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# THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASS ANALYST

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# VOLGOGRAD BOMBINGS DEMONSTRATE THE INABILITY OF RUSSIA'S SECURITY SERVICES

Emil Souleimanov

*On the eve of the New Year's celebrations, two subsequent terrorist attacks hit Volgograd, located around 900 kilometers southeast of Moscow and around 650 kilometers northeast of Sochi. Leaving at least 34 dead and dozens injured, the Volgograd bombings raised questions regarding the ability of Russian intelligence and security services to properly anticipate and forestall terrorist attacks, and doubts about their capacity to ensure the security of the upcoming Winter Olympics. Additionally, the Volgograd bombings indicated a certain evolution of Russia's Jihadist underground that might have repercussions for the nation's security in the years to come.*

**BACKGROUND:** A number of factors amplified the shock experienced by Russian society in the last days of 2013. First, the terrorist acts took place on the 29th and 30th of December, on two subsequent days and within less than 24 hours, and in the same city, demonstrating the glaring incapacity of Russia's security services to prevent at least the recurrence of terrorist acts. Second, the bombings hit the city's railway station and a trolleybus that was less than 2 kilometers away from the railway station. Importantly, the railway station in Volgograd, as elsewhere in Russia, has been among the most closely guarded areas of the city. Third, the two bombings took place only a few kilometers from the site of another bombing that hit the city in October 2013, when a female suicide bomber detonated her explosives in a bus, claiming seven lives and dozens injured. In sum, the terrorists were able to carry out three successful bombings in the same city, considered as a strategic crossroads, within three months.

In fact, the October and December bombings both seem to have been carried out by suicide bombers with links to the Dagestani insurgency. Naida Asiyalova, an ethnic Avar who is believed to have perpetrated the October bombing, was born in the Central Dagestani town of Buynaksk. She most likely organized the bombing in cooperation with her boyfriend Dmitry Sokolov, an ethnic Russian with links to Dagestani insurgents. She was in fact the first female suicide bomber to contradict the established profile of a "black widow" as she had no personal reason for revenge. On the contrary, having been seduced by her school teacher at the age of 17 and misused by several men, she earned a reputation for herself as a "spoiled woman" in the area, leading to disrupted relations with her relatives and apparently serving as her initial impetus to turn to Islam in the last years of her life.

The first December bombing was carried out by Oksana Aslanova, an ethnic Tabasarani (a small Dagestani ethnicity), who probably had a Russian mother, was



born and raised in Turkmenistan, and then subsequently married two or three members of the Dagestani insurgency who were later killed in combat, hence a typical example of a "black widow." Authorities have speculated that an unknown male might have assisted her during the railway bombing. The trolleybus bombing was carried out by Pavel Pechenkin, an ethnic Russian native of the Mari-El Republic, who had converted to Islam and become radicalized over several years. He travelled to Dagestan several times where he supposedly established contacts with Dagestani jamaats. According to some sources, Pechenkin's interest in Islam and personal radicalization went hand in hand with his research of Jihadist websites and contacts with Jihadist communities in Kazan, where he had worked as a paramedic. Yet Pechenkin also had no personal reason for revenge.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Shortly after the Volgograd bombings, some commentators have been quick to note that the terrorist acts testified to the Caucasus Emirate's changed strategy. In fact, following a wave of anti-regime protests that stroke Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and other Russian cities in 2011, emir Doku Umarov declared a moratorium on terrorist acts in Russian cities. The moratorium was later cancelled as Umarov called for renewed attacks during the Sochi Olympics. In

reality, Umarov's power has been steadily diminishing over the last few years, as the Chechen wing of the North Caucasian insurgency was significantly weakened particularly after the killing of the influential Gakayev brothers in January 2013.

Even though Umarov has been regarded as an icon of resistance by part of the North Caucasian insurgents, his grip over the situation is minimal. Instead, following massive crackdowns on local jamaats, the resistance movement has been decentralized, with various jamaats and even individuals operating on their own. According to some information, cooperation has been quite intermittent even among the strongest Dagestani jamaats. At the same time, the intensification of counterinsurgency operations in Dagestan has led to increased numbers of radicalized youth that would not hesitate to carry out highly lethal terrorist acts for the sake of revenge.

Still, the Volgograd attacks have demonstrated that a new and powerful entity is emerging in Russia: recent converts to Jihadism. Due to their sheer devotion to the cause, increasingly radical agenda, and lack of connections with their native social backgrounds, they have found the sense of their lives in serving a single noble cause, which has turned their attacks increasingly indiscriminate and lethal. Contrary to North Caucasian jihadists, whose main motivation for suicide terrorism has been a desire to retaliate against wrongdoings inflicted either upon themselves or their families, non-local jihadists have pursued a broader and more elusive agenda of doing what they believe is in the interest of Islam. As such, they are not concerned

whether their co-ethnics or fellow believers approve of their terrorist acts. This, in turn, has boosted the role of imams of Salafi congregations, since the "non-rooted" converts are, as a rule, much more prone to being manipulated because they come from disrupted backgrounds and lack links to local communities. In a parallel with the April 2013 Boston bombings, carried out by two Chechen-Avar brothers, the increasing salience of individual or small-group self-radicalization, for which the use of various freely accessible internet sources, such as YouTube and Islamist forums, has been symptomatic. This scheme of self-radicalization, coupled with the ongoing formation of independent cells within the Jihadist resistance, will likely play an increasing role in the years to come, rendering the task of anticipating the activities of would-be terrorists all the more difficult. This also assigns Russian authorities with the crucial task of properly monitoring the internet-related activities of individuals involved, or sympathetic to, the Jihadist cause. Importantly, a pattern is being established that involves cooperation between terrorists of a "Slavic" background with North Caucasian – particularly Dagestani – insurgents. The security implications for Russian authorities are magnified by the perspective of a deadly alliance between newly converted non-North Caucasian jihadists and experienced, well-equipped and financed jihadists from the North Caucasus. The movements and contacts of "Slavic" jihadists will raise far less suspicion than Caucasian ones, and cooperation leading to their deployment in areas inside Russia proper would be a

