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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASS ANALYST

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

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MOSCOW AND THE CRIMEAN TATARS: IS RUSSIA INCITING A NEW JIHADI FRONT?

Stephen Blank

When Moscow invaded and annexed Crimea, it also reacquired control over the Crimean Tatar population there, approximately 300,000 people. Russia's annexation is utterly at odds with the desires of the Crimean Tatars and their Majlis or Council. As the veteran Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev has said, they want only autonomy within Ukraine, an insight based on the clear recognition that only in a democratic Ukraine, especially in the light of planned reforms to decentralize Ukraine's administration, can their demands be met. The record of the treatment of Tatars in Crimea after Russia's annexation implies that Moscow risks inciting a new insurgency, possibly with Jihadist overtones.

BACKGROUND: In March 2014, Russia offered many overtures to the Crimean Tatars to win their support. On March 11, the Crimean parliament adopted a declaration "On guarantees for the restoration of rights of the Crimean Tatar people," stating that in a future Crimean constitution, the Crimean Tatar language will have the status of official language (together with Russian and Ukrainian); that in executive organs of state power in Crimea at least 20 percent of positions will be reserved for Crimean Tatars; that Crimean Tatar self-government organs, the Kurultai and the Majlis, will be officially recognized; and that financial assistance, as well as assistance for the restoration of historical monuments and native language education, will be provided. President Putin also invited Dzhemilev to Moscow where he reportedly promised "to do everything" to protect Crimean Tatars from any possible aggression. Several official delegations from Tatarstan also visited Crimea and offered them material assistance.

But by April, the Tatars still refused to support the annexation while the new Crimean constitution proclaimed Crimea "united and indivisible," did not recognize the Crimean Tatars as an "indigenous people" of Crimea, and did not give them the right to self-determination or recognize the Majlis or other self-governing bodies. Thus they got no autonomy at all. The Constitution gave the Tatars Russian citizenship entailing the right to own land and recognized their language as one of Crimea's official languages but also reduced the total number of Parliamentary seats from 100 to 75, raised the number of single-seat constituencies to 75 percent, and effectively barred the Majlis from fielding party lists because only national, not local or ethnic, parties can compete in Russian elections. Finally, in July the Crimean prosecutor, Natalya Poklonskaya charged the Majlis with extremist activity threatening its prohibition and thus denying the Tatars any political voice at all.

Moscow is also trying to eliminate the Tatars' pro-Ukrainian Majlis leadership and split the Tatars' religious administration by creating its own pro-Moscow authorities, both of which are long-standing Muscovite, Tsarist, and Soviet tactics. Russia seeks to eradicate Crimean Tatar Islamist groups and to use its designated strongman in Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, to help control the Tatars. By late April, Moscow and the Crimean authorities exiled Dzhemilev from Crimea. They threatened him and anyone demonstrating on behalf of Crimean Tatar autonomy in Ukraine with the full weight of repression under Russian law.



(Source: Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People)

IMPLICATIONS: Russian and Crimean authorities also began arresting or “disappearing” dissidents, and obviously not only Tatars. These “disappearances” began in Mid-March, finally leading the Crimean Muftiate (also known as the Muslim Spiritual Directorate, MSD) to speak out against the authorities. Moscow, in classic Russian imperialist style, also simultaneously sought to break the ties among the Mufti, the MDS and the

Majlis. Russian authorities warned that the MSD was “in danger” because of those links to the anti-Russian and anti-Orthodox Majlis. By the end of June the same official who made this warning, the notorious anti-Muslim Roman Silantyev, warned that the FSB planned to liquidate “radical Islamic organizations in Crimea.” Since Silantyev defines as extremist anyone he and the authorities do not like and has repeatedly threatened the MSD, this new warning could clearly presage a full-scale offensive on the MSD and the Crimean Tatars.

Finally in early July the Crimean authorities barred Refat Chubarov, leader of the Majlis, from entering “Russian territory” because of his “activities to incite interethnic hatred.” In light of Putin’s warning that “none of us can allow the Crimean Tatar people to become a bargaining chip in disputes – especially in disputes between Russia and Ukraine,” it is clear that they can hope for nothing from either Moscow or the local authorities. Likewise the UN High Commissioner for human rights, Navi Pillay, stated that “Tatars faced numerous problems including physical harassment, fear of religious persecution and internal displacement.” And the UN simultaneously released a report attesting to those risks.

The consequences of this repression are not long in coming. Crimean Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Temirgaliyev recently announced that the government would ask Tatars to vacate “illegally occupied land.” This threatens the status of many of the

Tatars, who have mostly lived in makeshift homes on unauthorized property after they returned from exile. Temirgaliyev essentially offered transfers of the Crimean Tatars to other lands but is clearly not interested in resolving claims to the lands from which they were dispossessed in 1944. Neither can anyone place any credence in his “promises” to resettle the Tatars on suitable lands elsewhere in Crimea. By June, Russia’s Ministry of Development was preparing legislation allowing Moscow to seize significant amounts of land in Crimea on an accelerated basis, ostensibly to promote economic development along the same lines Moscow used to seize lands in and around Sochi before the Winter Olympics. This economic development would likely take the form of casinos to reduce the costs of annexation by effectively imposing a hidden tax through that sector. Whatever Moscow’s motives might be, this could easily become another Crimean land grab for well-connected Russian elites. Other analyses confirm that due to the incomplete nature of claims of title to land in Crimea, “Russian officials will deal with the law much as the Kremlin did with Ukraine’s sovereign borders – as they choose.”

