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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.

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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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CENTRAL ASIAN QUALMS ABOUT EURASIAN UNION MOUNTING

Stephen Blank

The current Ukrainian crisis has focused attention on Russia's drive to construct a Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and a customs Union as part of it. But Ukraine is by no means the whole story, as reservations if not resistance to the project mount in Central Asia. Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have taken steps to resist Russian encroachments and to raise the price of their admission into this union. In January 2014, Kazakhstan's government launched a plan to re-privatize the crucial Kazakh banking sector, partly in order to shield it from the tactics used by Russian banks to buy up equity in distressed banks under EEU guidelines. Kyrgyzstan also displays an increased desire to force Russia to bargain for Kyrgyzstan's admission to the Customs Union and EEU.

BACKGROUND: Russia continues to maintain that the door is open to all Central Asian states, particularly Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, to join both projects even though their contributions would be minimal and might result in a transfer of resources from Russia to these countries. But while Kyrgyzstan could according to its own government not enter the Customs Union before 2015, it is apparently not happy with the proposed road map. It clearly feels the conditions advanced for its joining the Customs Union do not sufficiently guard the interests of the state and has directed its negotiators to uphold those interests. The road map was completed without Kyrgyz participation and approved by the Eurasian Economic Commission without the Kyrgyz government's approval.

Although those statements opposing the road map were made in December 2013, the intergovernmental working group on Kyrgyzstan's entry rejected the proposed roadmap already in

August 2013 and has not met since then. Pro-Kremlin analysts like Alexander Knyazev accused Bishkek of trying to preserve a criminalized economy of Chinese contraband (thus inadvertently giving away a prime reason for the union, namely excluding Chinese commerce) and Afghan narcotics. By November 2013, Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev stated that 2015 might be too early for entry. Kyrgyz delegates are demanding the right to maintain low WTO-style tariffs on almost 1000 goods imported mainly from China so that it can then re-export them. This shuttle trade exceeds Kyrgyzstan's 2008 GNP by almost 100 percent. At the same time, agricultural sectors are divided over the benefits of joining because chicken farmers who export see access to a large market, whereas crop farmers fear the invasion of cheaper or protected crops from Russia if not Kazakhstan. Car dealers will also face a doubling of prices for imported cars. But it is clear that Kyrgyzstan is demanding large subsidies before



entry into the Union, US\$ 200 million annually for five years. This sum may be more than Moscow is willing to pay, but Kyrgyzstan has stuck to that demand and its experts reckon it also needs US\$ 215 million to build border infrastructure that complies with the Custom Union's rules. At the same time, many new entrepreneurs are more interested in exporting to the global market than merely to the customs union. And the Kyrgyz political party Reform has now opposed the Customs Union for leading to higher prices and ensuing social tensions.

IMPLICATIONS: It is clear that for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to join the Customs Union and EEU, Moscow will have to subsidize them generously for a long time. Although this was the case with the new EU members, it clearly does not appear to be part of Moscow's calculations. The attempt by EEU bodies and intergovernmental groups to dictate terms to Kyrgyzstan without its participation extends the concerns voiced by Kazakhstan and its President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2013 and sheds a revealing light on just how unlike the EU these organizations are.

Clearly, Moscow is unwilling to grasp that if it wants a union structured along EU lines as Putin has claimed, it will have to pay for it handsomely and for a long time. Russia instead seemed to think it could dictate terms and impose terms of trade on poor small states like Kyrgyzstan and even upon much stronger states like Kazakhstan. Therefore, it apparently failed to reckon with the potential of opposition from these states, let alone with the reality of having to subsidize Kyrgyzstan for years.

Moreover, as the late Alexandros Petersen has pointed out, based on his discussions with Chinese traders, they do not see these Russian moves as representing a serious threat to their growing ascendancy in Central Asian markets. It is hence debatable whether or not the Customs Union and EEU can achieve their economic and geopolitical goals. In that case, Moscow would end up with the worst of all worlds, a Customs Union of little or no economic benefit and long-term subsidies of poorer states to keep them in its political orbit. Unfortunately this outcome bears an uncanny resemblance to what the Soviet bloc had become by the 1970s and to a system of relationships that was an instrumental feature in its collapse because it was unsustainable. This does not mean that Russia lacks the means to force these states into the Union or will not attempt to do so. Indeed, the evidence to date suggests that Russia will readily use whatever coercive tactics it possesses for that purpose. In 2010, Russia raised its energy tariffs on Kyrgyzstan to a level

that provoked the revolution of that year, unseating the truly criminalized Bakiyev ruling clan. But the point is that coercing Kyrgyzstan and presumably Tajikistan as well into joining the customs union and EEU gains little or nothing for Moscow, especially if it cannot stop the flood of Chinese goods that now compete successfully against Russian products in Central Asia. Coercion is unprofitable because it only leads to ever larger subsidization of non-competitive "Putinized" economies in a vain effort to retain them in a weaker version of the Soviet system or bloc. Moscow would then be reaffirming the truth of Marx's observation that when history repeats itself the first time it is a tragedy and the second time a farce. However, it is unclear whether Moscow grasps this logic. Its policy has been driven by the idea of a revived version of the Russian or Soviet empire and key members of the elite, like Sergei Glazyev, seem to be animated by the idea that one can make a reformed Marxist economy work somehow. But this may yet help plunge the area comprised by the Customs Union and EEU into ever greater political instability because these states' ability to compete globally and economically will have been fatally compromised. This warning applies to Russia as well. If Russia cannot grow using its current growth model, which even members of the government acknowledge, how can it afford to sustain a neo-imperial policy that inevitably leads to long-term or ever growing subsidies of the poorer members?

Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that many independent Russian economists have argued that the Customs Union and EEU will provide little or no benefit to Russia and that it makes equally little sense in economic terms. On the other hand, as Moscow's pressure on Armenia and Ukraine shows, it does represent a geopolitical program par excellence, namely the extrusion of EU influence in the West and Chinese commercial and economic power in the East. Another geopolitical motive is to ensure that the states around Russia resemble it in terms of their governmental and economic structure. But that socio-economic-political structure has already led to a dead end, acknowledged by leading members of the Russian government.

CONCLUSIONS: It is hardly surprising that we see revolutionary upheavals in Kyiv and mounting opposition from governmental and private sectors in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Until now, Moscow has been deaf and blind to these protests or to the need to put its own house in order. But the delusion that it can refashion something like the old empire at tolerable economic-political costs by repression and subsidies suggests what Einstein described as insanity, namely doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. If this is and remains the case, then not only will the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Ukrainian objections to these unions be disregarded, Russia will also (and quite literally) have to use force or the threat of it to induce acquiescence in its grand design.

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TURKISTAN ISLAMIC PARTY INCREASES ITS MEDIA PROFILE

Jacob Zenn

One of the main objectives of terrorist and other non-state militant groups, especially those which are significantly weaker than the states they oppose, is to win the narrative. The Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), an Uighur-led and Pakistan-based militant group, in its own words seeks to “liberate East Turkistan [Xinjiang] from its Communist oppressors.” Although the TIP has carried out few attacks in China, it is a frequent contributor of anti-Chinese and anti-American propaganda to al-Qaeda online forums. The TIP’s praise of several high-profile attacks by Uyghurs in China in 2013 has placed the TIP in greater spotlight than ever before in its role as a mouthpiece for the Uighur militant cause.

BACKGROUND: Since its emergence in 2006, the TIP has mostly been a propaganda wing for anti-Chinese Uyghurs who fled from Afghanistan to Pakistan after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. The TIP, however, traces its legacy to Hassan Mahsum, a Uighur who served time in prison in Xinjiang for his role in attempted uprisings against the Chinese government in the 1990s. After his prison term, Mahsum took exile in Afghanistan, where he became the leader of other anti-Chinese exiles. The group that Mahsum led has been referred to as the “East Turkistan Islamic Movement” (ETIM), but there is no primary source evidence to support that any such group ever existed. Rather, the Uyghurs under Mahsum were subsumed under the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), as per a directive from Taliban leader Mullah Omar, or they received refuge in al-Qaeda camps run by Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan but had no formal name. Consistent with this, in an interview in 2002, Mahsum

said that his fighters did not have “any organizational contact or relations with al Qaeda or the Taliban ... Maybe some individuals fought alongside them on their own.” Similarly, Uyghurs captured in Afghanistan and then detained in Guantanamo Bay denied knowing about “ETIM,” which was probably because no such group existed, although some did admit knowing Mahsum or his successors. Mahsum was killed in a Pakistani army raid on an al-Qaeda compound in South Waziristan in 2003. His successor was Abdul Haq-Turkistani, who ran some militant training camps in Afghanistan before 2001 and then led Uighur fighters in Pakistan until he was killed in 2010 in a U.S. drone strike in North Waziristan while in a vehicle with the Taliban. It was under Abdul Haq that the TIP was formed with a media wing as sophisticated as any other in the al-Qaeda network. Its first video was called “Jihad in Turkistan” and released in 2006. Future videos, however, were produced by the TIP media wing, Islom



Awazi (Voice of Islam) and discussed themes such the history of Muslims in China, the “crimes” of the Communist Chinese against Uighur culture, women and Islam, and broader themes, such as “liberating” Palestine. Since 2012, the TIP has also co-issued videos with the media wing of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which is called Jund Allah Studios.

In 2008, The TIP also began publishing its quarterly Arabic-language publication under the editor Abdullah Mansour, which is called “Islamic Turkistan” and is now in its 13th edition. After the death of Abdul Haq’s successor, Abdul Shakoor Turkistani, in 2012, Mansour emerged as the TIP’s leader. Since 2012, the TIP has issued increasingly frequent videos praising attacks in Xinjiang, which is not surprising given that Islamic Turkistan’s editor, Mansour, is also now the TIP’s leader.

IMPLICATIONS: There are several networks of pro-Uighur organizations outside of China. First, there are Uighur organizations that peacefully advocate for greater Uighur autonomy in Xinjiang and more religious and cultural freedoms in China. These organizations are mostly based in Western countries in Europe and the U.S., including the World Uyghur Congress in Germany, but these

networks also include some organizations in Turkey and Central Asia.

Second, there are a number of Uighur organizations in Turkey, which are likely more closely tied to militant Uighur groups in Pakistan or to formerly Turkey-based Uighur militant groups, such as the East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO). The ETLO’s former leader said in 2003 that his group would seek to achieve “East Turkistan independence” by “peaceful means,” but that the formation of a military wing is “inevitable.” The TIP’s claims to be supporting the Syrian rebels with “humanitarian aid,” TIP materials that appear on the websites of Turkish Uighur organizations, and the existence of Turks fighting with the TIP in Pakistan and Uyghurs fighting with the Syrian rebels suggests that there may be some lingering connections between Uighur militants and Turkish organizations. These organizations in Turkey, however, rarely receive international media coverage, despite China’s concerns about them, but they may be influential among some of the tens of thousands of Uyghurs in Turkey.

Third, the TIP represents a minority of Uighur organizations around the world in that it promotes Jihad against China, openly affiliates with al-Qaeda and supports suicide attacks against U.S. troops in Afghanistan and on Chinese security forces in China. It has even released videos and photos of its attackers training in Afghanistan-Pakistan border region before they carried out attacks in Xinjiang, such as Mementi Tiliwaldi, who was involved

in a car-ramming of Han pedestrians on the eve of Ramadan in October 2011, and Nuruddin, one of the TIP's six "Turkish martyrs," who carried out a suicide operation against NATO forces in 2013.

