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KEY ISSUE: A short 75-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

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.

IMPLICATIONS: 300-450 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

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

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 700-800 words.

Those interested in joining The Analyst's pool of authors to contribute articles, field reports, or contacts of potential writers, please send your CV to: <scornell@jhu.edu> and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

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THE EVOLVING STRATEGIC CONTEXT OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

Mamuka Tsereteli

Newly emerging geopolitical and economic realities are dictating an increased focus on developing the land transportation corridor between Asia and Europe. Asian producers and European importers are seeking faster ways of delivering business orders to European consumers at competitive prices, while there is also an increased flow of goods from Europe to Asia. Maritime routes are cheap but slow, and there is a growing competition between different land transportation options from China, India, Pakistan and other countries via Central Asia to Europe. One of them is a multimodal transportation option from Central Asia through the South Caucasus to the Black Sea or Turkey and beyond to Europe. Regional leadership and U.S. and EU support is required for it to succeed.

BACKGROUND: Europe is the largest trading partner for Asian producers. For example, the China-EU bilateral trade in goods reached €428 billion in 2013. EU exports to China increased by 2.9 percent to reach a record €148.1 billion. EU exports have nearly doubled in the past five years, contributing to a rebalancing of the trade relationship. China is the EU's main supplier, with €279.9 billion worth of goods in 2013. In general, with rising purchasing power in China, India and other large and small countries in Asia, a larger trade in goods between Europe and Asia can be expected. These developments increase the potential of bilateral trade exponentially and, therefore, require additional transport options.

Current transportation options include the most cost effective transportation from Eastern China via sea, crossing the Indian Ocean, and then through the Suez Canal to Europe. As of today, this

is the preferred way of transporting goods from China. But while this is the cheapest route, it is also the most time consuming, taking at least 40 days. A wide range of goods and products require faster delivery at competitive prices, hence the necessity of the shorter transportation options. One traditional route with a shorter delivery time is crossing from China into Russia and reaching Europe via the Trans-Siberian Railway; but this is not the best export option for the rapidly developing Central and Western Chinese provinces due to geography and distances.



(Source: [Joe Pyrek](#), Creative Commons 2.0)

A much more attractive land route for reaching Europe from China is a railway connection with Central Asia and beyond to Russia. Trains using the Chongqing-Xinjiang-Europe international railway network take just under 20 days to get to Europe, roughly twice as fast as cargo ships sailing from China's east coast ports. The railway passes through Xi'an, Lanzhou, Urumqi and the Alataw Pass, where it crosses the border into Kazakhstan. It then continues through Russia, Belarus and Poland into Germany.

China's rapidly developing Xinjiang region is also looking for export options via Central Asia. Urumqi, the provincial capital, is more than 3,100 kilometers (1,920 miles) from Beijing, while Kashgar, the westernmost Chinese city and historically a major Silk Road trading hub, is nearly 4,400 kilometers from the Chinese coast. It is natural that producers from Xinjiang are looking at transport options via Central Asia for shipping their goods to European markets. Kazakhstan is becoming major transit hub in growing trade between Western China and Europe. The recently developed railway connection from the Khorgos border crossing to the Zhetygen terminal near Almaty will facilitate larger cargo traffic between Xinjiang and Central Asia and beyond. In August Kazakhstan commissioned the new Zhezkazgan-Shalkar-Beineu and the Arkalyk-Shubarkol rail links with a total length of more than 1,200 km, 17 major stations and 31 junctures. These new railroads will be a shorter route to get from the East to the Caspian and further to the Caucasus and Europe,

while making it possible to move rail cars eastward all the way to the Lianyungang port on the Chinese Pacific coast.

India's interest in Central Asian markets and transit for Indian goods is also growing. Currently some products are shipped via Pakistan and Afghanistan to Central Asia and beyond by tracks, demonstrating a powerful transportation option even in the current security environment, and it promises to grow exponentially when conditions are improved and additional elements of infrastructure are in place. The Central Asian transportation network was a key element of the so called Northern Distribution Network (NDN), used to supply U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Russia's railway system and Latvia's port of Riga were part of the NDN as well, as was the South Caucasus transportation system, both connected to Central Asia. Reversed cargos associated with the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan have created a good precondition for commercializing cargo transportation from Afghanistan and most other countries of South Asia.

