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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst is an English language global Web journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing the Central Asia-Caucasus region. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports however authors may suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in *The Analyst* (www.cacianalyst.org) and described below.

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Analytical articles require a three to four sentence 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.

Analytical article structure: Ideal length between 1000 and 1200 words.

KEY ISSUE: A short 100-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

BACKGROUND: 300-400 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: 300-400 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

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

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Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGO. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed has 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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TAJIKISTAN'S 'YEAR OF ARYAN CIVILIZATION' AND THE COMPETITION OF IDEOLOGIES

Pulat Shozimov

As a result of the revolution in Kyrgyzstan, Southern elites are coming to power, implying the deconstruction of the Soviet-era political configuration where the North dominated the South. This process is directly connected with the strengthening of national and religious projects in the entire Central Asia, with formerly marginalized Southern elites increasingly playing a key role. This change occurred earlier than elsewhere in Tajikistan. The "Year of Arian civilization" project is an example of southern nationalist elite projects. Northern elites, on the other hand, consider this project an indirect attempt to exclude them from political and economic power.

BACKGROUND: After the changes in Kyrgyzstan, at least a will to create modern democratic institutions can be observed. On the other hand, officials in Uzbekistan categorically assess that only the radical Islamic or semi-criminal forces can come to power if the existing Uzbek regime would collapse. Uzbekistan's government has its reasons and rationale for this conclusion, but the suppression of the opposition and limiting the space for the expression of the will of the people could lead to dangerous consequences.

Uzbekistan's case is connected with Tajikistan because of the key role of religion in politics in both countries. After long and complex negotiations between the United Tajik Opposition and the Tajik Government from 1994 to 1997, a peace agreement was signed in 1997. This deal ended the 1992-1997 civil war, and initiated a political culture of dialogue as well as political legitimacy for the two sides. These negotiations transformed the Islamic Party Renaissance of Tajikistan from its radical and militant direction towards a moderate and peaceful agenda.

However this does not mean Tajikistan does not have a problem. From 1998 onwards, strong competition has developed between the Government and the opposition. In spite of including 30% of opposition representatives into the power structures of the

Government, several leading figures have now, at the eve of the 2006 presidential elections, been excluded from government structures. The leader of the Democracy party Mahmadrusi Iskandarov is in jail, and some of the key opposition newspapers like 'Nerui Suhan' have been closed. Yet the political process continues, and the main players from the opposition are Abdullo Nuri, Chairman of the Islamic Renaissance Party, Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda and Muhiddin Kabiri, its vice chairmen, who continue to play an active role in the political life of Tajikistan.

Two main projects – the national and the religious – compete against each other in present-day Tajikistan. Where the Islamic Renaissance party tries to join the national and the religious, the Government seeks to separate them.

As the Government declared 2006 the year of Arian Civilization in the year of presidential election, representatives of political Islam are concerned with this project. They point out that the State tries to create the same situation on the eve of presidential election in 2006 as what happened in 1998-1999, where it was constructed an alternative religious-political project on the basis of Zoroastrian heritage. It is no secret that Tajikistan's President Emomali Rakhmonov considers Zoroaster as a Tajik from Bactria and connects Zoroastrianism directly with Tajik national identity.

One of the Aryan symbols was institutionalized in the national flag of Tajikistan, depicting seven stars above the crown of Ismail Samani, the founder of the Samanid Dynasty who is revered as the father of the Tajik nation. Interestingly, the same Zoroastrian symbol was used also from 1989 to 1991 by the National pan-Iranian cultural and political movement 'Rastokhez', which erected a monument of the epic Persian poet Firdausi in the center of Dushanbe after destroying a Lenin statue. After coming to power, Rakhmonov replaced the Firdausi monument with a giant statue of Ismail Samani.

The founders of the Aryan project are representatives of the South, and basically Tajiks with a secular and ethno-national orientation. This project aspires to replace the stern dualism between atheism and Islamism and create a space for coexistence of different approaches within a joint Tajik identity; and moreover, to create an ethno-national nucleus that could be the basis for Tajikistan's political unity.

IMPLICATIONS: Tajikistan has since its foundation lacked a state ideology and has been hesitant to develop one. At present Tajikistan officially bases its statehood on general democratic principles and stresses that no one ideology can be recognized as the State ideology.

However, representatives of Political Islam (IPRT) and the Communist Party insist that the state identify with their respective ideology. They argue that any state must have an ideology. The IPRT is working for basic principles of political Islam to be adopted into the cultural and political context of Tajikistan. Interestingly, the political Islam project, just like the official Aryan project, focuses on the ninth and tenth centuries, the period of Ismail Samani and the time of the appearance of the first Tajik State. Political Islam tries to connect Tajik identity with Islam through the Samani period, while the government uses the same period to build an ethno-national identity. Hence the Government refuses to adopt an official ideology, thereby having more space for political maneuver.

One of main goals of the Aryan project is to prevent the possibility of the Islamization or Turkification of

Tajik society. At the same time, there is a danger that if the Aryan project is radicalized, it could lead not to unity within Tajik society but to fragmentation. In particular, this risk is greatest in the northern region of Tajikistan, which is heavily Uzbek-populated and considered by the Tajik nationalist elites as the region of the country where the process of Turkification has progressed furthest and poses a threat to the state.

Of course, Tajikistan's Aryan project has nothing in common with Nazi German Aryan ideology. However it could be a base for the appearance of radical political groups that could provoke the process of disintegration of society in Tajikistan. In that case, Political Islam could prove to be a force capable of containing the radicalization of the Aryan project. On the other hand, if the constructors of the Aryan project are able to avoid ethno-nationalist radicalization and can show the influence of Zoroastrianism on Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the form of strengthening coexistence, this could help avoiding increasing tension on the ethno-national and religious basis. At the same time, the Government would be well-advised to recall the experience of Iran, where as a result of a radical implementation of a similar Zoroastrian- and Aryan-based project by the monarchy, an Islamic revolution took place in 1979.

CONCLUSIONS: Tajikistan has a paradoxical political situation where the restraining factors preventing the monopolization of power are not political institutions but a competition between different cultural and political projects and their charismatic leaders that create a propitious political balance in society. However, this situation is unlikely to continue indefinitely, and if these cultural resources will not be institutionalize in modern institutional forms, this could lead to the renewed destabilization of Tajikistan.

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FROM GUUAM TO CDC?

Daniel Linotte

Uzbekistan's withdrawal from GUUAM, the uneasy path of democracy in Azerbaijan, and the recent decision by the leaders of Georgia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine to create the Commonwealth of Democratic Choice (CDC) may have far reaching implications for the two CIS countries that are still struggling to overtake the negative legacy of former regimes, in particular corruption and poor governance. The new regional grouping may eventually replace the de facto weakened and ineffective GUUAM, opening unique opportunities for far-reaching cooperation and exchanges between new EU members and less advanced transition countries in the CIS region.

BACKGROUND: Uzbekistan officially notified its decision to withdraw from GUUAM on May 5, 2005. This move could have been anticipated a long time ago. Uzbekistan was not very involved in GUUAM activities and the growing repression in the country definitely diverged with the popular and pacific revolutions that took place in other member states, most obviously Georgia and Ukraine. But the case of Azerbaijan also diverged strongly with Uzbekistan in terms of general freedoms and the transparency of elections. Nevertheless, democracy does not seem to strengthen remarkably in Azerbaijan, and the media and the opposition are regularly confronted with pressures from authorities. The upcoming November 6 parliamentary elections will indicate whether Azerbaijan will move more significantly toward democracy.

For the time being, in "Western GUUAM", the new Ukrainian and Georgian leaders are showing little progress in the fight against corruption despite high hopes raised by the rose and orange revolutions. On the contrary, they seem to exhibit signs of early fatigue, raising skepticism and disillusion among supporters. Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, after being in power for about half a year, dismissed his entire cabinet because of growing evidence of corrupt practices. He even

accused his former Prime Minister, Yulia Timoshenko, of using political power for personal gain. The funding of his electoral campaign is also a source of concern. In Georgia, President Mikheil Saakashvili's firm stance against corruption seems to have faltered, and as indicated by recent statements from journalists and political opponents, he is being accused of trying to impose restrictions on basic freedoms. Whether real or perceived, such alarming developments require more vigilance and reactions from the international community, the West in particular, to help strengthen democracy and civil society in these countries. Realism and pragmatism must prevail. In particular, emerging international relations and groupings should be fully exploited to support new initiatives to improve governance and raise transparency. In that context, the planned creation of the Commonwealth of Democratic Choice by the leaders of Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Georgia, and possible follow-ups, might create very unique opportunities for far reaching cooperation between new EU members and CIS states, far beyond mere political statements. While initially limited to two states from each group, this could be only the beginning.

IMPLICATIONS: Poland and Lithuania can be considered interesting case studies in the fight against corruption. As indicated by international

experts, Poland is a country where the corruption levels have fallen substantially after radical measures were taken. The fight against corruption in Poland is supported by the World Bank, which helped develop a strong anti-corruption program that is built on two major pillars: a high-level group reuniting leading political figures and civil society, with assistance provided to a series of key NGOs. Lithuania has also adopted new laws and created a powerful and independent body, the Special Investigations Services (SIS) at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which focuses on the linkages between organized crime and corrupt practices. In that respect, much importance is given to international criminal organizations operating in EU countries and in former Soviet Republics. These two countries now belong to the EU, which represents a formidable “nominal anchor” for the adoption of modern legislation, the promotion of good governance, democracy and human rights. Moreover, they are NATO members, which supports transparent practices in defense budgetary matters and the civilian control over the military.