However, in 2013 the TIP is for the first time gaining international media coverage alongside the pro-democracy and pro-human rights Uyghur organizations, such as the World Uyghur Congress. This is affording the TIP a voice to represent the Uyghurs, which used to be exclusively the domain of Western-based Uyghur groups. For example, the TIP got much of the media attention after a suicide attack in Tiananmen Square in October 2013 was carried out by an Uyghur husband, wife, and mother, who were reportedly seeking revenge against China for the government's refusal to allow the family to build a mosque in Xinjiang. Reuters and the *Guardian* reported Mansour's claim that the attack was a "jihadi operation" and the result of an Uyghur "awakening" after sixty years of Chinese oppression.

Since 2013 was the most violent year in Xinjiang and more Uyghurs are starting to take arms against the Chinese government it is possible that even if the TIP does not directly command attacks, it will become the mouthpiece for militant-minded Uyghurs. The TIP, therefore, will increasingly shape the narrative of Uyghur grievances and opposition to the Chinese government in Xinjiang. Xinjiang would therefore become more closely associated with other "jihadist theatres" like Kashmir and Palestine and may attract more attention from

international jihadists who either donate funds to the TIP or other Muslims who join the preexisting Kazakhs, Turks (including Kurds), Uzbeks, Russians, and Uyghurs in the TIP.

CONCLUSIONS: With the emergence of Abdullah Mansour as the TIP leader, the TIP now has a media-savvy representative, who will likely be more effective than previous TIP leaders in issuing propaganda in defense of what he calls the "Uyghur mujahedeen." At the same, with the U.S. and NATO troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014, the TIP and its allies in the IMU, whose spiritual leader Abu Zar al-Burmi claims China will be the next "number one enemy," may experience less pressure in Pakistan and may be able to launch a new wave of attacks in Xinjiang or possibly deeper in "inner China," such as Beijing or Shanghai. This would afford the TIP even more of a pulpit to spread its message and present its version of the Uyghur narrative in international media. This would force China to not only defend against attacks operationally, but also to develop a coordinated counter-narrative to neutralize the potential impact of TIP's violent messaging to Uyghurs in Xinjiang, ethnic Turks in Central Asia, and Muslims around the world.

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Islamist Militant Threats to Central
Asia in February 2013.

AZERBAIJANIS VOLUNTEER IN SYRIA CONFLICT

Emil Souleimanov

Recently, frequent media reports of Azerbaijani citizens involved in the Syrian civil war have sparked a renewed interest in the possible impact of Arab revolutions on this post-Soviet country. Even though Azerbaijani authorities have sought to remain silent on the matter, news from both the South Caucasus and the Middle East suggest that Azerbaijani volunteers have increasingly been participating in the civil war hundreds of miles away from their homeland. Upon their return in Azerbaijan, they might pose a serious threat to the internal stability of the nation of nine million, located at the crossroads of Turkey, Iran, and Russia.

BACKGROUND: The sectarian divide in Syria distantly resembles that of Azerbaijan, though in reversed form. Formally, the majority of Azerbaijanis, estimated at around two thirds, adhere to Shiite Islam. Around a third of Azerbaijan's population, historically concentrated in the country's northern provinces, profess Sunni Islam. Ethnically, Sunni Islam prevails among Azerbaijan's Lezgin, Avar, and a number of demographically weak minorities, scattered across the country's border with Dagestan. Yet importantly, even though the vast majority of Azerbaijanis self-identify as Muslims, they have been heavily secularized following the seven decades of Soviet rule, with Islam constituting a rather part of ethnic identity. In a number of surveys, Azerbaijanis have demonstrated a general lack of interest in religious matters.

Even so, the role of religion has increased in Azerbaijan recently, given a number of factors. First, the massive

crackdown on political opposition in the country has led to a considerable weakening of secular parties, many of which have gradually lost support among the population either due to their collaboration with the regime, or due to the incompetence and frailty of their leaders. Second, even though the majority of Azerbaijanis are characterized by a high degree of secularism, Islam as a cultural phenomenon still continues to play a role in the lives of a segment of Azerbaijanis, which holds particularly in the countryside. Third, given the increasing appeal of political Islam worldwide, a certain part of Azerbaijani youth has found itself attracted by the revolutionary ideology of (militant) Salafism with its fighting spirit, as well as its declared quest for establishing a fair Islamic state based on the principle of piety, solidarity, and welfare.

Importantly, while the majority of Azerbaijanis have remained disinterested in religious affairs, parts



of the country's radicalized Muslims have recently attracted support – given their confessional allegiances – from either Iran or Dagestani jihadists. Evidence suggests that while the country's Shiite radicals have been recruited into Tehran-backed Hezbollah units (see the [02/08/12 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)), Sunni radicals have been advancing the idea of a Salafi state in Azerbaijan that might be associated with the virtual theocracy in the North Caucasus, the Caucasus Emirate, that is waging a war against the Russian domination of the region (see the [05/02/12 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)).

Even though radicals from among Azerbaijan's Sunni and Shiite communities have been weakened as a consequence of a massive crackdown by Azerbaijani law enforcement, they still represent a security concern in the country that is disproportionate to their share of the population.

IMPLICATIONS: The ongoing participation of Azerbaijani citizens in the Syrian civil war fits well with this recent trend. Azerbaijan's Sunni radicals have been travelling in relatively large numbers via Turkey to Syria in order to become part of international jihadist brigades fighting

the regime forces. According to some estimates, up to three hundred Azerbaijani citizens, of whom a large part is composed of ethnic Azerbaijanis, have been participating in jihadist units, concentrated primarily in the Al Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front and Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar units.

