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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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Svante E. Cornell

Research Director; Editor, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst
Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University
1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, USA.
Tel. +1-202-663-5922; 1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785

PANETTA'S AFGHAN CHALLENGE

Richard Weitz

Successfully managing the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan is perhaps the most urgent task of Leon Panetta, the new U.S. Defense Secretary. The fundamental issue is how fast U.S. and NATO troops will leave the country and what Afghan conditions and regional structure will emerge in their wake. No matter how effectively U.S. forces implement their strategy and tactics, they cannot win the war alone. The Pentagon needs reliable partners, both in Afghanistan and elsewhere, to leave behind a democratic government able to contain widespread political violence and prevent the reconstruction of terrorist bases and suppress a narcotics-funded insurgency that threatens neighboring countries.

BACKGROUND: Last month, President Barack Obama announced the first major withdrawals of U.S. combat forces from Afghanistan in almost a decade. The Pentagon will remove 10,000 troops from Afghanistan in July and August. Another 20,000 U.S. soldiers will depart by the end of 2012, leaving 60,000 American troops in Afghanistan for the time being. NATO decided last November that foreign troops should remain in Afghanistan through at least 2014.

Panetta has insisted that any withdrawal remain “condition-based,” meaning that its pace and extent will depend on how rapidly U.S. forces can transfer the lead role in fighting the war to the Afghan government. The announced dates for this transition have repeatedly slipped as the Taliban has proven more tenacious, and the Afghan security forces less effective, than expected.

Inside Afghanistan, the problem is that the government and its security forces still experience major difficulties in providing good governance and the rule of the law, promoting economic development and job creation, combating corruption and narcotics trafficking, and protecting Taliban members who attempt to reintegrate peacefully into Afghan society.

Despite extensive foreign training programs and other support, moreover, the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police cannot yet defeat the Taliban insurgents without continued direct U.S. combat assistance.

The death of Osama bin Laden is a new wildcard. There are hopes that his elimination will make it easier for additional Taliban leaders to break with the al-Qaeda extremists, but much depends on Pakistani polices. Will the Pakistani authorities use the opening created by his death to turn against the remaining extremists — or will their anger at the unauthorized U.S. raid against the bin Laden compound sway them in another direction?

Another uncertainty is how the sweeping turnover in the senior U.S. national security establishment involved with Afghanistan and Pakistan (Gates, Panetta, Mike Mullen, David Petraeus, Karl Eikenberry, David Rodriguez, etc.) might affect the U.S. strategy and positions there. Although the change might not result in radically different U.S. policies, the new personalities might help improve the troubled ties between U.S., Afghan, and Pakistani officials. Afghan President Hamid Karzai's relations with General Petraeus and

Ambassador Eikenberry with have been particularly troubled.

Looking farther out, the U.S. needs to decide what kind of security relationship to sustain in Afghanistan after 2014. Gates has proposed a jointly operated air base, which could include the stationing of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones) and perhaps some manned helicopters and combat planes. A more limited option could include U.S. advisers and contractors to supervise the military aid that will likely continue under any scenario. The precise point along this continuum will depend on the degree of continuing internal conflict and the emerging regional security order. Ideally Afghanistan's neighbors will play a major role in stabilizing the country, but if they continue to wage a proxy fight for influence on Afghan territory, then a continuing U.S. military presence might help stabilize matters.

IMPLICATIONS: One of Panetta's most important challenges as he manages the planned drawdown in U.S. forces in Afghanistan is crafting a new regional security structure to fill the vacuum. Although Russia and its Central Asian allies have become very supportive of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, they have shown no interest in sending combat troops into Afghanistan. The Kazakh parliament had to rapidly backtrack after a decision to send a few military personnel on a non-combat mission in Afghanistan provoked widespread public outrage. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) has limited its role primarily to interdicting some of the Afghan narcotics being trafficked throughout Eurasia.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which includes many of Afghanistan's neighbors as full members or formal observers, is sometimes described as a possible

replacement security institution for NATO in the Afghanistan region. Despite acknowledging the need to increase their engagement with that country given the impending NATO military withdrawal, last month's SCO leadership summit in Astana deferred the Afghanistan government's application to become a formal SCO observer. Karzai again had to attend the summit as a special guest of the host government.

The existing SCO members still seemed confused over the regional security structure they want to erect as NATO reduces its military presence there. Deepening engagement with the Afghan government would help compensate for the NATO military withdrawal, but China in particular appears reluctant to throw its weight behind Karzai for fear of antagonizing the Taliban, which could retaliate against the PRC's growing economic interests in Afghanistan. As in Libya and the Sudan, the Chinese seem prepared to work with the Taliban if they would respect the PRC's growing economic presence in the region and not support Uighur separatism in Xinjiang.

The Pentagon might try to compensate for its declining troop strength in Central Asia by increasing still further its drone strikes in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and perhaps elsewhere. As CIA Director, Panetta became very fond of the drone attacks on al-Qaeda and Taliban insurgents operating along the Afghan-Pakistan border. In fact, Panetta's deep involvement with counterterrorist operations in Pakistan might result in his becoming the main Washington contact with the Pakistani government, filling the role now played by Admiral Mike Mullen, the retiring Chairman of the U.S. Chiefs of Staff. Panetta has developed extensive operational ties with Pakistan's influential intelligence leaders as



Leon Panetta

head of the CIA, which conducts its own drone operation in Pakistan independent of the Pentagon.

Yet, Pakistan's potential collaboration in this endeavor remains problematic.

Since 9/11, U.S. officials have sought to constrain Pakistani support for their former Taliban allies in Afghanistan as well as other terrorist groups. At the same time, the Pentagon relies heavily on Pakistani support for the U.S.-led military campaign against al-Qaeda and its Taliban allies, which includes air strikes by unmanned aerial vehicles on targets located on Pakistani territory. The United States also needs Pakistani support to transit military supplied to U.S. troops in Afghanistan and to achieve a favorable regional environment for an eventual peace settlement there. Meanwhile, the U.S. gives Pakistan billions of dollars in direct assistance as well as considerable revenue to Pakistanis involved in the shipping of US military supplies to Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, this May's Pentagon-led helicopter assault on bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad in central Pakistan has further antagonized many Pakistanis, though its effects on Pakistani-U.S. military and intelligence cooperation appear unclear. Some Pakistani officials have called for distancing their country from the U.S.-led war on terror, while others have pledged to eliminate the terrorist

sanctuaries in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Evidence that members of Pakistan's intelligence establishment continue to support the al-Qaeda-linked Haqqani network fighting U.S. forces in Afghanistan persists. The Pentagon has also prudently increased the flow of supplies through the Northern Distribution Network in anticipation of possible cutbacks in the volume of goods reaching Afghanistan through Pakistan.

CONCLUSIONS: One of Gates' insights that Panetta would be wise to bear in mind is the U.S. need to sustain and apply robust non-military capabilities to Afghanistan and other intra-state conflicts. In Afghanistan, the Pentagon must collaborate with U.S. civilian agencies as well as foreign partners to design and apply tailored defense, diplomatic, and development strategies. Gates described the war in Afghanistan — where a coalition of almost 50 countries, hundreds of nongovernmental organizations, and some of the world's most important multilateral institutions like NATO, the United Nations, and the European Union are seeking to establish a prosperous and peaceful nation — as a model for applying “the full range of instruments of national power and international co-operation to protect our vital interests”. The underfunding of U.S. civilian agencies having vital national security missions in Afghanistan, such as the State Department, now risks undermining the successes U.S. forces have achieved in the past year, snatching victory from defeat by preventing the consolidation of the recent battlefield victories.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Richard Weitz is Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Political-Military Analysis at Hudson Institute. He is the author, among other works, of *Kazakhstan and the New International Politics of Eurasia* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2008).

