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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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KYRGYZSTAN'S SECURITY PREDICAMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EURASIAN UNION MEMBERSHIP

Dmitry Shlapentokh

Bishkek has long considered whether to join the Russia-led Eurasian Union. Yet recent events relating to the resumed hostility with Uzbekistan, border disputes with Tajikistan, and Russia's move against Ukraine could play a decisive role in Bishkek's decision to accommodate Moscow's geopolitical project. An additional factor is the worsening situation in the Middle East, where the rise of Islamic extremism and the clear inability of the U.S. and its allies to deal with the problem is clearly taken into consideration by Kyrgyzstan's leadership and likely provides an incentive for reinforcing its alliance with Moscow.

BACKGROUND: Kyrgyzstan has a troubled record of relations with its neighbors. This goes in particular for its relationship with Uzbekistan, which pursues assertive and implicitly aggressive policies toward several of its neighbors, usually relating to the distribution of water resources. The Central Asian rivers Amu Darya and Syr Darya start in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and both Bishkek and Dushanbe seek to regulate the flow of water, threatening Uzbekistan's water supply. Tashkent has clearly demonstrated its displeasure with these developments. In early June, it stopped the delivery of gas to Kyrgyzstan, and disrupted Kyrgyzstan's supply of electricity. Some Uzbek intellectuals even threatened that war was a possibility, and it is inconceivable in Uzbekistan's form of government that these statements could have been made without encouragement from above.

Bishkek reciprocated by threatening to cut the supply of water to Uzbekistan through water reservoirs and canals

under Bishkek's control; actions that Bishkek could possibly justify by referring to water shortages in many of Kyrgyzstan's regions. In addition, both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan insisted that they would proceed with building planned hydropower dams, which would drastically increase their control over the flow of water to Uzbekistan. They also implied that Moscow is on their side in these endeavors. Moscow provided an approving nod, intended to signal to Tashkent that its rapprochement with the U.S. has been noted. Indeed, Uzbekistan left the CSTO – the Russia-led security organization of post-Soviet states – in 2013 and opened a NATO office in Tashkent.

While these actions and responses follow a familiar pattern over the last decade, there are also new contextual circumstances. Russia's moves in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea on the stated grounds of protecting ethnic kin, and the inability of the West to prevent Moscow's actions created a

new precedent. And this might push Bishkek closer to Moscow's orbit, albeit it would certainly seek to preserve a degree of independence.



(Source: Kremlin.ru)

IMPLICATIONS: Most Central Asian states are multiethnic and the relationships between ethnic minorities and the dominant ethnic groups are often not harmonious. Yet only in Kyrgyzstan have these interethnic tensions led to considerable ethnic violence. Kyrgyzstan has a sizeable Uzbek population settled close its border with Uzbekistan, where deadly ethnic clashes erupted in 1990 and 2010. In the most recent events, Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov was most likely tempted to intervene militarily. Yet he did not. A main reason was his reluctance to take the initiative and create a dangerous precedent. (See [June 23, 2010 CACI Analyst](#))

Presently, Russia's actions in Crimea could be taken to legitimate similar actions in other parts of the post-Soviet space. It should also be recalled that Uzbekistan has the strongest military in the region and Kyrgyzstan could hardly withstand it in the case of a direct confrontation, especially if Uzbekistan's army would be supported by local Uzbeks. Bishkek's

apprehension is increased by Uzbekistan's claim on disputed land near Osh and the continually tense situation in Osh. Some local observers believe that Uzbekistan could well absorb the enclave of Barak, formally a part of Kyrgyzstan but located inside Uzbekistan's territory.

Another dimension concerns regional geopolitical arrangements. Despite Russia's increasing involvement in the Ukrainian crisis – at least several thousand Russian regulars are fighting on the separatist side and Moscow has recently opened a new front in Southern Ukraine – the Western response has remained weak. The economic sanctions are still moderate and the U.S. and its NATO allies have no plans to send troops or even provide visible amounts of weapons to Ukraine as not to irritate Russia. The Western allies also demonstrated their limited ability to deal with the crisis in Iraq. This demonstrated to Bishkek – and of course to other Central Asian states and beyond – that in the case of a major military crisis with Uzbekistan or even with much weaker Dushanbe, the specter of which was actualized by the recent military clashes on the Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan border, certainly makes Bishkek nervous.

But Bishkek's problems are not limited to the possibility of bilateral conflicts with Uzbekistan or Tajikistan. The looming departure of the bulk of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and the spread of jihadism in the Middle East potentially has serious implications for Kyrgyzstan's domestic security situation – around 100 Kyrgyz citizens

are currently fighting in Syria. Bishkek hence has several incentives to think seriously about securing military support from outside.

Russia has again emerged as a possible patron, albeit its messages to Central Asian counterparts are contradictory. On the one hand, Moscow's annexation of Crimea implies that it does not consider borders to be sacrosanct. On the other, Russia's actions indicate that it is prepared to use force to protect its allies. On July 21-28, 2014, Russia executed large scale military exercises that engaged troops from Volga to Siberia. One objective of the maneuvers was to demonstrate Russia's ability to bring troops into Central Asia. In August, Russian jets from the Kant airbase in Kyrgyzstan engaged in a new round of military exercises.