Operating largely in alliance with the troops of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Azerbaijani jihadists have been located predominantly in Syria's northern provinces on the borders with Turkey, specifically in the provinces of Idlib and Aleppo. Given their command of Russian, they form separate units with jihadists from the North Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Volga-Ural area. Abu Yahya al-Azeri, a renowned jihadist of Azerbaijani descent who was killed in combat last year, had been a close associate of the Chechen jihadist commanders Abu Umar al-Chechen and Salahuddin al-Chechen and appeared with them on a number of video tapes.

Up to one hundred Azerbaijani Shiites are also reported to have travelled to Syria in recent months, forming the core of some Iranian Azerbaijani-manned combat units that have been fighting the civil war on the side of the al-Assad regime. It appears that a significant part of Azerbaijani Shiite volunteers traveling to Syria is comprised of the students of Islamic theology, concentrated in the Iranian cities of Qom and Mashhad. While the majority of Azerbaijani jihadists seem to be emanating from the country's north, as well as Baku, and some areas to the northwest of the country, Shiite

radicals recruit predominantly from the Absheron peninsula and the Lenkoran area, which has traditionally been regarded as the focal point of pro-Iranian Shiite radicalism.

The pattern of recruitment of Azerbaijani volunteers is of particular interest. Azerbaijani jihadists travel to the Syria battlefield individually, largely relying on their own means and join jihadist units upon arrival, based on their personal contacts or support provided by Turkish, North Caucasian, or Syrian jihadists.

By contrast, Shiite radicals from Azerbaijan seem to be benefiting from an established scheme of recruitment and support run by Iranian authorities. They are transported to the war zone and grouped into various fighting units by Iranian authorities, who most likely provide the volunteers with initial military training. This assumption is supported by the fact that bodies of Azerbaijani Shiite fighters from Syria are dispatched to Azerbaijan from Iran, a practice that requires the approval of Iranian authorities.

A number of influential Shiite leaders known for their pro-Iranian sentiments, e.g. Elshan Quliyev, Elshan Mustafaoglu, and Ilgar Ibrahimoglu, have decried the jihadist interference in the war as yet another sign of U.S.-backed efforts to overthrow the pro-Iranian Alawite Assad, a natural ally of all Shiites. Still, the country's pro-regime (Shiite) clergy led by sheikh Allahshukur Pashazade has refrained from taking a stance in the Syria conflict.

CONCLUSIONS: From the very start of the civil war in Syria, Azerbaijani

authorities have sought to remain neutral, issuing appeals to the Syrian people to end the violence and find a peaceful solution to the conflict. This can only partially be explained by diplomatic considerations. Attempts to overthrow what they consider legitimate governments, the spread of the color revolutions in the post-Soviet space a decade ago, as well as the Arab spring and its armed repercussions, have raised concerns in Baku over the prospect of revolutionary tendencies in the Azerbaijani public, among which discontent with the regime is on the rise. Preoccupied with the local protest movement, Azerbaijan's government has apparently underestimated the threat of Azerbaijani citizens traveling to Syrian battlefields.

The last time Azerbaijanis voluntarily joined a distant war was in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, when Azerbaijani Sunnis supported the Ottoman fellow believers, while Azerbaijani Shiites joined the Russian Army to combat Sunni "infidels." While Azerbaijan's social landscape has changed considerably, the Syria war illustrates that these faded divides might be revived in certain circumstances. Should hundreds of Azerbaijani volunteers, imbued with war-generated determination, armed with military experience, and worldwide contacts succeed in returning to their homeland once the war is over, they might pose an enormous threat to Azerbaijan's internal security.

Both sides are very likely to increase pressure on the authorities to regain control over Nagorno-Karabakh even

by military means. The jihadists would most likely align themselves with Dagestani insurgents and their Azerbaijani allies, causing turmoil in the country's northernmost areas, and thereby amplifying Azerbaijan's vulnerability to pressures from its northern neighbor. On the other hand, Shiite veterans would reify the standing of the country's radical Shiite centers as Iran's fifth column. Even though regime change in the country would be unlikely given the lack of popular support in Azerbaijani society for religious radicals, they might still challenge Baku's authority or engage in clashes among themselves. For a certain segment of Azerbaijani youth, they already represent a viable alternative to the regime.

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KYRGYZSTAN WANTS TO KEEP ITS WHOLESALE MARKETS IN THE CUSTOMS UNION

Jamil Payaz

Kyrgyzstan has slowed down its accession to the Russia-led Customs Union after the Eurasian Economic Commission disregarded its request to include special preferences in Kyrgyzstan's roadmap. With an economy immensely benefiting from the transit of Chinese goods to the wider region, Kyrgyzstan is asking that its wholesale bazaars, Dordoi, Karasuu, and Madina, be granted free-trade-zone status and other support for the first years of its membership. However, it remains to be seen whether the Union members will eventually concede to Kyrgyzstan's conditions, as free-trade-zones would undermine the Union's very idea of protecting its market.

BACKGROUND: Kyrgyzstan's wholesale markets grew large thanks to low tariffs with China. Dordoi, located near Bishkek, primarily serves wholesale customers from Russia and Kazakhstan, whereas Karasuu, located near the Uzbek border in southern Kyrgyzstan, provides affordable goods to buyers from the Fergana valley across the Uzbek and Tajik borders. In Bishkek, the Madina bazaar where many ethnic Uyghurs run their sales outlets, sells textile and accessories for the country's robust garment industry.

