders have said they expect a sharp spike in casualties as new troops move into areas held by fighters ahead of an August 20 presidential election. (Reuters)

UZBEKISTAN WARNS OVER RUSSIAN BASE PLAN

14 July

Uzbekistan is warning against a Russian plan to open a military base near the Uzbek border in southern Kyrgyzstan, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. Uzbek Senator Surayo Odilhodjaeva told RFE/RL that the proposed new base -- reportedly near the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh -- would not contribute to the security of Central Asia. "I think the less military bases we have in the region, the better," she said. Uzbek political commentator Sanobar Shermatova said Tashkent's objection to an increased Russian military presence close to its borders is natural. "Tashkent wants to maintain a balance of power," Shermatova said. "It realizes that Russia may lean [more] toward Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan [than Uzbekistan and that] Kazakhstan may join them, thus leaving the Uzbeks alone and reducing the country's influence." Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin and Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov met with Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiy in Bishkek on July 7. The three reportedly discussed a proposal for a new military base in southern Kyrgyzstan. If approved, such a scheme would be the second Russian-operated military base in the country, after a base in Kant that opened in September 2003 under an agreement with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to station Russian forces for 15 years. U.S. Undersecretary of State William Burns said in Bishkek on July 12 that "any such decision is obviously the sovereign right of the government of Kyrgyzstan." Uzbek President Islam Karimov told Burns in Tashkent one day later that Uzbekistan is willing to further develop ties with the United States. Regional analyst Deirdre Tynan told RFE/RL that a move by Russia in Kyrgyzstan gives Tashkent "plenty of room and political justification to cooperate further with the U.S. in order to create a level of security for Uzbeks." Russian observer Fedor Lukyanov said another step that Karimov might take in response to Russia's attempt to secure

another military base would be to withdraw from the CSTO. He said that Karimov has already tried to "sabotage the Russian initiative to establish CSTO's rapid deployment forces last month [by not agreeing to the proposal]." (RFE/RL)

CENTRAL ASIAN UIGHURS FEAR CRACKDOWN COULD SPREAD

14 July

Anguished by ethnic violence in China but fearful that crackdowns on their minority group could spread, Uighur activists across Central Asia said Tuesday they have urged local communities to avoid large public protests. Up to half a million Uighurs live in the former Soviet states west of China, prompting concerns that ethnic clashes in China's western Xinjiang region could trigger a wave of violence across the region. Tensions still run high in Xinjiang amid tight security, more than a week after the regional capital, Urumqi, erupted in riots that the government says claimed 184 lives. Chinese authorities say most of those killed were Han Chinese — an assertion denied by international Uighur rights groups. Public reactions among Uighur minorities in Central Asia have been muted, however, amid fears that governments might crack down on protesters to appease China, the regional giant. "This has been a strong psychological blow for Uighurs in Kazakhstan," said Khakhriman Khozhamberdi, who leads an Uighur political movement in that country. About 300,000 ethnic Uighurs live in Kazakhstan, the largest population outside China. "But no protests are taking place here," Khozhamberdi said. "Instead we are holding traditional religious ceremonies as a mark of respect for the dead. We are calling on everybody to remain peaceful." Beijing's political and economic influence in Central Asia is rapidly expanding. In April, Beijing agreed to lend Kazakhstan about \$5 billion in exchange for an increased stake in the country's energy sector. Governments in the region have remained largely silent about the events in Xinjiang but all have denounced separatist movements. In recent days, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have evacuated more than 1,000 of their nationals from the violence-affected Chinese region. (AP)

MEDVEDEV SPEAKS OF HIS TRIP TO TSKHINVALI

14 July

Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, said the Georgian people would some day rule tough verdict to President Saakashvili for attacking South Ossetia last August. Speaking at a meeting with Russian

navy sailors in Sochi after visiting breakaway South Ossetia on July 13, Medvedev said that "the new state was created after a boorish aggression by the Georgian regime." "Of course full responsibility for what has happened [last August] lies on this regime, but it's not our business to deal with it," he continued. "One day the Georgian people itself will rule a heavy sentence to Saakashvili's regime and to those who took part in those bloody actions." "Our task is to help young state to stand on its feet, to overcome difficulties, simply to survive in difficult conditions, which exist in Caucasus," Medvedev said. "I can tell you frankly: they live there poorly and in difficult conditions. They were all grateful to Russia for those difficult decisions, which we had to take last August. Part of those people might not be alive now if we have not taken those decisions. They were thanking Russia with tears on their eyes... It strengthens Russia's reputation in Caucasus and in the world." "We have a [military] base there," he continued. "Decent conditions for the service are created there and this [military base] is a direct signal for them, who can't settle-down and for them in whose minds idiotic plans emerge time after time." (Civil Georgia)

UN MONITORS TO LEAVE GEORGIA

15 July

The UN Security Council failed to extend the mission of the 130 observers last month, due to a Russian veto. Last August, Russia backed Abkhazia's declaration of independence from Georgia. But no other international organisation has done so. The monitors have been in the region for 16 years, monitoring a ceasefire. Their mandate ceased to exist exactly one month ago. So, as they prepare to leave their field offices in Abkhazia and Georgia, there will be no farewell ceremony. They will simply pack their bags and leave. Russia backed the region's declaration of independence from Georgia following the short but devastating war in the other disputed territory of South Ossetia. This has made it very difficult for international organisations to go about their work. The UN says it deeply regrets the end of the mission's mandate. It had been in the region since 1993, when it was deployed to report violations of an earlier ceasefire between Georgian forces and Abkhaz separatists. From now on, there will be no international peace monitors working inside either of the volatile, disputed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. There are concerns

that the remaining populations will now live in a security vacuum, finding it harder to draw attention to their problems. (BBC)

MOSCOW MUST MAKE CONCESSIONS TO DUSHANBE TO USE MILITARY BASE IN TAJIKISTAN

15 July

For the activity of the Russian Ayni airbase in Tajikistan, Moscow must either provide funds for the construction of hydropower plants on the territory of Central Asian states, or begin paying rent and other expenses for location of the Russian air groups in its territory, says a European expert on Central Asia, Yuri Fedorov. Russia claims the use of Ayni airbase in Tajikistan, which is important for Moscow from the point of view of the interests of the country in Central Asia. However, the sides have some differences - Russia tries to obtain this facility free of charge, and the Tajik government does not agree with this. The press even reported that Dushanbe proposed anti-terrorist coalition forces to use the base for operations in Afghanistan. However, according to the expert, the talk about the possible use of NATO forces is a provocation in the media. "Judging by the reaction of the U.S., they do not have real plans to establish a base in Ayni," Fedorov, Research Fellow of Chatham House Royal Institute of International Affairs Russian and Eurasian Program, told Trend News via e-mail. However, the use of Aini by Russia remains valid. "Dushanbe requires Russia to fulfill its promise to allocate huge funds for the construction of hydropower plants, including Rogun, which ultimately damage Russia's relations with Uzbekistan, which are now in a very wretched condition, or to pay rent and other expenses on placement of the Russian air groups in Ayni," Fedorov said. Uzbekistan opposes against the construction of hydropower plants in the neighbor states - Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, because of water lack in the country. Tashkent is afraid that due to the construction of hydropower stations on the rivers of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the volume of water that falls in Uzbekistan will diminish and it will greatly affect the agriculture. He said that Russia will somehow find funds to pay for its aviation presence in Tajikistan, since without air support, Russian 201st base troops' fighting efficiency is low. (Trend News)