Under the circumstances and given the historical connection between the Crimean Tatars and Turkey it is likewise no surprise that the Tatars have appealed to Turkey and even Azerbaijan for relief and support. However, both Ankara and Baku have multiple reasons for caution in defending the Crimean Tatars. More overt representations on their behalf

would not only jeopardize their own ties to Moscow, but also go far to confirm the visible suspicions of authorities in Crimea and Russia that the Tatars are a seditious “fifth column” with ties to Turkey and plotting to embroil Turkey and/or Azerbaijan in Russia’s internal affairs. The signs of this mentality of suspicion, coupled with the fact that Russian nationalism has for twenty years been systematically directed against Muslims, can only add to the dangers facing the Crimean Tatars.

CONCLUSIONS: Today no institutional, moral, or legal barriers other than expediency and potential fear of the consequences stand between the Kremlin and a return to historical policies of deporting an ethnic or other minority deemed to pose a threat. But today, Muslims are insurgents all over the world, including the North Caucasus. There are plenty of signs that Russian repression could generate an Islamic or other terrorist movement among Crimean Tatars that could ultimately connect with those in the North Caucasus. And there is no reason to believe that the Kremlin is not concerned that this could come about. Even before this crisis there was a high potential for violence in Crimea and analysts who studied it worried that the conventional wisdom was that Russia could annex it and was thinking of doing so whenever that decision suited it.

Yet the potential for ethnic violence has been there from 1991 and Russian policies are clearly, just as in the North Caucasus, stimulating that potential

outcome. The forces that made for past deportations could come again, and not only against the Crimean Tatars because overall nationality policy is moving towards ever stricter centralization, repression, and chauvinism as in the past. But this time the spirit of resistance pervades the Muslim world and they will fight back. Moscow may believe, as St. Petersburg did a century ago, that it could incite ethnic antagonisms in the Black Sea basin and benefit from doing so even at the cost of war. But that illusion was brutally shattered in World War I and an equally delusional drive to restore the empire to save Putinism could trigger one or more new theaters in the global war on terror. If Russia maintains its current approach towards the Crimean Tatars and Russia's other ethnic minorities, Putin might yet come to be seen not as the victor of Chechnya but as the father of a new "second front" in anti-Russian Jihad.

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PROSPECTS FOR THE CAUCASUS EMIRATE UNDER KEBEDOV'S LEADERSHIP

Emil Souleimanov

*In March 2014, jihadist websites confirmed the death of Doku Umarov, the founder in 2007 of the Caucasus Emirate, a virtual theocracy claiming the territories of Russia's North Caucasus. Pro-Moscow Chechen authorities were quick to claim they had liquidated Umarov, considered by many as a personal foe of Ramzan Kadyrov, as a result of special operation. Yet the jihadist websites posit that Umarov died of natural causes a few months before the formal announcement of his death. Several months later, a new amir of the Caucasus Emirate, Aliaskhab Kebedov, an ethnic Avar from neighboring Dagestan going by the *nomme de guerre* Ali Abu Muhammad, was elected by the *shura*, i.e. Council, of the Emirate.*

BACKGROUND: Umarov's incessant suffering from several diseases that he acquired in the early 2000s made him disappear from the public space for most of 2013. Umarov was hence primarily considered a symbol of resistance. This was compounded by the considerable weakening of the Chechen insurgency particularly in the aftermath of the liquidation by pro-Moscow Chechen security forces in 2013 of the Gakayev brothers (see the [02/06/2013 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)) and other prominent insurgent leaders, along with members of their groups. With the command of the Caucasus Emirate heavily fragmented, the Chechen wing of the regional resistance movement weakened, and individual jamaats operating on their own, Umarov's debilitation and subsequent death had little impact on developments on the ground.

Abu Muhammad is 42 years old, and he comes from the Avar-majority village of Teletl in Central Dagestan. Appointed a *qadi*, i.e. supreme judge, of the Caucasus Emirate in 2010, he is known to have a basic command of Arabic and Islamic theology, and a limited military record. He reportedly engaged in criminal activities and attempted to run his own business before joining a group of jihadis in 2008 or 2009. During this period, he developed close personal ties with emir Saleh, then leader of the major Dagestani jamaat of Shariat, who was killed in 2012. He subsequently fought for about a year in the ranks of *amir* Sayfullah Gubdensky's jamaat.

His uncle Khalid Kebedov was shot dead by unknown gunmen in 2013, which some observers in Dagestan have interpreted as an act of vengeance by local law enforcement against Abu Muhammed. One of the reasons is

believed to be Abu Muhammed's masterminding of the infamous 2012 assassination of Said Chirkeysy, a reputed Sufi clergyman, which alienated local jihadists from ordinary Dagestanis. Dagestani sources have also claimed that Abu Muhammad has approved of suicidal terrorism, and is personally motivated to fight local law enforcement, as well as federal troops. He has been supportive not only of large-scale assaults on Dagestani police, but also of attacks on civilian targets in "continental" Russia. His power base has been in the capital city of Dagestan, in his native Shamil district, as well as in the Gubden district in the mountainous Avar-populated central-western part of the country, where insurgent activities have been on the rise recently.

Against this background, Abu Muhammad's election as the new *amir* of the Caucasus Emirate confirms the increasingly momentous standing of Dagestan-based jihadist groups that have turned the Caspian republic into a hotbed of regional insurgency since the late 2000s (see the [09/29/2010 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)).

Abu Muhammad is the first ever non-Chechen leader of the regional insurgency. He is also unrelated to the "old guard" of influential regional insurgency leaders, who fought in the First and Second Chechnya wars. Despite his limited military experience, the four *amirs* of the vilayets of Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Kabardino-Balkaria-Karachay are said to have supported his bid over that of Aslambek Vadalov, a prominent leader

of the Chechen insurgency, who along with Tarkhan Gaziyeu remains one of few Chechen *amirs* still alive. Since around 2013, Chechen insurgents have generally sought to avoid attention from local and federal security agencies to outlive current tough times. Therefore, they have considerably limited their activities, which apparently weakened Vadalov's bid.