The forthcoming CDC might be unique because it links new EU members with substantial experience in terms of successful political and economic reforms and former Soviet countries, members of the CIS that are still confronted with numerous challenges to consolidate their democratic regimes and develop their economies. Such a mix of countries could help initiate joint programs and projects to improve governance in the lagging countries, namely Georgia and Ukraine, relying on the experience of the leading countries, Lithuania and Poland. Twinning between countries that are to some extent comparable in size and share some common legacies would make sense – Poland with Ukraine, Lithuania with Georgia. Anti-corruption activities could be developed, using the combined resources of the twinned countries, with external support from other countries, including the U.S., International Organizations such as the UNDP, and Financial Institutions such as the IMF, World Bank

and EBRD. That would allow moving much closer to zero-tolerance policies regarding corruption. Poland is also hosting a “branch” of the Belgian-based *College of Europe*, which educates future cadres in new EU member countries, giving priority to governance matters. Such an institution could also focus on the training of future Ukrainian, Georgian, and perhaps other states’ political leaders and high-level civil servants.

CONCLUSIONS: The signing by four countries of the basic documents founding the CDC is expected to take place this fall at a summit in Ukraine where the U.S., the EU and Russia are to be invited as observers. The new organization is generally seen as a political one with the aim of promoting democratic values, as indicated by its name. This may definitely help both Georgia and Ukraine, i.e. countries in which corruption is quite resilient. It should be made clear that genuine democracies, in these countries and elsewhere, cannot develop with pervasive and high corruption levels. For that reason, CDC will become a meaningful organization if it helps to develop effective cooperation for combating corruption and enhance the quality of governance, which underlines that the organization must be both inward- and outward-looking. Success stories could allow CDC to expand in size and depth, bringing more countries closer to Western norms of democracy, freedoms and human rights.

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HOW MIGHT IRAN'S NUCLEARIZATION AFFECT CENTRAL ASIA?

Stephen Blank

It is clear or should be clear to observers that Iran is trying to build nuclear weapons in defiance of its international commitments to the International Atomic Energy Agency, European Union (IAEA), and the UN, let alone the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). It also is clear that its effort is precipitating a major international crisis. Yet few analyses of this issue's multiple dimensions have focused on its implications for the South Caucasus or Central Asia. If this crisis intensifies its repercussions will undoubtedly have an impact on those areas even if we cannot be certain as to its scope and duration.

BACKGROUND: It has long been known that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons capability to go with its enhanced missile and conventional programs, particularly naval and air programs. Most analyses of Iran's policies, both nuclear and conventional have, not surprisingly, emphasized the Gulf as the priority strategic direction but the importance of Central Asia and the Caucasus should not be overlooked, as Iran certainly does not. Since the advent of American bases there, Iran has gradually perceived them to be a threat and campaigned resolutely against any further expansion of the U.S. presence in the Caspian basin. It has also joined with Russia and China in an alliance against the United States. Thus Iran opposes the presence of all 'non-regional' powers in the area, a formulation also in favor among Russian officials. This formulation also allows it to support the Chinese and Russian presence in the area and this support has been rewarded by its elevation to an observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. That elevation represents an acknowledgment by Moscow and Beijing that Iran has legitimate interests in Central Asia that comport with their own interests and that deserve formal recognition. At the same time, and not by accident, these two states are Iran's major supporters in the UN and IAEA and their objections to bringing the Iranian violation of the NPT regime to the UN underscore their mutual alliance.

China's motives are quite clear. It depends increasingly on Iran for an unhampered energy

source in the Gulf, one that cannot be controlled or blocked by American influence. China also is clearly trying to create a 'multipolar world order' with Russia that leverages regional blocs to constrain and reduce Washington's scope for action and that obliges it to take their interests into consideration. China, like Russia, also strongly opposes U.S. calls for democratic reform throughout the CIS. Iran fears these calls as well and for the same reasons, seeing them a pretext for U.S. attacks on its own theocratic regime. Both Moscow and China value not only an anti-American Iran that allows them legitimate scope for playing a blocking role in the Gulf, they also value a friendly Iran that does not support Islamic revolution in the CIS and which is a lucrative source for their key lobbies supporting the proliferation of weapons. Those lobbies are their defense industries and arms sellers. In Russia's case, they are its Ministry of Atomic Energy (Minatom) who are champions of the Iranian connection in Moscow.

IMPLICATIONS: Iran, fearing expanded U.S. presence in Central Asia, has also undertaken a concerted campaign to improve its relations with all the states in the Caspian basin since 2002, offering to improve trade ties, economic assistance, and enhanced political ties so that they will not permit themselves to be staging bases for the U.S. military. Tehran clearly fears that U.S. bases in the CIS could be turned against it as it thought they might be used against Iraq. Iran now also supports Russia's recent proposal for a permanent Caspian

fleet to defend against terrorist or other threats – a thinly veiled program for permanent Russian naval dominance there. In return for such support against Washington, Iran gets reliable support for both its nuclear and conventional buildups from both Moscow and Beijing. Obviously these capitals hope that such weapon transfers will strengthen Iran's ability to deter American pressures if not attacks against Iran.

But Iran has threatened force against Caspian states before as in the summer of 2001 and with a nuclear shield for increased conventional capabilities, it could do so again if necessary. Certainly, these enhanced military capabilities would also allow it to provide more aggressive support to insurgents in any of these states because it would then have a potentially real deterrent with which to counter threats from other CIS actors against those insurgents.

Neither can the west, Russia, or China continue to count on domestic support for a less aggressive Iranian policy as the recent presidential elections showed that to be highly unlikely. Nor is Iran facing an economic crisis. In the last three years its average annual rate of economic growth has been 5.5% and it is literally rolling in money from oil and gas sales which it uses adroitly, e.g. with China and India, to advance its strategic interests and ward off reprisals for its nuclear program. Its energy revenues thus constitute not just economic power but power that can be transformed into enduring political leverage as well.

Iranian nuclearization would also increase the likelihood that Central Asia's efforts to establish a nuclear free zone would come under much more pressure whether or not it is formally postulated in a treaty. We might well expect increased attempts by proliferators of all stripes to traverse Central Asia with illicit or contraband materials of relevance to nuclear weapons programs.

This could only add to the stresses and strains of regional security in Central Asia. Should Iran become successful in its nuclear quest, then that region will be surrounded by five nuclear powers, Iran, Russia, China, India, and Pakistan. That can

only add to the militarization and polarization into rival and competing blocs that is already emerging quite clearly.

CONCLUSIONS: Any violation of international treaties and order poses major threats to those directly affected by it, especially if the transgressing state is successful in its activity. This is no less true as concerns Iran's attempts to defy the international community and build a nuclear weapon in defiance of its previous commitments. Equally dangerous for the Central Asian states is the fact that this violation is being supported by Russia and China who are acting as a bloc against an allied counter-bloc led by Washington. These pressures place Central Asian states exactly where they do not wish to be, i.e. between two rival coalitions, each demanding adherence at the price of their freedom of maneuver.

In many ways the prospect of Iran's nuclearization adds to the risks these states already confront. Certainly it introduces an unprecedented level of dynamism and threat to the regional systems wherein Iran operates, like Central Asia, as well as to global nuclear regimes. Certainly nuclearization not only intensifies the regional polarization among blocs as well as the militarization of the area. By also freeing Iran from external military constraint, it ultimately could allow Tehran to kick away the ladder of support from Russia and China and relate to them as an independent and credible military power in the area with its own agenda. The acquisition of such freedom from external constraint is a classic motive for proliferation and Iran is no exception. While Iran's quest for nuclear power and for this freedom may currently benefit Russia and China in the short or even middle term, it certainly does not benefit Central Asian states and may yet rebound as well upon Russia and China.

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ENGAGING ISRAEL: BLESSING OR CURSE FOR MUSHARRAF?

Naveed Ahmad

Over the last two weeks, engagement with Israel has become the buzz words for the largely state-manuevered Pakistani media which is relentlessly and hysterically sparing time and space for the pragmatic debate. Prior the Istanbul Sept 1 meeting of the Pakistani foreign minister and his Israeli counterpart, a hint of sympathy for Israel on national media – official and private both – was enough to earn the stigma of working against the national interest. Soon came, the historic Musharraf-Sharon ‘chance meeting’ and handshake at the UN. Just a couple of days later, General Musharraf showed up for a banquet dinner speech at the American Jewish Council. While this fast-forward approach has startled the Muslim world, it has equally shocked and confused the Pakistani people, who once again feel left out in the process.

BACKGROUND: Historically, the Muslims of South Asia stood for Palestine as far back as March 23, 1940, when they gathered in Lahore to demand the creation of an independent homeland of their own. It was no coincidence that after passing the Pakistan resolution, the Muslims of the subcontinent had also unanimously adopted a pledge on Palestine.

The resolution recorded, “. . . no arrangements of a piecemeal character should be made in Palestine which are contrary in spirit and opposed to the pledges given to the Muslim world.” The resolution further warned against “the danger of using force in the Holy Land to overawe the Arabs . . . into submission”.