huge asset to the insurgency particularly on the eve of the upcoming Olympics.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The emergence of non-North Caucasian jihadists entails two important consequences: first, the inability of Russian security forces to infiltrate Jihadist cells across the country, and second, their inability to solidly monitor the movements and activities of already known Jihadists. Interestingly, the identities of the three terrorists mentioned in this article, who are believed to have carried out the Volgograd bombings, were known by Russian secret services who had sought to monitor their activities. Still, they proved unable both to trace their location and to anticipate the bombings they carried out. The fact that these persons were able to travel freely across the country, make contact with insurgents, and to obtain explosives, speaks to the unprofessionalism of Russia's secret services.

Even though the Russian authorities' unprecedented concentration on Sochi in the context of the upcoming Olympics will likely thwart terrorist acts in that city and its vicinity, that same attention seems to have left other Russian areas unprotected, giving the terrorists a chance to attack cities that are just a few hundred kilometers away from the Olympic site. This provides the terrorists with an opportunity to make their case public during as well as after the Sochi Olympics.

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*Wars Reconsidered* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and *An Endless War: The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007).

# INDIA'S CHALLENGES IN CENTRAL ASIA

Stephen Blank

*As India enters 2014 it faces multiple and mounting security challenges in Central Asia, which originate first of all in Afghanistan and second in Iran. The impending U.S. and NATO withdrawal leaves India as the most exposed foreign power supporting Afghanistan, which few believe can survive without continuing large-scale allied support and at least some military presence. The U.S. withdrawal, which might be accelerated if no Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) is signed between Washington and Kabul, would expose India to the risks of intensified fighting in Afghanistan. Pakistan's belief that India's presence there represents a threat also exposes India to further terrorist onslaughts, particularly by forces trained and supported by Pakistani military and intelligence agencies.*

**BACKGROUND:** This allied withdrawal may also expose Central Asian governments to intensified terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan. But if that occurs, India will be unable to provide much assistance to them, particularly as Pakistan continues not only to block it geographically but also politically. Moreover, China continues to work to restrict Indian influence to South Asia, both in its own right and through its “use” of Pakistan. Beijing shows no sign, for example, of supporting Indian membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and has far outstripped India as an investor in Central Asia, particularly in energy. In 2013, China prevailed over India in gaining a share of Kazakhstan's giant Kashagan field. Since the U.S. functions as the creator of political space for India to operate in both Afghanistan and Central Asia, the U.S. withdrawal reduces India's ability to gain a major foothold in an area that will probably be subjected to increasing political and strategic rivalry after 2014. This could create major problems for India in obtaining vitally needed energy from Central Asia. The TAPI pipeline from Turkmenistan remains suspended even though all the paperwork has been signed, because no financing or project management has yet been secured. And this consideration leads to the challenge of Iran. The recent 5+1 agreement has created opportunities for India to resume at least limited forms of commerce, especially in energy, with Iran. There are already signs that India and Pakistan, both of whom desperately need new and increased energy sources have resumed discussions with Iran about a pipeline from Iran through Pakistan to India (IPI). Yet too close a relationship with Iran still risks either Congressional or governmental pressure from the U.S.. India has already invested over US\$ 2 billion in efforts to help strengthen the Afghan state, and has earned a considerable reputation in Afghanistan to the extent that Washington has asked it to help persuade President Karzai to sign the BSA and allow a continuing U.S.



military presence in Afghanistan. Yet precisely the size of its investment in Afghanistan has aroused immense Pakistani suspicion and since many of the terrorist groups operating there have ties to the ISI or the Pakistani army, they are poised to strike at Indian interests in Afghanistan or directly against India. This remains the case despite signs of improvement in bilateral Indo-Pakistani relations. Without a U.S. presence in Afghanistan, the challenges to India to sustain its investment there in the face of declining Western support, continuing terrorism, and Pakistani machinations multiply. Moreover, China will exercise whatever capabilities it has to prevent India from becoming a true Central Asian power as it has done throughout the post-1991 period.

**IMPLICATIONS:** India's investments in Afghanistan are not only intended to strengthen that state and reduce the terrorist threat. They also aim, as the TAPI pipeline indicates, to promote Indian economic growth. Neither is energy the sole factor even if it is a crucial one. The U.S. government's proclaimed Silk Road, even if

Washington is not doing much to promote it, is largely intended to promote ties between India, Central Asia, and Europe. If Afghanistan is destabilized and Pakistan hostile or if Central Asia itself becomes convulsed with violence, India's commercial exposure abroad as well as its access to Turkmen gas will be seriously negatively affected. The TAPI pipeline, an idea that has existed since at last 1997 cannot gain traction amid increasing violence as that will scare off investors and any company that thinks about actually managing the project.

This would force India to turn to Iran for energy and to other actors like China and Russia for support in Central Asia. Iran is at best a questionable partner because its nuclear issues are by no means resolved. And even in the earlier negotiations over the IPI, Iran constantly raised the price for tariffs and changed the conditions it was prepared to accept. Therefore, there is no guarantee it will not do so again. In other words, the impending allied withdrawal from Afghanistan places India in a situation where it risks isolation in Central Asia.