At the same time, Moscow continued to promise Bishkek economic benefits in return for its membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Russia's legitimization of the war and Crimea's annexation as well as its military prowess clearly plays a role in Bishkek's thinking as Russia might provide some modicum of protection. Yet allegiances in Central Asia are fluid and Bishkek's alignment with Moscow might not be permanent. Even if Kyrgyzstan would finally join the Eurasian Union, this would not prevent Bishkek from pursuing geopolitical relations with other players.

CONCLUSIONS: Kyrgyzstan has a history of tensions with its neighbors, of which those with Uzbekistan presents the most serious risks, due to its regional ambitions as well as the

considerable number of Uzbek minorities in Kyrgyzstan. Like other countries in the region, Bishkek has long engaged in a "multi-vector" foreign policy. But the present security situation in the post-Soviet space and beyond and the clear inability of the West to guarantee small Central Asian states' territorial integrity and defend them from Islamism might induce some of them, Kyrgyzstan in particular, to increasingly seek Russia's protection. The eventual configuration of events could involve several scenarios. One is that Kyrgyzstan would indeed join the EEU not so much for the economic benefits involved but for the implied promise of security. Another scenario would entail a closer relationship with Russia without any direct affiliation with the EEU. This model might allow Bishkek to also receive economic largesse from nearby China and possibly Turkey.

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AFGHAN POLITICAL SETTLEMENT UNLIKELY BEFORE THE U.S. EXIT

Mushtaq A. Kaw

Alongside the current U.S.-Taliban conflict, the U.S. has unsuccessfully sought reconciliation with the Taliban for a political settlement of the Afghan crisis. Nonetheless, in May 2014, the U.S. swapped five Taliban prisoners for one U.S. soldier to renew the peace process and ensure stability in Afghanistan before the planned exit later this year. However, the prisoner exchange failed to deliver results due to the Taliban's indifference to dialogue and democratic processes. Consequently, no political settlement for peace in Afghanistan is forthcoming before the U.S. drawdown. A settlement is equally unlikely in its immediate aftermath, which will likely be dominated by rivalries between the Taliban and their competitors.

BACKGROUND: The 9/11 terror attack led the U.S. to invade Afghanistan in 2001, removing the Taliban from power and subsequently engaging in a protracted U.S.-Taliban conflict for power and ideological domination in Afghanistan. However, neither the U.S. nor the Taliban could outweigh each other in this war, notwithstanding immense human losses and infrastructural damage.

Nevertheless, the U.S. attempted indirect peace talks with the Taliban for conflict resolution amid strong opposition both from hard-core militants and many U.S. policy planners. The former thought that the process would divert the Jihadists from their basic Islamic mission, whereas the latter feared it would legitimize the Taliban's resumption of power and the establishment of a theocratic state in Afghanistan. Since 2010, various

confidence building measures were conceived and adopted for a political settlement of the Afghan crisis. But nothing substantial followed for number of reasons, most importantly the U.S.-Karzai logjam over the retention of foreign forces in post-2014 Afghanistan.



(Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Yet in May 2014, the U.S. set free five top brass Taliban from the Guantanamo Bay prison in exchange for one U.S. soldier, Bowe Bergdahl. While the deal was described in

optimistic and reconciliatory terms, it proved largely symbolic as both parties had hidden motives. The U.S. sought to sway the Taliban into a safeguard for its future interests in the region, while the Taliban saw the deal as a step toward reasserting their power and gaining the release of remaining detainees in U.S. captivity. Hence, the Taliban termed the deal a “big victory.”

For various reasons, the deal did not serve the U.S. purpose of ensuring stability in Afghanistan before the withdrawal. The U.S. and Taliban worldviews are strikingly at odds. Whereas the U.S. advocates the concept of global citizenship irrespective of confession, the Taliban espouse a citizenship rooted in Islam alone. The Taliban advocate a total pull out of foreign troops from Afghanistan regardless of the nod given by Afghanistan’s largest *Jirga* (tribal assemblage) for their prolonged stay. Obviously, President Obama’s recent suggestion to retain 9,800 residual U.S. troops in Afghanistan until 2015 to blunt the insurgency and train Afghan troops will not improve prospects for peace with the Taliban.

The Taliban also denounce the idea of sharing power with the Northern Alliance (NA), the non-Pashtun militant group composed of Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazara, due to their support of the U.S. in the current war against the Taliban. The NA also opposes a stronger position for the Taliban for fear of ensuing ethnic cleansing and a loss of their currently strong grip on the existing power structure in Afghanistan.

IMPLICATIONS: The Taliban reject the Western democratic vision as a threat to the country’s rich rural-tribal tradition and hereditary warlord rights over their respective domains. Assuming the Taliban agree to a U.S.-supported political rapprochement with President Karzai or his successor, its most dreaded Haqqani faction will hardly subscribe to it. They simply read it as a calculated U.S. agenda to hinder a Taliban resurgence and avenge Western military and financial losses. Instead, they want a complete withdrawal of foreign troops before “becoming part of a political settlement” with Karzai, whom they consider a “hand-picked U.S. ally” and a “traitor,” incapable of representing Afghanistan. They feel that Karzai has nothing to show for his time in power except corruption and poor governance.