IMPLICATIONS: Currently, options exist for railway cars to continue from Central Asia through Russia into Europe, as well as two alternative options for linking world markets by bypassing Russia. One option is to ship cargos to Iran, and then to Turkish or Iranian ports. As of today, Iran provides transit mostly for cargos originating in Central Asia. Over 12 million tons of goods were transited via Iran in the past Iranian

calendar year, which ended on March 20, 2014 – a 4 percent rise on year on year basis. Over 96 percent of the goods transited by roads, showing an 8 percent rise compared to the year ending in March 2013. The attractiveness of the Iranian option for the auto shipments is determined by the very low cost of diesel fuel due to Iran's continued government subsidies.

The Central Asian states are building a railway connection to Iran via Turkmenistan to potentially use the railway connection from Iran to Turkey. The railroad will run from Uzen in Kazakhstan through Bereket in Turkmenistan to the Gorgan in Iran, then onward via Iran's existing railroad system to Turkey, the Iranian Gulf ports, or to the newly developing port of Chahabar on the Gulf of Oman. Chahabar is of great interest to India as an access point to Central Asia, and possibly even to Europe via the Caucasus and the Black Sea. This Port already serves as an important export point for Afghanistan, competing with Gwadar port in Pakistan.

These developments clearly present Iran as a competitor to other transportation options that bypass Russia, but also bypass Iran – the multimodal transportation network from Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan via the Caspian Sea through Azerbaijan, then to Georgia's Black Sea ports or Turkey's transportation system to Europe and the Mediterranean. The additional attraction of this option is that some cargos could be shipped from the Port of Poti in Georgia via the Black Sea and the Danube Channel to

the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, or via a Viking container train connecting the Black Sea through Ukraine and Belarus to the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda. The overall security environment in the Black Sea area, as well as security in Ukraine, will be a major factor in the viability of these options. Instability in the Black Sea region spreading from Ukraine may damage the perception of this transit corridor's security.

It is clear that there will be fierce competition for cargos between these diverse transportation networks. Russia will try to maintain the leading role in transit for Asia-Europe trade. Countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus will need greater regional cooperation and major international support to establish viable transportation alternatives to the emerging transit options in Russia and Iran.

A regional effort is in place, focused on developing the new elements of infrastructure facilitating Asia-Europe trade. In addition to upgrading railway infrastructure in Kazakhstan, this also includes the new railway system connecting Turkmenistan to Afghanistan and then Tajikistan, which can facilitate regional trade, as well as trade between these states and the rest of the world via Trans-Caspian or Iranian connections. This also includes upgrading port facilities on both sides of Caspian Sea – Aktau and Turkmenbashi on the Eastern shore, and Baku/Alat on the Western shore. Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey are finalizing construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, which will ensure

delivery of rail cars all the way from China to Turkey's Mediterranean ports, or directly to Europe by railway. Port facilities are under active development on Georgia's Black Sea coast, including an upgrade of the existing terminals, as well as plans for developing new ones. There are also ongoing upgrades to the road systems in both Georgia and Azerbaijan.

In addition to infrastructure development, there are clear signs of greater coordination between the transit countries. Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey – in the framework of the so called Silk Wind project – have agreed to create a common customs and tariff structure for container trains shipped from China to Europe. The railway companies of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have also agreed on a common tariff on grain and liquefied petroleum gas from Kazakhstan to Georgia. As a sign of greater collaboration between Georgian and Azerbaijani railways, container block trains resumed regular operations in July 2014 between Baku and the Black Sea port of Poti twice a week, allowing containers to move from the Caspian port to the Black Sea port in about 30 hours.

