

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING
VOL. 17 NO. 02
22 JANUARY 2015

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASS ANALYST

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Submission Guidelines:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CHINA'S ROLE IN STABILIZING AFGHANISTAN

Sudha Ramachandran

Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani's recent visit to Beijing was an important milestone in Sino-Afghan relations as it marked the start of China's enhanced role in Afghanistan, especially as a peacemaker in the war-ravaged country. While Beijing's close ties with Pakistan will come in handy in dealing with the Taliban, the road to building stability in Afghanistan is littered with landmines. Can Beijing succeed where mightier powers such as the Soviet Union and the United States did not?

BACKGROUND: China's growing profile in Afghanistan, especially as a peacemaker has sparked intense discussion worldwide about its motivations, assets, challenges and chances of success. It was Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's visit to China late last year that signaled Beijing's growing role in the strife-torn country. Ghani's choice of China as the destination of his first state visit abroad was interpreted as an indication of the priority he accords Beijing in Afghanistan's future, especially in the context of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which ended its combat mission on December 31.

During Ghani's visit, China signaled plans to intensify engagement with Afghanistan. It pledged US\$ 327 million in grants through 2017, professional training for 3,000 Afghans over the next five years, humanitarian aid, etc. In addition, the two countries announced a "new important consensus" on combating the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a separatist group in China's Xinjiang province that borders Afghanistan. Besides, China expressed support for a peace and

reconciliation process in Afghanistan that is "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned."



(Source: Gov.cn)

Although China and Afghanistan are neighbors, bilateral engagement was limited for decades. Even after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, China maintained a low profile. It avoided sending troops and contributed just US\$ 250 million to Afghanistan in the 2002-13 period, preferring to focus on investment in Afghanistan's natural resources sector. It was only in 2012 that Afghanistan began occupying more space on China's diplomatic radar. In February that year, China's then security chief Zhou Yongkang visited Kabul, becoming the most senior Chinese leader to visit Afghanistan in over four decades. Underscoring China's rising role in Afghanistan's

internal security, Zhou announced plans to train Afghan policemen. More recently, Beijing appointed a special envoy on Afghanistan.

China's new interest in Afghanistan's stability stems from anxieties over rising militancy of its Uighur separatists and their links with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. There is concern too over the impact that persisting instability in Afghanistan will have on Chinese investments there. A US\$ 3 billion-deal reached in 2007 for extraction and processing of copper from the Mes Aynak mines is yet to take off. China's other investment plans inside Afghanistan, its plans for development of its western provinces as well as its Silk Route ambitions hinge on a stable Afghanistan. But a deteriorating security situation looms especially with ISAF pulling out the bulk of its troops from Afghanistan. Beijing's new willingness to play a stabilizing role in Afghanistan must be seen in this context.

IMPLICATIONS: What is China's plan for stabilizing Afghanistan? It is expected to avoid deploying troops in Afghanistan as it is keen to avoid getting caught in a quagmire. However, the Chinese government is mulling legislation on deploying troops in counter-terrorism missions abroad with the consent of the host nation. This suggests that it could consider deployment on limited missions in Afghanistan perhaps against Uighur militants taking sanctuary there.

Its strategy will focus on economic development, especially on its traditional strength in resource

extraction and infrastructure development, an approach that Ghani, a former World Bank economist, will welcome.

Another important pillar of its stabilization strategy is support for the reconciliation process. It has welcomed the Taliban to any "neutral venue such as China." Its special envoy on Afghanistan, Sun Yuxi, is said to have met the Taliban more than once in Peshawar, Pakistan and a Taliban delegation led by Qari Din Mohammad, a member of the Taliban political office in Doha, visited China recently. Among the issues discussed was an idea China promoted at the recent "Heart of Asia" ministerial conference it hosted in Beijing, which favors establishing a regional forum for reconciliation in Afghanistan.

China possesses several advantages as its steps into a peacemaking role in Afghanistan. Unlike other powers, it is not burdened by a negative historical legacy. Importantly, it enjoys close ties with Pakistan and will leverage its enormous influence over Islamabad to get it to support the peace process as well as to bring on board the Taliban. Besides, China has set up or is part of several groupings/dialogues such as the Pakistan-China-Afghanistan trilateral dialogue; the India-China-Russia dialogue, the 6+1 dialogue on Afghanistan, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, whose input, expertise, or support it can draw on. China has also stepped up its engagement with Washington on Afghanistan. Finally, China has powerful inducements – benefits of

regional trade and economic development - to lure Pakistan and Afghanistan to the negotiating table and to co-operate and reach a settlement.

However, problems loom. The kind of development China is considering could itself trigger new conflicts. Resource extraction the world over is known to generate anger among local communities as it involves complicated land acquisition and contamination of local resources. Jobs promised to locals often fail to compensate their loss of land and access to forests. This is likely to become more troublesome in the Chinese context as its companies working abroad prefer taking Chinese laborers to work on the projects. This has been the experience in Africa, for instance. An influx of Chinese workers into Afghanistan would complicate an already difficult conflict situation.

CONCLUSION: China's agenda in Afghanistan is limited; it is not considering any grand nation-building project or seeking to determine the complexion of the Afghanistan government. All it wants is stability there. This will require it to convince the conflict parties to give up violence. This may not be easy. There is little to suggest that Pakistan wants to move away from using terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy in the neighborhood. China faces a formidable task of convincing Pakistan. How far will it go to succeed? Will it be willing to take on Islamabad if Pakistan resists mending its ways? Importantly, China may have to contend with the Islamic State (IS) as well. Afghan officials

confirm the presence of IS fighters in southern Afghanistan. Taliban-IS tensions could leave China grappling with a conflict that is more complex than those that the Soviets and Americans struggled with.