It did not take Moscow or Beijing long to size up this situation. Indeed, both these governments have recently met with both Pakistani and Indian officials to work out agreements of mutual support against terrorism. Hence, Russia and China are already trying to moderate Pakistani and Indian rivalry in Afghanistan and tie India to their Central Asia agenda of preserving the status quo, while denying India the means to conduct an independent policy. They thus hope to supplant the U.S. and redirect the geopolitical trends generated by its large-scale intervention into Afghanistan and Central Asia after 2001. This might also



mean increased pressure on India to join the IPI rather than the U.S. backed TAPI pipeline scheme, in turn implying an end to any independent Indian or Indo-American silk road project through Central Asia. Both China and Russia have their own transcontinental trade and transportation route programs, neither of which supports a U.S. proposal that bypasses both of them for deliberate geostrategic reasons.

In that context the IPI becomes much more important, especially for China because it becomes the physical frame for a potential Iran-China pipeline through Pakistan to the port of Gwadar and then to China, provided China can build and sustain the Karakorum highway. This route would essentially freeze out TAPI, leave Turkmenistan dependent on China, and deprive other Central Asian states of opportunities to provide energy to India, thus curtailing their freedom of maneuver. Thus throughout South and Central Asia geoeconomics and geopolitics march hand in hand together.

At the same time there is no guarantee that India's security would be enhanced. Russia and especially China are both unlikely to commit either large-scale military aid or actual troops to Afghanistan should the situation there deteriorate and India might be left holding the bag in such a situation. And it is unlikely after a U.S. withdrawal that Russia and China would both willingly support closer Indo-Pakistani cooperation and restraint when doing so contradicts almost 65 years of Chinese policy.

In 2014, India will face a difficult situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia and regarding its security and energy supplies with a diminished hand. While

this is a consequence of the U.S. withdrawal; it is also the outcome of India's past failure to develop a sufficiently robust strategy for Central Asia and the means to carry it out. This failure concerning India's national security strategy in general is widely commented upon in the literature on Indian foreign and defense policy, and its negative results now looms in Central Asia and elsewhere.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Yet, challenge or crisis could, as the Chinese character for crisis suggests, provide an opportunity for India. India must use this crisis or series of challenges to develop stronger and more efficacious means for advancing and defending its national interests in Central Asia lest the region becomes the object, at least to a certain degree, of a Russo-Chinese rivalry under the guise of a condominium. India, like the U.S. and Central Asian states, is interested in preserving the security, integrity, and sovereignty of these states. Although India, Russia and China all oppose terrorism for good reasons, Russia's and China's records indicate that they do not support the other key goals of Indian policy in Central Asia and certainly have no interest in good or improved governance in the region. Given the likelihood of regime change or of volatility due to internal factors in Central Asia, India's interests will suffer if it cannot play an independent role there and so will the vital interests of the Central Asian governments.

India is not directly challenged by internal crises in Central Asia, however, if they occur in conjunction with a breakdown of the Afghan situation then both Indian and Central Asian vital interests will be at stake. But the means

available to both sides to cooperate effectively against those challenges will have been seriously reduced along with the chances for an effective resolution of such crises. Strategic challenge and transformation are coming to both Afghanistan and Central Asia, forcing India to confront the question of its ability to develop the policy resources necessary to secure its interests in this volatile period.

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## KAZAKHSTAN DRIFTS TO CHINA AMID TENSION WITH RUSSIA

Dmitry Shlapentokh

*Kazakhstan is a member of the Russian-sponsored Custom Union, and intends to join the Eurasian Union. Yet, Kazakhstan's foreign policy indicates that it regards Russia as just one among several partners, with which it cooperates in some areas but also competes against in others. The transportation of oil and natural gas has increasingly become a bone of contention, whereas China has emerged as a viable alternative. China has provided Kazakhstan with alternative transportation routes such as railroads, along with considerable investment, providing alternatives to Russia as well as the West. Neither the Russian-led Eurasian Union, nor any Western economic or geopolitical construction, is likely to monopolize Astana's attention.*

**BACKGROUND:** Kazakhstan's relationship with China started to develop early in the post-Soviet era amid Nazarbayev's adherence to Eurasianism and emphasis of the uniqueness of Eurasian civilization as a "symbiosis" of Slavs and the mostly Turkic peoples of central Eurasia, manifesting Kazakhstan's desire for not just economic but political integration with Russia. Yet, even at that time Kazakhstan engaged with a variety of partners, including China. Oil and natural gas emerged as the most important point of cooperation. Kazakhstan's desire to partner with China in extracting and exporting hydrocarbons was fully reciprocated by China which started to face considerable challenges in satisfying its energy needs. Importantly, the very year of the USSR's collapse and the emergence of independent Kazakhstan coincided with an important threshold in China's oil production and consumption, making China a net importer of oil in 1992. As it was becoming clear that Beijing would be unable to rapidly increase hydrocarbon production inside the country, increased energy imports became an economic as well as a strategic imperative. Chinese thinking in this regard went beyond the purely economic aspects of energy cooperation and saw the geopolitical implications of these projects. In this perspective, hydrocarbon imports from Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, were considered to be especially beneficial as the routes for delivering the essential raw materials were located outside direct U.S. influence. Beijing thus started to increase its influence in Kazakhstan's hydrocarbon industry from the very beginning of the republic's history. In the early 1990s, Kazakhstan followed the example of other former USSR countries of the and engaged in privatization, allowing China to buy some of Kazakhstan's energy enterprises. China and Kazakhstan



later signed an agreement to build a pipeline for delivering oil from Eastern Kazakhstan to China, which was completed in 2005. Kazakhstan thus developed its relationship with China alongside its increasing cooperation with Russia. The very fact that Kazakhstan finally decided to join the Moscow-sponsored project of forming a Eurasian Union was mostly due to Kazakhstan's desire to use old Soviet pipelines in order to transport Kazakh hydrocarbons to the West, a plan that Moscow opposed.