All these developments strengthen the competitive position of Central Asia-South Caucasus transportation corridor. But in order to compensate disadvantages of the multimodal nature of the transportation between railway and maritime operations, more must be done by the transit countries to reduce costs and transit time. That will require harmonizing tariffs and border crossing

procedures for an entire range of cargos for containers, as well as other cargos, with the common aim of increasing the competitiveness of all of the corridor's transit countries.

CONCLUSIONS: At least two elements are needed for the Central Asia-South Caucasus transportation system option to succeed: 1) strong regional cooperation between all transit countries and, 2) strong support for security and stability in the region by the major actors interested in the success of this corridor. The regional countries and their governing elites need to realize that a large scale presence and interest from international actors such as China, India, the EU, as well as the commercial interests of producers, global traders and consumers from Europe, Asia and the U.S. will facilitate greater interest in stability and security in Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

Greater traffic can increase stability for the transit countries, while strengthening their sovereignty and economic and political independence. China's and the EU's interest in the functioning of this corridor is a strong factor contributing to its potential success, but it is the U.S. that has a unique ability and experience to facilitate regional cooperation through pro-active diplomacy, as it demonstrated during Caspian energy developments. Currently functioning infrastructure that allows hydrocarbons from the Caspian region to be shipped to European markets is a vivid demonstration of the success of U.S.

policies in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The countries of the region should step up their own diplomatic efforts to generate support from the U.S. and other state and commercial actors. Concerted efforts by countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus and their international partners, including the U.S., can make these regions a primary transit route for Asia-Europe trade. By linking two major economic power centers of the world and by harmonizing multiple interests, this transportation network will facilitate global and regional stability.

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IS IRAN MAKING A COMEBACK IN CENTRAL ASIA?

Stephen Blank

Iran is seeking to recapture lost ground in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Earlier signs that the nuclear issue might be moving towards a peaceful resolution has encouraged some of Iran's neighbors to take preparatory steps to resume dialogue with Tehran. Iran has extensive ties with and influence in Afghanistan. Thus Iran's vital interests are connected with the future of that country. As NATO winds down its presence there, the widespread concern about the future of Afghanistan may lead improved ties between Iran and Central Asian states who clearly want as many foreign governments as possible to exercise a moderating influence on Afghan developments.

BACKGROUND: Iran has for many reasons failed to utilize its proximity to Central Asia for maximum gain since 1991. Certainly one of those reasons is its support for Islamic terrorist groups, generally Shiite, whereas Central Asian governments regard all dissent as extremism or terrorism and are Sunni except for Tajikistan. Perhaps even more importantly, Iran's nuclear program not only alarmed all members of the SCO, the sanctions imposed by Washington and the constant diplomatic pressure to isolate Iran has short-circuited any real possibility for both Iran and its Central Asian neighbors to maximize potential trade and investment deals.

Yet President Rouhani's government has formulated a new regionalism concept whereby Iran will try to augment its influence in neighboring regions like the Caucasus and Central Asia. The new regionalism policy aims to overcome that setback to both sides' potential for trade, investment, and

mutual influence. And there are at least some signs of increased Iranian capacity in this regard. The ongoing evolution of some major infrastructural projects like China's Silk Road and the obstacles to others like the TAPI gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to India led to a reconsideration of Iran's eligibility to participate in the Silk Road or to an alternative gas pipeline from Iran through Pakistan to India.



(Source: president.ir)

In August Iran announced that it no longer needs gas imports from Turkmenistan as it is increasing domestic production. This is not a negative move toward Turkmenistan

but rather a change in Iran's capacity and domestic policy, evidenced by the fact that the so called Ashgabat Agreement created a North-South corridor from Turkmenistan through Uzbekistan to Iran and Oman is steadily moving forward. This railroad and corridor should give a major boost to Central Asian countries' efforts to reach the Gulf and other markets. It should also connect to China's Silk Road and greatly increase the global interconnections of rail and other commercial traffic for all the countries involved. Likewise, the Iran-Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan railroad is scheduled to open in November. This project will provide similar gains to all of its members in accessing hitherto distant or relatively inaccessible markets and increasing a network of interconnecting north-south and east-west rail lines and corridors where Iran and its neighbors and partners stand to make very handsome gains.