REBUILDING CONFLICT MEDIATION INFRASTRUCTURE IN KYRGYZSTAN

Rafis Abazov

The first anniversary of the tragic interethnic conflicts in and around Osh city in June passed peacefully. Discussions, however, reveal a deep divide in Kyrgyz society about the causes and consequences of the events. Some believe they were a one-time occurrence caused by political instability following the April 2010 “Revolution”, which removed President Kurmanbek Bakiyev from power, and that it was instigated by Bakiyev's supporters in order to destabilize the country. Others think conflicts are inevitable in this densely populated and impoverished multiethnic part of the Fergana Valley. The only way to mitigate those conflicts is to build a conflict mediation infrastructure in order to avoid the escalation of local community disputes into large-scale bloody quarrels.

BACKGROUND: Ever since the first large-scale interethnic conflicts between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities erupted around the Osh-Uzgen area in summer 1990, experts, politicians and the international community have expressed great concern about political stability in the area and have focused on building a conflict mediation infrastructure. Conflict mediation uses an alternative dispute-resolution approach to negotiate differences and/or settlements through trusted third parties. Indeed, the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities lived in this area together for hundreds of years through good times and bad, and the relations were not always easy. Yet, on most occasions they managed to resolve their differences through their own conflict mediation system. This system was built around the traditional institutions of the society – the councils and courts of *aqsaqals* (elders), religious leaders and *qadis* (judges), informal and formal networks of tribal and community leaders. The great shift was introduced during the Soviet reforms, as the Soviet policy-makers greatly centralized policy-making and conflict resolution systems by removing power from local governments and local authorities and concentrating it in the

hands of ruling party leaders and government officials. The combination of total state and party domination and of the power of the law-enforcing institutions helped to keep political and social development and interethnic relations under tight control.

The situation radically changed in the late 1980s with the weakening of the ruling party's grip and with the introduction of radical political reforms – perestroika. The escalation of interethnic tensions between 1986 and 1990 illustrated the political and social vacuum left by a significant weakening of state control over political development and social institutions, especially at the local level, as the institutions of civil society were very weak in the late Soviet era. This weakness became especially apparent during the bloody clashes in the summer of 1990, as Kyrgyz government officials struggled to identify the groups and individuals who might represent conflicting parties and pull together a conflict mediation system to mediate mutually accepted ways to move forward. After independence in 1991, both the Kyrgyz government led by western-oriented President Askar Akayev and the international donor community focused on building a



conflict prevention system including a conflict mediation infrastructure built around the western approach and western-sponsored NGOs.

One of Kyrgyzstan's leading political experts, Sheradil Bakhtygulov, argued that "...probably over US\$ 100 million were spent during the last 20 years on helping to strengthen the civil society institutions in southern Kyrgyzstan, but events in summer 2010 suggest that the international donors very often did not understand the local situation and did to not see nuances of the local political dynamics..." According to government estimates, over 3,000 NGOs have been registered in the country, but only a quarter or a third of these are active at any one time. This is in fact a major problem in Kyrgyzstan and in neighboring Central Asian

republics, as in this economic, cultural and political environment not many NGOs can sustain their work without outside support. Meanwhile, the traditional institutions of civil society and the traditional conflict mediation system were neglected, though they developed at their own pace and according to their own dynamics.

IMPLICATIONS: People in Kyrgyzstan had reason to be scared: experts estimated that between 400 and 1,000 people were killed in the interethnic conflicts between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities, about 1,900 injured and about 100,000 were displaced. It remains the single bloodiest event within the borders of Kyrgyzstan since the country's establishment in 1924.

Tensions between local communities, businesses, rival political groups and clans escalated for more than a month in May–June 2010. To be fair, some attempts were made by NGOs and western donor organizations, including OSCE- and UNDP-sponsored or coordinated round tables, meetings and training programs. But the fact that the quarrels spread over wide geographical areas and across social and ethnic groups indicates that the conflict mediation system did not work. Various reasons may be suggested for this. First, there was clearly a lack of communication between disputing parties, including the lack of new media communication. The truth is in this conflict the new media platforms were quite widely used by the perpetrators of the conflict, but were not sufficiently activated by the conflict mediators and civil society institutions. Second, in the time of boiling hostilities there was no trusted impartial third-party representation able to bring together at least the major players before the conflict took place. Third, at the time of crisis the conflict mediation infrastructure was fragmented and dispersed. There was simply no neutral place where all interested parties could reach legitimate and binding settlements and agreements. Fourth, mediation facilitators were scarce on the ground, especially those able to work on systematic ways to deal with growing tensions before and during the conflict.

CONCLUSIONS: The interethnic clashes and political conflicts in Osh Oblast in June 2010 raised several important questions about the need for building an appropriate and effective conflict mediation system. In general, mediation is a part of conflict prevention systems. It works by providing a platform to manage problems, misunderstandings and grievances by bringing people together to

negotiation tables, preferably long before the actual conflict explodes, and by providing them with conflict mediation tools, an institutional platform and know-how to handle differences. Because the people in Osh Oblast still do not trust each other, there is still a need to continue working out differences and finding ways to move forward. The first step should be to strengthen both the traditional and western-style conflict mediation systems by granting equal attention and resources to each. The second step should be for government agencies and international donors to focus on building an effective infrastructure of conflict mediation that local communities would have trust in and ownership of, and that would incorporate the power of the new media in future mediation and mediation communication process. And the third step is to conduct needs assessments in order to identify and support the most effective conflict mediation approach workable in the environment of Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asia republics, probably something like one-stop community service centers where local communities and citizens can receive a range of services including training and support in conflict mediation.

AUTHORS' BIO: Rafis Abazov, PhD, teaches at SIPA, Columbia University. He was a visiting professor at Al Farabi Kazakh National University (summer 2011). He is author of *The Formation of Post-Soviet International Politics in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan* (1999), *The Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (2007) and some others. He has been awarded an IREX 2010–2011 EPS fellowship (Title VIII program) for research on public policy reforms in Kazakhstan. The author would like to express his gratitude to Mr. Atajan Yazmuradov of the UN Mediation Unit for his help in preparing this article.

ABADAN BLASTS TO HAVE REPERCUSSIONS FOR TURKMENISTAN'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Jan Šír

Last July, two significant events stirred the waters of the otherwise apparently still Turkmenistan politics. First, large-scale explosions of ammunition at arms depots swept over Abadan, a satellite town of the capital Ashkhabad, leaving dozens dead and wreaking havoc with the town infrastructure. The emergency was eventually followed by a statement of President Berdimuhammedov, inviting exile opposition leaders to return to Turkmenistan and run in the upcoming presidential election to be held in early 2012. While the statement was given considerable coverage in both local and international media, the explosions initially passed relatively unnoticed.

BACKGROUND: A series of blasts were reported from outside the capital Ashkhabad on Thursday, July 7, during peak afternoon hours. The blasts occurred at about 4.40 pm and lasted until late night. For reasons that are yet to be clarified, the explosions hit a weaponry storage in Abadan, located some 20 kilometers west of Ashkhabad and the released ordnance, including several Grad and Smerch multiple rocket systems and high-explosive artillery shells, triggered a chain of detonations leading to heavy devastation in the town and adjacent villages. Aside from the military base itself, hundreds of buildings were reportedly burned down and damaged during the accident, among them the town's maternity hospital, school, kindergarten, carpet factory, and a few blocks of public housing. The Abadan hydro power plant also stopped operating in the wake of the explosions, causing electricity blackouts in parts of Ashkhabad.

The evacuation of Abadan began shortly, covering the entire town of some 50,000 residents. An improvised evacuation camp was set up in the town's sports stadium providing first medical aid and coordinating the rescue

operations on spot. Ambulances shuttled between Abadan and Ashkhabad taking the injured to hospitals across Turkmenistan's capital, accompanied by military personnel and police sent to the disaster site to prevent looting. Meanwhile, unexploded missiles were reported to be scattered around by the uncontrolled detonations and hindered the evacuation of those unable or unwilling to leave. Telephone lines connecting Abadan with other parts of the country were cut within minutes after the first blasts became known to Turkmenistan's authorities, and no hot line was established with either of the relevant government agencies, which added to the panic during the chaotic evacuation from the destroyed town.