(Source: Youtube)

IMPLICATIONS: According to local sources, Abu Muhammad has a dubious reputation among some Dagestani insurgents and their supporters due to his controversial past, as he was allegedly involved in the alcohol business in the early post-Soviet period, and because he is all but a strong and experienced military leader. Others claim that his status as a former *qadi* gives certain credit to Abu Muhammad's authority, though some have decried his lack of solid Islamic education and his limited knowledge of Arabic and Islamic law. Either way, due to his limited experience as an insurgent leader, his election is likely to have little impact on the ground as individual jamaats in Dagestan will operate independently. In recent months, no significant changes have taken place in insurgent activities in Dagestan and the broader region.

Abu Muhammad's relationship with Umar al-Shishani, the North Caucasian jihadists' informal leader in Syria and a rising star of the global jihadist movement, deserves particular attention. The Georgia-born ethnic Chechen amir, currently commanding hundreds of Syria-based North Caucasian jihadists, is said not to know Abu Muhammad personally. Yet intriguingly, Abu Muhammad's recent statement addressing al-Shishani, in which he called on the Chechen to refrain from making jihad-related statements because of the latter's lack of Islamic education and "poor command of the Russian and Arabic languages" revealed a certain sense of competitiveness, envy, and mistrust on Abu Muhammad's side toward the currently most influential jihadist leader of North Caucasian origin, unlike him known to be a gifted military commander and a brave warrior.

Possibly due to Abu Muhammad's personal envy toward al-Shishani, the former has publicly sided with the al-Zawahiri-led and Al Qaeda-affiliated jihadist group Jabhat an-Nusra (JN) in the ongoing dispute within the ranks of North Caucasian jihadists in Syria (see the [07/02/2014 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)). Abu Muhammad has criticized al-Shishani's ties with the al-Baghdadi-led Islamic State (IS), formerly known as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). The utilitarian character of Abu Muhammad's stance toward al-Zawahiri and al-Shishani is reified by his recent ambiguous and rather illogical statements. He has referred to al-Zawahiri as "our sheikh,"

explicitly recognizing Al-Qaeda's leadership over Muslims in general, and North Caucasian jihadists in particular. Yet in another recent statement, Abu Muhammad called on the Syria-based North Caucasian jihadists to refrain from joining the competing jihadist armies, that is, both IS and JN, and instead pledge allegiance to him. In so doing, Abu Muhammad sought to retain his influence among North Caucasian volunteers deployed in Syria, profiling himself as a jihadist leader whose influence extends beyond the boundaries of the North Caucasus.

While some North Caucasian fighters, particularly those grouped into the Caucasus Emirate-aligned Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (JMA), have indeed sworn allegiance to Abu Muhammad, North Caucasian jihadists aligned with IS have denounced him; a recently released tape suggests that Abu Muhammad should rather "eat leaves" than comment on al-Shishani, hinting at the increasing frictions within the North Caucasian insurgency. Abu Muhammad's effort to enhance his reputation among Syria-based North Caucasian jihadists, as yet the strongest force composed of local fighters, has seemingly been counterproductive, revealing deep divides between North Caucasians deployed in Syria and Dagestan-based insurgents in the North Caucasus. Since many IS-linked insurgents are of Chechen origin, and Abu Muhammad is an ethnic Avar claiming leadership over Chechen insurgent groups, nationalist overtones may also have reinforced these divisions. Last but not least, it appears that Abu Muhammad lacks direct ties

with external financial sources, which are now largely controlled by Syria-based North Caucasian jihadists, not least by al-Shishani himself and his associates.

CONCLUSIONS: Abu Muhammad's formal "reign" has so far had little impact on the developments on the ground. Currently, little interaction takes place between individual North Caucasian jamaats. Chechen and Ingush insurgent groups are considerably weakened, and groups in the Northwest Caucasus were virtually annihilated on the eve of the Sochi Olympics. Still, as Abu Muhammad has been a proponent of attacks on "apostate" Sufi leaders, approving of indiscriminate terrorist attacks in Russia proper on ideological grounds, no change of tactics deployed by the most operational segment of the Caucasus Emirate, the Dagestani jamaats, is to be expected as long as Abu Muhammad's personal reputation shapes the mindset of individual jihadists. Because Abu Muhammad has a dubious reputation outside his native Dagestan, and an ambiguous standing within the republic, the new *amir* will likely to seek to strengthen his credentials as a strong and committed military commander. He may promote high-lethality attacks in Russia proper, as well as in Dagestan and across the region. Still, his standing will likely remain symbolic, as his capacity to impact developments on the ground is limited due both to his personal traits, and to the increasingly harsh counterinsurgency.

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UKRAINE AND THE NORTHERN DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

John Daly

Two routes of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), collectively known as the Northern Lines of Communication (NLOC) run through Russia, but deteriorating U.S.-Russian relations over Ukraine could complicate the continued usage of the NDN by U.S./NATO/ISAF forces. The NDN's importance is well understood in both Washington and Moscow. The question is now, in an attempt to modify Russian behavior over Ukraine, whether a proposed third round of increased Western sanctions and intensified NATO activities around Russia's periphery may cause the Russian government to deny ISAF and NATO further use of the NLOC segments of the NDN.



(Source: afghanwarnews.info)

BACKGROUND:

U.S./NATO/International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) troops are currently drawing down their presence in Afghanistan via airlifts and the 3,212 mile-long (NDN) series of three railway lines, in conjunction with Pakistan Ground Lines of Communication (PAKGLOC) truck routes. Due to political tensions between the U.S. and Pakistan over a U.S. attack on a border post and drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas, the PAKGLOC was temporarily shut down in 2011 and November 2013. U.S. basing rights at Karshi-Khanabad airport in Uzbekistan were cancelled

after the Andijan events in 2005, while Kyrgyzstan's government recently refused to renew the lease on Manas airbase, which closed on June 3, 2014. Washington accordingly began to transfer operations to Mihail Kogălniceanu International Airport in Romania, 3,200 miles and five hours flying time from Afghanistan.