Rouhani has tried to revive relations with Russia and major oil and food deals that will benefit Iran by getting it out of the sanctions regime and help Russia overcome its own sanctions due to the war with Ukraine.

Iran is also seeking to improve ties to Azerbaijan, which fell apart in 2012-2013 due to the uncovering of several Iranian terrorist plots. Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev made a state visit to Iran and Rouhani said there was no obstacle to the expansion of ties between them. Other Iranian officials have made similar declarations and the summit has led to new agreements on trade and cooperation. The deterioration of U.S.-

Azerbaijani relations undoubtedly plays a role here as do Baku's anxieties concerning Moscow and its desire to create as many friendly relations with neighbors and key regional actors as possible. Another factor may be the concern that if ties between Tehran and Washington improve, Azerbaijan might be left out of key energy, trade, and strategic decisions that would follow. Nevertheless it is unclear just how much of a change this implies in the substance of Irano-Azeri relations as Baku is hardly surrendering its ties to Israel and certainly wants more support from Washington.

IMPLICATIONS: It is by no means clear to what extent Iran's campaign to improve its overall position in Central Asia will succeed. Rouhani's appearance at the annual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization reaffirmed Iran's quest for full membership in the SCO. Since the SCO is likely to expand to include India and Pakistan as full members by the 2015 summit, Iran will certainly push for that status too. Yet Iran still cannot get into the SCO as the bylaws of that organization prohibit its membership because of the sanctions that it continues to experience. Moreover, nobody in Central Asia wants a nuclear Iran or gratuitous provocations with Washington over that issue. Neither is it clear that the issue of support for terrorism will simply disappear since Iran has hardly disbanded its capabilities in this regard and as Sunni-Shiite suspicions are, if anything, rising across the Islamic world.

Nevertheless, we should take account of the tangible material developments that are occurring. China's Silk Road is materializing and former Russian programs for an independent North-South corridor or network with a terminus in Iran or India will be integrated into it over time. Iran may eventually realize its ambitions to become a trade, energy, and economic hub but it must do so in conjunction with a vast increase in Chinese economic power across the region. Central Asian states too will benefit economically but it is unlikely that their smaller networks, whose degree of connection to larger projects like the Silk Road has yet to be decided, will be completely independent.

All of this is contingent upon a resolution of the nuclear issue, which has hit a roadblock over enrichment quotas. Iran's recent demands for an industrial-size enrichment program will not break the deadlock in negotiations and may set them back. Certainly such demands do not alleviate neighbors and great powers' suspicions concerning Iran's objective in this region or in the Middle East. Until this issue is resolved, any effort to improve Iran's relations with Central Asian states or to maximize their economic interaction will fail, and Iran will continuously be denied full membership in the SCO. Neither will its economy be able to serve as an entrepot for Central Asian states in search of new markets.

Similarly Baku's suspicions of Iran's goals, capabilities, and policies will not abate unless the issues of terrorism and nuclear power are resolved. It is also

unlikely that the littoral States of the Caspian Sea will truly warm up to Iran absent a change in the hitherto unyielding Iranian position regarding demarcation of the Caspian Sea. On the other hand, should these issues be resolved in a satisfactory way, it is quite clear that the West will have a major interest in opening the Caspian Sea up to Iranian and Central Asian energy trade to Europe to realize the visions of a Trans-Caspian pipeline and a southern corridor given the vital importance of finding alternatives to Russia's predatory energy policies in Europe and Central Asia.

Given all the perturbations occurring in world politics, it is clear that neither Iran nor Central Asia are unaffected by those developments and trends. But the extent to which Iran and Central Asian states (including Azerbaijan) can forge more rewarding mutual ties still lies largely in Tehran's hands. It is by no means clear that Iran is ready to make a major policy shift from the fruitless and unnecessarily antagonistic policies of the past to a different and potentially more successful policy line in Central Eurasia.