The government maintained a low profile throughout the entire aftermath of the accident, providing little information to the public. With the situation escalating in Abadan, the national TV and radio continued broadcasting standard entertainment programs offering no news coverage from the spot while only a sparse mention of an "emergency situation in conjunction with the ignition of firework



pyrotechnics” was made available by the authorities late at night through the Internet, to which the majority of Turkmens have no access anyway. The numerous press releases that were subsequently issued by Turkmenistan’s Foreign Ministry mainly protested against “slandering reports” about significant numbers of victims and damage featured by the Russian media, rather than being specific about what actually happened in Abadan. Special units were reportedly set up under the national security ministry to search and detain those seeking to record the disaster on mobile phones or cameras and transmit eye-witness accounts to the outside world through independent channels.

The death toll varies from source to source and is subject to continuous reexamination. The bottom end is fifteen dead, including both civilians and soldiers as ultimately admitted by the Turkmenistani government after three days of denying any casualties. Independent sources, in turn, claim several hundreds were killed or wounded as a result of the accident. For instance, the eventually hacked émigré website Turkmenistan Chronicle, run by prominent human rights activist Farid Tukhbatullin and relying on a wide network of stringers, put the number of victims at as high as 1382, of which

about one third were reportedly children. However, these numbers are difficult to verify since in many instances the authorities reportedly refused to hand over the dead bodies to the relatives for burial, preferring to bury the dead in mass graves.

IMPLICATIONS: Hiding, distorting or otherwise manipulating information about the true extent of disasters which happen from time to time is nothing new for the post-Soviet region in general and for Turkmenistan in particular. However, the government’s latest tenacious denying of the undeniable, coupled with gross mismanagement which was probably at the core of the disaster itself and when coping with its consequences, is a serious blow to the painfully created reform image of President Berdimuhammedov both domestically and abroad, posing the single most striking challenge to his rule ever since his successful takeover following the death of his eccentric predecessor Saparmurat Turkmenbashi five years ago. Berdimuhammedov’s largely perceived indecisiveness, failure to take action in a critical moment, and ostentatious disrespect for symbolically important aspects of Turkmen life, such as sponsoring a national mourning for

the dead, is topped by his announced leave for holiday and has already provoked manifestations of displeasure among the traditionally conservative Turkmen society in Berdimuhammedov's native province of Ahal, a region that forms the president's power base and is key to maintaining the inter-clan balance nationwide based on the Ahal predominance. For the first time since Berdimuhammedov's ascent to power in late 2006, water cannons were reportedly deployed around the president's palace in Ashkhabad and country residence as perhaps the most visible part of the tightening security measures indicating the degree of insecurity that might in the meantime have prevailed on the part of ruling elites vis-a-vis possible unrest in light of the Abadan tragedy.

Moreover, the emergency in Abadan once again raised questions regarding Turkmenistan's defense capabilities and its very ability to act independently in such a complex geopolitical and security environment as Central Asia. Based on eye-witness accounts there are credible reports that foreign military sappers, sent to Turkmenistan from Iran and subsequently replaced by specialists from Russia's Ministry for Emergency Situations, operated on the spot from the very first days following the disaster and were engaged, in particular, in clearing undetonated ammunition – a fact likely pointing to a critical lack within Turkmenistan's Armed Forces of competent combat engineering cadres capable of performing basic military tasks and duties such as running armament systems at the army's disposal. While asking for international assistance is under normal circumstances perfectly natural in case of an emergency, none of the parties involved yet confirmed provision

of such assistance to Turkmenistan, and there are coincidences that need clarification particularly as regards Russia's possibly extending its military presence over Turkmenistan given the past troubled relationship between Moscow and Ashkhabad.

CONCLUSIONS: Against this backdrop, President Berdimuhammedov's latest initiatives such as his televised invitation to the leaders of the Turkmen opposition in exile the day after the devastating blasts in Abadan to return to Turkmenistan and take part in the upcoming presidential elections seem like little more than hollow lip service aimed at shifting the attention of the public away from what may turn out to be the beginning of an usually hot summer in the wake of nationwide celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of Turkmenistan's independence. There are no indications as yet that the latest tragedy in Abadan could initiate spreading revolutionary riots to remote Central Asia in line with an Arab Spring scenario, given the social peculiarities of the countries in this post-Soviet region. That said, breaking the unofficially imposed embargo on information about what appears to have been the most serious emergency in Turkmenistan over the past decade is indicative of the government gradually losing its grip over the society and is a factor making such a wind of change eventually possible.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Jan Šír is a Research Fellow with Institute of International Studies at Charles University in Prague. He is co-author of the Silk Road Paper *Dismantling Totalitarianism? Turkmenistan under Berdimuhammedov* (Washington, DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2009).

UZBEKISTAN-KYRGYZSTAN RELATIONS AFTER JUNE 2010 IMPLY A CONTINUED LACK OF REGIONALISM

Farkhod Tolipov

Relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have become a barometer for and a troublesome symptom of the overall regional development in Central Asia. One year has passed since the tragic events of June 2010 in the south of Kyrgyzstan where a terrible clash took place between local Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. Hundreds of Uzbeks were killed in the massacres. Allegations, investigations and analyses of the events are still filled with controversial interpretations and perceptions. Reactions to the international investigation of the conflict are telling of the lack of much-needed regional conflict mechanisms for conflict resolution in Central Asia.

BACKGROUND: In June 1990 and June 2010 tragic events occurred in the South of Kyrgyzstan, in the form of inter-ethnic conflict between the local Uzbek community and the titular nationals, the Kyrgyz. In both cases, massacres occurred between national groups who lived together and were “modernized” and “civilized” in the former Soviet state throughout the 20th century.

After one year, the clash between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz is still subject to different allegations and interpretations. It was a highly dramatic lesson for the so-called newly independent states of Central Asia, especially Kyrgyzstan and neighboring Uzbekistan. During the clash, the question of Uzbekistan’s interference or non-interference in order to save Uzbeks in Southern Kyrgyzstan was crucial for the further development of the conflict and its outcomes.

Immediately after the outburst of violence in the Osh and Jalalabad provinces, Uzbekistan’s President Islam Karimov stated that the conflict was an internal affair of Kyrgyzstan. In September 2010, at the UNGA, he pointed out that both Uzbek and Kyrgyz communities

became victims of well-planned and organized actions of a third force. Interestingly, Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbaeva expressed her official gratitude to Karimov for Uzbekistan’s non-interference, but called on Russia to help in coping with the tragedy. This statement added a certain geopolitical element to what was an internal affair of Kyrgyzstan.

Meanwhile, the events of June 2010 were investigated by the Independent International Commission (IIC), which was unique as the first international investigation of a conflict in the post-Soviet space. The IIC indicated four sides to the conflict; former President Bakiyev and his supporters; the new government headed by President Otunbaeva; the local Uzbek community; and criminal groups, mostly active in the drug trade.

In its Final Report, the IIC announced that about 500 people were killed in the massacre, of which 74 percent were Uzbeks and 24 percent Kyrgyz. The main reason for the conflict, according to the IIC, was political fanaticism that exploited ethno-nationalism. The IIC’s goals were fourfold: establishing facts; evaluating the events in the perspective of

international law; figuring out personal and institutional responsibilities; and working out recommendations.

The overall content of the huge report was naturally critical. It did not qualify the conflict as a genocide or crime of war, as expected by Uzbeks, but found some tokens of crimes against humanity. It also pointed out massive violations of the rights of Uzbeks, especially political rights, a factor which was essential in the activation of the Uzbek community after the Bakiyev government's fall in April 2010.

The IIC's final report was followed by comments of the Kyrgyz government. The official position of the Otunbaeva government is that former President Bakiyev and his supporters who fled the country after the April 2010 revolution were behind the massacres. The Kyrgyz government's comments were in turn critical towards the IIC's report, rejecting the IIC's conclusions as unbalanced and pro-Uzbek.

Thus, the overall investigation process and the subsequent official reaction to it revealed that the topic of ethno-nationalism remains not only highly politically sensitive but also doomed to a deadlock in the Central Asian context.