Obviously, the Taliban are unimpressed with Karzai’s strategic moves to refuse signing a security deal with U.S., his release of Taliban militants from Afghan jails, his formation of alliances with some non-Pashtun power brokers and his sponsorship of the High Peace Council Road Map to 2015. Importantly, the Roadmap recognizes the Taliban as a major political party and concedes prominent executive and cabinet positions to its top leadership. It also assigns a greater role to Pakistan, the Taliban’s friend and patron, about which a spokesperson of the Afghan army averred, “The Afghan conflict can be sorted out in a week’s time if Pakistan holds back support to the Taliban.” Obviously, peace and stability in Afghanistan is technically

impossible before the U.S. pullout in 2014. But it is equally unlikely after 2014, due to the risks of civil war or the country's partition along ethnic lines.

The U.S. drawdown in 2014 may temporarily introduce a modicum of physical security in Afghanistan. In the long run, however, it risks exposing the country and the region to a multitude of complications.

Afghanistan could conceivably descend into a civil war between pro and anti-Taliban factions for political power and ethno-ideological supremacy. It will become exacerbated by the involvement of competing foreign powers pursuing their respective stakes. Consequently, the quantum of human casualties and infrastructural damage would grow and add to the woes and worries of haggard Afghan citizens.

The civil war could well end in the Taliban's favor as they have already made some gains in the south. But the country's future would be fluid. Recently set democratic trends would weaken in the face of the traditional tribal-warlord fabric. The gap between secular and radical forces would widen and various multi-billion-dollar projects conceived for Afghanistan's empowerment and its intra-regional transportation and trade with Central and South Asia would become increasingly difficult to implement.

Radical forces will seek to forcefully push through their agenda of regime change and theocracy in Afghanistan and possibly beyond in Central, South and South East Asia. This would endanger the region's rich tradition of

multiculturalism and human coexistence.

No doubt, the soaring U.S. war expenses would plummet and give a slight respite to its citizens from the current economic meltdown. But its decade-old influence in Afghanistan and the region will decline in the process. China will seek to fill the ensuing vacuum through regional and economic integration of Afghanistan, though its earlier US\$10 billion investment may itself run a security risk due to the Taliban's assumed comeback after the civil war.

Secessionism and religious violence risks deepening in the disputed part of Jammu and Kashmir under India and in Xinjiang under China. Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan will certainly increase due to its historical association with the Afghan Taliban. But it would lose its Western assistance and its claim to U.S. military aid for counter-terrorism initiatives. Still more alarming is the prospect that the activities of the Pakistani Taliban (Tahrikh-i Taliban Pakistan), will increase and force the government to bring about some constitutional changes to accommodate their Islamist view, no matter how unpopular this would be among many Pakistanis.

CONCLUSIONS: As the date for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan approaches, the U.S. made a last-ditch effort to settle its dispute with the Taliban and, as a confidence building measure, exchanged five Taliban leaders for one U.S. soldier in May 2014. However, the deal yielded no desired results, ultimately due to the

Taliban's aspiration to absolute power and a theocratic state, and its contempt for the democratic culture. The given predicament rules out any political settlement before the U.S. troops pull out in 2014. Yet a settlement is equally unlikely immediately after 2014, due to the considerable risk of a civil war or a division of Afghanistan on ethno-ideological grounds. In any case, Afghanistan's fragility will remain until the Taliban change their conservative mindset from "co-annihilation" to "co-existence."

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REPERCUSSIONS OF MOSCOW'S EXPANSIONIST FOREIGN POLICY IN NORTH CAUCASUS

Valeriy Dzutsev

Russia's rapidly changing economic and political landscape is affecting relations between the peripheral North Caucasus region and the central government. As Moscow's resources dwindle or are projected to diminish significantly, its ability to support an elaborate system of dependencies and allegiances in its semi-colonial periphery plummets. The central government seeks to reap more revenues from the regions and to decrease the appetites of local elites in order to finance its expansionist policies abroad. As a result, political uncertainty is growing and the previously muted criticism of Moscow's policies from the North Caucasus' ruling elites is coming to the forefront.

BACKGROUND: Economic crisis, the conflict in Ukraine and international sanctions are transforming the political regime in Russia, also affecting relations between the central government and peripheral regions. Moscow has struggled to suppress separatism in the North Caucasus over the past 20 years. It is not surprising, therefore, that the international crisis caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine reverberates in the North Caucasus. Russia's aggressive policies in Ukraine have a direct impact on the political and economic situation in Russia's most unstable periphery. Regional authorities in the North Caucasus have begun to voice unusual concerns, demanding justice from Moscow. The signs of muted discontent that is apparently brewing in the North Caucasus suggest that the existing order dominated by fear of the

all-powerful central state may start crumbling.

For example, the influential Dagestani newspaper *Chernovik* termed a conference devoted to countering religious extremism in the city of Makhachkala on August 6 a "breakthrough" event. "For the first time the representatives of the republican authorities publicly voiced arguments that describe the activities of the law enforcement agencies not only as insufficient and overburdened with formalities, but as carried out with excesses that result in the opposite effect – exasperation of the masses, provoking intra-religious conflict," the newspaper wrote.

As a rule, regional authorities in the North Caucasus do not criticize the combat operations of the police and security services against the insurgents. Without civilian oversight, the security

services routinely break the law and are shielded from prosecution by the Russian federal government. This situation, according to some observers, results in a continual cycle of violence as the victims' friends and relatives take revenge against the government or extend their passive support to the insurgents. Dagestan has been the most volatile North Caucasian republic in the past several years, and some local observers have arrived at the conclusion that the conflict in the republic is political and, therefore, needs a negotiated political solution. An understanding is growing in Dagestan that Moscow is not interested in reaching peace in the republic as it is fighting a colonial war against non-Russians.



(Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), [Creative Commons](#))

IMPLICATIONS: Apart from the tacit disagreement on such a major policy issue as counterinsurgency, economic discrepancies emerge in forms that are previously unheard of. Russian authorities have launched a campaign of shutting down regional banks. A number of Dagestani banks were shut down in the past year under the pretext of fraud, money laundering operations and even providing support for the republic's insurgents. Several regional banks were shut down in North Ossetia and the republic is on

the verge of economic collapse, according to some analysts. North Ossetia's Prime Minister Sergei Takoev made a frantic statement that the closing of banks in the republic "undermined confidence in the fairness of business laws" in Russia. This appears to be a campaign of expropriation that is practically eliminating the North Caucasus' regional banking industry. On August 30, one of the few large profitable enterprises in Dagestan, the Kizlyar brandy factory was appropriated by Moscow as "federal property."

It appears that calculating its present and future losses because of the poor economic outlook, Moscow has decided to collect as much revenues and assets from the regions as possible, but in a clandestine, indirect way. The North Caucasus used to be more privileged compared to other Russian regions because of its separatist aspirations, but Moscow currently appears intent on cutting those privileges.

The North Caucasian republics are not necessarily poor. Dagestan, for example, reportedly has at least 1 billion tons of oil reserves. This is a large resource for a republic with a population of barely 4 million. Yet, Moscow does not allow these oil fields to be developed as it fears losing control over this region. The approaching economic downturn will raise these pressing issues with ever greater urgency – why does Dagestan have to survive on financial handouts from Moscow, when it can potentially flourish on its oil reserves?

On September 8, President Putin disbanded the Ministry for Regional Development, but the Ministry for the Development of the North Caucasus remained in place. It is unclear, however, what this ministry will do as the government has significantly scaled down its plans for developing world class ski resorts in the North Caucasus. Moscow's grandiose plans for constructing one resort in each of the North Caucasian republics never seemed realistic and were seemingly devised as a ploy to appease regional elites against the backdrop of the Russian government's lavish spending on the nearby Olympic sites in Sochi. After the Olympics and facing many other pressing issues, the fairytale about ski resorts in the North Caucasus was practically renounced by officials.

The absence of actual or even potential prospects for life improvement in the North Caucasus combined with the tightening of regional economic policy will likely have serious consequences for Russia's rule in the region. Much depends on how the conflict in Ukraine evolves and how hard the sanctions will hit Russia's economy, but the fault lines have become evident. The Russian government faces financial overstretch at home as an effect of its government's expansive (and expansionist) foreign policy. The restive North Caucasus region is a key indicator of how Moscow will cope with domestic pressures. While Moscow can always rely on crude force in this peripheral region that is largely populated by ethnic non-Russians, even there it will also have to offer some benefits in order to retain control over the situation.

As the Russian government's foreign policy gamble will require more resources, its ability to provide benefits to domestic audiences will decrease further. Regional elites in the North Caucasus already show signs of weariness about Moscow's inattention to their interests and outright plundering of their resources. This incentivizes the central government to adopt some radical changes in regional policies. Moscow should either opt for granting the regions greater autonomy in developing their existing resources and capabilities or move in to establish a greater degree of direct rule. At this time Moscow appears to signal that it has opted for the latter in the North Caucasus.

CONCLUSIONS: Facing foreign policy challenges, the Russian government chooses to draw more resources from the regions and establish greater control over them. However, the allegiance of the regional elites has its limits and fault lines appear to emerge in the North Caucasus. Although no region in the North Caucasus is likely to challenge Moscow directly at this point, the tensions already manifest themselves in unusually open and nervous statements by regional officials. As the Russian leadership continues on a collision course with the neighboring countries and the West, its foreign policy challenges will mount. This will have a direct impact on domestic stability and prompt the government to adopt significant changes, especially so in the North Caucasus, a region that is regarded as potentially disloyal.

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HOW REAL IS THE JIHADI THREAT TO KAZAKHSTAN?

John C.K. Daly

In the 23 years since the collapse of the USSR, Central Asia's interest in its Islamic heritage has grown, with many mosques opening and increasing numbers of Central Asians making the haj. This interest has coincided with militant unrest roiling the Muslim world, from the Maghreb to Xinjiang, leaving Central Asian governments concerned whether radicals, particularly from neighboring Afghanistan, may seek to raise the banner of jihad in their countries. In mid-August, Kazakh FSB officers detained four men in Pavlodar in northeastern Kazakhstan, ranging in age from 20 to 46, who called themselves Salafis. The quartet was subsequently charged with promoting terrorism and extremism under Chapter 9, Article 233 of the Criminal Code of the Republic.



(Source: [OECD](#), [Creative Commons](#))

BACKGROUND: The activity of radical Islamic militants from Central Asia can be divided into two stages. The first includes the beginnings of Islamic radicalism and the efforts of radicals to exploit the weakness of the region's states in the first decade after the fall of the USSR. The second includes the period after the 9/11 attacks and the fall of the Taliban in 2001, when radicals from Central Asia were forced to escape and found themselves in a new environment, while their influence on the situation in Central Asia was diminished.

In Oct. 2006 the office of Kazakhstan's prosecutor-general released an updated

list of 12 organizations, approved by the Supreme Court, banned on the basis of terrorist activities.