ISAF has hence shifted nearly all of its logistics to the NDN. The two NDN NLOC routes run through Russia to Afghanistan via Latvia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, along with a subsidiary transiting Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. A southern NDN route, NATO designation "Central Line of Communication" (CLOC), bypasses Russia completely, as it runs through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, crossing the Caspian via rail ferries to Azerbaijan and Georgia. The CLOC would surge in importance should worsening U.S.-Russian relations lead

to a closure of NDN NLOC routes through Russia.

The U.S. has attempted to stay engaged in Eurasia by formulating a “New Silk Road” strategy. Over the course of several speeches in 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton committed U.S. foreign policy in Asia to the vision of a “New Silk Road.” On July 20, 2011 in Chennai, India Clinton proposed, “Let’s work together to create a new Silk Road ... an international web and network of economic and transit connections. That means building more rail lines, highways, energy infrastructure ... it certainly means removing the bureaucratic barriers and other impediments to the free flow of goods and people. It means casting aside the outdated trade policies that we all still are living with and adopting new rules for the 21st century.” In a speech in October 2012 Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake reiterated that the NDN routes could serve after the U.S. and NATO drawdown in Afghanistan as components of the U.S. “Silk Road Vision.”

IMPLICATIONS: The sole Eurasian railway initiative that Washington has strongly supported since early 2009 is the 3,212 mile-long NDN series of railway links. Over the past five years since it undertook its first shipments, the NDN has risen to critical importance for U.S. forces in Afghanistan, and is now a critical component of the U.S. downsizing of its presence there. According to the U.S. State Department, the NDN has

the capacity to transport 4,000 tons of cargo per month and can cater for eight trains travelling in each direction per day. On average, 100-120 containers travel the route every day. For further logistical support of ISAF forces in Afghanistan in May 2012 the U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) established an Expeditionary Railway Center (ERC) to assist the mission of the U.S. Army’s 757th Transportation Battalion (Railway). In a reciprocal gesture, in 2013 the Afghan government established the Afghan Railway Authority to coordinate national railway policy.

The NDN is playing a crucial role in the U.S. military’s “retrograde” (the military term for withdrawal), since the U.S. Defense Department has more than 750,000 pieces of equipment worth more than US\$ 36 billion in Afghanistan that needs to be moved out. Overall, the NATO and ISAF 48 nation allies and partners are planning to move an estimated US\$ 28 billion in equipment and materiel out of Afghanistan. Each coalition country is responsible for withdrawing its own equipment. The U.S. remaining withdrawal will involve 35,000 vehicles and 95,000 shipping containers, according to Maj. Gen. Kurt Stein, commander of the 1st Theater Sustainment Command.

The most significant potential challenge to ISAF is the increasingly strained relations between Russia and NATO. Should Russia decide to shutter the NLOC, then the southern CLOC railway lines would become the sole remaining railway transit route for ISAF’s retrograde operation.

Moscow is very aware of its bargaining power with the NDN; two days after the Crimean annexation, *Военное обозрение* (“*Military Review*”) published an article which noted, “They understand this in the Kremlin: the agreement over the ‘Northern Distribution Network’ at NATO’s disposal is one of the strongest trumps that Russia has in its conflict with the West.”

Many believe that the Western sanctions policy could negatively impact ISAF’s Afghanistan deployments. On March 29 the U.S. ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul was asked what other U.S.-Russian cooperation could be in jeopardy after Crimea. McFaul replied, “I worry more about disruption in our use of the NDN, which helps to supply our soldiers and civilians in Afghanistan. A key component of the NDN travels through Russia.” On March 14, four days before Putin announced the annexation of Crimea, RAND Corp. senior political scientist Christopher Chivvis said, “The U.S. is most exposed when it comes to what we call the NDN ...”

Putting the NDN further at risk, on March 21 the Obama administration placed Vladimir Iakunin, head of Russian Railways and a known ally of Putin for two decades, on its first list of individuals sanctioned over Crimea, while if Pakistan again closes its border crossings, analysts predict that Washington might have to abandon much of its heavy military equipment in Afghanistan. NATO has adopted an increasingly aggressive posture towards

Russia since its March annexation of Crimea, increasing maritime and air patrols in the Black and Baltic Seas, undertaking military exercises in NATO’s Eastern and Central European member states and opening a NATO liaison office in Tashkent on May 16, all actions that will unsettle Putin.

CONCLUSIONS: The Western withdrawal from Afghanistan via the NDN NLOC is hostage to U.S. and European desires to punish Russia for its Ukrainian policy. On July 9 Victoria Nuland, the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs, told members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “We are ready to impose more costs – including targeted, sector-specific sanctions – very soon, if Russia does not decisively change course and break its ties with separatists.” Washington is also pressuring France to nullify its 2011 US\$ 1.7 billion contract to build two 23,700-ton *Mistral*-class amphibious assault ships for Russia, the first of which is scheduled for delivery in October. If either policy option is implemented, then it would seem more than likely that Moscow would retaliate by using one of its “strongest trumps,” moving against the NDN NLOC routes through Russia, as prophesized by Ambassador McFaul.

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RUSSIA'S UNIFICATION STRATEGY WILL RAISE TENSIONS WITH MINORITY REGIONS

Valeriy Dzutsev

The issue of minority languages in Russia is becoming an important issue in relations between the Russia's central government and regions. As the government in Moscow seeks to unify the country through the suppression of all other ethnic identities apart from ethnic Russian, it faces resistance from regional nationalisms. Cultural symbols, such as monuments, are also at play as minorities often reject the ethnic Russian heroes that conquered them. Moscow's attempt to press ahead with Russification of the diverse country indicates the government's inability to present an attractive modernization project that would include all ethnic groups. The aggressive assimilationist stance of the Russian government toward ethnic minorities signifies the rising distrust.