IMPLICATIONS: The Kyrgyz government's comments state that the Kyrgyz provisional government was left to cope with the clashes in the south on its own without support from the international community and international organizations which are supposed to deal with this type of conflicts. The government may have referred to the OSCE, the CSTO or the SCO. However, none of these international organizations could intervene directly and effectively in the Osh and Jalalabad massacre. Neither the CSTO nor the SCO are instrumental in crisis resolution or peace-enforcement, because they are not authorized to

do so by their Charters. Moreover, a large part of Kyrgyzstan's leadership initially refused to receive even a small OSCE police group for conducting investigations, referring to Kyrgyz sovereignty and stating that they could scrutinize their domestic problems themselves.

The results of the IIC's investigation and the reactions from the Kyrgyz government were all expected. It is unsurprising that the Kyrgyz side could not accept the IIC's report without criticism, that the Uzbek side was unhappy with the IIC's report, particularly because many Uzbeks still insist that the events should have been evaluated as genocide against them, and that the IIC's report itself is not thorough enough to satisfy all sides. Indeed, the purpose of the Commission was not peacekeeping, but investigation. It was allowed to produce asymmetric results, possibly indicating one side as a victim and another as an aggressor. It is therefore quite symptomatic in the Central Asian context that a mutual lack of trust existing between the conflicting groups prior to the IIC's investigation afterwards turned into mutual frustration.

The June 2010 events and their investigation are telling in terms of their implications for regional geopolitics, integration, and democratic development. It deserves mentioning that the Commission stated its recommendations were aimed at establishing the truth, achieving reconciliation and ensuring reparations to victims. No doubt, it did serve that purpose. At the same time, some serious questions remain unanswered and others still arise in the wake of this international intervention.

The concept of a state's internal affairs in cases resembling the interethnic conflict in Southern Kyrgyzstan is especially problematic and vague in the evaluation and interpretation of such a conflict. Indeed, would Russia have undertaken



immediate measures to save Russians if the clashes would have affected the Russian community in Kyrgyzstan? There was an obvious risk that solidarity with the Uzbek population in Kyrgyzstan could have drawn Uzbekistan into the conflict, underlining the international conflict potential of domestic ethnic conflicts in the region.

Moreover, the Kyrgyz government accused the IIC of an unbalanced approach to the issue, but the question is whether this government's own measures for reconciliation and criminal investigation will be more balanced and serve to establish the truth. Finally, a question of great importance is whether future relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan will particularly depend on the extent to which an objective and independent investigation of the June 2010 events is conducted.

CONCLUSIONS: The IIC made a significant effort to attract international attention to the situation in Southern Kyrgyzstan and contribute to reconciliation between the conflicting communities. At the same time, there were limitations to the Commission's mission. A stronger analysis of the situation is still needed. The problem is that while the 1990

and 2010 tragedies in Southern Kyrgyzstan were related to animosities between local Uzbeks and Kyrgyz and may have broken out for different reasons, they evidently have one fundamental cause. Perspectives on the immediate triggers of the conflict and consideration of its underlying causes may not lead to the same conclusions, and both the IIC's report and the Kyrgyz government's comments focused primarily on the triggers.

It is becoming clear after 20 years of independence that the abundance of nationalism and the lack of regionalism in both domestic policy and the regional relations between Central Asian countries are, in fact, the underlying causes of conflicts like that in Southern Kyrgyzstan. This not only perpetuates interethnic tension and mistrust within one country but also damages the integration process within the entire region.

From this point of view, we can assume that crisis prevention and peacekeeping instruments should exist at the disposal of Central Asian states themselves. In this particular conflict, a bilateral mechanism should exist between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan for communications, exchanges, monitoring, and analysis of the situation in places like Osh and Jalalabad. This proposal at least implies a more adequate position and scope for actions than non-participation, distancing or solely issuing statements based on the misperception that the Osh events are a purely internal affair of Kyrgyzstan.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Farkhod Tolipov holds a PhD in Political Science and is an independent analyst based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

FIELD REPORTS

LARGE-SCALE PRISON AMNESTY ANNOUNCED IN TAJIKISTAN

Alexander Sodiqov

Ahead of Tajikistan's 20th independence anniversary on 9 September, President Emomali Rahmon sent a draft law to the country's parliament on July 27, which would grant full amnesty or reduced terms for nearly 15,000 individuals serving prison sentences and awaiting legal proceedings in pre-trial detention. Over 8,500 may be released from jail under the proposed amnesty, which will extend to all female inmates, minors, convicts over the age of 55, disabled inmates, foreign nationals, veterans of the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, military deserters, and those suffering from cancer, tuberculosis or other serious illnesses. Prisoners eligible for release will also include those sentenced for crimes of negligence, other offences punishable by jail terms not exceeding five years, and economic crimes if the convicts have fully repaid the financial losses they caused.

The amnesty will also extend to members of outlawed Islamic groups and political movements who were convicted of extremism and imprisoned for up to five years or have served three quarters of their terms. The amnesty will also pardon an unknown number of dissident Colonel Mahmud Khudoyberdiyev's followers who did not recognize the conditions of the peace accord that ended the 1992-1997 civil war in the country and launched a rebellion against government forces in 1997, invading what is now the country's northern region of Sughd from Uzbekistan a year later. Prisoners falling under this category will be freed if they have served most of their prison terms unless they were convicted of terrorism, murder, or other serious crimes.

In addition to those who will be freed from prison or pre-trial detention, all inmates in the country are expected to have their prison terms cut – except for

those serving life sentences. The presidential press service has described the proposed “golden” amnesty as a “humane act which aims to facilitate the return of convicts to peaceful work, life and family environment, and contribute to their correction”.

The planned amnesty has been welcomed across Tajikistan's political spectrum. Prominent Tajik cleric and Senator Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, who served as a spiritual leader of the Tajik Islamic opposition during the civil war, said the amnesty announced in the run-up to the holy month of Ramadan (starting on August 1 in Tajikistan) is a “great act pleasing God.”

At the same time, some experts and opposition leaders have described the planned amnesty as incomplete because it does not apply to some individuals and major groups of prisoners. Prominent Tajik human rights activist Oynihol Bobonazarova said the draft amnesty law should also have provided for the release of prominent convicts, such as former Tajik interior minister Yaqub Salimov (sentenced to 15 years in 2004), former head of the opposition Democratic Party (DPT) Mahmadrusi Iskandarov (sentenced to 23 years in 2005), and former commander of the Tajik Presidential Guard Ghaffor Mirzoyev (serving a life sentence since 2006), as they had all “served the country in the past”. The three inmates were convicted by Tajik courts on a range of charges, including state treason and attempts to overthrow the government.

Turajonzoda also believes that the proposed amnesty should extend to Iskandarov, Mirzoyev and Salimov. In addition, the cleric argues that amnesty should be granted to “hundreds of

supporters of the former United Tajik Opposition” who have been jailed or are wanted by the authorities despite the general amnesty declared as part of the 1997 peace accord. According to Saidumar Husayni, who serves as Deputy Chairman of the opposition Islamic Revival Party (IRPT) and represents the party in the lower chamber of Tajikistan’s parliament, up to 300 former opposition fighters are currently in prison. Husayni says the proposed amnesty is not likely to lead to their release.

Payam Foroughi, a Fellow at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Academy in Bishkek, suggests that it would be appropriate to include two former Guantanamo detainees, Rukhniddin Sharopov and Abdumuqit Vohidov, as part of the proposed amnesty. He considers it very likely that the two Tajik detainees were deceived into thinking that they were joining the national army in 2001, later flown by helicopter to Afghanistan without their consent, and then sold by Afghan militants to U.S. security agents for bounties of US\$ 10,000-20,000 each. From 2002 to 2007, Sharopov and Vohidov were kept at the U.S. prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where they had no access to an attorney, were interrogated by both U.S. and Tajik security agents and subsequently repatriated to Tajikistan, tortured into signing confessions and sentenced to lengthy prison terms by a court trial that was marred by serious due process violations.