CONCLUSIONS: There is little reason to doubt that a different set of Iranian policies would evoke a positive response in Central Asia since all those states would like to see as many foreign partners as possible involved in, but not dominating, Central Asia. Those policies too would be extremely beneficial to Iran economically and geopolitically. Not only would they enhance its economic growth and standing in the global economy, they

would also add to its security given its concerns about Afghanistan and about its own Azeri minority. Most of all, the specter of further nuclearization, a threat that unites Central Asia, would be lifted to some degree from the area. Until now, change has consisted in some significant but not breakthrough moves in economics. It is now up to Iran more than any other actor to take the next big step forward and move its relations with Central Asia from one of nice words and atmospherics to genuinely substantive policy proposals. If Iran does take that bold step, it is almost certain to find a positive response from its neighbors, to everyone's benefit and advantage.

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SCO MILITARY DRILLS STRENGTHEN RUSSIAN- CHINESE REGIONAL HEGEMONY

Richard Weitz

On August 24-29, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) held its largest multinational exercise in history, Peace Mission 2014. The declared objective of the joint drills is to help the SCO member governments deter and, if necessary, defeat potential terrorist threats. But the exercises also allow Russia and China to communicate to the SCO and other parties, especially the U.S., that Moscow and Beijing have a genuine security partnership and that it extends to cover Central Asia.

BACKGROUND: Peace Mission 2014 took place at Zhurihe Training Base, located in Inner Mongolia in North China. Five of the six SCO members sent troops (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, but not Uzbekistan). The war games saw a panoply of weapons used, including unmanned aerial vehicles, air-defense missiles, tanks, armored vehicles, other ground vehicles, and special operations units. A total of about 70 aircraft participated in the exercise, including fighter planes, airborne early warning aircraft, armed helicopters, and surveillance and combat drones. The combined forces practiced ground and aerial reconnaissance, joint precision strikes, integrated air-ground assaults on fortified positions, joint hostage rescue and urban assault missions, and extensive information sharing.

The exercise scenario involved an international terrorist organization supporting a separatist movement in a

country, plotting coups, and aiming for violent regime change. More specifically, the scenario hypothesized that a city in an unnamed Eurasian country had become a hub of political instability and terrorist activity, and its government called on the SCO to intervene in order to resolve the issues. The fictitious separatist organization had more than 2,000 fighters armed with tanks, missiles and even light aircraft – something on the scale of ISIL rather than al-Qaeda. The active phase saw the SCO forces first using electronic warfare measures against their adversary's communication systems. Chinese and Russian planes, helicopters, and drones then conducted air strikes against the "terrorists." The SCO forces subsequently employed high-precision artillery attacks that destroyed the terrorists' command centers. Finally, SCO ground forces with combined air support liberated the terrorist-occupied zones and freed their hostages.

China provided the most troops by far, including some 5,000 personnel and more than 400 combat systems. The PLA's CH-4 unmanned combat aerial vehicle made its first appearance at the SCO exercise. The Chinese also contributed some of their most sophisticated manned aircraft such as its J-10 and J-11 fighter jets, its JH-7 fighter bombers, and its KJ-2000 airborne early warning and control aircraft. Also debuting in the SCO exercises were the WZ-10 and WZ-19 attack helicopters. The PLA's most modern tank, the Type 9, also took part.



(Source: [Retxham](#), Creative Commons 3.0)

By contrast, less than 1,000 Russian troops participated in Peace Mission 2014, travelling by rail from Russia's Eastern Military District. Russia also contributed 60 armored vehicles, more than 20 missile and artillery systems, more than 60 other military vehicles; eight Mi-8 AMTSh helicopter gunships; four Sukhoi Su-25 attack planes; and two IL-76 military transport planes.

Unlike last year's Peace Mission exercise, which was an exclusively China-Russian affair, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan each sent hundreds of elite soldiers to Peace Mission 2014, making it a more genuine multinational drill. Kyrgyzstan deployed about 500 members of its

Special Forces unit and a few dozen combat vehicles (including eight tanks); Kazakhstan, which often sends the largest Central Asian contingent, provided only about 300 elite airborne troops; and some 200 rapid reaction troops came from Tajikistan. As usual, Uzbekistan did not send troops to the exercises.