The list included a number of Central Asian-based separatist, or religious movements, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islam (Party of Islamic Liberation, HuT) the Jamaat of Central Asian Mujahidin and the Uyghur Islamic Party of Eastern Turkestan separatist group. Foreign-banned militant groups included the Kongra-Gel Kurdish organization (PKK), the Boz Kurt ("Gray Wolves") Turkish right-wing group, Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba, Kuwait's Social Reforms Society, Lebanon's Asbat an-Ansar Palestinian group, al Qaeda, Afghanistan's Taliban, and the Muslim Brotherhood are also included in the list. In contrast to the secretive IMU, HuT, which seeks to reestablish a Caliphate in Central Asia, produces an abundance of literature about its goals, including a website (www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org). In 2011 Kazakhstan's sole

indigenous militant group emerged with several attacks in country, the Jund al Khilafah (“Soldiers of the Caliphate”).

In its struggle against Islamic radicalism and terrorism Kazakhstan has reached out to a broad array of allies. One of the most important international allies for Kazakhstan is the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), founded in 2007 to assist post-Soviet Central Asian nations via its mandate and through regional cooperation to respond to domestic and transnational threats to peace while also supporting regional sustainable development.

Another regional mechanism for coping with terrorism is regular meetings of the Commonwealth of Independent States’ (CIS) national counter-terrorism centers. On February 11-12, 2014, the heads of national CIS counter-terrorism centers held their 7th meeting in Moscow under the auspices of the CIS Anti-Terrorism Center (ATC).

Legal structures regarding terrorism have also been tightened, with Kazakhstan’s Criminal Code Article 233-3 (financing of terrorist or extremist activities and other complicity in terrorism or extremism) providing for up to eight years imprisonment.

Kazakhstan has also developed governmental mechanisms to cope with the increased threats of religious extremism and terrorism. Kazakhstan’s National Security Committee (NSC) in July 2013 established an Anti-Terror Center (ACT). On March 14 during an ACT

session, NSC chairman Nurtay Abykayev reminded the participants of the need for prompt implementation of a state program drawn up in 2013 and extending to 2017 for counteracting religious extremism and terrorism by drawing up a plan of measures for its execution.

IMPLICATIONS: The Kazakh government has adopted a proactive approach to dealing with terrorism and religious extremism and is not going it alone; it is an active participant in regional counterterrorism efforts. In June 2012, Central Asian officials met in Almaty to discuss a joint plan of action for implementing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia.

Two months later, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) experts met in Almaty to discuss joint activities, while Kazakh security forces conducted joint counterterrorism drills with their Russian and Ukrainian counterparts. The SCO has held five anti-terrorist exercises; the sixth, code-named “Peace Mission 2014” was the first to be held in a single SCO state. Involving 7,000 SCO troops, the operation was held in China’s Chzhuzhihe military district in Inner Mongolia on August 24-29.

The exercise’s goal was to deter the “three evil forces” of terrorism, separatism and extremism. The scenario for the exercise involved a separatist organization, supported by an international terrorist organization, staging terrorist incidents and a coup. The SCO dispatched military forces to put down the insurrection and restore

stability at the request of the country's government.

The Kazakh government has also turned its attention to the Internet as a possible vehicle for radicalization. In September 2012 an Agency for Religious Affairs spokesman said that between January and September 2012, 1,800 websites were investigated for violent extremist content, while a National Security Council representative stated that 950 websites promoting violent extremism had been shut down since 2010. According to Kazakhstan's Prosecutor-General Askhat Daulbayev, in 2013 courts ruled to block access to 596 "destructive" website resources and prohibiting their operations in Kazakhstan.

Earlier this year, Kazakhstan's Prosecutor General's Office announced that since 2011 it had in conjunction with other government agencies monitored over 90,000 on-line resources to check on their content. As part of the government's plan to conduct a large-scale campaign to counter radicalization in society, new legislation requires all media outlets in Kazakhstan to assist state bodies in counterterrorism efforts.

On June 4, Kazakhstan's Deputy Prosecutor General Andrei Kravchenko said that more than 10 terrorist acts have been committed in Kazakhstan over the past several years, resulting in the deaths of 17 law enforcement officials and four civilians being injured, while for the period January-April 2014, 57 criminal cases had been opened.

Kazakhstan's problem of radicalization is no longer limited to in-country

malcontents. On January 8, Kyrgyz State National Security Committee (GKNB) special services detained two Kazakh citizens, identified only as "R. N." and "S. M." and described as members of an "international terrorist organization," in Chui oblast in northern Kyrgyzstan, near the border with Kazakhstan. The Kyrgyz GKNB press office reported that the Kazakh nationals came to Kyrgyzstan unlawfully "after undergoing military training in Syria," and that the detainees planned to settle in Kyrgyzstan using false passports "with the aim of setting up a recruitment pipeline for further trafficking of recruits to Syria."

CONCLUSIONS: While

Kazakhstan has largely escaped the high levels of militant violence that has scarred neighboring post-Soviet Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, a worrying aspect of the trickle of Kazakh jihadis being detained and prosecuted is their relative youth. As more than 60 percent of Central Asia's 50 million people are under the age of 25, the radicalization of this young portion of the population will become an ever higher government priority.