Foroughi, along with Human Rights Watch and several American lawyers, claims that there is no evidence that either Sharopov or Vohidov engaged

in any form of violence or fired a single bullet while in Afghanistan, and their only faults consisted of being young, naïve and “in the wrong place at the wrong time. After nine years of imprisonment in Afghanistan, Cuba and Tajikistan, it would be appropriate for them to be amnestied”, Foroughi says. That said, the chances of the two falling into the impending amnesty appear dim.

The amnesty bill must now be approved by both houses of parliament and signed by the president to become law, but given the rubberstamp nature of Tajikistan’s parliament, this is seen as a mere formality. The authorities have already set up a commission to implement the amnesty during the next three months. It is not expected that the commission’s work will be open to public oversight. Transparency could help prevent corruption which has been a major feature of Tajikistan’s judiciary and penitentiary systems. According to Fattoh Saidov, head of Tajikistan’s State Financial Control and Anticorruption Agency, almost all of the prisoners released under the amnesty in November 2009 had to pay bribes.

While the authorities do not publicize the number of inmates in Tajik prisons, unofficial estimates of the country’s prison population range from 11,000 to 13,000. Tajikistan has had 13 large-scale prison amnesties over the past 20 years. The most recent amnesty pardoned about 10,000 individuals in November 2009.

POST-NAZARBAYEV SUCCESSION BECOMING MOST DISCUSSED ISSUE IN KAZAKHSTAN

Georgiy Voloshin

The latest statement by President Nazarbayev’s political advisor Ermukhamet Ertysbayev has literally turned the community of political

commentators upside down. In his July 25 interview for the reputable Russian newspaper *Kommersant*, Ertysbayev said that if Kazakhstan’s President was

to prematurely relinquish his responsibilities, his son-in-law Timur Kulibayev would be most likely to succeed him. This statement follows a recent publication in the German tabloid *Bild*, which reported about Nazarbayev's hospitalization in one of Hamburg's most prominent clinics. According to the German press, Nazarbayev might have been diagnosed with cancer and has visited the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf to receive expensive treatment. This information, though strongly denied by the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Kazakhstan's Embassy in Berlin, is now subject to lively discussions about the future of the current president and his political heritage.

Mukhtar Ablyazov, President Nazarbayev's major opponent and currently exiled in London, has earlier told the *Respublika* newspaper that Timur Kulibayev, currently in control of the Samruk-Kazyna Sovereign Welfare Fund responsible for 54 percent of Kazakhstan's GDP, is too weak to face competition from other representatives of Kazakhstan's political elite. In Ablyazov's view, the best placed contender for the presidency would be Prime Minister Karim Massimov, an experienced economist and financier, who guided the country through and out of the world economic crisis starting in 2008. The only disadvantages of Massimov's bid would be his Uyghur origin, his poor knowledge of the Kazakh language and his lack of popular support within Kazakhstan's population of 16-million. At the same time, as Ablyazov confided, Massimov benefits from the trust of a group of influential entrepreneurs, known as "oligarchs", who are in possession of Kazakhstan's vast energy resources and are interested in maintaining the status quo in order to secure their lucrative jobs.

Most experts believe that the *Kommersant* commentary seeks to take the teeth out of Mukhat Ablyazov's statements aimed against both Kulibayev and Massimov, known to be if not friends, at least long-time partners and close associates. According to Ertysbayev, Kulibayev's experience as the head of several energy companies

in Kazakhstan and his direct participation in the management of the presidential family's affairs impart considerable weight to his eventual bid for the highest public office in the country. "I know Timur Kulibayev quite well. He graduated from the Moscow State University, used to be one of the best students, is endowed with systemic reasoning and has wide professional experience acquired not only throughout his years of work in Samruk-Kazyna but also in previous jobs. Though he did not work in Government and was not a regional governor, he has learnt much through the prism of public and political management", said Ertysbayev, referring to Kulibayev's background. At the same time, President Nazarbayev's long-time aide did not exclude the most active participation of Prime Minister Massimov in the definition of the country's future political course, given his own administrative and media resources.

Though it is still neither clear whether the issue of succession is being seriously discussed in the highest corridors of power, nor who is most likely to take over the reins in case of Nazarbayev's sudden decision to step down, most observers do concur that a political slugfest among the strongest candidates has already been announced. Whilst Nazarbayev officially remains in office till 2016 as a result of his April 3 reelection, his deteriorating health may speed up the designation of a successor for the purpose of ensuring political continuity and preserving the fragile balance of power among regional clans.

At a time when bets are being made on who will be the next person to run the ninth largest country in the world by area, the internal political situation seems to remain rather tense. The Mangystau region in Western Kazakhstan has been engulfed for weeks with mass protests of oil sector workers dissatisfied with low salaries and intolerable working conditions. Their cause has become an issue of international concern, prompting the British pop-star Sting to cancel his concert on the occasion of the Astana Day on July 6. Another stumbling block for Western Kazakhstan's regional administration is the increased activity of radical

Islamic organizations, which regularly attack police patrols and district outposts. On July 22, the governor of the Aktobe region, where elite forces and local law enforcement agents tried for weeks to

destroy a few extremist cells responsible for the killing of two police officers, was promptly replaced by presidential decree.

CIA REPORTEDLY CONCLUDED BOMBING OF U.S. EMBASSY IN TBILISI HAS TIES TO MOSCOW

Maka Gurgenedze

U.S. intelligence agencies confirmed Russian ties to the explosion near the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi last year, the *Washington Times* reported on July 27th. Russia termed the publication an attempt to stir a new “propaganda hype”.

A bomb blown up 60 meters from the U.S. embassy’s exterior wall on September 22, 2010, did not cause death, injury or damage to the embassy. The incident, however, was one in a series of 12 accomplished or attempted bombings over a year throughout Georgia.

An identical design of unpacked military-grade explosives, known as RDX in the U.S. and hexogen in Georgia, corroborated that they came from the same source, the Georgian Interior Ministry reported. It said that an examination of the arrested suspects’ cell phones led the investigators to the Russian military officer Yevgeni Borisov, who was serving in the breakaway region Abkhazia when the series of bomb blasts occurred in Georgia. The national court found Borisov guilty of cooperating with the Russian special services to organize terrorist attacks against the Georgian state and sentenced him to 30 years in absentia.

According to the *Washington Times*, the classified report produced by U.S. intelligence agencies in December 2010 verified the findings of the Georgian side, and thereby the connection between Russia’s military intelligence and the explosion at the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi. The document became available to the members and staff of the House and Senate intelligence committees in January.

The *Washington Times* publication is based on statements from two U.S. officials who are familiar with the report, and supports the facts put forth by the Georgian Interior Ministry. “It is written without hedges, and it confirms the Georgian account”, that the bombing was coordinated by the GRU, Russian military intelligence, one of the U.S. officials said.

In response to the publication, Russia’s State Secretary and Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin said that “the *Washington Times* is to trigger a second propaganda wave around issues that have already been discussed with American and Georgian representatives at the beginning of this year”. Karasin said the Russian side has conducted a qualified investigation and reported to both the American and Georgian officials, thus “all these rounds of allegations are absolutely false and baseless”, he said.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in Washington intend to learn more about the details of the incident. Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona, the Senate’s Republican whip, said that congress should probe the matter through the intelligence committees and discuss the findings carefully. This is important as the U.S. administration supports Russia’s membership in the WTO and plans to reach a cooperative missile defense agreement with Moscow, the *Washington Times* reported.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton brought up the issue with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov first in February in Munich when they signed the New START arms pact, and then on

July 13 when the counterparts sealed an agreement on child adoptions, the publication informed.

However, from the perspective of some U.S. intelligence officials, the State Department's reaction to the issue was "weak" given the fact that Borisov continues to operate in Abkhazia: "The fact that this GRU major is still at large in Abkhazia should tell you all you need to know about how effective our response has been", the *Washington Times* quoted one U.S. intelligence official.