The contributions of these bazaars to Kyrgyzstan's economy cannot be overestimated. Deputy Minister for Economy Danil Ibrayev says these markets provide direct and indirect employment to one fifth of Kyrgyzstan's labor force. And according to the National Statistic Committee, goods imported from China amounted to almost a quarter of all Kyrgyzstan's imports in 2012. It is

worth mentioning that the official figures tend to underreport the actual figures due to cross-border smuggling and corruption. Nevertheless, a World Bank report suggests that up to 85 percent of goods in these bazaars are re-exported. The share of the Dordoi bazaar alone amounts to one third of the country's GDP.

In addition, the abundance of cheap Chinese materials has spawned thousands of sewing shops near these bazaars. These clothing manufacturers, providing employment to youth, especially young women, were able to boost demand for "Made in Kyrgyzstan" brand clothes in Russia and Kazakhstan, with the whole sector generating about 7 percent of the country's tax revenues. Rough estimations suggest that 15 percent of Bishkek's one-million-population is involved in the apparel production. It is obvious that this sector remains highly vulnerable to the Union's high tariffs. Local economists fear the Union



tariffs will render their products uncompetitive by increasing prime cost. Currently, the customs tariff averages 5.1 percent and the accession to the Union will at least double it, they warn.

At the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (SEEC) on December 24, 2013, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev made it unequivocally clear that he is against special preferences for new members. He stated, "Kyrgyzstan's position is clear; the Commission Council endorsed the draft roadmap without taking into account [Kyrgyzstan's] suggestions ... Of course, if [Kyrgyzstan] has some issues, let us consider them later, if necessary, but we should not allow accession to the Customs Union with special regimes retained." He stressed that there should be no one legged entry. Nazarbayev was widely quoted in local media as saying "Integration does not give free candies, as some think, and does not allot anything. We go there voluntarily in the interest of our countries."

IMPLICATIONS: These words can be understood as addressed to Kyrgyzstan's President Almazbek Atambayev, who while speaking to the

domestic press, also appeared unwavering in his statements about the conditions for joining the Union. At a press conference held in Bishkek on the eve of the SEEC, President Atambayev rejected the existing roadmap, echoing the government's vocal concerns that it was drafted without Kyrgyzstan's participation even though the Kyrgyz side met with the commission eight times since the start of talks. "I am too toughened to succumb to pressure," he stressed answering a journalist's question as to whether accession to the Union is being imposed on Kyrgyzstan. However, he noted that unlike Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan has limited alternatives and "will choose the path that people of Kyrgyzstan agrees on." Even though Kyrgyzstan reaps significant benefits from the transit of Chinese goods, the government appears committed to join the Union in the long run. The government does not hide that its declaration of intent in 2011 to join the Customs Union was a political decision. However, the government is growing increasingly concerned with the economic risks its membership might bring and fully understands that a leap in prices and unemployment can easily trigger political disturbances. Indeed, Kyrgyzstan's demands seem quite difficult for some of the Union members to accept, given Kyrgyzstan's small market and weak purchasing power, as well as its porous and disputed borders especially with Tajikistan, and its need for large investments to address these problems. Indeed, the government is

relying on the Union members to help improve its customs and border infrastructure, arguing that it will become the Union's external border. Vice Prime Minister Otorbayev has admitted that the 2014 budget cannot afford any border strengthening projects.

More importantly, Kyrgyzstan's government requests a development fund to cushion against possible economic downturns, stating a need for about US\$ 200 million annually to boost new enterprises and create jobs for a period of up to five years until the economy is fully harmonized with that of the Union. Interestingly, the government insists that this package includes an agreement that Kyrgyz labor migrants are provided with preferential treatment in the Union. Frequent news of their mistreatment in Russia and Kazakhstan has raised demands from the Kyrgyz public for some sort of guarantees that Kyrgyz migrants will not be subject to deportations on whim. One fifth of Kyrgyzstan's 5.5 million population is working abroad, primarily in Russia.

Whenever the Customs Union is discussed, many emphasize Kyrgyzstan's susceptibility to Moscow's economic leverage. Currently, the Customs Union's share of Kyrgyzstan's overall trade turnover equals about 43 percent. Moreover, some essential goods are imported exclusively from Russia and Kazakhstan, including oil products, wheat, flour, and coal. Kyrgyzstan recently handed over its aging and indebted gas supply system Kyrgyzgaz

to Gazprom in order to secure an uninterrupted supply of gas to the country, according to President Atambayev. The authorities also expect Russia to help construct the country's Kambar-Ata dam and hydropower plants, and equip the Kyrgyz military. In the event that Kyrgyzstan refuses to join the Union, observers warn that the current non-tariff policy on fuel that Russia exports to Kyrgyzstan will be the first to be lifted.

The next round of talks with the Eurasian Economic Commission will be held in March, but it is expected to be another futile effort to come to an agreement. The EEC head, Victor Hristenko, said the issues raised by the Kyrgyz side go beyond the commission's mandate and must be dealt with at the presidential level.

Another unclear issue is how Kyrgyzstan will handle the tariff differences as a member of both WTO and the Union. Economy Minister Temir Sariyev said, "We will have to negotiate with each WTO member and pay them compensation [for the increased tariffs]. The total sum [of compensation] is unknown." He said that Kyrgyzstan is in no position to pay the compensation and that the Union members should be the ones to address the issue.

CONCLUSIONS: Atambayev, whose tenure has been marked by a strong pro-Russian rhetoric and Russia's promises to invest in Kyrgyzstan's large economic projects, understands that accession to the Union carries great risks for the country's stability and that it does not need to be unduly

expedited. Therefore, Kyrgyzstan will closely follow the process of Armenia's accession to the Union and the consequences of its membership. The Armenia case is appealing due to the country's size and membership in the WTO. So far, no objective surveys have been conducted to analyze the Kyrgyz public's attitude toward the prospect of joining the Customs Union. Yet, even if such a survey would be conducted, it might not reflect the long-term perception because the actual pros and cons of membership remain obscure to the public.