IMPLICATIONS: After almost a decade of joint drills, the SCO militaries have improved their ability to operate together. For example, they have enhanced the ability of the SCO armed forces to deter – and if necessary suppress – another popular rebellion or large – scale terrorist movement, such as the ones that took place in Tiananmen Square in spring 1989 and Andijan, Uzbekistan, in May 2005. Wang Xinjun, a researcher with the PLA Academy of Military Sciences, wrote at the time of Peace Mission 2013 that the war games communicate that “China and Russia will work together to firmly crack down on terrorism.”

These drills have improved the ability of the PLA to deploy forces in Central Asia. The PRC has used the maneuvers with Russia to practice coordinating large and varied forces with one of the world's leading military powers. For example, the 2007 live-fire drills in Chelyabinsk allowed the PLA to practice deploying and supporting a large military force at a considerable distance from mainland China. The same challenge was overcome with Peace Mission 2013 when the PLA forces had to travel more than 4,000 kilometers from the PLA's Shenyang Military Region to the Chebarkul

training field in the Urals. In recent years, the PLA has developed a cadre of Russian-speaking officers to coordinate with the Russian and other SCO militaries, thereby promoting interoperability.

In justifying the Peace Mission 2014 exercises, Chinese writers pointed to the growing possibility that terrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries could spill-over into Central Asia and argued that “joint military drills and other moves taken by SCO members for defense and security cooperation will send a strong deterrent signal.” This summer’s SCO war games occurred after Chinese authorities had become alarmed by the surge in Uighur domestic terrorism during the past year in China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. PRC Defense ministry representatives declared that the exercise would help deter the “three evil forces” of terrorism, separatism and extremism by strengthening the militaries’ ability to coordinate counter-terrorism operations. Fang Fenghui, Chief of the PLA General Staff, said that, “The success of the joint drill demonstrated ... their resolution to fight against the three evil forces,” maintaining that the situation around Afghanistan was becoming more complicated and “terrorists are rapidly infiltrating into Central Asia.”

Even if the SCO does not establish a military presence in Afghanistan, which became a formal SCO observer in 2012, the member states might establish some kind of barrier to try to limit the flow of Afghan-based

terrorists and narco-traffickers into their countries. All the countries have security and economic interests near Afghanistan that would be threatened by renewed chaos in that country. China is aiming to construct a New Silk Road through Central Asia and deepen transportation links with Pakistan and Iran, while Russia is trying to establish an integrated economic and security bloc among the former Soviet states, some of which border Afghanistan.

From the perspective of China – something of an outsider in Central Asia and an object of popular concern in neighboring states – collaborating through SCO-wide joint military exercises can promote mutual confidence building aimed at increasing reassurance and mutual trust. Wang Ning, chief director of the Joint Directing Department of the exercise and deputy chief of the PLA general staff, said that the exercises have an “important and far-reaching political significance in strengthening mutual trust among the SCO member states.” Commenting on the most recent Peace Mission 2014, Meng Xiangqing of the PLA National Defense University argued that China had displayed a high level of trust in allowing the other SCO members to send their armed forces into its interior. Shao Yuqun of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies argued that the SCO exercises “can help build up mutual trust between the member states and thus enable the SCO to play a greater role in stabilizing the region,” including the use of non-military means.

Furthermore, the exercises provide an opportunity for Russia and China in particular to demonstrate their capabilities to external audiences. Through the exercises, which typically involve observers or combat troops from Central Asian states, Russia and China are able to underscore their ability to defend Central Asian governments from foreign or internal threats. If successful, such reassurance weakens Western influence in the region by helping persuade their SCO allies that they need not rely on NATO and the U.S. for their defense.

CONCLUSION: One should not exaggerate the significance of these SCO exercises. In principle, SCO members might come to one another's defense in case of an external invasion, but the organization's charter does not formally authorize collective defense operations. In practice, China would likely prove reluctant to make such a defensive commitment since Beijing has shunned formal military alliances, while the other five governments belong to the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, which is explicitly tasked with providing for the mutual defense of its members from external attack.