This is the first time that China will be essaying the role of peacemaker outside its borders. It must adopt an inclusive approach on economic development. Ordinary Afghans must benefit and not just their leaders if they are to be weaned away from weapons and war. Beijing needs to be inclusive with regard to the peace process as well. Getting a handful of parties to sign a peace agreement may be simpler but it will not culminate in a sustainable peace. A broad-based approach that draws as many actors as possible to the table is necessary. Inclusion of communities at the ground level is necessary as they are vital pillars in building peace. Beijing must keep Afghanistan's neighbors and the regional powers as well as the U.S. and Russia in the loop as opacity triggers suspicion. Importantly, it must move beyond the realm of rhetoric to enable a genuinely Afghan-owned and led peace process, one where Afghan ideas and capacity are sought. This is after all Afghanistan's peace process.

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ASTANA STRIVES TO RESOLVE UKRAINE CONFLICT

Richard Weitz

Kazakhstan stands out in Central Asia and the South Caucasus for its government's activist diplomacy directed at building institutions, promoting disarmament, and reducing Eurasian conflicts. Astana has sought to ban nuclear tests globally and extend confidence-building mechanisms throughout Asia, and Kazakhstan's past conflict resolution efforts have addressed Iran, water disputes, and Afghanistan. Kazakhstan's current mediation effort concerns the Ukraine conflict. Kazakhstan's recurring challenge, which may disrupt its Ukrainian efforts, is that its ability to resolve disputes is limited in the absence of supporting partners.

BACKGROUND: The forced resignation of President Viktor Yanukovich by the Euromaidan protests, Moscow's annexation of the Crimea in a controversial referendum rejected by Ukraine and most other world countries, and the fighting in eastern Ukraine between the Kiev government and Russian-backed separatists based in the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic prompted Kazakhstan to launch a sustained crisis management effort directed at Ukraine. The undertaking has involved government declarations, phone calls, and bilateral as well as multilateral meetings led by President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov.

Kazakhstan's concern has been deepened by the Western sanctions on Russia, Kazakhstan's main partner in many economic sectors, and the Russian countersanctions, which have banned imports of European Union

products. To prevent the illegal entry into the Russian black market of EU products intended for Belarus and Kazakhstan, which have refused to adopt the countersanctions despite their trilateral Customs Union with Russia, Russian officials have responded by restricting the transit of goods from Belarus into Kazakhstan through Russian territory.



(Source: [Presidency of Ukraine](#))

The parties to the Ukrainian conflict signed a truce agreement after several weeks of meetings in Minsk in August and September 2014, but that ceasefire has failed to hold. To promote a more enduring peace settlement, President

Nazarbayev has proposed convening a meeting of leaders from Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France in Astana to discuss strengthening implementation of the Minsk agreement, specifically how to bolster the ceasefire and release all Ukrainian prisoners. These so-called “Normandy Four” first met on June 6 on the sidelines of an event marking the 70th anniversary of the Allied D-Day amphibious landings in Normandy. Nazarbayev made the offer after meeting with French President Francois Hollande, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, and after speaking with German Chancellor Angela Merkel by phone.

Discussions continue at the expert and diplomat level over the timing, agenda, and participants of such a meeting. A December 30 statement on the Kazakhstan President’s official website said that, “Kazakhstan is ready to host negotiations on ... any other date that is convenient for the parties.” Divisions have emerged between the Europeans, with Hollande especially eager to hold the meeting and end the sanctions. In contrast, President Poroshenko would like to discuss the return of Crimea to Ukraine as well as restoring Kiev’s control over eastern Ukraine. Nazarbayev has stated that he hopes the talks could impart sufficient momentum to transform the ceasefire into a more comprehensive and enduring peace agreement. Following any meeting, the countries plan to return to the Geneva format, which would involve the U.S., which has offered general backing for measures to

end the fighting in Ukraine, and the UN.

IMPLICATIONS: Holding discussions in Astana offers certain advantages. Kazakhstan has good relations with all the major players. Neither German President Merkel nor French President Hollande attended the earlier talks in Minsk due to tensions with Belarusian President Lukashenko but are open to attending a summit in Astana. Relations between Kazakhstan and Ukraine have been good in recent years regardless of the changes in government in Kiev. The cooperation “Roadmap” signed in 2007 under former pro-Western President Viktor Yushchenko had essentially the same cooperative tone and content as that of the Roadmap signed in 2010 under Moscow-leaning President Yanukovich. Nazarbayev has publicly supported Ukraine’s independence and territorial integrity and right to choose its economic and security partners. Kazakhstan is a co-founder of the new Eurasian Union and a leading member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and also has close ties with Russia.

Kazakhstan’s motives for pursuing conflict resolution in general are straightforward. It wants to minimize regional conflicts that can threaten its strategic and economic interests as well as raise its national diplomatic profile by promoting international peace and hosting major world conferences. Kazakhstan is also currently seeking to become a member of the UN Security Council and may hope to strengthen its candidacy through successful

diplomatic initiatives. The other governments have seemed to welcome Kazakhstan's mediation efforts due to the limited effectiveness of the UN, the OSCE, and alternative mediation mechanisms.