Recently, the director of information and analysis for the Georgian Interior Ministry, Shota Utiashvili, personally shared details of the embassy bombing attempt with the State Department and Pentagon officials, though U.S. officials had then not reached consensus on the responsibility for the Tbilisi blast, according to the *Washington Times*.

The report of the U.S. intelligence services is favorable to the Georgian government, which has previously found it difficult to convince international and domestic skeptics that the

numerous terrorist attacks detected in Georgia over a year were exclusively masterminded by the Kremlin. Denying the charges, Moscow accuses Tbilisi of "spy mania" manifested in a continuous search for Russian traces in all crimes. Some Georgian opposition parties, in turn, claim that the authorities deftly use the argument of "spy networks" to divert public attention from social problems and justify its control of media sources. Given this sort of criticism, the CIA's highly classified report serves Tbilisi's interests very well. Unfavorable for Georgia, however, is the "weak" reaction of the U.S. to the possible instances of Russian state-sponsored terrorism.

Therefore, the main question is whether the corroboration of alleged links between the Russian government and the attempted bombing will to any extent bring about a reconsideration of the U.S.-Russia reset policy, one element of which is a *de facto* arms embargo on Georgia; or alternatively, whether a weak U.S. reaction to the CIA findings may cast a shadow on the partnership between the U.S. and Georgia.

JUDICIAL REFORM LAUNCHED IN KYRGYZSTAN

Joldosh Osmonov

On July 25, the newly-formed Council for the Selection of Judges started interviewing the candidates to the vacant positions of judges of the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Chamber. Almost 130 applicants are competing for 35 vacant posts in the Supreme Court and 11 in the Constitutional Chamber. The names of the selected candidates will be finalized by August 5 and sent to the President, who will in her turn submit the list of candidates to the parliament for approval.

The replacement of the entire pool of the Supreme Court judges is being conducted within the framework of broader reforms of the entire legal system in Kyrgyzstan. During the reign of the previous regimes, reform of the judicial branch was

one of the most voiced and long-lasting demands of not only opposition forces but also the wider public as the judiciary system discredited itself and turned into the most corrupt state institution throughout the years since Kyrgyzstan's independence. After last year's government change, judicial reform became one of the focal points of the Constitutional reforms. As a result, fundamental changes in the legal system were introduced, including the elimination of the separate Constitutional court and deputing its powers to the newly-created Constitutional chamber under the Supreme Court. These changes were reflected in the new Constitution which was approved at a nationwide referendum in 2010.

Regarding the selection of judges, the Constitution foresees the formation of a Council for the Selection of Judges consisting of 24 members offered by the parliamentary majority, the parliamentary opposition and the Council of Judges, each group providing one third of the council's members. Within its three-year term, the selecting council is responsible for choosing candidates for all vacant judge posts in the country.

With a declared aim to get rid of corrupt judges and create an independent and professional judicial system, the parliament announced all judge posts in the country vacant. "Currently, around 450 judges work across the country, all these posts may now be considered vacant" stated Sadyr Japarov, the head of the parliamentary committee on judicial and legal affairs, at the first meeting of the selecting council.

On August 15, despite the parliament's summer vacation, its members will gather for an extraordinary session to approve the candidacies for the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Chamber. Afterwards, open competition for judge posts in all local courts is to be announced. We expect that a full replacement of the entire pool of judges in Kyrgyzstan will be finished by the end of October, Japarov concluded.

Meanwhile, the parliament's judicial system reform initiative was highly supported and praised by the country's leadership including Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbaeva. "From now on neither the President nor the legislative and executive branches possess mechanisms to put pressure on the judges' work", President Otunbaeva stated during her meeting with the council members. She noted that the process of restoring public trust in the judicial branch has started and now the council's main task is to ensure transparency in selecting new judges.

However, despite the purported openness and independence of the council's work, civil society

representatives contend that the purpose of the reforms is undermined due to the lack of transparency and impartiality in the process of selecting judges. Aziza Abdrasulova, a member of the civil society council for judicial system control, stated that two members of the selecting council are running for judge posts in the Supreme Court. This creates a conflict of interests, Abdrasulova said.

In addition, civil society expressed heavy criticism toward the process of the council's formation. As members of civil society council explained, the Constitution provides that the candidates for the council from the parliamentary majority and the opposition must come from civil society. However, parliamentary factions rather elected their trusted representatives, thus undermining the idea of creating a truly independent judicial branch, they claimed. Nurbek Toktakunov, head of the "Precedent" Legal Institute, noted that "parliamentary factions are making everything possible and impossible to form a judicial system which will be under the control of politicians."

Similar concerns were voiced in the opinion of the European Commission for Democracy through Law, the so called Venice Commission. The main recommendations of the commission derived from a review of the draft law on the council, and aimed at reducing the risks of political influence and excluding party affiliation of the council members.

Local experts claim that the whole idea of a judicial system reform is becoming a subject of political manipulation and a continuing power struggle between different political forces. Such a situation will, of course, contribute to the rise of public skepticism and distrust in the council's work and the judicial reform as a whole, which in the end could possibly lead to a failure of these reforms, experts concluded.

NEWS DIGEST

NETHERLANDS SENDS REDUCED AFGHANISTAN MISSION, AS CANADA ENDS COMBAT RULE

7 July

The Dutch military is sending 160 soldiers to Afghanistan as part of its new, scaled-down mission to the country. The troops, mostly support staff for 225 military police trainers, will be deployed to the northern Konduz Province and will be under the protection of German troops. A total of 545 Dutch soldiers and police trainers will assist NATO in Afghanistan through 2014, a big step back from the Netherlands' previous commitment of 1,600 soldiers. The bulk of the troops was withdrawn last year after the Dutch government collapsed over whether to extend their deployment. Meanwhile, Canada ended its combat mission in Afghanistan today after nine years and the death of 157 men. The departure of nearly 3,000 troops comes as Western forces begin to announce gradual drawdowns of troops ahead of a full withdrawal in 2014. A separate Canadian training mission involving 950 troops will work in Kabul with Afghan security forces. (RFE/RL)

AFGHANISTAN'S PRESIDENT'S BROTHER ASSASSINATED

12 July

The assassination of Ahmad Wali Karzai, a brother of Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai, in his hometown of Kandahar leaves a potentially dangerous power vacuum in the country's restive south. Afghan officials say Karzai, who was head of the Kandahar Provincial Council, was shot dead on July 12 inside his home in the southern city. Local officials said the assassination was carried out by Sardar Muhammad, a close associate of the Karzai family. Muhammad was a long-serving former bodyguard of Ahmad Wali's older brother, Qayum, and a trusted man in the family. Some other reports, however, said Sardar Mohammad was a member of Ahmad Wali Karzai's own security detail. At a news conference the day of the killing, Kandahar Governor Tooryalai Wesa said Muhammad had been "misled" into carrying out the assassination. "The person who killed Ahmad Wali Karzai was very close to him," Wesa said. "He was going to his

office most often. He has held police and military posts. He has been responsible for road and street security. No one ever thought that [Sardar Muhammad] would take such action. He knew [Ahmad Wali Karzai's] family. He was eating at the same table with Ahmad Wali Karzai's family. Yet it is unclear who misled him into this action. Unfortunately, it has happened. It is an irreparable and unforgivable incident." President Karzai confirmed his brother's assassination when he appeared at a joint press conference with visiting French President Nicolas Sarkozy, saying the killing reflected the sorrow of the Afghan people. "As you have already heard, my younger brother Ahmad Wali Karzai was martyred today at his home. This is the life of the Afghan people," he said. "In each household in Afghanistan, we have experienced such misery. We hope that the sufferings of the Afghan people come to an end, God willing, and that peace and a security prevail in our country so that no Afghan family ever again faces the pains and suffering we've all experienced." The president has traveled to Kandahar for the funeral. The Taliban have claimed responsibility for the assassination, calling it one of their "biggest achievements." A spokesman for the group told the AFP news agency that the Taliban had assigned a gunman to kill the powerful politician. However, officials say it remains unclear whether the killing was the result of a Taliban plot, an internal feud, or whether other motives existed. President Karzai has flown to Kandahar to attend his brother's funeral, set for July 13. (RFE/RL)