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G-GLOBALIZING PUBLIC POLICY OPTIONS IN KAZAKHSTAN

Rafis Abazov

G-Global was established as a global discussion tool, as during the last two decades public policy consultations have been a mixed blessing for the government of Kazakhstan. On the one hand, Astana has managed to attract leading international experts from world donor organizations and private consultancy groups, and has with their help has quite successfully restructured the country's economy. On the other hand, some policies have been painful and unpopular among the domestic electorate and have in some cases been heavily criticized for the lack of transparency in policy design and formulation. Will the G-Global project, created as a domestic and international public policy discussion initiative, contribute to better policy choices?

BACKGROUND: Kazakhstan introduced its G-Global Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) platform as an “intellectual network” and “communication Internet platform” in 2012. From its inception, the main intellectual engine behind G-Global has been Kazakhstan’s newly created leading think tank and network, the Eurasian Economic Club of Scientists (EECS). The EECS has also used G-Global as its permanent ICT platform for its annual Astana Economic Forum (AEF) in order to provide an opportunity for “equality of dialogue of people around the world.” From the start it has offered an arena for discussion on a wide variety of issues – from the global financial crisis and innovation policies to geopolitics. However, the main focus of G-Global has traditionally been developmental and transitional issues, with special attention being afforded to public policy choices and practices.

Kazakhstan’s policy makers have not forgotten the painful experience of the economic and social reforms of the 1990s, when leading international donors, like the IMF, designed the reform packages and often pressured for unpopular policy choices including the shock-therapy approach, providing no opportunity for other options or adjustments. In private, many government officials have complained that these choices not always were the best options in Kazakhstan’s specific environment, and that with some in-government and public consultations the moves could have been less painful and less unpopular.

These grumbles have become particularly loud since 2001–2004, when a large cohort of Western-educated Kazakhs – the recipients of the Bolashak government scholarship – have begun to return with a better understanding of modern governance and public policy process and to take

positions in all levels of government. It is quite natural that these young, ambitious policy-makers and managers should have turned to the emerging power of ICT, deciding to explore e-power and promote e-governance in order to improve public policy formulations and enhance the negotiation processes with the international organizations and western private investors.

The G-Global Internet communication platform was officially launched after several years of discussion and preparations, and has been heavily promoted by Kazakh government officials, including the office of Kazakhstan's President. President Nursultan Nazarbayev himself made a presentation on the G-Global initiative at the G20 Summit in St. Petersburg on September 6, 2013. The G-Global platform – housed at www.group-global.org – is organized as an open Internet portal somewhat similar to the web-portal of the World Economic Forum. It is subdivided into several sections, covering a series of local and global projects such as the World Anti-Crisis Conference, Kazakhstan New Silk Way, Green Bridge ecological program (Kazakhstan's contribution to the RIO+20 World Forum), Global Risk Expo-2014 and Atom. It also has a special global-expert sub-portal (<http://g-globalexpert.com/>) where experts can contribute their opinions and blogs.

IMPLICATIONS: G-Global is an integral part of the e-governance strategy of the Kazakhstan's government, which has established one

of the best e-gov infrastructures in the CIS region. According to the “United Nations E-Government Survey 2014,” Kazakhstan holds place 28 out of the 192 countries in the E-government Development Index and ranks 22nd in the E-participation Index. A systematic approach to promoting the G-Global platform and the AEF (the 7th AEF conference drew almost 10,000 participants in May 2014) and attracting international experts has gradually led to some positive results.



(Source: kazembassy.ca)

First, the platform has become a popular virtual discussion ground for local and international experts to dialogue on public policy choices and best-practice experience. For example, Kazakhstan's government utilized some critical suggestions and recommendations from international experts and made several adjustments in the Kazyna Sovereign Fund's multi-billion investments into the national Industrialization Road Map and funding priorities for 210 projects within the Business Road Map-2020 Program.