As a result of this and other problems, Kazakhstan's relationship with Russia in the energy sphere has become increasingly contentious. At the same time, Western companies have been unable to provide significant investment into Kazakhstan's economy. Consequently, China has taken advantage of the economic and geopolitical vacuum and Beijing is increasingly casting itself as Kazakhstan's major economic and implicitly geopolitical partner. The expansion of Kazakhstan's energy relationship with China has paralleled the increasing friction between Astana and Moscow.

**IMPLICATIONS:** In January 2013, Kazakhstan proclaimed that it would limit its imports of oil products from

Russia, a prospect that invoked skepticism among several Russian analysts. Yet in April 2013, Kazakhstan limited Russia's gasoline sales in the country and took other restrictive measures related to oil in dealing with Russia. Moscow assumed that Kazakhstan would have no choice and would finally cave into Russia's demands. However, Moscow was wrong and China presented a viable alternative. Kazakhstan now sends its oil to Chinese refineries instead of Russian ones. In addition, Kazakhstan demanded a higher price for gas it had already committed to Russia and would otherwise divert deliveries to China. In July 2013, Kazakhstan sold a US\$ 5 billion stake in the Kashagan oil field, one of the largest in the world, to China's CNPC.

This and other actions by Astana hardly pleased Russia and Russian observers proclaimed that this move would lead to gas shortages in Kazakhstan. Still, Kazakhstan continued its effort to limit its hydrocarbon trade with Russia. In June 2013, Kazakhstan prohibited the use of bitumen from Omsk refineries. At the same time, the relationship with China continued to expand. In September 2013, China and Kazakhstan signed several deals related to gas and oil. In addition, Nazarbayev proclaimed that Kazakhstan and China now entered an era of "strategic" relationship. Emphasizing Kazakhstan's desire to establish a closer relationship with China, Nazarbaev proposed that the two countries use national currencies in their trade. As recent events demonstrate, Kazakhstan's energy

cooperation with China continues to develop. Kazakhstan also plans to ship oil to China via an ambitious railroad project, the southern tinge of which implies that China will be one of the major destinations of Kazakhstan's goods and raw materials.

The question remains what broader geopolitical implications these developments will have and how the evolving economic cooperation between China and Kazakhstan should be understood in the context of Kazakhstan cooperation with other powers. The "multi vector" nature of Kazakhstan's foreign policy is well known. Still this does not imply that Astana engages with various powers simultaneously in pursuit of the same goals. Instead, Astana looks to different partners to fulfill distinct needs. From Russia, it seeks a military or geopolitical backup in the case of conflict with China and Islamic terrorism, while economic benefits seem to become less obvious regardless of its continuous plans for joining the "Eurasian Union."

From the West, Astana expects some investment, technological and scientific expertise, and a possible military backup in case of a conflict not just with Islamists and China but even Russia, if Moscow would on certain historical junctions try to use force or threats of force in dealing with Kazakhstan. In the case of China, Kazakhstan primarily expects investment, new markets and trade routes. The geopolitical implication of this "multi-vectorism" is complex and wrought with contradictions, where major players like China and Russia

could simultaneously constitute allies and competitors depending on the configuration of events. It is also unclear what trend will prevail. Yet if no major military or geopolitical shake up will compel Astana move close to Moscow, the China perspective will likely dominate Kazakhstan's actual foreign policy regardless of its numerous backup agreements with other players, including Russia, plainly because of China's increasing economic clout.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Kazakhstan is one of the cornerstones of the Moscow-designed Eurasian Union, implying a certain attachment to Moscow as a geopolitical center. However, the increasing tension with Russia especially over hydrocarbon trade indicates that the alliance with Moscow is just one among many vectors of Kazakhstan "multi vector" policy. Instead, China with its increasing economic clout has emerged as a significant competitor not only to Moscow but also to the West. While the geopolitical situation could change rapidly and dramatically, a continuation of the present trend implies that Beijing is becoming Kazakhstan's most important partner, regardless of the variety of other agreements and alliances that Astana has clinched or with other powers.

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# PAKISTAN'S NEW STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND THE AFGHANISTAN SITUATION

Naveed Ahmad

*Pakistan's third-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has appointed a new Chief of Army Staff replacing former President Pervez Musharraf's handpicked man, General Ashfaq Pervez Kiani. The elevation of General Raheel Sharif made global headlines primarily due to the country's nuclear capability and its military's tendency to intervene in politics through overt coup d'états. General Sharif, however, assumes leadership of the world's sixth largest military at a time when NATO troops are in a process of withdrawing from Afghanistan after a presence lasting over a decade. Despite Pakistan's improved democratic credentials, the leverage of its army chief on policies towards Afghanistan and India is likely to remain as decisive as it has ever been.*

**BACKGROUND:** Pakistan's 15th army chief is known to be a professional soldier, with little exposure to regional or domestic politics. General Sharif hails from a family where military service has been the most favored profession. His father and two brothers served in Pakistan's Army with distinction and one of his siblings received the highest award, Nishan-e-Haider, for gallantry in the 1971 war against India.

Prime Minister Sharif went against the advice of the outgoing army chief General Kiani in picking his successor. Kiani himself not only headed Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence but was also actively engaged in reaching a deal with the self-exiled popular leader and twice premier, the late Benazir Bhutto. Since Musharraf stepped down under public pressure in 2008, Kiani was actively in charge of Pakistan's Afghanistan policy. Bhutto's successors carefully avoided confronting the military's interests and

policies. To appease the military, President Asif Ali Zardari advised his Prime Minister to grant the military chief a three-year extension.