Since the creation of Israel on May 14, 1948, the Islamic republic does not recognize her as a sovereign, legitimate state and fully backs the Palestinian standpoint. In early 1948, Pakistan’s founding father Mohammad Ali Jinnah wrote to US President Harry Truman that the creation of Israel is a crime and history will never forgive those responsible for committing it. Soon, Pakistan voted against Israel’s admission into the UN.

Interestingly, various Jewish studies record presence of some 2,000 Bene Yisrael Jews living in Karachi

and a few hundred lived in Peshawar in 1947 with two synagogues in both the cities. Given the strong pro-Palestine sentiments, the Jewish community migrated either to India or Israel, leaving behind today some 50 to 60 families (some 200 odd individuals) living a low-profile, anonymous life in Pakistan. About a dozen of them are employed with the government. The synagogue in Peshawar is closed while the one in Karachi’s Rancore Lines area was razed for construction of a plaza in the 1980s.

Until 1992, Pakistan’s refusal to recognize Israel led to prolonged Indian restraint in having diplomatic relations with the Jewish state. New Delhi believed that such a decision may bring the Arab states closer to Islamabad.

Violent protest rallies asked the government to send Pakistani troops in aid to the Arab nations fighting against Israel in 1967. Later, the Pakistani pilots flew Jordanian and Syrian fighter jets in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and shot down the Israeli planes.

However, Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto wanted to become the first foreign leader to visit the West Bank in 1994 but the ‘honour’ went to Tancu Ciller after the Israeli refusal.

While Israelis kept visiting Pakistan during and after the Afghan war, using their American or

European travel documents, a very small number of Pakistanis also traveled to the Jewish state on special visas. Though the two chronic US-allies have a history of secret contacts at the diplomatic level abroad, nothing was visible till Shalom-Kasuri meeting and now Musharraf's 30-minute address to Jews in New York.

IMPLICATIONS: In his speech to the American Jews, Pakistani military ruler Pervez Musharraf asked Tel Aviv to allow the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, as this would give Israel security and diplomatic ties with Pakistan.

The New York audience rose to applaud him when Musharraf said, "What better signal for peace could there be than the opening of embassies in Israel by Islamic countries like Pakistan?"

He told an Israeli newspaper that he had no timetable for such ties. "We need to sit down and talk more [with the Israelis]," he told *The Jerusalem Post*, "and see how to move forward. We ought to be taking more steps." Undoubtedly, Musharraf used the event to pledge that Pakistan ultimately intended to cement full diplomatic relations with Israel.

Under international law, recognition of a state can either be formal or implied. Formal recognition is conveyed to the state concerned by means of an express notification and implied recognition takes place through acts which, although not referring expressly to recognition, leaves no doubt as to the intention of doing so.

By far, the predominant majority of Pakistanis finds this sea-change in the country's foreign policy 'uncalled for' and 'in conflict with the decade-old principled stance'. More than the content of his speech, the Pakistani intelligentsia and common people alike question the very decision and timing to engage Israel at the highest level. He raised more eyebrows after he termed the last six decades in Muslim-Jewish relations an 'aberration'.

But then under Musharraf-run democracy, there is little room for public opinion on such fundamental issues. Naturally, the discontent against the military

dictator is bound to soar at home. However, serious analysts and politicians are stunned by this unilateral, hasty and tacit nod for recognition of Israel.

While the Israelis claim that the Pakistani gesture is long overdue, General Musharraf and his team seem to believe that good ties with Jerusalem must no longer be hostage to the vagaries of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Key figures in the military regime privately also admit that Jews are too difficult to be ignored for an improved perception of Pakistan in Washington and also for containing 'disturbing' Indo-Israeli strategic cooperation.

Wishfully, Islamabad hopes to curtail the burgeoning Israeli-Indian relationship, which has grave implications for its security. Factually speaking, the containment of Indo-Israeli military cooperation – based on highly sophisticated, long term and in large financial volumes – is near-impossible for a new friend.

The Musharraf regime also realizes that Pakistan is a latecomer in the rapprochement with the Jewish state and should have kept the option open to seek more leverage with the Arab countries. The use of unilateral withdrawal from Gaza may not go down well at home as a convenient pretext for such a policy turnaround. Such a feeble face-saving excuse may not convince a highly sensitized Muslim nation which holds Sharon responsible for the massacre of the Palestinians at Sabra and Shatila.

CONCLUSIONS: So far, Musharraf has interpreted his every action, from minor policy adjustment to absolute U-turns, in the best of national interest and for the greater benefit of the Muslim Ummah. Since his bloodless military coup in October 1999 and particularly 9/11, Musharraf dependence on support from Washington and other European allies has been on the rise. The move of engaging Israel has not just silenced but startled certain circles in America, which were finding Musharraf too vulnerable to be relying on as an ally in Afghanistan's neighborhood. Whatever the public sentiment, Musharraf's allies know that an

army general can only take such critical U-turns and still get away with.

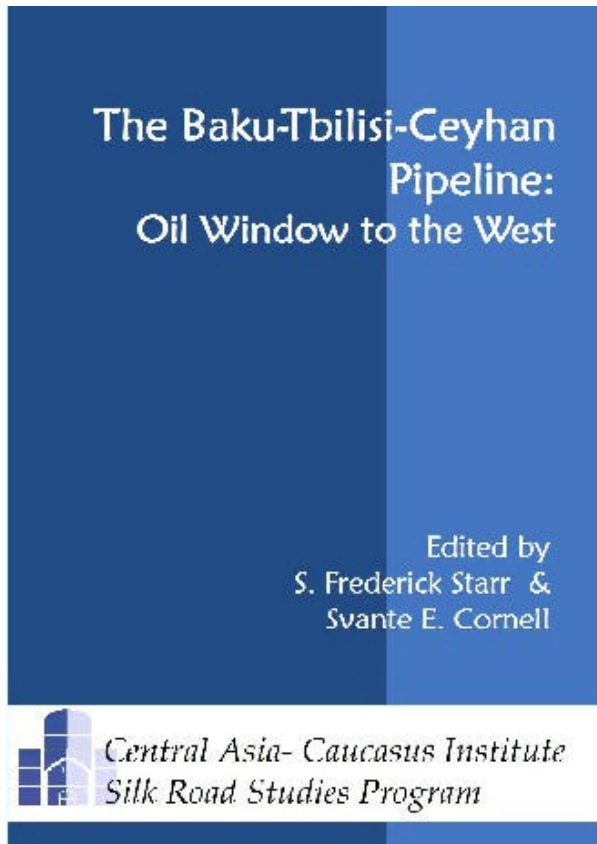
The engagement may help Pakistan improve its ranking within influential quarters in the U.S. and Europe, particularly led by the Jewish community, and mellow down its hostile projections in social life and media. Since the Istanbul meeting, Islamabad has been on the receiving end from the Arab world in particular and Muslim world in general. The Palestinians quickly shot down Islamabad's hot air balloon by publicly rebuking its claim of their support. Islamabad may need hectic diplomatic campaign to cool down her Arab friends.

Neither the Muslim world nor the Pakistani public is ready to accept the logic of resolution of the Palestinian problem by way of Israel's recognition. The establishment of full diplomatic relations with Israel by four major Muslim countries — Egypt, Jordan, Turkey and Mauritania — and trade links with Morocco, Tunisia and Qatar did little to

resolve the Palestinian problem. General Musharraf could be over-optimistic about his 'statesmanlike' profile while expecting to play a role in the creation of a viable Palestinian state.

The lines separating democracy, national interest and Musharraf's autocratic rule have of late been blurred beyond recognition. The course to hasty recognition of Israel may not serve the Palestinians at all but would significantly add to the profile of both Israel as well as General Pervez Musharraf.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Naveed Ahmad is an investigative journalist, broadcaster and academic whose work regularly appears in the Pakistani daily newspaper, The News, and the monthly magazine, Newline. He also hosts a 30-minute current affairs talk show, Insight, for Radio Pakistan's News and Current Affairs Channel. He serves on the panel of the Global Journalists Program, which is associated with the International Press Institute and U.S. National Public Radio.



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FIELD REPORTS

KYRGYZ PARLIAMENTARIAN BAYAMAN ERKINBAEV ASSASSINATED

Nurshat Ababakirov

In the evening of September 21, one of the deputies of Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament), Bayaman Erkinbaev, was shot to death by unknown assailants. Following the so-called Tulip Revolution, 3 assassinations of recognized people have taken place despite much-expected positive changes and stability. As a result, there are speculations of criminal connections by certain officials in the government and parliament. In addition, none of the killers have been found yet.

Bayaman Erkinbaev, 39, former wrestler, was shot as he was approaching his apartment in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan. This incident has led not only ordinary people into confusion, but also the people on the top, the government and Jogorku Kenesh. This could be seen in the parliamentary discussions the day after the assassination. All members of the government, including President Kurmanbek Bakiev, gathered before the Jogorku Kenesh, where a war of words between the executive and legislative branches followed. They accused each other of involvement in corruption and criminal activities.

Some of the deputies demanded the dissolution of the government due to its alleged incompetence. One of the oldest deputies, Dooronbek Sadyrbaev, even called for the President's impeachment. The president in his speech openly said, "You all know very well that the law enforcement agencies are corrupted and some of you are also involved in this. Therefore, do not pretend that you are innocent. This corruption existed long before and it did not emerge yesterday. It is so widespread that one cannot fight it alone."