SNOW LEOPARDS FOUND IN AFGHANISTAN

15 July

Endangered snow leopards have been spotted in one of the more peaceful areas of Afghanistan. The World Conservation Society said the usually solitary animals have been tracked across the Wakhan Corridor, in the northeast of the country where militant activity is low. Listed as globally threatened, only some 4,500 to 7,500 snow leopards exist, scattered across a dozen nations in the high mountain ranges of Central Asia. The cats are poached for their pelts and killed by shepherds

guarding their flocks from the potential predators. "This is a wonderful discovery. It shows that there is real hope for snow leopards in Afghanistan. Now our goal is to ensure that these magnificent animals have a secure future as part of Afghanistan's natural heritage," Peter Zahler, the World Conservation Society's deputy Asia director, said in a statement. The World Conservation Society has been working in the Wakhan Corridor since 2006 to preserve wildlife like the Marco Polo sheep and the ibex. In tandem with the U.S. government's aid arm, USAID, the World Conservation Society says it works with all schools in Wakham to teach conservation. It says it has also trained 59 rangers to monitor wildlife. The New York-based group has also started a scheme to compensate shepherds for livestock lost to predators. (RFE/RL)

EMPLOYER DENIES KAZAKH OIL WORKER STRIKE

20 July

European parliamentary member Paul Murphy currently in Kazakhstan, is claiming that 4,000 oil workers in Zhanaozen in Kazakhstan's Mangistau Region are on strike. However, the Razvedka i Dobycha KazMunaiGaz joint-stock company, which operates the oil company in question, denies the assertions, Almaty's Interfax-Kazakhstan news agency reported this week. A release from Razvedka i Dobycha KazMunaiGaz claims that Murphy's statement "does not conform to reality." The company said 850 people didn't report to work Monday but that the staff at the site is 9,180 people. Murphy, on his Web site, said the Kazakh national press agency issued a news release that was "an attempt to undermine the purpose of my visit." Murphy said he was in the area taking part in "GUE / NGL (European United Left/Nordic Green Left Group) delegation to Kazakhstan to meet with trade unionists, community activists, striking workers, opposition parties and human rights organizations." The dispute has the potential to escalate, as Murphy's Web site released a statement noting, "The European Parliament today reiterated its support for Murphy's statements on the situation in the country in light of false claims from the Kazakhstan national press agency that he is there only in a personal capacity." Since 1991 the development of Kazakhstan's hydrocarbon resources has been Central Asia's biggest success story. In the past two decades, since the 1991 implosion of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan has attracted more than \$120 billion in foreign direct investment, with nearly

all of the funding going into developing Kazakhstan's energy industry. That industry sector had been largely overlooked in the 1970s as western Siberia's massive oil reserves came online. Of the 15 former Soviet republics, Kazakhstan is sitting on the sole "superfield" discovered in the last three decades, with its Kashagan offshore Caspian superfield, the largest oil field outside the Middle East. In terms of reserves, the Kashagan field is fifth largest in the world, with recoverable reserves estimated at 9 billion-16 billion barrels. When fully developed, Kashagan will have a projected peak production of 1.3 million barrels per day. But labor disputes have been rising in the Kazakh energy industry over the past several years, with many workers complaining that they are paid a fraction of their Western colleagues' salaries. The Zhanaozen dispute is potentially the tip of the iceberg in terms of labor disputes in Kazakhstan's most profitable industry. (UPI)

ONE GEORGIAN SURVIVES, ANOTHER MISSING IN NORWAY ATTACK

23 July

Georgian girl is among survivors and another girl from Georgia is missing after at least 84 people were shot dead by a gunman disguised as a policeman at a youth summer camp on Norway's island of Utøya. Natia Chkhetiani, who survived in the attack, told Georgia's Rustavi 2 TV by phone from Oslo late on Saturday, that last time she saw her friend, Tamta Liparteliani, was shortly before the shooting began. The two are members of the movement, Young Socialists of Georgia, and were among around 700 participants of the summer camp on island of Utøya organized by the youth wing of the Norway's ruling Labor Party. Natia Chkhetiani said that after the shooting started she saw some young people jumping into water to escape hail of bullets; she said she also wanted to jump into water, but changed her mind after seeing how one boy was hit by bullet after jumping into water. She said she was hiding from one place to another mainly , along the rocky shore of the island. Chkhetiani also said that after the police boats arrived, she and some others hiding with her were still afraid to come out of hiding as the attacker himself was in the police uniform. The Georgian embassy in Denmark, which covers Norway, said it was in contact with the Norwegian police trying to find out the fate of another Georgian girl. President Saakashvili said in a letter of condolence to Norway's Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, that "this terrible atrocity once

again reminds us that terrorism remains one of the main common challenges of the world today". "For its solution, we have to strengthen our common efforts in order to ensure peace and stability in the world", Saakashvili the letter says. (Civil Georgia)

TAJIKISTAN SAYS ESCAPED MILITANTS KILLED, CAPTURED

26 July

Security forces in Tajikistan killed one Islamist militant who escaped prison nearly a year ago, and recaptured another, the Interior Ministry said on Tuesday, leaving only two of the 25 escapees on the run. The ministry said in a statement that one of its servicemen was also killed and two wounded in a gunfight with the militants on Monday, 250 km (155 miles) east of the capital Dushanbe. Tajikistan, the poorest of the 15 former Soviet republics, shares a 1,340-km (840-mile) border with Afghanistan and has been fighting a group of insurgents in the country's east since the jailbreak in August 2010. The Central Asian state of 7.5 million people, where tens of thousands were killed in a 1992-97 civil war, is viewed with concern by Russia and the United States because of its location on a drug trafficking route out of Afghanistan. Authorities say the 25 prisoners who escaped last year included the organisers of an alleged coup plot. President Imomali Rakhmon fired almost the entire leadership of his security services after the jailbreak. Sixteen of the fugitives have now been recaptured and a further seven killed, authorities say. Underlining the fragile peace in the mountainous republic, Interior Minister Abdurahim Kakharov said last week that a rebel commander who terrorised Dushanbe during the civil war might launch attacks to support a growing insurgency. A militant group linked to al Qaeda claimed responsibility for an ambush on a military convoy last September that killed 28 government troops. (Reuters)

ABKHAZ CANDIDATES SIGN 'CLEAN AND FAIR ELECTION' PLEDGE

27 July

With cordial smiles and vigorous handshakes three candidates running in the early presidential elections in breakaway Abkhazia signed on July 27 a joint agreement for "clean and fair election", pledging not to use "dirty tricks" against each other during the campaign. Acting president of the breakaway region Alexander Ankvab; prime minister Sergey Shamba and former vice president

Raul Khajimba signed the agreement upon the initiative of Forum of People's Unity of Abkhazia, an opposition party supporting Khajimba in the election, Abkhaz news agency, Apsnipress, reported. Text of the agreement reads that the candidates vow "to act only in line with the state interests of the Republic of Abkhazia and its people; not to allow undermining legitimacy and actual results of the election"; to conduct "open and fair" campaign and "to be open for any questions asked by voters and journalists." (Civil Georgia)

SWITZERLAND TALKS AZERBAIJANI WTO MEMBERSHIP

1 August

Azerbaijan's membership in the World Trade Organization has been discussed today in Switzerland. A delegation consisting of representatives of the Economic Development Ministry, Industry and Energy Ministry, Agriculture Ministry and State Customs Committee under the leadership of Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmud Mammadgulyev visited Switzerland. During the visit, the delegation held bilateral talks on Azerbaijan's membership in the WTO with the EU, Ecuador, Switzerland, Brazil and China. The consultations have been held with the UN Conference on Trade and Development. The discussions have been held with the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development of Cooperation in Switzerland. The head of the Azerbaijani delegation held bilateral meetings with the heads of missions of UN member-states accredited in Switzerland. (Trend)