BACKGROUND: In June, the Russian State Duma proposed to allow parents to choose their children's "mother tongue" at state schools. This simple and seemingly innocent proposal evoked uproar among ethnic republics in the Russian Federation. Two republics in particular, Tatarstan and North Ossetia, openly criticized the new legislation for its encroachment on minority rights. The chairman of the Russian State Duma's Committee for Nationalities' Affairs, Gajimet Safaraliev, proposed changes to existing laws intended to protect human rights and to improve knowledge of the Russian language. Safaraliev did not provide evidence, however, that ethnic non-Russians did worse than ethnic Russians on Russian language exams, while the legislator's concern for human rights can also be questioned.

Russian republics complain that if parents are allowed to choose their schoolchildren's mother tongue, they will overwhelmingly choose Russian to lower their children's burden of schoolwork, knowing that Russian is on the federal school exam, while regional languages are not. Some republics oblige all students, regardless of their ethnic origin, to study regional languages, arguing that this mutual cultural exchange strengthens the federation. Ironically, a poll that Safaraliev put on his website indicated that of the nearly 1,400 people who voted, 25 percent said they did not consider Russian as their mother tongue. Only 5 percent of those who knew other languages of the Russian Federation apart from Russian regarded Russian as their mother tongue.

The defenders of minority languages argue that public space should be created for the usage of minority

languages in their respective territories, thus incentivizing minorities to learn and speak their languages. After such an arrangement has been established, everybody should be allowed to freely choose school languages. However, the Russian government intends to ensure “the unity of nation” as stated multiple times by Vladimir Putin himself and by members of his government at the meeting on July 3 that was dedicated to the “role of culture and education in strengthening the unity and harmony, civil and patriotic upbringing of the youth.”

The discrepancies between Moscow and the regions are not limited to language, but extend to broader culture as perspicaciously suggested by the Russian officials. The Russian military unit in Adygea has recently installed a monument of Alexander Suvorov, the famous Russian 18th century military commander, in the city of Maikop. Renowned for his military skills across many wars fought by the Russian Empire, Suvorov was also known for his brutality in the war against the Circassians in the North Caucasus. As one of the Circassian activists, Andzor Kabard, pointed out in an interview for the Caucasus Knot, “Suvorov should have a monument where he was born. He was a great commander, and his countrymen have the right to be proud of him. However, the territory that he flooded with Circassians’ blood should not have his monuments.”

IMPLICATIONS: Increasingly, the Russian government shows less respect for the sensitivities of the Russian Federation’s minorities. While the

Russian state’s promotion of cultural uniformity did not encroach on the territories of republics in the North Caucasus a few years ago, the Russian government and public have recently become much more zealous about ethnic minorities’ compliance with the norms of the ethnic Russian majority. This especially concerns ethnic minorities in the North Caucasus that have retained strong cultural identities, bitterly fought Russian armies in the past and still harbor a substantial separatist sentiment.



(Source: Patrick Lauke, Flickr)

In September 2013, Chechnya’s ruler Ramzan Kadyrov opened a monument for Chechen women that heroically fought Russian forces in the 19th century. The ceremony generated a wave of condemnation and open xenophobia in Russian media. An attempt to erect a monument for Arkhip Osipov in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia in 2014 evoked a massive negative reaction among the Ossetian population and was abandoned. Osipov was a Russian 19th century soldier that fought against North Caucasians and became a Russian hero.

Russian nationalism has received another impetus against the backdrop of Russian-Ukrainian tensions.

However, domestically, it faces the resistance of minorities. Even though ethnic Russians comprise about 80 percent Russia's population, many ethnic minorities within Russia are spatially concentrated and therefore well prepared to take collective action when their rights are disregarded. Besides, the religious and ethnic identities of minorities in Russia are congruent in a few cases, implying that they reinforce each other and in turn reinforces the risk of conflict between them and the central government.

The Russian government's slogan to fight "Ukrainian fascists" for the wider "Russian world" naturally finds little appeal among many minorities that live in Russia. Despite multiple reports of Chechen fighters in Ukraine, ordinary Chechens cannot escape the comparison between Russia's brutal war against quasi-independent Chechnya in the two wars of 1994-1996 and 1999-2000 and the situation in Ukraine. Russia's thinly disguised involvement in armed conflict in Ukraine and its loud and self-righteous condemnation of human rights abuses by Ukrainian forces do not impress the North Caucasians. For example, last May several prominent Circassian activists from the North Caucasus addressed the new Ukrainian government, asking it to recognize the mass killings and expulsions of Circassians from their homeland by the Russian army in the 19th century as genocide. In their address, the Circassians emphasized the similarities between how the Circassians and the Ukrainians suffered at the hands of the Russian Empire.

Regardless of how the Russian Empire impacted the Ukrainians and the Circassians, the important implication of this address is that Russia's war propaganda, which has had a tremendous impact on Russian society and bumped Vladimir Putin's approval rating to the new heights, was much less successful among some ethnic minorities in Russia. Aware of this uncomfortable fact, the Russian government appears to be preparing for another campaign aimed at standardization and unification in order to diminish the country's diversity and increase its alignment along the official position.

CONCLUSIONS: Partly continuing the overall trend of strengthening the power vertical and partly responding to the lack of support among ethnic minorities for its Ukrainian gamble, Russia's government is gearing up for another assault on ethnic minorities of the country. Russia has traditionally regarded the country's ethnic diversity as a threat to its unity. Russia's invasion of Ukraine indicated that ethnic minorities have again failed to sufficiently support the central government. Using a combination of soft and hard power, Moscow strives to increase the penetration of the Russian language and to promote a "correct" interpretation of history among ethnic minorities from the positions of ethnic Russian nationalism. Even though open protests are unlikely under Russia's current regime, ethnic minorities are certain to use every opportunity to defend their rights. The new Russian policy is likely to increase the frictions between the central government and

the republican governments of regions with majority non-Russian populations.