With the assassination of Osama bin Laden in a high security Abbotabad cantonment, Pakistan's civilian and military leadership suffered a humiliation unprecedented since the 1971 dismemberment of East Pakistan. The elected government and military leadership clashed over a memo allegedly sent by Pakistan's ambassador to Washington to the U.S. administration, requesting support against a simmering military coup. Meanwhile, Pakistan-U.S. relations, already strained after the Lahore killings at the hands of CIA-contractor Raymond Allen Davis, deteriorated sharply after Bin Laden's killing and ensuing developments. Pakistan boycotted the Bonn Conference on Afghanistan held in December 2011. The relations were further strained in May 2012 when U.S. President Barack



Obama snubbed President Zardari on the sidelines of the Chicago NATO summit.

Afghanistan had its own share of complaints against Pakistan, many of which were shared by the U.S.. Washington pressed Pakistan to launch an operation against the Taliban's Haqqani faction, while Islamabad remained non-committal. For the most part, Pakistan's policy on Afghanistan originated in the Army's headquarters in Rawalpindi, where General Kiani was fully in charge.

The new military command in Pakistan is especially significant in light of the crucial developments in Afghanistan slated for 2014, the presidential election on April 5, and the withdrawal of NATO troops after handing over security to Afghanistan's armed forces. Over the past six weeks, one of the key NATO supply routes through Pakistan remains blocked by Imran Khan's opposition party, seeking a complete end to drone strikes in tribal areas. But Islamabad does not back his demands and Washington has so far shown little flexibility.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Pakistan-U.S. relations cannot be categorized as stable in the current circumstances. Islamabad condemns the CIA's drone

strikes but refuses to act against the violation of its sovereignty and international law. Yet, Washington's pressure on Islamabad to restore NATO supply routes is increasing, while Pakistan is losing millions of dollars in transit revenue. The bulk of NATO containers has so far been moved along the Northern Distribution Network, a set of logistical arrangements from Afghanistan via Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Baltic and Caspian ports.

Owing to a spate of bitter rows with the U.S., Pakistan has failed to exploit the Afghanistan situation to its favor. Banking on the notion of strategic depth, Islamabad has been relying more on its proxies than on emerging opportunities. Pakistan's strategic thinking under Musharraf and his successor Kiani had been aimed at exploiting core Taliban groups if the U.S. and its key allies install a hostile or pro-India regime in Afghanistan. In return, while Islamabad was termed a strategic ally in the war on terror, CIA-controlled Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) have operated in Pakistan's tribal areas and often firing missiles to kill alleged terrorists.

India has established consulates in eastern Afghanistan, sparking Pakistani allegations that it backs insurgents in Baluchistan province. For its lack of capacity and political will, Kabul has so far failed to ensure its neutrality in the region. Throughout the Cold War, India exploited the landlocked Central Asian state against Pakistan. Since the Soviet invasion, Pakistan has been struggling to use the volatile western neighbor for strategic

depth through a friendly regime in Kabul. A recent report by The New York Times backs Islamabad's claims that Kabul was involved in some of the terror attacks in the country.

For a Pakistan, sandwiched between Afghanistan and India, peaceful co-existence is an obvious way forward. Optimists believe that the country's new strategic command will step back and focus on military professional development, particularly its capability to fight insurgencies and terrorism. None in the military is more abreast with its professional needs than its commander-in-chief himself, for his last appointment was inspector general for training and evaluation.

In such a scenario, Prime Minister Sharif will effectively become in charge of foreign and defense policies. However, the U.S. will have to help Islamabad's elected government by ending drone strikes in tribal areas not only to reduce domestic political strain on Sharif but also to restore NATO supply routes. The Pentagon claims that infiltration of militants from Pakistan's tribal areas provokes drone strikes, which Islamabad must curb before seeking an end to the practice. However, the reality on the ground is to the contrary: against the 800 Pakistani posts on its side of the Afghan border, NATO and ISAF have merely 80 posts on their side to check unauthorized movement.

Besides increased Afghan troop deployment on the border, the Pakistani leadership needs the Obama administration's support in holding talks with the Taliban militia, which has claimed over 60,000 lives through

acts of terror. However, Washington has so far relied on a policy of reward and punishment. After his meeting with the newly appointed General Sharif on December 9, U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel sought a resumption of NATO supply transit through Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, otherwise the U.S. would freeze millions of dollars of assistance from the Coalition Support Fund (CSF). Yet Hagel's visit to Islamabad failed to impress the Pakistani military.

While Pakistan has released key Taliban leaders on Afghanistan's request, the peace talks have been slow and disappointing. Realistically, Washington and Kabul cannot ignore the Haqqani network which has strong influence in four adjoining Afghan provinces on the rugged border. Peace with the Taliban will be more credible with this faction becoming a stakeholder instead of an irritant.

Uncertainty over the bilateral security agreement between the U.S. and Afghanistan adds further pessimism to the post-2014 scenario, especially when President Karazi's final term in office expires in April.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Pakistan's new strategic leadership cannot abandon its role in the country's Afghanistan policy without any visibly favorable signs of stability. General Sharif knows that the country's economy is dependent on IMF funding and misadventures, covert or overt ones, are far from affordable. The military's enhanced capacity to fight extremism in tribal areas and foreign-backed insurgents in Baluchistan can help



ensure peace and thus, foreign investment. An unstable Afghanistan will damage Pakistan more than any other nation in the region or elsewhere. The Islamic republic is still home to over 1.8 million Afghan refugees with little foreign assistance for their well-being.

The U.S. must press the reset button in its relations with Pakistan by reassuring Islamabad of a neutral regime in Kabul and an immediate end to the controversial and illegal drone strikes. As a quid pro quo, Pakistan can not only help NATO troops withdraw from Afghanistan at a lower cost but also facilitate talks with the Taliban militia. Pakistan's political leaders desperately need a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, as well as international support for maintaining civilian control over foreign and defense policies.