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RELEASED VIDEO SHOWS GEORGIA'S FORMER INTERIOR MINISTER DEMANDING CORPSES

Eka Janashia

On January 29, an anonymous YouTube user uploaded a 4-minute video featuring Georgia's former Minister of Internal Affairs, Vano Merabishvili, ordering his subordinates to bring him two corpses: "I want two men, two dead bodies, bring me two dead bodies. That's it. Reward will be high." The video shows the preparation for the special search operation to hunt down the escaped suspects of the 2009 Mukhrovani mutiny.

The battalion stationed in the Mukhrovani military unit near Tbilisi along with some acting and former military officers declared mutiny on May 5, 2009. Among the plotters were the then commander of the ranger battalion Levan Amiridze, the retired army Colonel Koba Otanadze and the former army officer Gia Krialashvili. The resistance lasted only for several hours. Georgia's military and security forces surrounded the rebels and resumed control over the base on the same day. However, the mutiny leaders managed to escape.

The recently released video was likely shot that very day. It starts by featuring senior security and army officials discussing search operation details. Merabishvili appears and commands the then head of the Ministry of Interior's (MIA) special operative department, Erekle Kodua, and high-ranking military officers to

bring "two dead bodies." Merabishvili then demands immediate action and instructs Kodua and Data Akhalaia, the head of the MIA's Constitutional Security Department to give directions and start the search. Later, former President Mikheil Saakashvili and Justice Minister Zurab Adeishvili as well as Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava also arrive. Several soldiers were detained but nobody was killed on the day of the operation.

Two weeks later, as a result of another special operation, Amiridze and Otanadze were wounded and hospitalized while Krialashvili was shot dead. In January 2010, Otanadze and Amiridze were found guilty of mutiny and respectively sentenced to 29 and 28 years in prison.

The then ruling United National Movement (UNM) party led by president Saakashvili termed the incident a Russian-backed mutiny intended to overthrow the government. When the UNM lost the 2012 parliamentary elections and Georgian Dream (GD) came into power, Otanadze and Amiridze were released, as the parliament of Georgia granted them the status of "political prisoners."

Commenting the video, Merabishvili, who is now in pre-trial detention, said that he never gave the order to kill someone. Instead, by "two dead bodies," he meant two Russian

intelligence agents who, according to the operative information he had at that moment, were murdered by mutiny plotters for conspiracy purposes. Thus he tasked the Special Forces to find and bring him their corpses.

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili said "the law enforcement agencies will provide a more competent assessment, but I as a citizen can say that it is extremely grave, this is directly a commissioned murder, motivated by self-interest." Georgia's prosecutor's office has launched an investigation to "examine the legality of the special operation held in Mukhrovani." The video "clearly features high officials issuing unlawful orders," resulting in the death of Krialashvili, the statement of the prosecutor's office reads. The office already questioned Otanadze, Amiridze and Krialashvili's sister.

GD leaders apparently seek to downplay the political significance of the 2009 Mukhrovani case and the possibility of conflict escalation in case the government failed to take appropriate measures. They argue that the mutiny was an understandable protest by the military against the government, given Georgia's humiliating defeat in the 2008 August war. From this angle, they even question whether the incident should be defined as a mutiny. The UNM overstated the danger of the incident and deliberately linked it to the Kremlin to direct public attention from

the street protests taking place in Tbilisi at that time, they assert.

Contradicting this view, UNM leaders claim that GD's approach is dangerous as it creates a precedent for tolerating and pardoning mutineers and even dubbing them "political prisoners." They argue that the Mukhrovani incident was an attempted armed revolt that was prevented by the government in a timely fashion. If Merabishvili's aim was to murder the plotters, then the wounded Amiridze and Otanadze would not have been taken to hospital and survived. They also insist that the video was posted by the authorities in an effort to generate additional charges against Merabishvili whose term of detention is about to expire.

Regardless of the accuracy of these statements, the video has further damaged the UNM's image and forced it into a defensive position. Before its release, the UNM seemed to be favorably positioned ahead of the local elections given the downward trends in the economy and the government's failure to make progress on issues relating to South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Russia.

PROTESTS IN KYRGYZSTAN AGAINST CUSTOMS UNION ENTRY

Arslan Sabyrbekov

Kyrgyzstan's entry into the Customs Union with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus is a hot topic in Bishkek as the recently created political party Reforma, with the support of civil society activists, organized a protest against the country's entry into the Union. According to the protest organizers and participants, in the Customs Union Kyrgyzstan will lose its sovereignty, face restrictions on its political freedom and the prices for all commodities will rise by 25-30 percent.

The protest "Free Kyrgyzstan against the Customs Union" took place on January 22 in the center of Bishkek, near the cinema Ala-Too. The organizers took a very creative approach in organizing this small rally and visually demonstrated to the public the rise of prices for commodities after Kyrgyzstan's entry into the Customs Union. According to one of the protest organizers and Reforma leader Mirbek Asangariev, "Kyrgyzstan will face severe economic difficulties after the entry, its economy is too import dependent, its entrepreneurs will not be able to compete with that of the member countries and this will negatively impact the purchasing power of our population." He called on the political leadership to consider all these points seriously and make a thorough, politically independent decision.

The protest participants also jointly emphasized the fact that the socio-political situation and development of Kyrgyzstan is different from that of the Customs Union member countries. They underlined that all of Kyrgyzstan's achievements in terms of advancing democratic principles and greater political freedom might be put into jeopardy by joining the Union of authoritarian states. According to one of the protest participants and an independent opposition member of the Kyrgyz Parliament Ravshan Jeenbekov, the Customs Union is mostly a political project pushed forward by the Russian Federation to further advance its influence in its so called area of "privileged influence." In his words, "Euromaidan" in Ukraine clearly demonstrates the validity of this formulation, where a massive protest advocating closer ties with the EU is facing Moscow's apparent reluctance to let Ukraine slip from its orbit of influence. To buy the loyalty of the Ukrainian leadership, Russia reduced gas prices and provided significant financial assistance and the same processes can be observed in Kyrgyzstan.