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GEORGIAN AUTHORITIES ARREST FORMER MAYOR GIGI UGULAVA

Eka Janashia

The Investigation Service of Georgia's Ministry of Finance detained Gigi Ugulava, a former mayor of Tbilisi and election campaign chief of the opposition party United National Movement (UNM), at Tbilisi's airport before boarding a flight to Kiev, on July 3. Ugulava's arrest sparked apprehension ahead of the decisive second round of the local elections held on July 12.

On July 2, the Tbilisi City Court [turned down](#) the prosecution's motion to prevent Ugulava from traveling to Ukraine by depriving him of his passport and ID card. Since Ugulava has traveled abroad several times and returned back to Georgia for the last two years, the court found it inadvisable to ban his trip. However, the Investigation Service justified the arrest with the "urgent need" to interrogate Ugulava.

Two days earlier, the Investigation Service revealed [new criminal charges](#) against Ugulava related to the misspending of public funds and abuse of authority during his term as mayor. In 2009 and 2011, Ugulava allegedly granted preferential treatment to the car parking company [CT Park](#) in the distribution of revenues garnered through fines that incurred misspending of around US\$ 614,000 in budgetary funds.

After the arrest, Ugulava was incriminated with additional accusations of money laundering and hooliganism taking place at the Marneuli District Election Commission in early June.

Ugulava has purportedly received "black" money amounting to US\$ 760,000 from an offshore registered company affiliated with the former Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili to fund UNM's election campaign. In relation to the Marneuli incident, Ugulava was charged under articles 150 and 226 of the criminal code dealing with "coercion" and "organizing actions by a group which violate public order."

Aside from the most recent indictments, Ugulava has already faced multiple criminal charges since February 2013. The allegations involve misspending and embezzlement of large amounts of public funds (around US\$ 28.2 million) in 2011-2012. Although the court suspended Ugulava from the Tbilisi mayor's office in 2013, it declined the prosecution's motion for Ugulava's pre-trial detention and freed him on bail. It was only on July 4, 2014 that the Tbilisi City Court eventually ruled in favor of the prosecution's request and [ordered](#) pre-trial custody for Ugulava.

The court's decision boosted the protests of UNM supporters rallying

outside the court building. The dissent rapidly turned into a clash between police and activists. Several people were detained, including UNM lawmaker Levan Bezhashvili and former ambassador to Italy Kote Gabashvili for the administrative offense of petty hooliganism and disobeying police orders.

Ugulava's defense lawyer appealed the decision at the Court of Appeals but the judge Giorgi Mirotadze considered the petition as irrelevant. UNM insisted that by this decision, Mirotadze, who became a judge in November 2013, approved to become one of the government's favorite judges emerging within the judiciary since Georgian Dream came into power. Former PM David Bakradze said the UNM intends to submit Ugulava's case to the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights.

The U.S. ambassador to Georgia, Richard Norland, as well as the EU's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said they are deeply concerned with Ugulava's arrest and will follow the case closely. Their concerns were particularly raised due to the cancelation of a moratorium declared by PM Irakli Garibashvili on April 14, when Garibashvili called on the law enforcement agencies to refrain from detentions or other sorts of legal restrictions against political figures involved in the election campaign.

The head of the EU Delegation to Georgia, Ambassador Philip Dimitrov, warned that signing the Association Agreement does not mean that "everything else, including the

liberalization of the visa regime, should be considered to be guaranteed." More overtly, the Vice President of the European People's Party (EPP), Jacek Saryusz-Wolski appraised Ugulava's arrest as "unfortunate development" and blamed Georgian authorities for "political retribution" conducted against Georgia's main opposition and EPP member-party.

Conversely, PM Garibashvili assessed the court's decision as a "celebration of justice" and welcomed the reinforced independence of the judiciary. In response, Ugulava wrote on his Facebook account that "prison and exile do not stop political processes." At the court hearing he denied all charges against him as politically motivated and expressed his determination to continue the fight against the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili's regime.

Ugulava's detention prior to the second round of the local polls not only discredited the moratorium policy, but also triggered expectations about a new wave of politically inspired prosecutions labeled a "restoration of justice." Maintaining this sort of policy might seriously damage Georgia's EU-integration course.

SHOOTOUT AT THE KYRGYZ-TAJIK BORDER

Arslan Sabyrbekov

On June 2, upon the invitation of his
On July 10, an exchange of fire on a
disputed section of the Kyrgyz-Tajik
border reportedly left at least seven
border guards from both sides injured.
One Tajik citizen died of gunshot
wounds at the scene of the incident.
The foreign Ministries of the
neighboring countries, which generally
enjoy good relations, exchanged official
notes of protest accusing one another of
breaching international law and asking
for clarification of the circumstances.

The shootout took place on the
outskirts of the Vorukh, an exclave of
Tajik territory entirely enclosed within
Kyrgyzstan's southern region of
Batken. The Vorukh enclave is a
densely populated area with a
population of 40,000 residents, mainly
of Tajik ethnicity. Kyrgyz residents
living around Vorukh have to drive
through it to get to different parts of
the Batken region.

To avoid this difficulty and the
occasional frictions it causes, the
Kyrgyz government last January
decided to build a new road to bypass
the enclave completely. Tajik
authorities issued a statement
demanding an immediate end to the
construction works, saying that the
road is being built on a contested
territory and complaining that it would
allow the Kyrgyz to blockade the Tajik
enclave. At that time, the arguments
over the road construction led to a one-
hour shootout between the sides,

leaving two Tajik and five Kyrgyz
border guards heavily injured. After the
shootout, Bishkek closed its border for
almost two months and recalled its
ambassador from Dushanbe for
consultations.