Central Asian states now face the triple threats of Islamic radicalism, terrorism and drug trafficking. Accordingly, all the post-Soviet Central Asian states have identified these issues as their main security concerns. Afghanistan is the locus of that threat, which may metastasize after the ISAF withdrawal is completed in December 2014. Kazakhstan is actively seeking regional and international assistance in its

counter-terrorism efforts, from states and organizations including Russia, the U.S., EU, UN, CIS and the SCO to keep what has up to now been a minor if worrying trend containable. With a young, computer savvy population aware of the Internet, which radicals use as a recruiting tool, Kazakh security forces have their work cut out for them.

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RUSSIAN AND KAZAKH LEADERS EXCHANGE WORRYING STATEMENTS

Arslan Sabyrbekov

In a recent interview to the state TV channel Khabar, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev spoke about his country's possible withdrawal from the Eurasian Economic Union. In his words, "Kazakhstan's independence is our most precious treasure, for which our forefathers fought. We will never surrender our independence and will do everything to protect it. Astana will never join an organization of any form, which presents any threat to its independent statehood."

Analysts consider the demarche of the Kazakh President a response to recent Russian statements, which have to some extent questioned Kazakhstan's viability and independence as a state. Speaking at the Seliger youth forum, Russia's President Vladimir Putin described his Kazakh counterpart as the most experienced politician in the post-Soviet space and gave him credit for creating a state in a territory, where there was none before. In his words, "before Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan has never had any statehood." This statement from the Russian side generated a sharp and bitter reaction among the Kazakhstani public, especially in nationalist and patriot circles. Several virtual protest actions were organized in the country, particularly a flash mob on social media that demanded a history book to be sent to Putin for revision.

Moreover, an earlier statement by the Deputy Speaker of the Russian Duma, the leader of Russia's Liberal Democratic Party Vladimir Zhirinovsky, created a highly negative backdrop for President Putin's later remarks. In his usual undiplomatic manner, Zhirinovsky said that after settling the Ukrainian crisis, Moscow should pay attention to the developments in Kazakhstan, where in his opinion, "anti-Russian sentiments are also on the rise." Obviously, Zhirinovsky's statement come as no surprise to many. His demand last year that in return for its debts, Kyrgyzstan should give its Issyk-Kul Lake to Moscow, earned him a *persona non grata* status in that country.

The exchange of statements between the two Presidents has given rise to varying comments and assessments. Many were quick to make declarations about the big rift between Putin and Nazarbayev and the unexpected crisis in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). However, according to Almaty-based political analyst Dosym Satpaev, these implications are exaggerated. This is not the first time that Nazarbayev has made such remarks. In one of his earlier meetings with the country's intellectual circles, the Kazakh President described the EEU as an exclusively economic project and said that if doubts arise, Astana will leave the organization at any time it

deems necessary. Earlier, President Nazarbayev has also vetoed the creation of a legislative body within the EEU, the function of which obviously goes beyond mere economic integration.

The Moscow-based Central Asia expert Arkadyi Dubnov believes that Putin's Seliger remarks were interpreted by Kazakhstan's leadership in light of the developments in Ukraine. Kazakhstan, along with Ukraine, are parties to the 1994 Budapest memorandum. Both countries declined to maintain their nuclear arsenals in exchange for guarantees of territorial integrity. At that time, Moscow appeared as the major international guarantor and has in breach of the aforementioned memorandum annexed Crimea, claiming that no guarantees were given to the new political leadership in Kiev. According to Dubnov, Kazakhstan's political leadership might have interpreted Putin's and Zhirinovskiy's statements along the same lines, namely the possibility of a "Crimean scenario" in northern Kazakhstan with its significant Russian minority, if Astana obtains a new, nationalistic political leadership that disregards the Kremlin's interests.

Indeed, there are many unknowns in this story and one can only speculate about the real logic behind the statements. It remains unclear what really prompted President Putin to make this claim. One can also simply interpret his statement as an effort to emphasize the role of his Kazakh counterpart, who has also been awarded the lifelong title "leader of the nation," for founding modern Kazakhstan. Astana's statement is also unlikely to have implications beyond the declaratory level, since Nazarbayev, as President Putin also stated at the youth forum, "is himself the chief initiator behind the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union in its current form."

The author writes in his personal capacity. The views expressed are his own and do not represent the views of the organization for which he works.

NATO GRANTS GEORGIA A “SUBSTANTIAL PACKAGE”

Eka Janashia

On September 5, during NATO's two-day summit in Wales, Georgia obtained a “substantial package” instead of the long-expected Membership Action Plan (MAP), entailing a step toward closer integration with the alliance.

In the Wales declaration, NATO leaders acknowledged the visible progress that Georgia has made since the 2008 Bucharest summit and stated the provision of a “substantial package” as a tool that should further boost Georgia's integration with NATO. The package includes the launch of a Defense and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative aiming to buttress partner nations' ability by sharing NATO expertise in projecting international stability and conflict prevention without deploying large combat forces. Aside from Georgia, the initiative will be extended to Jordan and Moldova.

Consequently, the package aims to enhance Georgia's defense capabilities, particularly by supporting the Ministry of Defense and promoting reforms intending to modernize the defense and security sectors. It also aspires to increase the interoperability of Georgia's armed forces by involving them in more NATO trainings and exercises.

To this end, a military training center, which may in the future even gain a regional dimension, will be established in Georgia. According to Georgia's Defense Minister Irakli Alasania, one

suggestion is to deploy the center to the Krtsanisi training base. U.S. marines have been instructing nearly 12,000 Georgian troops in the Krtsanisi training facility before deployment to Afghanistan and other missions, the minister said. Finally, the package foresees the expansion of the NATO liaison office in Tbilisi.