Kazakhstan has long sought to advance regional economic social integration as well as reduce regional tensions that threaten its vital national interests. Astana's recent conflict resolution efforts have included hosting several rounds of meetings in 2013 between Iran and its P5+1 partners (all five permanent UN Security Council members and Germany). The sessions helped jump start the stalled talks which, later that year, reached an interim agreement that remains essentially in force. Furthermore, Kazakhstan and its neighbors have had to cope with the absence of an effective regional mechanism for managing Central Asia's limited water supplies. Therefore, in March 2013, Foreign Minister Idrissov visited Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to help settle their differences over the Rogun Dam, thereby securing some support for the principle that upstream and downstream states enjoy equal rights of access to shared water bodies. In the case of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan has been a leading force in the "Istanbul Process." These high-level meetings, which began in 2011 in Istanbul, try to further cooperation on concrete projects between Afghanistan and nearby countries located in "the heart of Asia." The six packages of interrelated confidence-building measures fall in the fields of education, counterterrorism, counternarcotics, disaster management,

infrastructure, and commercial and trade engagement.

Along with these general considerations regarding the reasons why Kazakhstan prioritizes conflict resolution in its foreign policy, the conflict in Ukraine has harmed Kazakhstan's economic and security interests. Kazakhstan does not want to give Russia the right to redraw national borders unilaterally or by force. The government has refused to recognize the independence of the Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which Russian troops have occupied since the August 2008 Russia-Georgia War.

Kazakhstan's officials also share the common Eurasian concern that, in trying to punish Russia, the Western governments have inadvertently inflicted much collateral damage on other countries. In accordance with their practice of seeking friendly relations with all important countries, Kazakhstan's officials have refrained from explicitly criticizing the Russian, Ukrainian, or Western governments or officials for these actions, but they would like to have the various sanctions and other punitive measures removed.

Furthermore, Kazakhstan would like to restore its economic relations with Ukraine. When he met with President Poroshenko in Kyiv on December 22, Nazarbayev lamented the decline in bilateral trade and investment between the two natural economic partners. Foreign Minister Idrissov has observed that. "We are connected to Ukraine by a common history, close economic links

and shared priorities,” including some 330,000 ethnic Ukrainians who compose one of Kazakhstan’s largest minorities and act as a “living bridge” between the two nations.

CONCLUSIONS: In seeking to resolve Eurasian conflicts, Kazakhstan’s main challenge is that Astana’s diplomatic and other conflict-resolution resources, though expanding, remain limited. Kazakhstan lacks the means by itself to coerce other countries through pressure, or induce them through side payments, into making major concessions on long-held national principles such as the right to enrich uranium or assured access to water. Furthermore, Kazakhstan cannot bring peace to Afghanistan or Ukraine when key actors, such as the Ukrainian separatists, see advantages in continuing the conflict. At best, Kazakhstan’s mediation can provide a benign mechanism that other parties can use to reach an agreement that they themselves see as promoting their interests—a favorable constellation of forces that is too often fleeting.

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HOW *RUSSKII MIR* ENTERS CENTRAL ASIAN POLITICS

Erica Marat

In Central Asia, developments in Ukraine are often seen through the lens of Kremlin propaganda. In Kazakhstan, provocative statements from high-level Russian politicians regarding statehood and separatism in Kazakhstan were reinterpreted and refuted by experts and MPs. In Kyrgyzstan, discussion has been more decentralized and initiated by pro-Russian MPs and NGOs. President Atambayev and other political actors prefer to ignore them, avoiding to blame the Kremlin directly. The influence of Kremlin propaganda poses a more urgent threat to the sovereignty of both countries than does the possibility of Kremlin hard-policy actions to destabilize parts of Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan in a similar fashion to Moscow's actions in Ukraine.

BACKGROUND: Russia's soft power has a tremendous influence in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as Russian media continues to set the tone for local discussions and political activities. The most common themes discussed in the media and within political circles include the large popular protests that toppled President Viktor Yanukovich's regime, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the ongoing civil war in Eastern Ukraine. These issues are usually perceived as unrelated events, and discussions are often infused with conspiracy theories.



(Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

In Kazakhstan's case, Putin's remarks last August on Kazakhstan gaining statehood only under President Nursultan Nazarbayev led to outrage in the parliament and among the wider public. Putin also said that Kazakhstan is part of the so-called *Russkii mir* (Russian world), a term that has gained ominous political connotations because of Russia's de facto annexation of Crimea and since Russia-backed mercenaries began fighting for the idea of Novorossiia in eastern Ukraine.

Putin's remarks were followed by those of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy two weeks later, when the controversial leader of the Liberal-Democratic Party hinted that, like eastern Ukraine, northern Kazakhstan legitimately belongs to Russia. Kazakh commentators are convinced that both Putin's and Zhirinovskiy's comments were staged and delivered to intimidate Kazakhstan's political leadership. In response to Putin's comments, there

was a public campaign of unclear origin calling for Kazakhs to send history books to Putin to educate him about Kazakhstan's past.

In addition to Putin and Zhirinovsky, the head of the "Other Russia" party, Eduard Limonov, has joined the list of notorious Russian nationalists insisting that some of Kazakhstan's territories should be annexed to Russia. Prior to Putin's and Zhirinovsky's recent statements, Limonov's provocations used to be regarded as outlandish. Today, Kazakhstani experts tend to view all three statements as representing the same Kremlin agenda.

While the discourse about the Ukrainian situation is top-down in Kazakhstan, the reverse is true for Kyrgyzstan. Starting this spring, several mass demonstrations have taken place in front of the Ukrainian embassy in Bishkek. All focused on issues that matter to the Kremlin, although the protestors did not directly link themselves to the Russian state. Demonstrators called for an end to fascism, backed the annexation of Crimea, and mourned those killed defending "Novorossiya" in Eastern Ukraine. Additional rallies were held in front of the U.S. embassy to call on Washington to stop intervening in Kyrgyzstan's domestic affairs.