On the contrary, Kyrgyzstan's political leadership continues to assert that the arguments of Customs Union opponents are not confirmed by any factual analysis. In the words of Oleg Pankratov, an advisor to Prime Minister Jantoro Satybaldiev, the small

scale protest mainly served as a PR opportunity for several politicians and public figures. According to the government representative, who also personally attended the protest, there might be a price increase for different commodities of around 4 percent and not 30 percent as opponents claim. Pankratov also dismissed the argument that Kyrgyzstan might have to pay compensation to the WTO member states after assuming full membership in the Customs Union. In his words "Kyrgyzstan can simultaneously uphold its WTO obligations and be a member of the Customs Union as well, which is also a case with the European Union member states."

Nevertheless, the terms of Kyrgyzstan's entry into the Customs Union are still under negotiation. On November 19, 2013, during the Moscow meeting of the Eurasian Economic Commission Council, representatives of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan jointly prepared and presented a road map for Kyrgyzstan's entry into the Union. Kyrgyz representatives did not participate in

the drafting of the aforementioned Action Plan and continue to insist on creating special terms, mainly concerning the continued operation of its two largest markets that focus on re-exporting Chinese goods.

In a recent interview, Kyrgyzstan's President Almazbek Atambayev also stated that the presented road map does not meet the country's national interests and that Kyrgyzstan will join and support integration unions if the future partners meet the demands presented. It is also no coincidence that after this reaction of the Kyrgyz side, the head of the Russian Federal Customs Service Andrey Belyalinov paid a visit to Bishkek. A senior Kremlin emissary held a series of meetings with Kyrgyz officials and stated Russia's readiness to hold further talks and develop a joint Action Plan meeting the demands of all sides. This statement might indeed mean that Moscow is willing to compromise and allow Bishkek special conditions. The next action plan will be discussed during the upcoming March meeting of the Eurasian Economic Commission Council.

KAZAKHSTAN ADOPTS NEW FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT

Georgiy Voloshin

On January 29, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev approved his country's new foreign policy concept for the period 2014-2020. As the document states, it was developed in line with the "Kazakhstan 2050" strategy made public by President Nazarbayev in December 2012 and further detailed in his recent address to the nation last month. The major goal of this strategic initiative is to ensure Kazakhstan's entry into the elite club of the world's 30 most developed countries by the turn of this century.

The new foreign policy concept lists several fundamental objectives. These include, *inter alia*, ensuring comprehensive national security, sovereignty and territorial integrity; strengthening world and regional peace and stability; supporting the central role of the United Nations in the existing global order; and diversifying Kazakhstan's economic development. Other priorities concern the legal protection of Kazakhstani citizens abroad and the active popularization of the Kazakh culture, language and traditions, in particular via the many Kazakh-speaking communities in Europe, America and East Asia.

Kazakhstan has identified Central Asia as the primary focus of its diplomatic action in the next few decades. In this respect, Astana will aim to develop closer ties with its southern neighbors

in trade and culture, besides its long-standing commitment to tackling cross-border organized crime, drug trafficking, terrorism and religious extremism emanating from Afghanistan. The country seeks to reinforce its leadership positions in the region and to continue playing a key role in structuring Central Asia's future geopolitical landscape in the post-2014 context.

As the Kazakhstani government is preparing to sign the founding treaty of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), to become fully operational as of next January, Eurasian integration is increasingly viewed from Astana as a priority focus area of its diplomacy. Thus, Kazakhstan is pledging its continuous support to the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space with Russia and Belarus, since both of these structures will serve as the basis of the future integration bloc. However, Kazakhstani authorities are keen to preserve the country's sovereignty and independence from Moscow, in the context where Russia has been pushing for closer integration not only at the economic level but also at the political one.

Astana has also confirmed its attachment to the principles of multilateralism, as embodied in its active involvement in multiple regional and international organizations. At various times, Kazakhstan occupied the rotating presidency of such entities

as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Islamic Cooperation Organization (ICO). It hopes to use these and some other discussion platforms to further engage in proactive diplomacy based on dialogue and coordination. Multilateral security, non-proliferation and peaceful conflict resolution will stay at the top of Kazakhstan's foreign policy agenda. While the new foreign policy concept affirms the need to adjust the country's external action to its revised priorities for the 21st century, Central Asia's biggest country still remains committed to its traditional multi-vector strategy. This strategy, which is now closely associated with Kazakhstan on the international stage, implies the pursuit of well-balanced and mutually advantageous relations simultaneously on several different fronts. Russia, China, the U.S. and the EU are and will continue to be Kazakhstan's primary partners in fields as diverse as trade, military cooperation or cultural exchanges. At the same time, Astana will keep on expanding its growing ties with such remote countries as South Korea, Japan, India and Pakistan as well as the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. In the previous years, Kazakhstan's efforts to diversify its foreign policy

partnerships have already resulted in the attraction of new investments and the implementation of many joint projects. Relations between Astana and Seoul are widely known in the region as a successful example of broader transcontinental cooperation across Eurasia. Kazakhstan also intends to remain involved in the normalization of bilateral relations between Iran and the West, given its previous track record as an impartial mediator on Tehran's domestic nuclear program.