Another accomplishment at the Wales summit is that Georgia has been placed among a group of nations – Australia, Finland, Jordan and Sweden – who attained an “elevated status” and “enhanced opportunities” of cooperation with NATO.

Whereas this, together with the “substantial package,” is a real achievement for Georgia, it is not a direct step toward NATO membership. The 2008 Bucharest declaration included the decision that MAP should be the next step for Georgia on its “direct way to membership,” meaning that MAP remains a necessary phase for accession to NATO. Notably, NATO's Wales declaration reaffirms all “elements” of the 2008 Bucharest summit decisions on Georgia.

In fact, Georgia's expectations regarding MAP faded months earlier during Georgian PM Irakli Garibashvili's visit in Berlin. In a meeting with Garibashvili on June 2, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that MAP for Georgia will not be on the agenda of the NATO summit in Wales but that there are opportunities

other than MAP that can reflect Georgia's progress. The German Chancellor certainly had in mind the "substantial package" that truly is an option for Georgia but not an alternative to MAP.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel visited Georgia instantly after the Wales summit, in the first visit by a U.S. Defense Secretary since 2003, and conveyed several important messages.

Firstly, it was a logical reflection of U.S. President Barack Obama's speech in Tallinn on September 3, when the president underscored the need for providing more assistance for NATO partners including Georgia and Moldova. Hagel informed Tbilisi that Washington intends to make an extensive contribution to the "substantial package" and pledged to continue its bilateral capacity building efforts with Georgia. He said the Pentagon is familiarizing itself with Tbilisi's request to purchase Sikorsky Blackhawk helicopters.

Secondly, in light of Russia's "aggression" and "brazen assault" on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, Hagel sought to neutralize the inconvenience caused by NATO's denial of MAP for Georgia and focused on the country's newly attained "special partnership" status with NATO which gives it "new options, new expandability, new possibilities." Finally, Hagel envisioned a potential role for Georgia in the U.S.-led coalition to destroy the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Evaluating the implications of NATO's recent summit for Georgia, the critics

say that there are some undesirable aspects of the declaration that could be avoided if proper diplomatic efforts were pursued by the government. Namely, the 31st article of the declaration expresses concerns that "protracted conflicts" undermine "the opportunities for citizens in the region to reach their full potential as members of the Euro-Atlantic community." Skeptics argue that it is an ambiguous article that could well mean that conflict zones on Georgia's territory might prevent the country's membership in NATO.

Another sensitive question is that the Wales declaration does not mention Georgia as an aspirant country while the declaration of the 2012 Chicago summit did. The Wales declaration pledges to assess Montenegro's progress towards NATO membership and decide the Alliance's final position on the matter no later than by the end of 2015. No such notifications were made regarding Georgia. Further, the declaration does not mention the conflicts over Crimea, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the same context, which hinders Georgia's de-occupation policy.

Finally, opposition politicians and some analysts believe that although Georgia has gained new and enhanced opportunities in its partnership with NATO, given its sizeable contribution to international missions the country should have been granted more than a "substantial package" at the Wales summit.

SHANGHAI COOPERATION CHALLENGES THE WEST

Oleg Salimov

Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe hosted the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit for two days on September 11-12. The summit concluded Tajikistan's position in the organization's rotating chairmanship and handed the duty over to the Russian Federation. The summit was attended by six member states, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and the five observers Afghanistan, India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan. Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov attended the summit as a distinguished guest. Economic cooperation and threats to regional security through political instability in Afghanistan, the Middle East, North Africa, and Ukraine were established as the summit's agenda. The long awaited expansion of the organization by adding India, Pakistan, and possibly Iran as new members became one of the most important announcements of the summit, outlining the SCO's projects for the upcoming year.

The expansion plans were revealed on the eve of the summit by Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in the Russian media outlet *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. The article referred to Pakistan, India, and Iran as new prospective members of the SCO. Iran has previously applied twice for SCO membership but the outcomes of Iran

joining it are highly ambiguous considering the country's frictions with Israel and the U.S. over its nuclear program. Russia's recently intensified conflict with Western countries draws it closer to Iran and raises Iran's hopes for full membership in the SCO. The question remains, however, whether the SCO will be able to manage the regional rivalry between China, India, and Pakistan if the prospective members are in fact accepted.

Lavrov also stressed the potential of using national currencies in financial operations among SCO's members. The statement is a continuation of Russia's political initiatives aimed at relinquishing euros and dollars in its financial operations in the wake of the U.S. and EU economic sanctions imposed on Russia for its role in Ukrainian crisis. Earlier, Russia and China, the two major players of SCO, have declared their intention of national currencies turnover in the recently started natural gas delivery project. It is only logical for Russia to employ the SCO's chairmanship and natural resources leverage to expand the organization through India, Pakistan, and Iran and to denounce euros and dollars when refocusing from Europe to Asia.

The SCO's memorandum declared several particular steps towards the promotion of national currencies in SCO's financial system and, as a result,

the alienation of euros and dollars. These include increasing members' financial and banking cooperation in regional trade and economy, and an intensification of efforts in establishing their own Development Fund and Bank of Development. However, it should be noted that the idea of establishing financial institutions within the SCO, such as a Development Fund, was first proposed in 2011 by Kazakhstan and widely supported by Russia as a response to the global financial crisis. At the same time, China offered its own project in the SCO's Bank of Development. Both were viewed as security measures for the SCO's members. Russia's current growing confrontation of with the West amplifies the likelihood that the proposed SCO financial institutions will be implemented.