In most cases, the main organizer was a group called *Russkii mir*. It is unclear whether this movement is a recent creation or existed before the Euromaidan events in Kiev. But the group became particularly vocal only in the past few months. Last month, *Russkii mir* protested in front of the

U.S. embassy in Bishkek, denouncing President Atambayev's meeting with billionaire philanthropist George Soros, who visited the capital city for a day. Observers have noted that only one participant in the demonstration appeared to be Kyrgyz; the rest were probably ethnic Russians. Ignoring the crowds, Atambayev welcomed Soros.

IMPLICATIONS: Interpretations of the political chaos in Ukraine over the past year have assumed idiosyncratic forms in Central Asia. While discussions in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are provoked by Russian officials and pro-Russian local groups, politicians and political commentators cherry pick events from Ukraine's recent history and adapt them to their own political agendas. Euromaidan, for example, is often associated with Western support for anti-government forces, not with the shortcomings of the Yanukovich regime. Political parties in Kyrgyzstan, such as Ata-Jurt, rail against Euromaidan, claiming that the U.S. is financing political change in the country, whereas political opposition groups like to threaten the incumbent president with mass protests to overthrow the government.

In Kazakhstan, however, interpretations of Putin's and Zhirinovsky's remarks about the country's territorial integrity and repercussions of the Ukrainian scenario with lost territories do not invoke Euromaidan. The months of protest are largely ignored, even by leading political experts, who believe that Kazakhstan's lack of civic activism

makes it incomparable with Ukraine. Political freedoms under Nazarbayev are much narrower compared with those under Yanukovich's regime.

Furthermore, in Kazakhstan the fact that Nazarbayev is often seen as the nation's founder is ignored. Instead, in reaction to Putin's statement, experts and MPs raced to talk about pre-Soviet forms of statehood on the territory of today's Kazakhstan. It seems that it is acceptable for Kazaks within Kazakhstan to present Nazarbayev as the father of the nation, but not for anyone outside of the nation to do the same.

Kazakhstan's worries about the possible proliferation of tendencies toward territorial secession have led to online censorship. Internet forums are closely monitored for any provocative or separatist content. Recently, Kazakhstan's authorities blocked the website *Meduza* for running a report titled "The People's Republic of Ust-Kamenogorsk," a region in the Eastern Kazakhstan Province which is called Oskemen in Kazakh. The report featured an interview with the head of Rudny Altai, Oleg Maslennikov, who called for the unification of ethnic Russians in one region. Maslennikov compared the alleged oppression of ethnic Russians in Ukraine with a similar situation in Kazakhstan.

In Kyrgyzstan, MPs follow Russia's lead by increasingly introducing measures to restrict various civic rights. In summer and autumn, the parliament discussed labeling organizations and individuals obtaining foreign grants as "foreign agents," as well as banning

"propaganda" about homosexuality. Both bills are similar to laws passed in Russia. It remains unknown whether the legislative initiatives were the result of Kremlin pressure on Kyrgyz MPs.

Finally, as a result of the Kremlin's attempts to coerce Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan into accepting the politicized concept of *Russki mir*, tensions in everyday life between the ethnic majorities and ethnic Russian minorities in these countries might be rising again. Although Russians in both countries have felt their privileged status eliminated in the post-Soviet era, Russians still enjoy far greater privileges compared to any other ethnic minority living in Central Asia. When governments adopt ethno-nationalist politics, it is mostly non-Russian ethnic minorities who feel the pressure. Often, they wind up with even fewer options for employment or education. The politicization of ethnicity by the Russian state may lead to future tensions in times of political uncertainty.

CONCLUSIONS: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan demonstrate how the idea of a politicized *Russkii mir* and recent developments in Ukraine enter public debate through statements by Russian officials, as well as through a more decentralized process initiated by pro-Russian MPs and NGOs. Discussions about what events in Ukraine mean for domestic politics – and Russian involvement – in both countries have assumed idiosyncratic forms and are often infused with conspiracy theories. Subsequently these discussions are politicized and adapted by Central

Asian politicians to suit their own political agendas. However, in times of political uncertainty, this may potentially lead to political frictions, as well as tensions between the ethnic majorities and ethnic Russian minorities. In Kazakhstan, this could conceivably take place during the inevitable transfer of power from Nazarbayev to his successor. In Kyrgyzstan, anti-Russian nationalism might be a factor in the next parliamentary and presidential elections.

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KABARDINO-BALKARIA: CONCLUSION OF NALCHIK TRIAL FAILS TO CALM VOLATILE REPUBLIC

Valeriy Dzutsev

Amid allegations of abuse, a highly controversial trial ended in lengthy prison sentences to suspected Islamic militants in Kabardino-Balkaria. An already violent republic may experience another spike of violence as the authorities demonstrate their lack of willingness to find political compromises. The absence of political mechanisms for bringing changes to the state system and economic recession are the two other major factors that will likely contribute to the deterioration of the security situation in the republic. Moscow's reliance on crude force and refusal to use political dialogue to settle differences are contributing factors to the instability in the republic.

BACKGROUND: A court trial that was unprecedented in Russia concluded in the city of Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria on December 23, 2014. The republic's Supreme Court sentenced 57 people to various prison terms, including 5 for life. The authorities are still looking for another 14 suspects that were reportedly involved in the crime. The trial lasted for nine years and despite its conclusion did not end the controversy over the process. The convicts, radical Islamists, were charged with staging a massive attack on Nalchik in October, 2005, when scores of militants attempted to take over government buildings in the city by a surprise attack. According to official information, 35 servicemen, 95 rebels and 12 civilians died in the assault. The officials assert that the notorious rebel commanders Shamil Basaev, Anzor Astemirov and Ilyas

Gorchkhanov, orchestrated the attack. Kabardino-Balkaria has never regained the status of a "quiet" republic since the attack in 2005 and it is unlikely to do so after the controversial verdict.



(Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Many peculiarities and outright breaches of the law prompted Amnesty International to condemn the court ruling. "The guilty verdicts and harsh sentences against 57 defendants accused of participating in an armed attack in the North Caucasus republic of Kabardino-Balkaria in 2005 are a huge

miscarriage of justice,” Amnesty International said on December 23, 2014. The authorities routinely refused to investigate multiple allegations of torture, according to the human rights activists.

At least one detained individual, Valery Bolov, died of beatings in custody and photographic evidence suggests that all of the suspects experienced harsh treatment in detention. Many of the suspects disavowed their confessions, saying that they were extorted from them by torture. The case of former Guantanamo detainee Ruslan Kudaev is especially well known. Kudaev was captured by U.S. forces in Afghanistan and spent 2.5 years in Guantanamo, but was subsequently released. Kudaev was briefly detained in Russia upon his arrival but then released, eventually becoming a local “celebrity” in Kabardino-Balkaria. Multiple witnesses said that Kudaev was not in Nalchik during the attack in 2005, but he was still sentenced to life in prison. Even some pro-Kremlin journalists, like Maksim Shevchenko, were outraged at Kudaev’s prison sentence, saying that the authorities sentenced him only for his refusal to provide false evidence against other people. “All charges were based only on confessions. All confessions were extorted by torture,” Shevchenko wrote. Shevchenko compared the trial with those during the Stalin era that were designed to intimidate the public and strengthen the repressive foundations of the state.

The unusually long and traumatic trial reverberated in all layers of Kabardino-Balkarian society and even across the

Russian judicial system, prompting the government to tighten legal procedures. For example, a special law on suspending jury trials in some cases was passed and was applied to this case *ex ante*, against the ruling of Russia’s own Constitutional Court.

IMPLICATIONS: On the day of the verdict reading, the security in the city of Nalchik was stepped up. Police with machineguns controlled the area around the courtroom and far beyond. Security in Kabardino-Balkaria deteriorated rapidly after the attack of 2005 and hundreds of people have since then been killed in the republic. The security situation shows few signs of improvement even now. In the period January-November, 2014, Kabardino-Balkaria came as the second most violent republic in the North Caucasus after Dagestan, according to an analysis of open sources by the Caucasian Knot website. 42 people were killed and 17 injured in insurgency-related attacks in the republic.

The trial may well have convinced all Muslim radicals in the republic that surrendering to the authorities is not an option. The Russian government not only failed to guarantee a fair trial, but even personal survival in detention. This does not leave many avenues for a peaceful settlement in Kabardino-Balkaria. In preparation for difficult times, the government announced in December 2014 the opening of two more federal militarized checkpoints in the republic. Police officers from other regions of Russia serve at the checkpoints, reflecting the Russian government’s distrust in the local police

and an increasing resemblance to colonial rule over an alien population.

A survey among young people conducted in Kabardino-Balkaria in 2014 indicated that material inequality was one of the major factors in the radicalization of the youth. The growing rift between North Caucasians and ethnic Russians also appeared to be an important driver of radicalism. The current political and economic situation in Kabardino-Balkaria does not appear to favor positive changes in public attitudes. Direct elections of the regional governor were abolished. The republic's economy under the conditions of economic sanctions against Russia is projected to deteriorate further as it heavily depends on budgetary injections from Moscow. About 55 percent of budget revenues in the republic come from the central government. Unemployment, which is cited as one of the primary drivers of radicalization among young people, is likely to soar from the estimated 10 percent in 2014.

Kabardino-Balkaria, or more specifically the Circassians/Kabardins, also have a specific sore that make them stand out in comparison to other North Caucasian republics: Russia's unwillingness to admit ethnic Circassians from war-torn Syria. An estimated 100,000 ethnic Circassians resided in Syria prior to the outbreak of civil war. Many of these people were stranded in the war zone. Slightly over 1,000 Syrian Circassians made it to Kabardino-Balkaria and the other Circassian populated republics of Adygea and Karachaevo-Cherkessia.

Moscow has refused to admit any more Circassians from Syria, apparently regarding them as a security threat. At the same time, the Russian government has opened the door to ethnic Russian emigrants, thereby sparking accusations of double standards and fueling ethnic tensions in the republic.

Russia's propagandist campaign in support of ethnic Russians in Eastern Ukraine had unintended consequences in the North Caucasus, including in Kabardino-Balkaria, where some refugees from Ukraine ended up. Comparing the Russian state's favorable attitude toward ethnic Russians from Ukraine to a far less generous treatment of Syrian Circassian refugees, some Circassians have bitterly criticized the authorities.

CONCLUSIONS: The controversy over the attack on Nalchik and the subsequent trial did not bring a sense of closure to Kabardino-Balkaria. Rather, the end of the trial and the long prison sentences it entailed may have a radicalizing effect on the republic's Muslim community. Even if the security situation does not deteriorate immediately, the rift between the authorities and the population is likely to grow. The Kabardino-Balkarian population's alienation from Russia could be further exacerbated by Moscow's differential treatment of ethnic Russians and ethnic Circassians. As Russia faces recession and its ability to fund its North Caucasian periphery is projected to decline, the allegiance of local rulers may also be called into question.

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BIOMETRICS AND KYRGYZSTAN'S 2015 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Zamira Sydykova

It is not even ten years since Kyrgyzstan went through two revolutions and an ethnic conflict of the summer of 2010, but we are now approaching new parliamentary elections which, as we are promised, will employ new IT technologies. However, even today, more than six months before the elections (they are planned for October-November 2015) these technologies are a subject of concern among the general population and of an even bigger unease among politicians.

This is the biometrics technology which the government of Kyrgyzstan is making hasty attempts to implement and is so readily reporting every day how many citizens and from which regions submitted their fingerprints.