The July 10 shootout at the border
coincided with the upcoming talks
between the heads of Border Services of
the two countries. According to Kyrgyz
official sources, the residents of the
Vorukh enclave have purposefully
taken unlawful actions to stop the
negotiations over the construction of
the aforementioned road. The Kyrgyz
Border Service made an official
statement claiming that around 30 Tajik
citizens have tried to build a water
pipeline from the territory of
Kyrgyzstan (river Karavshin) to the
Tajik village of Bedak, in Vorukh
enclave. Kyrgyz border guards
approached the scene, demanding a halt
to the illegal actions after which local
Tajiks threw stones at them. The
situation escalated further and
eventually led to a firefight between the
sides.

In its official protest to Bishkek,
Dushanbe gave a different description
of the situation, claiming that their
citizens were installing a water pipeline
on the territory of the Vorukh
cooperative at around 11.30 on July 10,
when Kyrgyz border guards approached
them and demanded to stop
construction works in an aggressive and
insulting manner. Tajik border guards,

who were nearby, tried to stop the actions of their Kyrgyz counterparts, who opened fire with automatic firearms, injuring several and killing one civilian.

Indeed, the sides are throwing accusations at one another for starting the conflict, instead of demonstrating political will to resolve the pressing problem. The July 10 shooting is unlikely to be the last and the death of a local Vorukh enclave resident could further exacerbate nationalist feelings.

To prevent further escalation of the conflict between the relatively friendly countries, political analyst at Moskovskiye Novosti Arkady Dubnov suggested that mediation by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) could positively contribute to a peaceful development. In his words “Mr. Bordyuzha, Secretary General of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, is not a representative of the Russian Federation, but heads an international organization, with both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as its members, and is in a position to talk to both sides and positively contribute to border conflict resolution.”

The proposal seems timely, since the issue of drawing a border cannot easily be resolved by two conflicting sides. Despite the creation of a Joint Border Drawing Commission, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have since 2006 not delimited a single kilometer of their contested border, which currently amounts to 460 kilometers. Negotiations are deadlocked for the simple reason that the Kyrgyz side

refers to maps from the 1950s and the Tajik side to maps from the 1920s. Thus, continued negotiations along these lines are simply unproductive.

Additionally, with Kyrgyzstan joining the Russia-led Customs Union, drawing concrete state borders with its neighbors is one of the many priority tasks for Bishkek to address.

The author wrote this article in his personal capacity. The views expressed are his own and do not represent those of the organization for which the author works.

TAJIKISTAN AFTER RECONCILIATION: 17 YEARS WITHOUT WAR OR PEACE

Kirgizbek Kanunov

On June 27, 2014, the Tajik authorities marked the 17th anniversary of the peace agreement they signed with the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) and dubbed it the Day of National Unity.

A number of circumstances indicate growing animosity and contradictions between the parties that signed peace accords in Tajikistan 17 years ago. Pundits from the former Soviet space and beyond present Tajikistan as a successful example of peacemaking, while some Tajik officials have long been making the case for President Rahmon to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

But is the peace in Tajikistan sustainable and can it be an example for others to follow? Ending the civil war and achieving peace is a centerpiece of Dushanbe's official ideology. The image of Rahmon as the Peacemaker-in-Chief has been heavily promoted in the state-owned media and is a favorite tagline of the official propaganda. It is telling that the participants of flash mobs that have lately been orchestrated against the opposition and international organizations in Tajikistan have repeatedly chanted their opposition to war that the West and the domestic opposition allegedly attempt to unleash.

By aggrandizing Rahmon as the chief peacemaker, the official media fails to mention Said Abdullo Nuri, the Tajik Government's negotiating partner and

the former leader of the opposition Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). In contrast, Tajikistan's independent media have lately been covering stories about the growing antagonism between the government and the IRPT – the main signatories to the peace accords in 1997.

According to the chief editor of *Ozodagon*, Aziz Nakibzoda, the war in Tajikistan ended in 1997, but has continued in a different form. Nakibzoda believes that today in Tajikistan there is a war to grab land, property, lucrative government posts, and spheres of influence. The title of his newspaper article reads "From one day of Unity to the other, 'the battles' turn more violent," underlining the growing contradictions in issues of preceding agreements between the government and opposition.

Observers note that the peace accords were a product of pressure from influential global players on the warring parties in the conflict. For example, according to Anatoly Adamishin, Russia's former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and ex-Minister for CIS Affairs, Rahmon was reluctant to negotiate with the opposition in the mid-90s. Adamishin maintains that the parties agreed to negotiate under pressure. Namely, Moscow brought pressure to bear on the government, while Iran pressured the opposition.

According to observers, during the signing of the peace accords, the government was not upfront about its intentions, and only considered the signing as a tactical pause.

Rahmon used the period after hostilities had ceased to consolidate his power. Several of Rahmon's influential opponents from the opposition as well as former associates have been eliminated. Some of them died or were convicted, and some others have left the country.

After numerous clashes in the country, a relative calm settled between 2002 and 2008, a period characterized by the growing role and influence of Rahmon's cronies and his family over key public policy decisions, including hiring and staffing in the state sector. As a consequence of these changes, the country's regions have seen a new redistribution of property and influence.

The fate of Nizomhon Juraev, a businessman from Isfara in Tajikistan's Sughd Province, who was Rahmon's election campaign manager in Sughd in 2006, is indicative of countrywide property redistribution. In 2008, having fallen from grace, Juraev lost his property, fled the country and was put on the wanted list. By 2008, uncommitted country resources had been all but depleted, which led to tensions within the ruling clan.

Persecution against the famous Tajik businessman and former Minister of Industry, Zaid Saidov may also be considered as a continuation of the struggle for resources. It is particularly remarkable that Saidov came to the

Tajik Government from the opposition as part of the power-sharing arrangement.