Before his death, Bayaman Erkinbaev said he had been threatened on telephone. His bodyguards were arrested several days before. He apparently even complained to the Speaker of the Parliament, Omurbek Tekebaev, about the lack of protections. The day after his assassination, a pre-death letter was exposed in the news; however his colleagues rejected its validity, referring to Erkinbaev's poor writing skills in Russian. This letter explicitly favoured former President Askar Akaev and his regime. Nevertheless, this letter somehow affected common people's thoughts about the current government. The same day, Prime Minister Felix Kulov announced that he knew the identity of the killers, and that two days before, he had met with Bayaman Erkinbaev, who asked to publicize the name in case of his death. The fact was thought to make the Prime Minister himself a target for killers.

Bayaman Erkinbaev, a southerner, had been a leading businessman in the south of Kyrgyzstan and it was rumored that, given his alleged links to organized crime, he avoided prosecution by winning a parliamentary seat three times – in 1995, 2000, and 2005, offering him immunity. He owned big businesses such as the Alay Hotel in Osh, the Alysh Wrestling Center, the Turataly Bazaar in Karasuu, the largest wholesale market in Central Asia. One of the possible explanations to his assassination is his business interests. A month earlier, a group of demonstrators protested against high license fees introduced by Bayaman Erkinbaev's two sisters, who were running the market. Eventually, a new ownership under Abdalim Junusov, a competing businessman, was installed. However, in early

September Junusov and his driver were shot dead in Junusov's house. His family members and relatives blamed Bayaman Erkinbaev, who was then trying to get the market back.

However, others speculate that the Kyrgyz leadership is also involved in this incident. During the onset of the Tulip Revolution, it was believed that Bayaman Erkinbaev was rendering financial support to demonstrators in Jalalabad and Osh. In the aftermath of the revolution, he apparently fell out of favor with President Bakiev, who set fighting crime as one of the top priorities of his government. However, one has to consider the level of shadow economy, which exceeds 40% of Kyrgyzstan's national economy. Many businesses are forced to find semi-legal means or seek patronage from criminals or government officials in order to function.

The investigators say that the number of assassinations might continue to increase. The level of crime in Kyrgyzstan is connected to policemen's low salary, which is less than \$50 a month, considering Kyrgyzstan's average monthly salary is \$60. This has led to another problem affecting the quality of law enforcement – corruption. The

inability of the law enforcement agencies to effectively tackle criminals can be explained also by their demoralization after the assassination of two generals of the Ministry of Interior. Chyngyz Aliev and Uran Aliev (not related) were shot dead in November 2004 and August 2005, respectively, for their activity as investigators.

The previously assassinated pro-Akaev parliamentarian Jyrgalbek Surabaldiev was also owner of large trade centers. This coincidence might also suggest that the new composition of the government and the members of parliament were unable to divide business spheres or interests.

The government and the parliamentarians have become overtly sensitive to outside strikers. "After the recent frightening events, the main orders of law enforcement agencies has become to protect government officials and parliamentarians rather than the people" say human rights activists. After Bayaman Erkinbaev's death, parliamentarians were given the right to carry handguns, and their guards grew in number.

CHILLY DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN AZERBAIJAN AND RUSSIA

Gulnara Ismailova

Alleged U.S. plans to accommodate military bases on the territory of Azerbaijan and strengthening its military presence in the region can negatively affect Azerbaijani-Russian relations. Recently, the U.S. Embassy in Azerbaijan has confirmed information on the construction in Azerbaijan, with American participation, of two radar stations located in Astara, on the border with Iran and in the Khizi region, close to the Azerbaijan-Russian border. Both stations are thought to monitor Iranian airspace,

allowing Washington to be timely informed about any launches of the Iranian strategic missiles.

That American military installations are built in Azerbaijan is unpleasant news to Russian experts. Explained by the struggle against terrorism, the U.S. is seen as surrounding Russia with radar stations for the distant detection of missile launches.

At the same time, official representatives of the Azerbaijani government and military leadership

have failed to confirm this information. In the opinion of local politicians, these actions can deteriorate relations between Moscow and Baku. Etibar Mamedov, a leader of the "New Policy" block, argued that parliament should make proper decisions and legislation should be duly amended in order to establish American bases in Azerbaijan. But he said that at the same time it is necessary to consider the reaction of Russia and Iran. Ilgar Gasimov, head of the movement "In the name of Azerbaijan", said it would be strange if Russia did not react to the presence of U.S. military forces in Azerbaijan. "Sanctions which Moscow can apply will affect Azerbaijan dramatically"

In late 2003, rumors of the possible introduction of a visa regime between Russia and Azerbaijan leaked. At the time, the parties managed to overcome their disagreements. However, official Moscow in January 2005 introduced new procedures for CIS citizens by mandating the use of international as opposed to internal passports. This became another step of the Kremlin in relation to its Caucasian neighbors, including Azerbaijan.

Commenting on the situation, the Chairman of the Islamic committee of Russia, ethnic Azeri Heydar Djamal, raised fears that Russia could introduce a visa regime with Azerbaijan in connection with American military plans in the region, assessing it as a serious tool of political and economic pressure. No less than two millions Azeris earn money in Russia and send it to their families back home, he noted.

Recently, several hundred Azeris living in Russia have become victims of police brutality. A group of police special forces conducted sudden raids on a market near Moscow where

most traders hail from Azerbaijan. Police brutalized many Azeris and demanded they leave Russia. Tens were severely injured and hospitalized. During these pogroms, more than 200 Azeris have been detained. This was not the first incident between Azeris and representatives of Russian law enforcement bodies. In October 2002, an Azerbaijani citizen, Qasim Ajdarly, was killed by special divisions of the police

in a Russian shopping mall from injuries incurred by police beating. The Russian Public Prosecutor initiated proceedings to investigate any wrongdoing, but no result has been achieved.

Commenting on the increasing intolerance toward Azeris in Russia, Baku political scientist Rovshan Novruzoglu noted that in some cases murders or beatings of Azeris occur either with active police participation, or with promises police will not interfere. "Such cases have become common on Russian streets and have taken on a massive nature", Novruzoglu said.

According to economic expert Ingilab Ahmedov, the introduction of a visa regime and economic sanctions by Russia could have serious consequences. Foreign trade between Russia and Azerbaijan amounted to close to \$760 million in 2004, and Russian investments in Azerbaijan's economy amounted to \$120 million last year. "Azerbaijan is vulnerable in its economic

relations with Russia. Moscow could create discomfoting conditions for Azerbaijani citizens working there as day laborers and in markets. By blocking borders, Russia could create problems for the export of Azerbaijani agricultural products and for trade relations. We can feel Russian pressure in the geopolitical sense as well, including demonstrations of force in the Caspian Sea and problems with gas supply", Ahmedov emphasized.

As evidence of possible Russian economic pressure, it became known that in spite of numerous promises by the Russian government to allow to Azerbaijani vessels to pass through the Volga-Don canal connecting the Caspian Sea with world seas, this question has not been resolved. The first round of negotiations on the issue between Azerbaijani Deputy Prime Minister Abbas Abbasov and his Russian counterpart ended without positive results. According to the chief of information of the State Caspian Sea Shipping Company Vugar Sadigov, no Azerbaijani vessel has passed through the canal since the beginning of the year. "Three ships transporting oil equipment for British Petroleum were allowed to pass from Azov to the Caspian Sea.

Now they are moored in an Azerbaijan port and cannot go back. Some figures in Russian official circles are not interested in normal relations with Azerbaijan and lobby their own interests. At the same time, Azerbaijan carries material losses”, Sadygov stated.

Responding to information on American radar stations in Azerbaijan, Russian news agencies distributed reactions by the Russian Ministry of Defense. According to Interfax, ministry spokesmen considered the establishment of U.S. radar stations 130 km from the Russian border as undesirable, even though it would not affect the Russian military’s readiness. Russia would also need

to consider the type and capacity of such as radar station and the reason for its construction before responding.

Meanwhile, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov confirmed the Kremlin’s decision to construct two new military bases on the territory of the Russian North Caucasus, near Russia’s border with Azerbaijan and Georgia. “New bases will be mountain brigades complemented with helicopters. They will have special weaponry in order to protect the Russian border with the countries of the South Caucasus in cooperation with border guards”, Ivanov declared.

PESHAWAR SEMINAR ON GLOBAL TERRORISM

Zahid Anwar

Speakers representing leading European nations, the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China at a recent seminar in Peshawar admitted there is no unanimously accepted definition of “terrorism”, though they seemed unanimous on the point that al-Qaeda had masterminded most terrorist actions in the world since the 9/11 tragedy in United States.

The seminar, “Global Terrorism: Assessment from Russia, China and Germany,” was organized by the Area Study Centre for Russia, China and Central Asia at Peshawar University in collaboration with the Hanns Seidel Foundation of Germany, on 1 September 2005. The first guest speaker, Rolf Tophoven from the Institute of Terrorism Research and Security Policy, Essen, Germany, while quoting German intelligence sources, disclosed that the al-Qaeda network of Osama bin Laden had its cells in sixty countries of the world. In Germany alone, he continued, there were 31,000 sympathizers of Osama bin Laden of whom 500 were to be considered extremely dangerous. There were, he said, up to 10,000 active supporters of Al-Qaeda in the United Kingdom. The militants have expanded their

operational bases in Europe during the past two years.

Talking about the modus operandi of al-Qaeda, the German scholar said, the old Al-Qaeda no longer has control of the global cadres and cell networks any longer. The organization has become decentralized and its members are eschewing communication with each other in order to avoid being identified. In this context, he said not to fully agreed with the view that Pakistan has completely, both vertically and horizontally, destroyed al-Qaeda’s communication network.