UZBEKISTAN 'HALTS MOBILE INTERNET, SMS' FOR EXAM DAY

2 August

Mobile operators in Uzbekistan suspended Internet and messaging services for the duration of nationwide university entrance exams Tuesday in an apparent bid to prevent cheating, a report said. Five national mobile operators shut down mobile Internet and text and picture messaging for four hours from 9:00 am (0400 GMT), citing "urgent maintenance work on telecommunications networks," gazeta.uz reported. Voice services were not affected, the website said. The restrictions affected not just those taking tests, but all of the country's estimated 19 million mobile phone users. "Restrictions on additional services are introduced by mobile operators in Uzbekistan every year on the day of admission test exams," the Russian-language

website said. Reports suggested that authorities feared students may use mobile Internet and text-messaging to cheat on their exams. Police conduct a thorough search for phones and cheat sheets before students enter a university building. Uzbekistan is a former Soviet republic, the most populous in Central Asia with a population of 28 million people. (AFP)

FOUR GUARDS REPORTED KILLED IN NORTH AFGHANISTAN ATTACKS

2 August

Police have said that three suicide bombers attacked a guesthouse frequented by foreigners in the northern Afghan city of Konduz on August 2, killing four Afghan security guards. A Konduz police official, Abdul Rahman, said one attacker detonated a car bomb at the gates of the guesthouse while the other two stormed the building where they fought Afghan forces for a couple of hours before detonating their explosives. Ten people, including civilians and an Afghan police officer were wounded in the explosions and fighting. It was not immediately clear whether there were any foreigners among the injured. Police said that German aid workers often stayed in the guesthouse. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. The incident is the latest in what appears to be a rising number of violent attacks in northern Afghanistan, which has previously been seen as more secure than the south and east of the country. (RFE/RL)

CO-CHAIRMAN: SOME FORCES WANT TO SPLIT WORLD AZERBAIJANIS CONGRESS

3 August

Some forces want to split and weaken the World Azerbaijanis Congress (WAC), the Congress co-chairman Sabir Rustamkhanli said at a news conference on Wednesday. He said Saftar Rahimli, removed from his office in the WAC, now gathered several people around him and says that he removed the Congress leadership from office. Given that these individuals do not have this right because two of seven board members of the WAC, whom he gathered around him, were dismissed from their posts at a board meeting. "The WAC has its charter, and all its activity is regulated by this charter," Rustamkhanli said. He underlined that due to the fact that WAC representation in Azerbaijan did not pass state registration and was not able to carry out any legal activity, it was eliminated. And the head of WAC representation in Azerbaijan Saftar

Rahimli was planned to transfer to another post in Congress.

"As soon as Saftar Rahimli heard about the elimination of the WAC representation in Azerbaijan, he immediately made a stink in press and started the separatist activity," Rustamkhanli said. He said those dismissed from their posts in Congress have repeatedly stated that they were allegedly supporters of the unity of the WAC. With such statements these people want to deceive the public. Rustamkhanli also commented on some media statements about misappropriation of money from the Congress's budget. "Those who seek to split the WAC, spreads press reports that I allegedly squandered the Congress's funds. I want to stress that the WAC have never had any financial accounts in any bank. We are collecting funds on our accounts and on accounts of our friends only for holding conferences. A financial report on expenditure of these funds is always made at the end of the congresses," Rustamkhanli said. (Trend)

TAJIKISTAN BANS YOUTH FROM MOSQUES

4 August

Tajikistan on Wednesday banned all children and teenagers from worshipping in mosques as the volatile Central Asian republic pressed ahead with its battle against rising Islamic fundamentalism. President Emomali Rakhmon signed the measure into law after it was unanimously adopted by the upper house of parliament last month, local news reports said. The law bans those under the age of 18 from praying in churches or mosques and requires them to study in secular schools, Azিয়া-Plus news agency said. The authorities said the change would help stem the spread of religious fundamentalism in the overwhelmingly Muslim but secular nation. But the bill's passage was strongly condemned by religious groups. "The ban to attend mosques will give rise to the negative reaction among the people," prominent Muslim theologian and former deputy prime minister Akbar Turadzhonzoda said in an open letter to the president. Other religious leaders noted that Rakhmon signed the law in the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan -- a period of fasting and prayer for Muslims. The president also approved separate changes to the criminal code that make "active participation" in an unauthorised rally into an offence punishable by up to five years in prison. Those found guilty of providing "illegal religious education" to young people can now be put behind bars for up to 12 years. The impoverished ex-

Soviet state shares a 1,340-kilometre (840-mile) border with Afghanistan and has previously accused religious groups of stoking unrest in a bid to impose Islamic rule. Rakhmon last year recalled Tajik students studying abroad after accusing foreign institutions of taking steps to "prepare terrorists". (AFP)

AZERBAIJAN READY TO SUPPORT NABUCCO

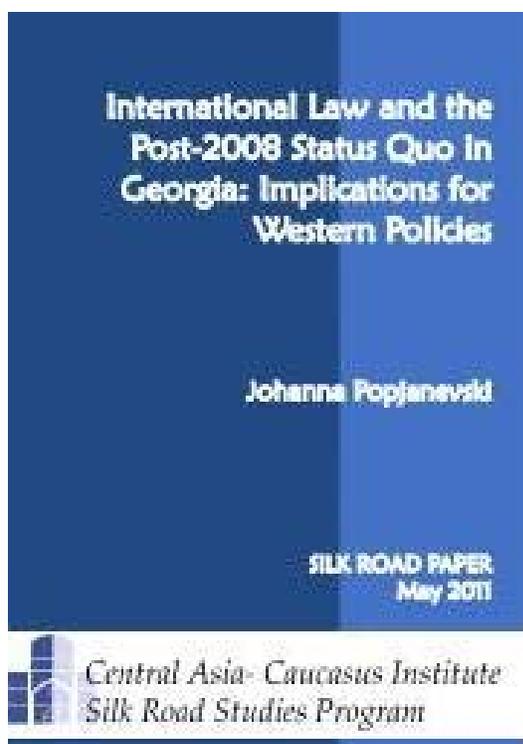
4 August

Azerbaijan can serve not only as a potential transit country but a gas supplier to the proposed Nabucco pipeline for Europe, the country's energy minister said. The Nabucco project consortium in Vienna aims to get some natural gas to fill the pipeline with non-Russian suppliers such as Azerbaijan. In May, however, it was announced that construction was delayed by one year to 2013 and gas deliveries weren't expected until 2017 because of supplier timelines. Europe is trying to break the Russian grip on the regional energy sector through a series of transit networks in the so-called Southern Corridor, which includes the Nabucco natural gas pipeline. Baku is at the center of a regional energy race spurred by 2009 disputes between Russia and Ukraine, which hosts 80 percent of the Russian natural gas sent to European consumers. Azeri Minister of Industry and Energy Natiq Aliyev said his country was backing the Nabucco project. "As part of this project, Azerbaijan can serve as a transit

country, as well as a gas supplier, as the project is seen as a priority in light of the diversification of gas supplies," he was quoted by news agency News.Az as saying. Azerbaijan has more than 50 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in its Shah Deniz gas field in the Caspian Sea. (UPI)

TURKMEN PRESIDENT RECEIVES TAJIK FM 4 August

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received Tajik Foreign Minister Khamrokhon Zarifi on Aug. 3, the press-service of the Turkmen government said. The text states that Tajik President Emomali Rahmon wished happiness, peace and welfare to the Turkmen counterpart and Turkmen people. "Tajikistan attaches great importance to developing the full cooperation with fraternal Turkmenistan," the message said. President Berdimuhamedov said that Turkmen people always valued the relations with its neighbors. The sides exchanged views on the entire range of the interstate cooperation and cooperation in all important areas, especially in economy, trade, energy, transport and communication. On the eve of Zarifi's visit, Tajik media wrote that Dushanbe wants to increase the supply of oil products to the country from Turkmenistan. The country depends on the imports from Russia in this area. Russia increased the export fees several times and it led to a jump in prices in the domestic food market. (Trend)



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