Finally, Kazakhstan seeks to deploy more of its diplomatic missions in places where its presence has been limited so far. Last November, President Nazarbayev ordered the opening of a new embassy in South Africa and is planning to make an official visit to Johannesburg later this year. Another full-fledged embassy has been operating in Brazil since 2012. As Kazakhstani Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov recently noted in an article published by *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, a pro-government newspaper, two other embassies will be opened by the end of 2014 in Ethiopia and Mexico. By so doing, Kazakhstan seeks to become a more active player in international affairs.

TURKMENISTAN ANNOUNCES ACTION PLAN TO HOST 2017 ASIAN INDOOR & MARTIAL ARTS GAMES

Tavus Rejepova

At a December 18 extended Cabinet meeting, President Berdimuhamedov released a major action plan for each government ministry in preparation for hosting the 5th Asian Indoor & Martial Arts Games (AIMAG) 2017 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. Representatives of Turkish, Italian and British companies attended the Cabinet session and pitched new project ideas in preparation and organization of the games.

The news that Turkmenistan will be the first Central Asian country to host the AIMAG came in 2010 when the host city contract was signed between the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the National Olympic Committee of Turkmenistan in Kuwait. The contract was signed following an earlier 2006 exploratory visit of the representatives of the International Olympic Committee and the OCA to Turkmenistan. Held every four years, AIMAG will bring together the best athletes and teams of Asian countries to compete in 17 sports in Ashgabat in 2017. The 4th AIMAG took place in the city of Incheon, South Korea from June 29-July 6, 2013 and Ashgabat officially received the OCA flag from Incheon at the closing ceremony on July 6.

In January and December 2013, President Berdimuhamedov created two committees, an Organizing Committee of the Asian Games and an Executive Committee respectively to

oversee the preparations for the 5th Asian Games. In order to host the AIMAG in Turkmenistan, Turkmen government began a massive construction of a US\$ 5 billion Olympic Village in Ashgabat expected to be the largest sports complex in Central Asia.

Built by Turkey's construction company Polimeks, the Olympic Village project covers an area of over 150 hectares and includes more than 30 facilities such as a closed athletics complex, a 5,000-seat-capacity water complex, a 4,000-seat-capacity indoor tennis court, hotels, stadiums, entertainment centers, an indoor cycle track designed for 6,000 seats, a Paralympics complex and shopping centers. The entire project will be implemented in three phases, with the first completed in 2014, the second in 2015 and the third six months before the games begin in 2017.

Within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding between Turkmenistan and the United Kingdom on cooperation in the field of sports, Turkmenistan held two major media forums with foreign experts in June and November 2013 to ensure worldwide media coverage of the 5th Asian Games in 2017. At the end of September 2013, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs jointly with the USAID organized a seminar entitled "international experience in the

organization of international sports events.”

Following the speeches of company heads at the December 18 Cabinet meeting, President Berdimuhamedov outlined the detailed priority tasks regarding the preparations for AIMAG. Particularly, the State Sports Committee of Turkmenistan, jointly with the National Olympic Committee of Turkmenistan, was tasked to prepare Turkmenistan’s high level sportsmen in all 17 types of games during the 2017 Asian Games in Ashgabat. Selected sportsmen will be sent for training abroad and the State Sports Committee will hire experienced foreign trainers. The president noted that the referees will also need to attend international trainings.

Berdimuhamedov said that the emblem, mascot and souvenirs of the Asian Games should reflect the national symbols of Turkmenistan and the Turkmen people. The torch of the Asian Games will officially be lit and carried across the territory of Turkmenistan with a starting point at Mary province’s Galkynysh gas field, the world’s second largest deposit of natural gas.

According to the President’s Asian Games preparation action plan, the Ashgabat city mayor’s office is to prepare all commercials and advertisements around the city including geographic as well as tourist maps, videos and booklets about the Olympic Village and the Asian Games. TV, radio and Cinematography committee of Turkmenistan will air the championships live. The Ministry of

Culture was tasked to oversee the opening and closing ceremonies as well as awarding the winners of the championships accompanied by international concerts.

The Ministry of Education will select and train the English and Russian speaking volunteers abroad to serve the foreign visitors during the Asian Games. In addition, Turkmen-English, Turkmen-Russian, and Turkmen-Arabic special conversational dictionaries and sports dictionaries will be prepared to aid the foreign visitors.

To prepare for the 5th Asian Games, Turkmenistan has also started building a brand new international airport in Ashgabat and the Turkmenistan Airlines jointly with the State Customs Service of Turkmenistan is going to allow the foreign sports delegations a simplified procedure of transfer through the customs and the clearance of their sports equipment.

The Ministry of Communications will provide a currently non-existent Wi-Fi connection in Ashgabat, proper internet communication within the Olympic Village and cellular service in residential houses for the guests. The Central Bank is tasked to make the exchange points as well as MasterCard payment systems available at the hotels. Also, the Textile Ministry is going to prepare gifts with Asian Games symbols for sports games participants and special uniforms for flight attendants and Asian Games volunteers.

The President instructed the Trade and Foreign Economic Relations Ministry to prepare high quality food

service, Asian cuisine by hiring famous chefs from abroad. The Ministry of Healthcare will train high quality medical doctors and collaborate with the World Health Organization on doping control during the championships. Onsite ambulance service and special medical rooms are envisioned to be stationed at all times. The Ministry of National Security and Ministry of Internal Affairs are tasked to provide utmost security during the Games.

Promoting the sports and physical culture in the country is a priority of President Berdimuhamedov's policies.

In July 2014, Turkmenistan is also going to host the first ever international wind surfing World Cup in the coastal resort area of Awaza and invite professional surfers of the Professional Windsurfers Association (PWA). The government also hopes that hosting such sports events will help to improve Turkmenistan's reputation worldwide. The government's action plan for preparations to host the AIMAG sounds comprehensive but it remains to be seen how this entire service infrastructure will be built from scratch.