Rolf Tophoven said al-Qaeda is like a cancer, and if you remove one cell, metastases grow back somewhere else, and that it is extremely difficult to determine the structure of al-Qaeda. The potential of al-Qaeda, he added, had been underestimated. It is necessary to send the message that Al-Qaeda and its associated groups are not Quranic organizations, and they represent a corrupted view of Islam by misinterpreting the Qur’an and other texts. On the other hand, it is necessary to solve the actual conflicts in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which all contribute to recruiting.

Alexander Nikitin, President of the Russian Political Science Association and Director of the Center for Political and International Studies, MGIMO University, Russia, identified three kinds of terrorism: traditional criminal terrorism, revolutionary terrorism and political terrorism. In his view, religious terrorism is the reincarnation of political terrorism. The Russian scholar talked at length on 'International Legal Instruments for the Fight against Terrorism and Consequences of Anti-Terrorist Campaigns for International Relations.' The legal basis for tackling terrorism in its new manifestations remains inadequate. No new major comprehensive conventions have been adopted. Existing conventions and treaties on terrorism were formulated in the pre-9/11 era, and are difficult to implement to new types of terrorism. Nikitin further stated that the anti-terror campaign was used by certain big powers as a cover for achieving pragmatic geopolitical, strategic, and economic goals of their own which have nothing in common with the war on terror. After four years of "response" to the initial 9/11 attacks, he assessed that the Western community expressed a clear preference to deal with the symptoms, terrorism, rather than with its roots and causes, i.e. social problems. He explained that the international community does not undertake any coordinated actions to improve social or economic situation in conflict areas.

Chinese scholar Dr. Fang Jinying, Deputy Director of the Centre for Ethnic and Religious Studies in Beijing in her paper on 'The International Terrorist Threat to Chinese Security' said that the security concept in China had gone through a change since 2004. She said that only from the late 1990s did China regard ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and international terrorism as three evil forces, posing threats to national, regional and global security. She identified terrorists' threat to Chinese working abroad, foreigners working within China, and a potential terrorist-related security risk to the Olympic Games to be held in Beijing in 2008.

Dr. Fang singled out the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China as the area sending signals of terrorism in the recent past. She declared

the Islamic Party of Liberation (Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami) in the region as the most significant terrorist organization. She said that the Chinese government was fully vigilant to such threats and was making all efforts at local, regional and international levels to quell terrorism.

British scholar Dr. James Dingley of the University of Ulster discussed the causes of global terrorism. One has to be cautious while talking about terrorism, he argued, because all governments have vested interests in the matter. After 9/11, Americans have a vested interests in the war on terrorism, and nobody is criticizing their conceptualization of terrorism and uncritical acceptance of this conceptualization has its own danger. "You look at Islam in way you don't look at Christianity. The terrorist is, he said, the exact opposite of the psychopath. To understand the origin and causes of terrorism, we should keep in mind the rational, economic and psychological levels of the terrorist. Terrorists face tremendous pressures and give their lives for a cause. Modernization processes makes the key players of traditional society redundant, and we find the terrorist campaign effective where modernization processes have actually started to hit traditional society. Most of the terrorists come from a lower middle class background.

Dr. Azmat Hayat Khan, Director of the Area Study Centre for Russia, China and Central Asia at Peshawar University highlighted the academic and scholastic activities of the ASC in the promotion of knowledge, current and current affairs. He also brought to the light the complex and subjective nature of terrorism. The discussion was moderated by Dr. Andrei Reich, Representative of the Hanns Seidel Foundation in Islamabad. The Vice Chancellor of Peshawar University, Lt. Gen. (retd) Mumtaz Gul chaired the gathering and shed light on the changing perceptions on the concepts of freedom fighters and terrorists. That said, he concluded that everyone deplored and condemned the tragic killing of innocent civilians on 9/11 in New York.

WORLD KAZAKH COMMUNITY BOOSTS THE IMAGE OF ASTANA

Marat Yermukanov

Thousands of ethnic Kazakhs dispersed over more than 40 countries of the world have returned to the land of their ancestors in the years of independence. They were lured into the country by promises of privileged social benefits, cheap housing and well-paid jobs. Beneficial in political and demographic terms, the rising inflow of returnees is nevertheless creating economic problems.

The Congress of the World Kazakh Community, held in Astana on September 29, received modest coverage in Kazakhstani media. On the eve of the event, analysts strongly doubted that delegates to the Congress would be able to hammer out a viable resolution on problems of the resettlement of ethnic Kazakhs and ways of interaction between the Kazakh government and the world community of Kazakhs.

Delegates to the Congress used the occasion to admire the booming western-style new capital of their ancestral country. They were obviously impressed to see that Kazakhstan had made great economic progress since the time of the first Congress of the World Kazakh Community in 1992 held in Turkistan city, the holy place for Kazakhstan's Moslems worshipped as a virtual second Mecca. Regular events of such a scale have a considerable political significance for Astana in the international arena. The key speaker at the Congress, President Nursultan Nazarbayev, seized the opportunity to highlight major economic and political achievements of the country and concluded that "our economic model is a good example for developing countries".

Economic figures cited by the president are really impressive. Over the last ten years, per capita GDP rose from \$100 to \$3400. Furthermore, the target set by the government is to raise that figure to \$9000 by

the year 2012. That task sounds feasible if one takes into account that over the last seven years, the annual economic growth rate has ranged between 9 and 10 percent. The country's total GDP is \$60 billion, surpassing the total GDP volume of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. President Nazarbayev, addressing the Congress, called Kazakhstan "the uncontested leader in the region".

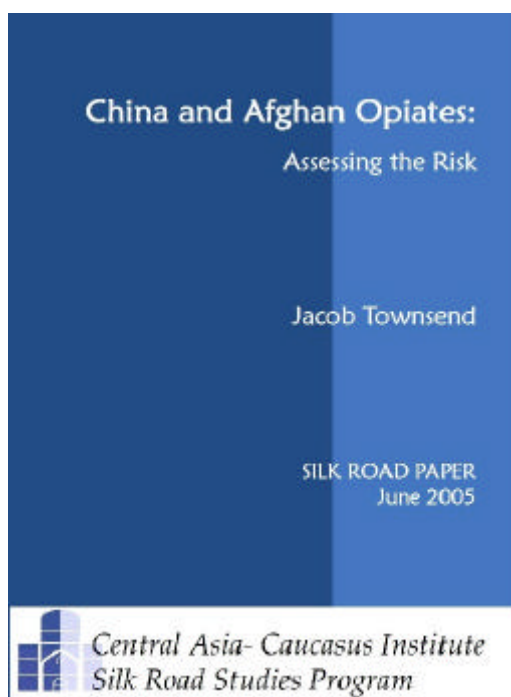
Nazarbayev's speech was frequently interrupted by bursts of applause which partly demonstrate the pride ethnic Kazakhs take in evident economic successes made by Kazakhstan, and partly admiration for the personality of Nursultan Nazarbayev, who managed to navigate the economy skillfully through hard times. It was a balm for the ears of ethnic Kazakhs to hear that Astana has eliminated all the problems inherited from tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union along the 14,500 kilometer border with China, as Nursultan Nazarbayev put it, "once and for all, without any doubts and reservations". According to him, not a disputable patch is left on the Kazakh-Chinese border. He also characterized border relations with Russia as good-neighborly. More significant than positive intergovernmental relations with its neighbors is probably the demographic security that ensued from regulating the migration process. Since Kazakhstan gained its god-sent independence, more than 110,590 families of ethnic Kazakhs from abroad returned to Kazakhstan for permanent residence. Coupled with growing birth rates, the returnees boosted the population growth among Kazakhs by half a million, no exceeding by far the once predominant Slavic population. Nursultan Nazarbayev argued that Kazakhstan, pursuing a wise migration policy and encouraging natural demographic growth rates, corrected the "ethno-

demographic disproportions” of the past. Recently, the Kazakh government raised the quota for ethnic Kazakh settlers from abroad to 15,000 families per year. The greatest population of Kazakhs numbering 1.7 million and 1.5 million respectively live in China and Uzbekistan. Many participants of the Congress hoped to hear a clear and definite answer to long-standing questions related to granting citizenship, housing and living conditions for Kazakh settlers returning from abroad. But the answer was ambiguous. Nazarbayev said that as every third Kazakh lives abroad, it is difficult to bring them all home at a time, and apparently there is no need to resettle them. He added that if ethnic Kazakhs wish to return to Kazakhstan, they should rely on their own financial means to cover all costs. On the other hand, he promised that amendments to the migration law would be introduced to make it easier for returnees to get citizenship.

This ambiguity signals a perceptible change in Astana’s policy towards ethnic Kazakhs. In the first years of independence, Kazakhs repatriated from abroad were warmly welcomed as a demographic counterbalance as Kazakhs had turned into a minority in their own land during Soviet years. Through financial aid and legal regulations, the

government offered some housing and job benefits to repatriated Kazakhs. Over the past 14 years, Kazakhs have increased to make up 60 percent of the population. The demographic target achieved, some government officials see no reason to leave the door open for repatriated people from Uzbekistan, Afghanistan or Mongolia with low job qualifications. Ethnic Kazakh migrants are increasingly becoming an economic burden in overpopulated cities where jobs and housing are scarce. On the other hand, many settlers are deeply disappointed by broken promises of housing, social assistance and job opportunities. They feel they are better off in their adoptive countries. Dalekhan Mamikhan, a delegate to the World Congress of Kazakhs, said that Kazakhs in China get social assistance from the government and have everything to preserve their language and culture.