For Kyrgyz people who already staged two revolutions, one of which (in 2005) was instigated specifically by the falsified elections, each suspicion sparks their revolutionary spirit. Cheated by previous governments, they are very wary of the biometrics and are very apprehensive because they believe that the new elections will spark new instability.

The biometrics technology was only tested during elections by a handful of countries – Mongolia, Bolivia and Venezuela. For instance, in Mongolia, a country with a population of 5 million people, the citizens were fingerprinted

and the government retained the fingerprints. Polling stations were equipped with special machines that read the fingerprints of each voter, so on the day of the elections voters would just open up their computers and push on the candidate, party or law that they were voting for and that was it. Voters could vote from anywhere, even if they were in a different city or abroad. The votes were counted immediately.

However, neither Europe, nor the U.S. adopted this approach for reasons of security in general and specifically because this would constitute a violation of the citizens' right to the secrecy of vote. Their discussions did not even include fingerprinting which in itself is a highly sensitive procedure involving storing highly sensitive information. For instance, in order to collect biometrical data of the 5 million people in Mongolia, 5,000 IT specialists were employed. It is unlikely that they were all sworn to secrecy.

Initially the government of Kyrgyzstan intended to implement an automated system, National Registry of Citizens, which would contain data for different categories of the population. It was later decided to combine this with the voter registration system so that they could obtain a list of voters and their identifying information – all in one registry. But when the campaign to collect biometric data commenced, a lot of issues surfaced. It is entirely possible

that this issue would not have gained so much publicity were it not for the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Aside from purely technical issues which were in great detail presented in Kyrgyzstan by the civic organization Citizens' Initiative for Internet Policy, and in particular, how biometric data will be stored in view of the peaked cyber-attacks around the world (e.g. during the elections in Estonia the database was kept in an embassy of a foreign state), there are many other problems which need to be solved.

Biometric voter registration is not prescribed by any law and neither is it part of the constitution which in Part 4 of Article 2 states, "Elections are free. Elections of the representatives to Zhogorku Kenesh, of the President and representatives of the local elective government bodies are held on the basis of universal, equal and direct right to vote by secret ballot".

The Government of Kyrgyzstan has announced that those who did not submit their fingerprints would not be allowed to vote. Moreover, even if an individual did provide his or her biometric data but for some reason will be in any other place or outside of the country, the person will definitely not be able to vote. However, internal and external migration in Kyrgyzstan are very high. It is inevitable that civic activists will be filing complaints with the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic about violation of their voting rights. This, in turn, will add to the chaos surrounding the upcoming political process in the country.

Part of the population is already of the opinion that the electronic voting will be easy to falsify, whereas the political elite who is poised to take part in the elections yet needs to figure out what rules will apply. At this time the parliament of Kyrgyzstan has on its docket four draft laws on elections. A serious concern is the impending increase of the 10 percent threshold and a non-refundable deposit (which will be just short of a million dollars). This will significantly impede the competitive abilities of political parties. Moreover, these restrictions are proposed by the governing pro-presidential coalition in the parliament. Rumors hold that the upcoming elections are being prepared by the presidential administration and the government and not by the Central Election Committee who now is not in charge of anything, not even of the voter registration.

TAJIKISTAN'S RULING PARTY PREPARES FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Oleg Salimov

Tajikistan's ruling National Democratic Party of (NDPT) held its 12th convention on December 13, 2014. The convention of the largest parliamentary party, holding 45 parliamentary seats out of 63, was led by its chairman, Tajikistan's President Emomali Rakhmon. The upcoming national and local parliamentary elections in February 2015 were the central theme of the convention. The delegates discussed the parliamentary work done by the party in the last five years and reviewed the party's program and agenda for the upcoming parliamentary elections. The current convention also marked the twentieth anniversary of NDPT.

Alongside the NDPT convention in Dushanbe, the second week of December was marred by the increased harassment of opposition political parties and their members. Tajik police held in custody numerous members of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRP), who were headed to IRP's own convention in Dushanbe, in Djirgatal and Asht districts for several hours without explanation. Also, the deputy chairman of the Social-Democratic Party of Tajikistan Shokirjon Khakimov reported an attempted arrest and harassment by police officers before his scheduled roundtable meeting at the Central Election Committee in Dushanbe on December 11. Khakimov is convinced

that these incidents were preplanned, likely to repeat, and aimed to intimidate parliamentary candidates.

Pressure on NDPT's parliamentary opponents is applied also through more subtle, intellectual means. The Center on Modern Processes and Forecasting, which was founded by the Tajik Academy of Science in June 2014, has drawn attention as a result of its controversial statements on the IRP. According to its director, Khafiz Boboerov, the Center was organized with the purpose of establishing a scientific basis for the country's development process. According to Boboerov, one of the Center's main research priorities is to establish control over theological, and in particular Islamic, influence in state politics. The Center presents its findings and conclusions on political Islam and the IRP for the consideration of the Tajik government. The statement gives rise to suspicion that the state funded academic institution was created with the primary purpose providing intellectual support for the ruling party's attempts to weaken its main political opponent.

At the same time, NDPT dominates the political arena in Tajikistan. The party counts nearly 250,000 members and controls 71 percent of Tajikistan's parliament. It has continuously held a majority in the parliament since the 2000 parliamentary elections. The party

includes the youth branch “Builders of Motherland” created in July 2011 and publishes its own newspaper “People’s tribune.” NDPT maintains five executive committees in all regions of the country, which unify 3,458 local representations. NDPT’s December convention was preceded by a convention held one month earlier on November 13 in Sughd region, led by deputy chairman Asror Latifzoda. The Sughd convention reviewed last year’s performance of the party’s regional committees. It also served to reinforce the number of party members ahead of the more important Dushanbe convention in December.