The SCO's own financial institutions are also in agreement with Russia's intent to develop regional automobile transportation infrastructure which will connect Asia with Russia's Siberia region. The infrastructure linking Asia and Siberia can serve to accelerate regional trade in addition to the Trans-Siberian railroad. Vladimir Putin announced the intent during the previous SCO summit in Bishkek in September 2013, and Lavrov also highlighted the transportation projects as a major SCO interest in his article on SCO expansion. In the Bishkek summit, the SCO's Interbanking association was seen as the major prospective investor of the project. In light of the latest proposals, if realized, the SCO's Bank of Development might

become a subsequent proprietor of the Asia-Siberia transportation project.

The SCO summit in Dushanbe demonstrated a growing division between the developing and developed worlds in Eurasia. The signs of division can be seen in the summit's official declaration, the statements of the officials, and the SCO's narrowing scope of priorities. The SCO unifies a group of regimes that pursue various objectives through a common need for political and economic survival. For example, stated in the summit's declaration, the determination to establish informational security and fend off informational-communication threats improve the survivability of authoritarian regimes like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. For Russia and Iran, the SCO is an engine for forging political alliances and economic partnerships. The emerging Asian countries are attracted to the SCO by the opportunity of obtaining cheap energy resources. The cumulative efforts of these countries can create a serious counterbalance to the West.

GEORGIA'S PM GARIBASHVILI VISITS ARMENIA

Erik Davtyan

On August 21, Georgia's Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili paid a two-day official visit to Armenia. Accepting the official invitation from the Armenian side, Garibashvili had meetings with his counterpart Hovik Abrahamyan, discussing a wide range of issues in the fields of trade relations, infrastructure, education and culture. The Georgian PM was also received by Armenia's President Serzh Sargsyan. The interlocutors discussed some aspects of Armenian-Georgian relations, as well as the agreements reached by the two states during Sargsyan's official visit to Georgia on June 18, 2014.

The August meetings were Garibashvili's first visit to Yerevan as Georgia's PM, therefore there were some expectations in Armenia from the official visit. After the "Georgian Dream" coalition's victory in Georgia's 2012 parliamentary elections, Garibashvili's visit became the second by a Georgian chief executive after Bidzina Ivanishvili's visit in 2013.

Armenia is dependent on Georgia for communication with the outer world, and Georgia serves as a transit corridor for export and import. Since Georgia has recalibrated its foreign policy toward promoting trilateral comprehensive cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan, many in Armenia pay close attention to

developments in Georgia's foreign affairs and its attitude towards Armenia and Armenian-Georgian relations. In this context, the outcomes of Garibashvili's visit and the high-level meetings potentially have significant implications for Armenia's geopolitical situation.

Another matter of concern for Armenia is the future of bilateral relations with Georgia in light of the different paths of regional integration the two countries have chosen. After signing an Association Agreement with the EU on June 27, Georgia has considerably deepened its integration process with the EU. Meanwhile, Armenia continues its route towards membership in the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union. The possibility that these divergent integration processes may damage relations between Armenia and Georgia is nevertheless officially downplayed by both sides. During the meeting, Abrahamyan stressed that "Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union will not affect the existing economic relations with Georgia", and added that "Armenia and Georgia could benefit from adhering to different integration units". Garibashvili reaffirmed his counterpart's assessment and added that it "might set a good example for the international community." However, these viewpoints were criticized by some observers. Tatul

Hakobyan, an analyst of the Civilitas foundation, stated that the different directions of integration will damage both Armenian-Iranian and Armenian-Georgian relations, “leading Armenia to economic, political and regional isolation”.

Aside from economic issues, the visit was also important in the context of national security and military affairs. A problematic development from Armenia’s perspective is that the defense ministers of Georgia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan held trilateral meetings on August 18 in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic shortly before Garibashvili’s official visit to Yerevan. During the visit, the three states decided to develop their defense cooperation, and especially the prospect of increased Georgian-Azerbaijani military cooperation caused concern in Armenia. The trilateral meeting was perceived in some circles as a step toward creating a trilateral alliance against Armenia. However, Johnny Melikyan, an expert on Georgian affairs, downplayed the importance of the Nakhchivan meeting, stating that its agenda did not go beyond that of a series of similar meetings that have periodically been organized between Georgia, Turkey and Azerbaijan since 2011, and does not have any specific importance for Armenian-Georgian relations. According to Melikyan, Georgia is interested in sustaining the balance in the South Caucasus, not in undermining Armenia’s national security.

Other analysts expressed disappointment regarding the lack of

output from Garibashvili’s visit. Arnold Stepanyan, leader of the civil initiative Multinational Georgia, stated that “Garibashvili’s visit to Armenia was perceived as an ordinary visit, as another meeting: nothing special was said or written.” Stepanyan thinks the state-level discussion of bilateral relations delivered less than expected and the lack of new agreements mark limited progress in broadening bilateral relations.

According to bestnews.am, “Garibashvili paid ‘a get-to-know-you visit’ to Armenia,” based on which increasing cooperation can evolve between Garibashvili’s and Abrahamyan’s cabinets. Despite the variety in opinions, the visit of the Georgian Prime Minister was generally perceived as a positive step towards an intensification of Armenian-Georgian relations.