The World Congress of Kazakhs fell short of many expectations. Astana attached more political importance to the event, rather than addressing the immediate economic and social problems of ethnic Kazakhs. Next autumn, Kazakhstan will, for the second time, host the Congress of World Religions. The event must add luster to Astana’s international image.



New Silk Road Paper!

China and Afghan Opiates: Assessing the Risk

by Jacob Townsend

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This timely policy paper discusses the link between Afghan opiates and China, focusing on the risk to China from the increase in Afghan drug production, the decline of Southeast Asian production, and changing political and economic patterns in China’s relationship with Central Asia.

NEWS DIGEST

SUSPECTED TERRORIST DETAINED IN CHECHNYA

21 September

A member of an illegal armed group on a list of wanted suspects in a series of crimes has been detained in Chechnya's Achkloi-Martan district, sources in Chechen law enforcement agencies told Interfax by phone on Wednesday. "A member of an illegal armed group, suspected of involvement in two shooting attacks and a bombing in the village of Samashki in summer 2004, was detained in his home as a result of a sweep operation in Samashki," a source said. Early on Tuesday, the bodies of two local residents with bullet wounds were discovered in the Komsomolskoye village of Groznensky district. A pistol with one bullet was collected at the scene, the source said. In another report, a cache of ammunition, including three Kalashnikov automatic rifles, a Makarov pistol, five hand grenades, 157 cartridges, two kilograms of explosives and three electrical detonators, was discovered in the basement of a ruined building in the village of Chernorechye in Grozny's Zavodskoi district. (Interfax)

RAMZAN KADYROV WILL NOT RUN FOR PARLIAMENT

22 September

Chechnya's First Deputy Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov has announced that he will not run for parliament. "I officially announce that I will not run for a seat in parliament, nor will I seek election as parliamentary speaker," Kadyrov told the press on Thursday. "I was assigned the important task of ensuring citizens' security, and I am doing and will continue to do this particular job. Speculations are being spread to mislead the public and incite disagreements between Chechen politicians," Kadyrov said. The Chechen parliamentary elections are to take place on November 27. (Interfax)

TASHKENT DEMAND OF U.S. BASE REMOVAL A SOVEREIGN RIGHT - SERGEI IVANOV

22 September

Tashkent's decision to demand the United States remove its airbase from Uzbekistan is the country's

sovereign right, said Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov. "The decision to demand the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Uzbekistan can be perceived in only one way - as a decision made by a sovereign country," Ivanov told journalists in Samarkand on Thursday. Tashkent demanded in July that the U.S. close down its airbase in Khanabad within 180 days. (Interfax)

GUNMEN KILL KYRGYZSTAN POLITICIAN

22 September

Gunmen in Kyrgyzstan have killed an MP who was a driving force behind the protests in March which led to the overthrow of President Askar Akayev. Bayaman Erkinbayev was shot in the neck and chest as he arrived by car at his home in the capital, Bishkek. Mr Erkinbayev, 38, was a wealthy businessman in southern Kyrgyzstan, where the anti-Akayev protests began. He is the second parliamentary deputy to be killed since the popular uprising earlier this year. The country has seen continuing political instability since then. According to a BBC correspondent in the region, Mr Erkinbayev was a former wrestler who owned a number of shops and hotels around the southern town of Osh. He was widely rumoured to be associated with the criminal world, our correspondent says. In recent months, Mr Erkinbayev had been involved in a murky and sometimes violent dispute over control of a lucrative regional market, one of the largest in the unstable Ferghana Valley region around Osh. In April, he escaped what he termed an attempt on his life, when he was shot and wounded in the face in Bishkek. It is unclear whether the motivation for that attack was political - at the time, he had announced plans to run for president - or linked to his business interests. In June, security guards in Osh opened fire on hundreds of protesters demonstrating against Mr Erkinbayev, whom they said has a heavy influence on small businesses in the region. It was the biggest public protest since Mr Akayev was driven into exile. Kurmanbek Bakiev was elected president in July. (BBC)

TROOPS LIFT RUSSIAN-UZBEK TIES

23 September

Russia and Uzbekistan are holding their first joint military exercises in hills north of the Uzbek city of

Samarkand. With 200 soldiers from each side taking part, the three-day drills will also involve paratroopers and an elite Russian commando unit. The exercises are being seen as a sign of closer relations between Moscow and Tashkent. They come just two months after the Uzbeks issued an ultimatum to US forces to leave a base in southern Uzbekistan. The military drills are taking place in a range of hills near the village of Farish, 100km (62 miles) north of Samarkand. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov and his Uzbek counterpart, Kadyr Gulomov, were due to inspect the proceedings on Friday. Mr Ivanov said the drills were aimed at countering the increasing flow of illegal drugs from nearby Afghanistan. The exercises are the latest sign of a significant warming of relations between Moscow and ex-Soviet Uzbekistan. (BBC)

HAIL STORM DESTROYS 70% OF GEORGIA'S KHVANCHKARA GRAPE HARVEST

25 September

A hail storm hit vineyards in five villages in Georgia's Ambrolauri district on Sunday, destroying 70% of the country's harvest of the Khvanchkara grape variety, from which a popular semi-sweet red wine is made. The hail storm continued for 40 minutes, sources in the Racha-Lechkhumi district administration told Interfax. The government plans to pay compensation to residents whose harvest was destroyed. (Interfax)

KAZAKH OPPOSITION PARTY NOMINATES PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

25 September

Kazakhstan's opposition party Ak Zhol [Bright Path] has nominated its leader Alikhan Baimenov as its candidate for the presidential election to be held on December 4. The nomination was backed unanimously by all of the 117 delegates to this party's congress on Sunday. Baimenov, 46, is an engineer and has a candidate's degree in mechanical engineering. He previously held state posts and was chief of the presidential staff. The Ak Zhol party split in winter 2005, and some of its former leaders, expelled from the party, announced the formation of a new, True Ak Zhol party, which has not been registered by the Justice Ministry, however. Baimenov's nomination has brought the number of presidential candidates to 12. (Interfax)

RUSSIA FAILS TO AGREE ON DEBT SETTLEMENT WITH AFGHANISTAN

26 September

Russian Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin has met his Afghan opposite number to discuss the settlement of Afghanistan's debts to Russia. He told a news conference in Washington that the debt amounts to about \$10 billion and is not serviced in any way. "We are engaged in complex negotiations on restructuring and partly writing it off," he said. He said "a solution was not found" during the last round of consultations. Asked whether Afghanistan is capable of starting debt payments Kudrin said Kabul is considering the possibility "but on certain conditions." He said he would also meet the finance ministers of Iran and Iraq. He said primarily technical questions of writing off debts would be discussed with the Iraqi minister. (Interfax)

GEORGIA COMMEMORATES FALL OF SUKHUMI

27 September

The Georgian government and the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz government in exile commemorated on 27 September the fall of the Abkhaz capital in 1993, which effectively ended the 14-month war and triggered the flight from Abkhaz territory of the region's ethnic Georgian population. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said at a ceremony in Tbilisi to honor the Georgians killed in the fighting that the war was a defeat for both Georgians and Abkhaz. Parliamentary speaker Burdjanadze vowed that Georgia will "soon" restore its control over the breakaway republic by peaceful means. Irakli Alasania, who heads the government in exile and whose father was killed in the 1992-93 war, vowed that "it is the duty of our generation" to restore Georgia's territorial integrity. (Caucasus Press)

US CONFIRMS UZBEK BASE DEPARTURE

27 September

US troops will leave their base in Uzbekistan by the end of the year, a senior US diplomat has confirmed. Assistant US Secretary of State Daniel Fried, speaking after talks in Tashkent, said the US had agreed to the demand "without further discussion". He admitted bilateral ties had gone through a "very difficult period" after the US criticised Uzbek suppression of an uprising in Andijan in May. But he dismissed as "ludicrous" claims that the US had been behind the unrest. The airbase at Karshi-Khanabad in south-eastern Uzbekistan has been an important hub for US operations in neighbouring Afghanistan following the 11 September 2001 attacks. "The Uzbek government made it clear that we need to leave the base, and we intend to leave it without further discussion," said Mr Fried after meeting Uzbek President Islam Karimov.