Speaking at the Dushanbe convention, Rakhmon emphasized the importance of attracting younger generations of Tajiks to NDPT’s ranks. The idea behind Rakhmon’s statement is to facilitate a generational succession which can contribute to NDPT’s political longevity and by extension that of the current regime. NDPT also seeks to remain relevant among Tajik labor migrants, which was indicated in the presentation given by Murivat Malikshoev, the NDPT’s representative in Russia’s Irkutsk region. Tajik labor migrants constitute a significant electoral mass outside of Tajikistan and the NDPT branch in Russia is a unique political structure targeting this particular group. NDPT is set to convince Tajik migrants that their ability to live and work in Russia is a direct result of the policies pursued by Rakhmon’s regime and the ruling party.

One of Rakhmon’s most quoted statements at the convention was his proclamation that elections should be open, democratic, and transparent. Rakhmon stressed the NDPT’s commitment to political and economic freedoms, rule of law, freedom of speech, a multiparty system, civil society, and democratization. However, Tajikistan has over the last year seen a tightening of civil liberties through harsh regulations on anti-governmental demonstrations, suppression of political initiatives through the imprisonment of Zaid Saidov, the founder the “New Tajikistan” party, infringements on the freedom of speech through detainment and persecution of various public figures, individuals, and journalists, and repression against opposition parties and their members. While the NDPT is likely to attain a sweeping victory in the approaching parliamentary elections, this outcome will have ambiguous implications for Tajikistan’s democratization.

AZERBAIJAN TIGHTENS PRESSURE ON DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN NGOs

Mina Muradova

As Azerbaijan prepares to host the first European Games this summer, new sport and non-sport venues are being constructed and infrastructure is being renovated. By investing millions to organize the games in just 30 months, Azerbaijan's government seeks to promote the young Caspian state through an ambitious sport event.

However, against this backdrop, Azerbaijan's government has intensified its crackdown on journalists and civil society representatives. Human Rights Watch issued a statement on January 20, saying that over the past year, the Azerbaijani government used a range of bogus criminal charges, including narcotics and weapons possession, tax evasion, hooliganism, incitement, and even treason, to convict or imprison at least 34 human rights defenders, political and civil activists, journalists, and bloggers, prompting others to flee the country or go into hiding. Following the prosecutors' requests, courts have frozen the bank accounts of at least 50 nongovernmental groups and in some cases the accounts of their staff, as part of ongoing criminal investigations against several foreign donors.

Another human rights watchdog, the International Federation for Human Rights, stated that Azerbaijan has adopted a whole arsenal of "anti-NGO laws" since 2013. NGOs are henceforth compelled to register their organization

with the government and their funds with the Ministry of Justice in order to receive funding (whether from inside or outside the country). Those who cannot or refuse to register their subsidies from abroad therefore break the law. The use of non-registered subsidies is now deemed to be an administrative offense and the judiciary considers the funds to be a source of taxable personal income.

The latest move to silence alternative voices was a police raid on the office of U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty on December 26, detaining journalists for hours. Former journalists of the station have also been questioned by police. Inspectors from the prosecutor's office ransacked the company safe, seized computers, memory sticks, and documents, and sealed the office shut.

"This operation is clearly designed to block the activities of our Baku bureau and threaten our journalists," Radio Azadliq director Kenan Aliyev told Reporters Without Borders. In a statement, Radio Azadliq co-director and Editor Nenad Pejic said: "The order comes from the top as retaliation for our reporting and as a thuggish effort to silence RFE/RL." Prosecutors said the bureau's work was to be terminated, but did not specify for how long.

Azerbaijani prosecutors have staged similar raids in recent months on other

so-called foreign entities, including foreign nongovernmental organizations such as IREX, the National Democratic Institute, and Oxfam.

The Baku bureau of RFE/RL was shut down twenty days after the arrest of its prominent anchor Khadija Ismayilova. She is well-known as an investigative reporter who published several reports about government corruption and the business of the president's family members. Ismayilova was detained for two months on heavily disputed charges of "inciting" a former colleague's suicide. If convicted, Ismayilova may face up to seven years in prison.

Pejic said "The arrest and detention of Khadija Ismayilova is the latest attempt in a two-year campaign to silence a journalist who has investigated government corruption and human rights abuses in Azerbaijan ... The charges brought against her today are outrageous. Khadija is being punished for her journalism."

In 2012, the Zeit Stiftung and Fritt Ord Foundation awarded Ismayilova with the Gerd Bucerius Free Press of Eastern Europe Award. She has received many other awards and is a respected journalist. She has published stories related to corruption in Azerbaijan, in particular within the Organized Crime and Corruption Project. Most recently, she also worked on consolidating the list of up to 100 political prisoners in Azerbaijan, prepared by Azerbaijani NGOs. Although her accuser, Tural Mustafayev, has withdrawn his complaint, she remains in detention.

"The arrest of Ismayilova is nothing but orchestrated intimidation, which is a part of the ongoing campaign aimed at silencing her free and critical voice," Dunja Mijatović, the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media, said in a written statement. Khadija Ismayilova was arrested the day after the head of the Presidential Administration Ramiz Mehdiyev published a lengthy article in which he directly calls NGOs the "fifth column." He publicly accused Ismayilova of treason and called RFE/RL's employees in the country spies.

"She along with her 'friends' prepare anti-Azerbaijani programs, make indecent statements, demonstrate an openly hostile attitude to well-known public figures and disseminate a lie. Her position has nothing in common with her journalist profession," Mehdiyev wrote in his article and specifically noted: "It is clear that this sort of defiance pleases Ms. Ismayilova's patrons abroad."