On the eve of the day of Unity, the authorities stepped up the pressure on the opposition movement yet again. Despite ongoing negotiations and agreements between the city authorities and the current leader of the IRPT, Muhiddin Kabiri, the authorities decided to blatantly demolish the party branch office in Khujand. Concomitantly, another IRPT branch office was destroyed in Panjikent.

Simultaneously, following an IRPT-related incident in Kulob, the Ministry of Interior issued a decision to initiate administrative proceedings against the party, since the Kulob party branch leader held a meeting in his private home, which contradicts the National Law on gatherings, meetings and conferences.

Moreover, the arrest of Alexander Sodiqov shows that the authorities are continuing pressure on another active opposition force in Gorno-Badakhshan, namely the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan (SDPT) by implicating its leader Alim Sherzamonov in an espionage story.

Meanwhile, on the eve of the Day of Unity, Rahmon sent a warning signal to NGOs, political parties and the media. More specifically, he said, "political parties, public associations and the media should be careful and shrewd when evaluating and reflecting on socio-political issues to ensure state independence, national interests, security, peace and political stability and strengthening national unity."

This suggests that Tajikistan's government conducts a deliberate policy of tightening control aligned with the country's leadership, which effectively derails the achievements of previous agreements with the opposition forces.

One of the key points of the power-sharing arrangement between the government and the UTO was to ensure the unencumbered functioning of the IRPT, but large-scale restrictions on its operations in the regions makes their existence a mere formality.

According to some political analysts in Dushanbe, it is more important for the government to retain power. They claim that the rhetoric of peace and preservation of constructive relations with the opposition is no longer a priority.

TAJIKISTAN'S GOVERNMENT ENRAGED BY CORRUPTION ALLEGATIONS

Oleg Salimov

Tajikistan's government is irate with the report on the country's investment outlook recently published by the U.S. Department of State. The report, named 2014 Investment Climate Statement – Tajikistan, was prepared by the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs at the U.S. Department of State. Although the report explains the financial risks for prospective investors in Tajikistan, Tajik officials chastised the U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan for interfering with Tajikistan's internal policy and attempting to destabilize the political situation in the country.

The resentment with the report among Tajik officials was provoked by a part of the report describing the problem of government corruption. Responding to data on corruption published in the report, Saifullo Safarov, deputy head of the Center of Strategic Research under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, accused the report publishers of attempting to trigger political unrest in Tajikistan. Without referring directly to the U.S., Safarov noted that by publishing such information, certain foreign countries pursue the goal of destabilizing Tajikistan.

Such a reaction by Tajik officials to the evaluation of the country's investment prospects derives from their fear of provoking a Ukrainian Maidan-type of

revolution in Tajikistan. In Ukraine, the Maidan movement started as a social rejection of corruption in government, which affected all levels of power and culminated at the highest governmental post – the president. The corrupt political elite, including president Yanukovich, was ousted from office as a result of the Maidan movement. President Rahmon understands the fragility of his position and the high potential for a Maidan-type upheaval in the country, which also explains Safarov's erratic commentary on the report.

The information published by the Department of State is not in any way new or sensational. Ordinary Tajiks are well aware of the problem as they have to face it on a regular basis. The report reviews the system of bribes, the practices of cronyism, and spheres of influence of different government agencies, specifically the notorious corruption in the Anticorruption agency. Safarov, in turn, failed to provide information on the efforts taken by the Tajik government to eliminate corruption or explain the connection between the report and potential political destabilization.

The assessment of the investment climate is common practice as it explains risks and benefits of conducting business in a certain country. In fact, only a small part of the

report was devoted to the problem of corruption while the main part reviewed the country's economy as a whole. The report is addressed to prospective foreign investors interested in Tajikistan and not to the general Tajik public. Accustomed to their ability to filter information, Tajik government officials seek to control even sources that are out of their legal reach such as the U.S. Department of State. Any dissent is seen as a direct challenge to the current regime.

The span of the corruption problem extends into the involvement of Tajik law enforcement and judiciary in disputes with foreign and local businessmen to benefit Tajikistan's ruling elite. This practice is also widely employed to constrain political opposition in Tajikistan. Thus, on April 21, 2014 the court in the city of Tursunzade ordered the confiscation of the property of Muhiddin Kabiri, leader of the opposition Party of Islamic Renaissance of Tajikistan. The case against Kabiri was initiated by the Anticorruption agency, ironically notorious for its corruption. The ownership of the large marketplace Sakhovat in Tursunzade was transferred from Kabiri to the Tajik Committee on Youth, Sport and Tourism. The court rejected Kabiri's arguments that the case was politically motivated. In an interview to a local newspaper, Kabiri complained that his close relatives were repeatedly subjected to persecution, extortion, and bribes by the Anticorruption agency, the Tajik Revenue services, and other state inspection agencies.

In another case, the Anticorruption agency in cooperation with Tajikistan's judiciary, including the Supreme Court, and the State Committee on National Security GKNB (former KGB) successfully neutralized Zaid Saidov, a potential challenger to Rahmon, from Tajikistan's political arena. Saidov received a 26-year imprisonment term and confiscation of property. The anticorruption agency also won another property confiscation case against Ukrainian businessman Dmitry Firtash and Saidov's son Khairullo. Numerous properties belonging to Firtash in Tajikistan were transferred to the Tajik government.

In this context, the furious protests of Tajik officials against the assessment of corruption in Tajikistan, conducted within a much larger examination of the country's investment climate, seems highly inappropriate and troubling. According to Transparency International, from 2003 to 2013 Tajikistan dropped from 124th to 154th place among 175 countries in TI's Corruption Perceptions Index. It is the brazen level of corruption in the country and the official disregard of the problem that may eventually provoke a public outburst, and not the investment climate report as alleged by Tajik government representatives.