He said the two countries' interests in security and democracy "are indivisible" but conceded "we did not agree on some issues". "The United States and Uzbekistan have had a very difficult period in relations, complicated by grave concerns regarding the human rights situation and events in Andijan". Fifteen men are currently on trial accusing of leading the popular protests in Andijan. They face multiple charges, including terrorism, shooting hostages and belonging to banned Islamic groups. All have pleaded guilty. Human rights groups allege the confessions were elicited through torture. One defendant said on Monday that the US embassy in Tashkent had given him money to help organise the violence - dismissed by Mr Fried as "ludicrous". "The assertions that the US supports an attack by Islamic extremists after fighting four years against exactly such people is not credible," he said. The unrest began on 12 May after supporters of 23 local businessmen - on trial for alleged Islamic extremism - broke into Andijan's jail and freed them. The armed men then occupied the town hall and a huge anti-government protest began. Witnesses say more than 500 people were killed by Uzbek security forces in the crackdown that followed. The Uzbek government put the death toll at 187, and has rejected demands for an international investigation into the incident. (BBC)

CANDIDATE KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

27 September

A candidate in Afghanistan's election has been shot dead. Mohammad Ashraf Ramazan, an ethnic hazara, was driving through the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif when he was shot by unknown attackers. Mr Ramazan is the first candidate to be killed by militants since the 18 September election. The counting of votes is still continuing. The US said earlier that two of its soldiers had been killed in attacks in the south and east of the country. In Mazar-e-Sharif, eyewitnesses told the BBC that police cordoned off the streets immediately after the attack, but the attackers managed to flee the area. Afghanistan's election commission says Mr Ramazan had been running in fifth place for one of 11 assembly seats in Balkh province with 12% of the vote counted so far. Some people had expressed concern before the vote about an "assassination clause" in the election law. The clause says if a winning candidate dies, his seat will go to the next candidate in line. Afghan President Hamid Karzai condemned the killing. "Mr Ramazan was a patriot who had well served his community. I strongly condemn the killing of Mohammad Ashraf Ramazan,"

he said in a statement. A well-known trader, Mr Ramazan was a supporter of Mohammad Mohaqiq, the former planning minister. (BBC)

CHECHNYA TO TRY SUSPECTED COMPENSATION EMBEZZLERS

28 September

Chechnya will very soon hold sensational court trials of officials accused of abuse of a Chechen compensation allowance program, Chechen President Alu Alkhanov said on Wednesday. "The Ministry of the Interior of the Chechen Republic has initiated many dozens of criminal cases. Thousands of illegal files have been barred from being included in the compensation payment list as a result of inspections by interior services," Alkhanov said. (Interfax)

GEORGIA QUESTIONS OSCE'S CONFLICT MEDIATION ABILITY

28 September

Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili expressed doubt on Wednesday that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe would be able to help Georgia settle its conflicts with its separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Zourabichvili told a news conference that the OSCE had failed to satisfy a Georgian request that it strengthen its monitoring of the South Ossetian conflict zone. This suggested the OSCE would be unable to cope with its mission, she argued. (Interfax)

CHECHEN COURT SYSTEM ALMOST RESTORED - OFFICIAL

28 September

The Chechen court system has been practically restored, Chechen Supreme Court Chairman Ziyavdi Zaurbekov told a Thursday press conference in Moscow. "Fourteen of the 15 district and town courts of Chechnya are already functioning. The Supreme Court and the Grozny Garrison Military Court are functioning, as well," he said. Chechen district and town courts have 84 vacancies. There are only 43 judges in Chechen courts, Abdrakhman Jabrailov, from the Chechen department of the Russian Supreme Court, said. Bailiffs and policemen protect court buildings and judges, he said. (Interfax)

KYRGYZ PARLIAMENT CONFIRMS 10 OF 16 PROPOSED CABINET MEMBERS

29 September

In a 27 September vote, Kyrgyzstan's parliament confirmed 10 of 16 ministers and committee heads proposed by President Kurmanbek Bakiev, RFE/RL's

Kyrgyz Service reported. Lawmakers voted down the candidacies of Roza Otunbaeva for foreign minister, Ishenbai Kadyrbekov for minister of transportation and communications, Toktokan Borombaeva for culture minister, and Alevtina Pronenko for labor and social security minister. Prime Minister Feliks Kulov reacted with surprise, saying, "It's not clear to me why Roza Otunbaeva's candidacy was rejected even though she was a leader of the revolution," Interfax-Kazakhstan reported. For her part, Otunbaeva told akipress.org that the vote did not surprise her. Noting that she was "not going to last long in the power relations that emerged," Otunbaeva blamed supporters of former President Askar Akaev and opportunists in parliament and the government. She promised to remain active and fight to "clean up politics." (RFE/RL)

BRITAIN MAY REVISE ITS POSITION REGARDING ZAKAYEV - RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR

29 September

Russian Ambassador in London Yury Fedotov said that Chechen separatist emissary Akhmed Zakayev, who is currently in exile in Great Britain, may be extradited to Russia. "We are hoping the British side may revise its position regarding the question of extraditing Chechen separatist emissary Akhmed Zakayev in the light of the July bombings in London," Fedotov told Interfax on Thursday. In Great Britain, "more and more people realize that the issue of fighting terrorism cannot be approached from a position of double standards," Fedotov said. "We hope that this, in time, will help to solve Zakayev's problem," Fedotov said. "We have heard statements from British representatives recently, which confirmed that there is a possibility [of Zakayev being extradited], if the Russian side presents more proof of Zakayev's involvement in criminal activities," Fedotov said. (Interfax)

ARMENIAN GOVERNMENT APPROVES DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2006

29 September

The government approved on 28 September a draft budget that envisages for the first time public expenditures in excess of \$1 billion, an increase of almost 20 percent over the comparable figure for 2005, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The draft, which will be submitted to parliament next week, envisages revenues of 380.3 billion drams (\$853 million) and expenditures of 450.2 billion drams. The 70 billion-dram deficit is to be financed

overwhelmingly from domestic sources, rather than low-interest loans from the World Bank. The single-largest item of public spending remains the defense sector, which is slated to receive 74.3 billion drams (\$166 million), a 21 percent increase over 2005. Social spending too will be increased, according to Deputy Finance Minister Pavel Safarian, who promised increases in public-sector wages and poverty benefits. Gross domestic product growth in 2006 is predicted at 7.5 percent, down from the double-digit growth registered over the past five years. (RFE/RL)

UZBEKS HELD IN RUSSIAN JAIL FOR ANDIJON EVENTS GO ON HUNGER STRIKE

30 September

Twelve citizens of Uzbekistan, one from Kyrgyzstan, and one from Russia, who are being held in a pretrial-detention center in Ivanovo, have declared a hunger strike. The Uzbeks were arrested in June on suspicion of taking part in the mid-May violence in the Uzbek city of Andijon. In an interview with Ekho Moskvyy on 29 September, Vitalii Ponomarev of Memorial said that only one of those in custody was even in Andijon at the time and this was because he was required to go back to have his passport changed after his 45th birthday. According to Memorial, the Russian citizen Khatam Khadzhimatov has been held for three months without a court order, which is a violation of the Russian Constitution. Memorial believes that Russian authorities are ignoring obvious violations of legal norms out of "political sympathy for the regime of [Uzbek President Islam] Karimov." (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZSTAN VIEWS RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA AS PRIORITY - KULOV

30 September

Kyrgyzstan views relations with Russia as a priority, said Kyrgyz Prime Minister Felix Kulov. "We consider Russia to be a priority in our foreign political relations," Kulov said at a press conference at the Interfax main office on Friday. Kulov, who is on a working visit to Russia, has had meetings with his Russian counterpart Mikhail Fradkov and members of the Russian business community. Kulov said he did not meet with ex-Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev, who is currently residing outside Moscow. "I am not afraid of meeting with anybody, including Akayev, but such a meeting did not feature in my plans," Kulov said. (Interfax)

KAZAKH ELECTORAL OFFICIALS CERTIFY 11 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

30 September

The Kazakh Central Election Commission issued a ruling on 30 September certifying the eligibility of 11 presidential candidates. The ruling verifies that the 11 candidates have met all of the commission's requirements, including the state Kazakh-language test, for the 4 December presidential election. The most prominent of these candidates include incumbent President Nursultan Nazarbaev; Zharmakhan Tuyakbai, the leader of the opposition "For a Just Kazakhstan" bloc; parliamentarians Ualikhan Kaisarov and Erasyil Abylkasymov; businessman Salim Oten; lawyer Mekemtas Tleulesov; and Alikhan Baimenov, the leader of the Ak Zhol party. The group also includes two female candidates, Maya Karamaeva, a 43-year-old woman who has nominated herself, and Baltabai Rakhimzhanov, the head of the National Federation of Farmers. The Central Election Commission has yet to rule on the status of another five candidates. (gazeta.kz)

NO CHANGES TO PEACEKEEPING MEMBERS WITHOUT ABKHAZ CONSENT - BAGAPSH

30 September

Abkhazia does not want to change the participants in the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict settlement process, President of the self-proclaimed republic Sergei Bagapsh said. "The peacekeeping forces were deployed in the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict zone in accordance with a ceasefire and a separation agreement signed by Georgia and Abkhazia on May 14, 1994," Bagapsh said. "Abkhazia does not want to introduce any changes to the document and without our consent it is impossible to introduce any new states to the peacekeeping process," the Abkhaz President's press service cites Bagapsh as saying. (Interfax)

ABKHAZIA, S. OSSETIA AGAINST WITHDRAWAL OF PEACEKEEPERS

30 September

Russian peacekeepers guarantee stability in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, according to the leaders of the two breakaway Georgian provinces. "We value Russia's peacekeeping mission in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone highly. Russian peacekeepers are guarantors of the stability of the situation in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone, and their withdrawal could only lead to a deterioration in the situation," Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh told Interfax on Friday. (Interfax)

POLICE DISPERSE AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION RALLY

1 October

Police in Baku resorted to force on 1 October in an attempt to disperse opposition supporters who sought to gather on one of the city squares for a rally prohibited by the municipal authorities. The rally was organized by the opposition Azadlyq bloc formed to participate in the parliamentary elections scheduled for 6 November. Would-be participants called for the resignation of the country's leadership and for free elections. Ali Kerimli, chairman of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (AHCP), one of Azadlyq's three constituent members, estimated turnout at several thousand. He said police detained up to 200 participants, including several registered parliamentary candidates. A Baku police spokesman quoted by day.az gave the number of people detained at 34, and claimed nine police officers were injured in an altercation with armed supporters of prominent Musavat party member Rauf Arifoglu. Arifoglu subsequently released a statement denying his supporters were armed. An undetermined number of rally participants and several journalists were also injured. (Turan)