This week a group of international NGOs started a campaign urging President Ilham Aliyev to release prominent human rights defenders who are currently behind bars in Azerbaijan. Another group of NGOs sent a letter to German Chancellor Angela Merkel ahead of her upcoming meeting with Aliyev on January 21 in Berlin. "President Aliyev is seeking a greater legitimacy by meeting the world leaders and hosting mega sporting events," said Hugh Williamson, HRW's Europe and Central Asia director. "Merkel should send a clear message that closer political and economic ties with Europe

are directly linked to Azerbaijan's release of unjustly jailed journalists and human rights advocates and respect for fundamental human rights."

The "Sports for Rights" NGO coalition issued a statement saying "Azerbaijan's partners should insist that this terrible situation in the country's human rights record is removed before Baku plays host to the European Games, and that these people be released immediately and unconditionally. We sincerely hope that we can count on your [Merkel's] principled leadership on this urgent matter."

RUSSIA INCREASES PRESENCE IN GEORGIA'S ENERGY AND TRANSPORTATION MARKETS

Eka Janashia

At the beginning of 2015, Russia's state-owned oil producer Rosneft entered Georgia's oil retail market by purchasing a 49 percent stake of Petrocas Energy Ltd. Petrocas' affluent assets include an oil terminal in Georgia's Black Sea port of Poti with a capacity of 1.9 million tons per year as well as a network of 140 gas stations in Georgia under the Gulf brand.

By launching a joint venture with Petrocas, Rosneft will gain high-quality storage capacity in one of the major oil and oil products hubs in the region, enrich supply routes options and enhance its operations in the Central Asia and South Caucasus oil market. "[It] is a new milestone that will highlight the strategic importance of the South Caucasian energy corridor," the main shareholder of Petrocas, Russian businessman David Iakobashvili said.

The opposition United National Movement (UNM) party insisted that Rosneft plans to acquire a controlling interest in Petrocas and called on the government to revoke a deal damaging to state interests. The government responded that it was during UNM's term in power that Russian investments penetrated strategic areas of Georgia's economy such as finances, electricity, chemicals, ore industry, food and dairy products. For example,

at that time, the Russian state-owned electricity trader, Inter RAO, obtained 75 percent of Tbilisi's electricity distribution company Telasi, thermal power generating plants, as well as the management right of two hydro power plants; Khrami I and Khrami II. The government also lamented that it has no right to influence private business, especially the decisions of Petrocas, which is registered in Cyprus and manages its operations from there.

UNM counter-argued that Rosneft operations in Abkhazia breach the Law on Occupied Territories and that the government is obliged to cancel the agreement granting the Russian company "the most important communications on the country's Black Sea shore."

Indeed, in 2009 Rosneft started offshore explorations and development of oil and gas fields in Abkhazia under an agreement signed between the company and Abkhazia's de facto government. Against this background, three of Georgia's government agencies began to study the legitimacy of the Rosneft-Petrocas deal. The results are yet unknown.

The recent deal reflects Russia's strategy to strengthen its infrastructure capabilities in the South Caucasus to ensure an uninterrupted delivery of oil as well as other products to Armenia,

which recently became a member of Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) but lacks land access to other EEU members in the absence of common borders. The reconstruction of the railway through Abkhazia and the planned Avro-Kakheti highway from Dagestan to eastern Georgia and then to Armenia, can be understood in this light.

While improving Armenia's situation is Moscow's key rationale, the Kremlin is also interested in consolidating its position in the Georgian market. UNM asserts that the Rosneft-Petrocas deal is only the beginning of "a big process" and unless countervailing measures are taken, "Moscow will have no obstacles at all."

On January 17, Iase Zautashvili, the General Director of Airzena, Georgia's national airlines, disclosed correspondence between Georgian and Russian state agencies regarding the prospect of restoring flights between the two countries. These clandestine negotiations aim to grant Russian companies a monopolistic position in Georgian airspace, Zautashvili said.

Referring to other covert correspondence taking place between the Russian and Georgian sides via the Swiss Embassy, UNM claims that 11 Russian companies, including Vladimir Putin's Private Company, will enter Georgia's airspace by dumping prices and eliminating the competition, including the national airlines, in order to obtain a monopolistic position in the Georgian market. The UNM also claims that some of these companies fall under the international sanctions

against Russia while others have violated the Law on Occupied Territories.

The Enguri hydropower plant with a total capacity of 1,300 megawatts could become another target of Russian strategic interest. Russia allegedly intends to register Georgia's most powerful hydroelectric station in the region in Abkhazia. Although Georgia's Ministry of Energy categorically denies that the plant's ownership is under discussion, Aslan Basaria, Director of Abkhazia's power company Chernomorenergo, claims that negotiations have already been launched with participation of the Georgian side. "The plant is located on Georgian territory and belongs to the Georgian state. The Chernomorenergo Director General's statement is far from reality," the Ministry of Energy says. Despite the denial, Sokhumi in fact raised the question of the Enguri hydropower plant's ownership a month ago when Abkhazia's de facto leader Raul Khajimba said "what is located on our territory should be owned by the Abkhaz people."

In fact, the Enguri generators are located on the territory of occupied Abkhazia while its arch dam is in the Georgian-controlled area. According to the informal agreement reached between Tbilisi and Sokhumi in the 1990s, Abkhazia gets 40 percent of the electricity generated by the plant free of charge while the rest goes to Georgia. The fact that the agreement terms are rather favorable to the Abkhaz side suggests that the questions raised over

the plant's ownership comes from Moscow, rather than Sukhumi.

Taken together, signs are emerging of several steps taken by Russia to make inroads into vitally important sectors of Georgia's economy.