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## OPPOSITION UNDER FIRE IN GEORGIA

Archil Zhorzholiani

The post-election period in Georgia, and especially December 2013, has been marked with a new wave of prosecutions against the main opposition party United National Movement (UNM).

At a court hearing in Kutaisi on December 17, the detained UNM General Secretary and former PM Vano Merabishvili declared that he was two days earlier taken out of his prison cell with a wrapped head and driven presumably to the department of the penitentiary system. In the office, the then chief prosecutor, Otar Partskhaladze allegedly pressed him to help with the investigation of former PM Zurab Zhvania's death and unveil former President Mikheil Saakashvili's bank account details to indict the latter for corruption. According to Merabishvili, his conditions in prison would worsen while his friends and relatives would be arrested if he refused. Alternatively, effective cooperation with the prosecutor's office would give him a chance to leave Georgia with "stolen" money.

The UNM called on the government to probe into Merabishvili's allegations immediately and demanded access to all prison surveillance camera recordings to validate the ex-PM claims. It also demanded that both Otar Partskhaladze and Sozar Subari, the Chief Prosecutor and Minister of Corrections and Legal Assistance (MCLA) in charge of penitentiary

system, respectively, should be suspended from office.

After a group of twelve NGOs strongly condemned the MCLA's passive stance, the latter's general inspection launched an investigation into the alleged wrongdoings conducted by penitentiary system employees regarding Merabishvili's kidnapping. However, the MCLA has as yet not provided video evidence sufficient to either reject or confirm the former PM's allegations. Merabishvili's lawyer insisted that the MCLA server keeps surveillance camera materials for a month after which it disappears automatically.

Merabishvili's assertions were followed by another scandal involving Partskhaladze. On December 23, one of the UNM leaders and then Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulva informed the public about the chief prosecutor's criminal record. He said that Partskhaladze was convicted for robbery in 2001 and served a sentence at the Augsburg prison in Germany.

The prosecutor's office initially dismissed the allegations, terming them an attempt by the UNM to damage Partskhaladze's reputation. The same stance was taken by leaders of the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) coalition. A day later, however, the chief prosecutor partly admitted that he had an "incident" with German police in 2000 but was sentenced neither for burglary nor for theft.

Apart from criminal records, Partskhaladze has also been accused of holding a fake law diploma, which would if true disqualify him from occupying the post of chief prosecutor.

On December 27, PM Gharibashvili acknowledged Partskhaladze's previous wrongdoings but said that the "noise" over the issue was "exaggerated" in an effort to undermine investigations into high-profile UNM officials. Meanwhile, the PM largely excluded the possibility that Partskhaladze would be dismissed. However, three days later Partskhaladze stepped down.

In parallel, without hearing the oral arguments of the parties, the Tbilisi City Court decided on December 26 to suspend Ugulava from the mayor's office on charges of alleged mispending of GEL 48.18 million of public funds. The major point of the court's verdict was that charges filed against Ugulava were directly linked with his activities as mayor and his stay at the post could hinder the process of gathering evidence in the case. The court's decision, however, featured legal inconsistencies as it drew upon Article 160 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, stating that the court cannot suspend an official directly but must send a request for that person's resignation to the head of his institution. As the Tbilisi Mayor is directly elected, there is no superior head capable of enforcing the court's decision, which has brought the case to a legal deadlock.

The other UNM members, summoned by the prosecutor's office in

December, were Giorgi Ghviniashvili and Kakha Butskhrikidze. They were questioned as part of the ongoing investigation into the high-profile murder case of Sandro Girgvliani committed in 2006. At the time, Ghviniashvili was chief prosecutor in Tbilisi while Butskhrikidze served as a deputy head of the penitentiary department. The prosecutor's office now probes into claims that four officers, who were sentenced for the crime, had enjoyed "privileged" conditions in prison to cover the involvement of their superiors in the murder case.

The new wave of attacks on the UNM reveals the weakness of the government as well as potential disadvantages that Georgia may face as a result of the reckless steps taken by its authorities.

The failure to timely investigate Merabishvili's alleged kidnapping put the ruling GD coalition in an embarrassing situation as it came to power promising the "restoration of justice." The same goes for Partskhaladze's case. For the post of chief prosecutor, PM Gharibashvili appointed a person with a criminal record who was in charge of determining the lawfulness of others. Evidently, such a malfunction damages the government's prestige and raises serious doubts over its managerial capabilities.

What is most harmful for the country is the removal from office of Tbilisi's mayor, who was directly elected by 55.2 per cent of Tbilisi constituents. This is a harmful precedent against any elected official and distorts the

essentials of democracy. The prosecution against Ugulava seems suspicious and political in light of the upcoming local elections where the UNM will likely nominate Ugulava as its candidate for Tbilisi mayor.

In addition to the internal drawbacks, recent developments may boost the EU perceptions of both selective justice and lack of rule of law in

Georgia, which will certainly hinder Georgia's Euro-integration process.

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## TURKMENISTAN HOLDS ITS FIRST MULTIPARTY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Tavus Rejepova

On December 15, almost 2.8 million voters cast their ballots to elect new members into Turkmenistan's first ever multi-party unicameral Parliament, Mejlis. According to the Central Election Commission (CEC), the total voter turnout was 91.3 percent out of all registered eligible voters. The CEC is expected to announce the results of the first multiparty elections in the country next week, while skeptics claim the elections bring no real change in the near future.

The CEC registered over 3 million voters in 125 single mandate constituencies and official sources reported that 91.3 percent of all eligible voters cast their ballot. Voting took place at 2,413 polling stations across Turkmenistan as well as 33 polling stations at Turkmenistan's diplomatic missions and consular offices abroad. 283 candidates were contending for 125 seats in the Mejlis, including 99 from the Democratic

Party, 21 from the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (PIE), 89 from the Organization of Trade Unions, 37 from the Women's Union, 22 from the Youth Union and 15 from Citizen Groups.