ONE SERVICEMAN KILLED, TWO WOUNDED IN CHECHNYA

2 October

One serviceman was killed and two others were wounded in Chechnya on Saturday. "A contract serviceman was wounded when unidentified assailants opened fire at a reconnaissance squad on the outskirts of the village of Avtury at 10:22 a.m. on October 1. The serviceman was hospitalized," a source in the Interior Ministry's temporary press center in the North Caucasus told Interfax by phone. He said that in another incident two servicemen of an engineer reconnaissance unit were wounded, when their armored personnel carrier hit a mine in the district center of Shatoi. "One of the wounded servicemen died in hospital," the source said. (Interfax)

JUSTICE PARTY OFFICE ATTACKED IN GEORGIA

2 October

Unidentified assailants have attacked the office of the Justice Party, led by Georgia's former Security Minister Igor Giorgadze, in the town of Telavi. The office windows were broken, the front door knocked down, the furniture damaged and the papers stolen early on Sunday, the party's press center told Interfax. "This savage act was timed to coincide with the party's congress due to take place in Tbilisi on October 3. The authorities and the radical forces supporting them are trying to foil our congress," head of the party's Telavi

branch Giorgy Tsikarishvili told the press on Sunday. Several district leaders of the Justice party have been attacked and beaten up this week. Police have failed to track down the assailants, although victims said they had been attacked by policemen. The Prosecutor General's Office put Giorgadze on a wanted list in 1995 on charges of organizing an attempt on the life of former Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze. (Interfax)

EU BANS ARMS SALES TO UZBEKISTAN

3 October

The EU has approved an arms embargo on Uzbekistan after the violent suppression of anti-government protests in the city of Andijan in May. It has also decided to deny visas to top Uzbek officials. However, the bloc has yet to announce who exactly will be affected by the travel ban. EU ministers meeting in Luxembourg said the sanctions were a consequence of Tashkent's refusal to allow an independent inquiry into the events. The Uzbek government says fewer than 200 people died in what it describes as an Islamic uprising. But international human rights organisations say security forces opened fire on protesters, most of them unarmed civilians, and that many more people died. Meanwhile the trial of those accused of being behind the protests is continuing in Tashkent. On Monday two Uzbek soldiers gave testimony, saying they had orders only to shoot armed people but had difficulties because of the darkness, the Associated Press reported. One of the men, Mohamed Yusupov, told the court the protesters had been offered a safe corridor out of the city centre but responded by killing the troops' commander and firing on hostages. Human rights groups have described the trial as nothing more than an attempt to cover up a massacre. The New York-based group Human Rights Watch has been calling for an arms embargo and other sanctions since it began. The EU's decision to impose sanctions was taken in response to what the ministers described as the "excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force" in Andijan. The embargo will affect arms, military equipment and other equipment which might be used for internal repression. Correspondents say it marks the first time the EU has suspended a partnership agreement with another country. (BBC)

NATO TO INTENSIFY USE OF AIR BASE IN KYRGYZSTAN – ENVOY

3 October

NATO countries are planning to intensify the use of the air base at Manas airport near Bishkek for the anti-terrorist operation, Special Representative of the

NATO Secretary General for Central Asia and the Caucasus Robert Simmons has said. He told a Monday news conference in Bishkek that the use of the air base will be increased. He said NATO and the United States are determined to continue their military presence in Afghanistan until the complete restoration of peace there. He said the effort in Afghanistan helps to prevent the spread of extremism in Central Asia and further in the world. To this end the United States and NATO will be using military bases in Central Asia that are meant to support troops in Afghanistan, he added. (Interfax)

GEORGIA IS UNANIMOUSLY SUPPORTING KAZAKHSTAN IN HOLDING THE CHAIR OF THE OSCE IN 2009

3 October

Georgia is unanimously supporting Kazakhstan in holding the chair of the OSCE in 2009, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili stated at the press conference in Tbilisi. Kazakhstan's participation in the solving international problems may play a decisive role, the Head of Georgia stressed. I am confident that Kazakhstan's holding chair of the OSCE is of great importance for us and for the whole region as well. Besides, the organization itself will get a 'second wind', the Head of the Parliament of Georgia Nino Burdzhaneladze noted at the meeting with kazakhstani leader. (www.akorda.kz)

PRESIDENT OF AZERBAIJAN CONGRATULATES THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ON ROSHASHANA

3 October,

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev sent a message of congratulations to the Jewish community of Azerbaijan whereby the head of state congratulated them on the Jewish New year- Roshashana. President Aliyev extended his best wishes and happiness to the country's Jews, noting that in Azerbaijan, all necessary democratic-legal bases have been created for preservation of the language and culture of all the minorities, national customs and traditions, for ensuring their human rights and freedoms. As all the peoples of the Republic, the Jewish community is also the active participator of the ongoing democratic processes in the country, the letter underlines. Head of the Azerbaijan State expresses confidence that the community would further actively take part in the socio-political and cultural life of the independent Azerbaijan. (AzerTag)

INGUSHETIAN PARLIAMENT APPEALS TO COSSACKS

3 October

The People's Assembly of the Republic of Ingushetia has written to Viktor Vodolatskii, ataman of the state-registered Don Cossacks, and Sergei Kalashnikov, ataman of the Kuban Cossacks, asking them to support the Ingush appeal to the Russian Constitutional Court to reject a request by North Ossetia to declare unconstitutional Articles 3 and 6 of the 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of Oppressed Peoples. Those two articles call for the restoration of the internal borders between North Caucasus republics that existed prior to the 1944 deportations of the Chechens and Ingush, among others, and the abolition of the then Checheno-Ingush ASSR. If implemented, they would entail the return to Ingushetia of North Ossetia's Prigorodnyi Raion. Meanwhile, Vodolatskii has presided over weeklong celebrations in Novocherkassk, attended among others by Grand Duchess Mariya Vladimirovna, one of the surviving members of the Romanov dynasty, to mark the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Don Cossack troops, "Nezavisimaya gazeta" reported on 3 October. The rival, unregistered Don Cossacks led by ataman Nikolai Kositsyn were not represented at the celebrations. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKHS SEEK "STRATEGIC CONTROL" OVER PETROKAZ

4 October

Kazakhstan wants "strategic control" over Canadian oil company PetroKazakhstan's assets and its state oil firm is in talks to obtain a stake in the firm, the energy minister said on Tuesday. Such a move could complicate a \$4.18 billion offer from China National Petroleum Corp. (CNPC) for PetroKazakhstan Inc., which has all of its assets in ex-Soviet Kazakhstan. The Chinese bid, announced more than a month ago, has unsettled some Kazakh lawmakers who want a refinery owned by PetroKazakhstan brought back under state control. "Whatever happens to the shares, the state company will have a stake, which would allow (us) to properly work in this direction," Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Vladimir Shkolnik told reporters at an oil and gas conference in Almaty. "In any case, strategic control will stay within the country," he said. "This is a very serious issue, we're talking here about a strategic enterprise, upon which a huge southern region of our country is dependent." Shkolnik said talks were under way but declined to specify with whom or to give any further details. PetroKazakhstan produces 150,000 barrels per day but

also owns the best of only three oil refineries in Kazakhstan, a vast landlocked Central Asian state bordering China and Russia. The Canadian company has modernised the refinery at Shymkent but has frequently clashed with the government over its attempts to cap fuel prices during the harvest season. CNPC denied a newspaper report last month saying that it was in talks to sell half of PetroKazakhstan to Kazakhstan. And industry sources said on Tuesday the structure of the deal might be more complicated than just a direct purchase. "Kazakhstan is definitely afraid of CNPC becoming a monopoly in the country's south. So they might think about buying Shymkent and one of PetroKazakhstan's producing units from CNPC on market terms," said an industry source. Kazakhstan has become increasingly assertive about state oil company KazMunaiGas playing a role in major projects and has demanded foreign companies pay a greater share of their local earnings back to the state. Last month, parliament started considering an amendment to the subsoil laws which would impose greater state control over the sales of foreign-held stakes in the energy sector. The Kazakh government used a similar change to the subsoil law last year as part of a battle to gain access for KazMunaiGas to the consortium developing the offshore Kashagan field. British BG Group Plc's had sought to sell its share in the ENI-led consortium to most of the other consortium members, only to be blocked by the government and the change in law. After months of negotiation, the state agreed to pay \$600 million for half of BG's 16.67 percent stake. (Reuters)

S. OSSETIA, ABKHAZIA 'SELF-PROCLAIMED' REPUBLICS - KOKOITY

4 October

South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transdniestria should be referred as self-proclaimed republics, said South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity. "Our unions with Abkhazia and Transdniestria clearly demonstrate that we should cast away such terms as 'unrecognized' republics. We are self-proclaimed republics," Kokoity told a briefing at the Interfax main office on Tuesday. The celebration of the 15th anniversary of South Ossetia's independence on September 18-20 "clearly demonstrated to everyone, including the Georgian side, that South Ossetia is an established state," he said. "From the point of view of self-determination, the truth is on our side and we do not doubt our success," he said. (Interfax)