Though the so-called unions represent the highest number of candidates in total, any union member can simultaneously be affiliated with the ruling Democratic Party of Turkmenistan in reality. No candidates were running on an independent line or agenda. Pictures and biographies of the candidates were published in both Turkmen and Russian in the country's main newspapers and on billboards at polling stations. President Berdimuhamedov, accompanied by his father and mother, voted at polling station #48 of electoral constituency 7. Early voting opened on December 5 in some of the polling stations for voters who are unable to vote on Election Day.

According to the laws of Turkmenistan, any citizen who is over the age of 25 and has been residing in the country for the past 10 years can qualify as a candidate for a seat in the parliament. Nominations are made by registered political parties, groups of citizens and public associations and the elected members of parliament serve for a term of five years. The last parliamentary elections were held in December 2008. As opposed to previous elections, this year's candidates running for parliamentary elections included some ethnic Russians.

Turkmenistan got its second political party in 2012, when it adopted the Law on Political Parties and the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs was formed, which is an ally rather than a contender to the dominant Democratic party. In August of this year, President Berdimuhamedov stepped down as a member and leader of the Democratic Party to promote a multiparty political system in the country and not to favor any given party. The Election Code was passed in May 2013, unifying the earlier existing separate laws on elections. During several weeks in the run up to the elections, the state TV channels aired footage of nominees campaigning in public areas such as secondary schools of their respective election constituencies.

The Executive Committee Chairman and CIS Executive Secretary Sergei Lebedev who led the group of CIS observers said at a December 16 press conference in Ashgabat that the "elections on December 15, 2013 were

held in accordance with the Constitution and the Electoral Code of Turkmenistan. The elections met the generally accepted democratic norms, were open, transparent and ensured the free expression of citizens."

However, despite the latest legislative reforms and the occurrence of an election featuring several parties for the first time in Turkmenistan's history, the elections sustained heavy criticism from international NGOs. John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia program director said in a statement on the organization's website that "Holding these elections will not address the atmosphere of total repression, denial of the basic human rights, and the all-permeating fear that has gripped society in Turkmenistan for years, and all pretense of progress on human rights is simply deceitful." RFE/RL reported instances of voters casting several ballots and reported that the voter turnout was significantly lower than what has been officially reported.

Upon an invitation from Turkmenistan, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) sent a small 15 person assessment team to examine but not to conduct a comprehensive observation, of the extent to which the elections meet international standards. The OSCE report is due in about two months. The Berlin based Transparency International released the "Corruption Perceptions Index 2013" a week before the December 15 elections, ranking Turkmenistan 168, an improvement by two steps

compared to its 170 spot in the 2012 list.

Domestically, the elections were touted as a landmark event in Turkmenistan's transition to democracy. The newly elected

parliamentarians will undoubtedly be loyal to the current administration's policies and the election is unlikely to bring any changes to the lives of ordinary people in Turkmenistan.

## AZERBAIJAN ARRESTS ELECTION MONITOR AND SIGNS SHAH DENIZ DEAL

Mina Muradova

On December 16, Anar Mammadli, a well-known elections watcher in Azerbaijan, was detained on charges of illegal business activity and tax evasion. However, human rights defenders believe that the pre-trial detention of Mammadli is politically motivated as a result of his critical reports on the October Presidential Elections in Azerbaijan. Mammadli is Chairman of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center (EMDC), which documented widespread electoral violations during the October presidential poll. Immediately after Ilham Aliyev was controversially re-elected for a third term, the authorities launched an investigation of EMDC.

Mammadli was detained along with the center's executive director, Bashir Suleymanli, and Elnur Mammadli, head of an allied group called International Cooperation of Volunteers. The other two were released, but Anar Mammadli was brought before a court and detained for three months.

According to APA news agency, the Prosecutor General's Office accuses Mammadli of evading taxes of 20,000 manats (US\$ 25,500) due on a grant of US\$ 276,000, which the Washington-based National Democratic Institute gave EMDC to monitor the election. It also alleged that US\$ 163,000 of this sum was transferred to Suleymanli's private bank account. "The accusations, of tax evasion, illegal business activity, and abuse of power are invented," Hafiz Hasanov, head of the NGO Law and Development, told reporters at a press conference.

Hasanov noted that since the government five years ago revoked the official registration of EMDC's predecessor, the Election Monitoring Centre, Mammadli has conducted monitoring programs as a private individual. According to Hasanov, "EMDS did not have state registration, and Mammadli was forced to act as an individual taxpayer. But it is stupid to call this 'illegal business activity', because he had registration as a taxpayer ... Mammadli is under

investigation because he monitored elections. The government does not want anyone independent of it to be involved in elections.”

EMDC's reported the presidential elections “cannot be considered fair, free and transparent.” The statement was by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) report, which described the October 9 presidential election as “seriously flawed” and falling “well short of OSCE commitments in most areas.” According to official results, Aliyev won the poll with 85 percent of the vote.

The call from domestic human rights activists for Mammadli's immediate release was quickly picked up by international organizations. “Anar Mammadli has championed democratic and human rights for years in Azerbaijan, despite persistent pressure by the authorities to silence him and his colleagues,” said Denis Krivosheev, Europe and Central Asia Deputy Program Director at Amnesty International. “His arrest sends a chilling message to Azerbaijani civil society and adds to an atmosphere of self-censorship and fear that has grown under the authoritarian rule of Ilham Aliyev.”

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch (HRW), highlighted systemic human rights violations in Azerbaijan. In its December statement, HRW noted that in the run-up to and aftermath of the October presidential election, “the authorities engaged in an unprecedented crackdown to silence all voices of criticism and dissent.” The fundamental rights to freedom of

expression, assembly and association have particularly been under attack.

According to HRW, Azerbaijan now has 143 political prisoners. These include journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders, civic and political activists, religious followers, and ordinary citizens, who have been “detained or imprisoned for political reasons, many in connection with exercising their fundamental freedoms.”

Mammadli was arrested a day before Western politicians, including EU Energy Commissioner Gunther Oettinger and British Foreign Secretary William Hague, attended the signing of a multibillion-dollar investment agreement, paving the way for the first gas deliveries from Azerbaijan to Europe.

International human rights organizations called on Hague to raise the issue of political arrests with the Azerbaijani authorities. Allan Hogarth, Amnesty UK's Head of Policy & Government Affairs, claimed that the Foreign Secretary “must honor” his own promise not to allow trade interests to trump human rights concerns in foreign relations and use the UK's key role in Azerbaijan's economic prosperity to make it clear that human rights abuses will not be tolerated.

On December 17, the BP-led consortium developing the Shah Deniz field in the Caspian Sea announced the final investment decision (FID) for Stage 2. This decision is aimed to create a new Southern Gas Corridor to Europe. The total cost of Shah Deniz Stage 2 and the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) expansion projects will

be around US\$ 28 billion. 16 billion cubic meters per year of gas from Shah Deniz field will be carried some 3,500 kilometers to provide energy for millions of consumers in Georgia, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and Italy. The first gas is targeted for late 2018, with sales to Georgia and Turkey; the first deliveries to Europe will follow approximately a year later. President Aliyev said the agreements "will change the energy map of Europe."

After meeting with Aliyev, Hague told reporters in Baku that he had raised Mammadli's case and added: "For us,

economic development and greater prosperity go along with greater human rights." U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry congratulated President Aliyev on the FID and described it as "a symbol of an important milestone in Azerbaijan's history ... By making the first step in joining Europe, Azerbaijan is becoming a new reliable member of world energy resources and helps ensure Europe's energy security," he noted in a statement published on the website of the U.S.-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce on January 7.

## KYRGYZSTAN'S GRAND MUFTI RESIGNS

Arslan Sabyrbekov

On January 7, Kyrgyzstan's Grand Mufti Rakhmatulla-Hajji Egemberdiev stepped down amid a scandal over a sex video posted on local websites on New Year's Eve. The country's spiritual leader had personally submitted his resignation to the Council of Ulemas (Religious Clerics), stating that it was an inhumane act with the objective of damaging his dignity and called on President Atambayev to intervene and protect his rights. Egemberdiev is now the sixth mufti replaced in Kyrgyzstan over the past four years amid different scandals.

Kyrgyzstan's Congress of Muslims appointed Egemberdiev as Grand Mufti a little more than a year ago to a five year term, despite the fact he was under investigation for failing to pay taxes on money earned by organizing

trips to the hajj, an annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. The hajj, which is mandatory for all Muslims at least once during their lifetime, is seen as an opportunity for bribe taking for Kyrgyzstan's Spiritual Board of Muslims or the Muftiate, which in 2011 assumed responsibility for administrating much-coveted trips according to the hajj's quota. Egemberdiev stated then that the allegations against him are baseless and were intended to ruin his reputation and simply prevent his election as the country's Grand Mufti. He asserts that the video is more of the same and was posted by people close to the Chairman of the State Commission on Religious Affairs, Abdilatif Jumabaev, who in turn called the ex-Mufti's allegations baseless.



A video posted on New Year's Eve appears to show the country's highest religious authority engaged in a sexual act with a young woman, whose identity is unclear. Critics immediately characterized her as an unnamed lady, who tempted the nation's spiritual leader into an extramarital affair. In his statement, Egemberdiev said that he is "clean before God" and that the woman in the video is in fact his wife through "Nikah," an Islamic marriage ceremony that some men use to take additional wives in countries where polygamy is illegal (Kyrgyzstan being one of them). Furthermore, it was also reported that a new video has been released showing an older Kyrgyz couple stating to be the young woman's parents and confirming that she is Grand Mufti's wife. This, however, did not satisfy a small crowd of protesters, who immediately gathered in front of Egemberdiev's Bishkek office demanding his immediate resignation and calling him an adulterer.

The resignation of the country's grand mufti has provoked immediate and widespread public discussion. Orozbek Moldaliev, the president's representative in the parliament, denied any orchestrated pressure campaign, accusing the country's religious leaders of using their posts to enrich themselves rather than fulfilling their mission as religious leaders. Moldaliev went on to state that "an entire generation of mullahs has

grown up with the same level of religious education, and they all want to become muftis and the financial benefit from hajj is the reason behind this wish." Local experts talk about hidden profits of US\$ 4 to 6 million annually.

Muslim Scholar Kadyr Malikov thinks the Mufti's resignation was a right decision under the circumstances. He also stated that "the Muftiate is need of deeper reforms. Its role and place in the society needs to be clearly defined and its reputation, especially in light of all the negative developments has to be improved and this requires many efforts."

Former Chairman of the State Commission on Religious Affairs Kanybek Osmonaliev believes that this incident shows Kyrgyzstan's continuous struggle to find a true spiritual leader. "Over the past 20 years, Kyrgyzstan has not been successful in generating a single true and genuine religious leader meeting the expectations of our country's Muslims." He added that "this incident and all the previous dubious deals with hajj funding seriously undermined Muftiate's reputation in the eyes of the general public, which is an extremely challenging task to regain."

On January 8, Kyrgyzstan's Council of Ulemas appointed the former Mufti's deputy, Maksat Toktomushev, as the country's acting Grand Mufti. The new Grand Mufti is expected to be elected on February 8, 2014.