Second, it has provided a unique opportunity for Kazakhstan's economists, experts and policy practitioners to integrate with the global intellectual and policy community. For example, Kazakhstan

has been among few countries from the CIS zone to make significant contributions to the RIO+20 UN Forum on sustainable development in Brazil in 2012 and committed up to US\$ 4 billion to support alternative energy development in the country and in the greater Central Asian region as part of the preparations for the World Expo-2017 in Astana. Third, G-Global has offered to create a neutral international communicative platform for global security dialogue, though its success has been mixed. For example, in spring and summer 2014 Astana offered its platform to establish a dialogue between Kiev and Moscow on the Ukrainian crisis; however this offer was never considered by the conflicting parties.

Recent policy studies on e-governance and the experience of the G-Global platform suggest that the future of effective public policy process lies in a right combination of traditional political procedures with the greater usage of ICT in governance processes. E-government, including the G-Global platform, provides the politically active general electorate with an opportunity to learn more and to contribute to the policy formulation process, assuming that they will thus have a greater stake in the reforms and policy implementation process. It also provides a huge opportunity for a young generation of policy makers to voice their innovative ideas and views, rendering the policy formulation process more inclusive and possibly more effective.

CONCLUSION: The G-Global platform still faces challenges in attracting attention and new followers, especially among the young generation of intellectuals and policy practitioners both from Kazakhstan and foreign countries (so far 2.5 million users visited the website, official est.). To become more relevant, the G-Global should take additional steps and actions to expand its audience.

In particular, it needs to establish greater cooperation with think tanks and universities both in Kazakhstan and around the world, especially among one of the potentially largest target audiences – the student and educator communities. It should also consider finding links to the traditional media in Kazakhstan (which about 60 percent of the country's citizens still read) in order to improve its outreach and expand the audience. In addition, it should find ways to show that electorate's e-participation contributes indeed in the policy making process.

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CHINA EXPANDS INFLUENCE IN TAJIKISTAN

Oleg Salimov

Tajikistan's President Rakhmon met with China's leader Xi Jinping right after the recent SCO summit in Dushanbe. It was Jinping's first visit to Tajikistan. The official meeting concluded in the signing of 16 contracts and agreements on cooperation. In general, the agreements and contracts covered three major areas, such as economy, agriculture, and banking. The leaders also signed separate agreements on extradition and exchange of convicted persons. The connotation of the official visit is a continuation of China's political and economic expansion in Tajikistan.

Tajikistan's major financial achievement in the meeting between Rakhmon and Jinping was securing a grant for trade and technology development in the amount of RMB 300 million (approximately US\$ 49 million) and the approval of lax export credit from China's Ministry of Trade (the amount is yet to be announced). The RMB 300 million grant is the second non-repayable financial aid to Tajikistan after a similar RMB 150 million grant provided in 2012 by China's then leader Hu Jintao to Tajikistan during Rakhmon's official visit to Beijing.

According to Tajikistan's Ministry of Economic Development, the amount of China's total credit to Tajikistan exceeds US\$ 800 million. The latest agreement between Tajikistan's

government and China's Export - Import Bank foresees the prospect of a US\$ 400 million credit from China for various developmental projects in Tajikistan. In providing development and consumer credits to Tajikistan, China pursues its own economic goals of finding and supplying new markets. The previous lax credits from China were primarily aimed at developing transportation connections between Tajikistan and China. Thus, the road from Dushanbe in Tajikistan to the Xinjiang Uighur autonomous region in China allowed for an increase in the export of Chinese goods to Tajikistan. The recent approval of lax export credit to Tajikistan is a predictable step intended to increase China's exports even further.

In turn, Tajikistan falls greatly behind in trade turnover with China. According to Tajikistan's Statistics Agency, the China-Tajikistan trade in 2013 reached a record US\$ 682 million, with China's share amounting to US\$ 595.7 million and Tajikistan's to only US\$ 86.3 million. Tajikistan's production industry also suffers from unbalanced trade with China. Raw materials such as aluminum, cotton, and leather are the primary export items from Tajikistan to China, whereas ready products, goods, and equipment are the main importing categories from China. This

significantly undermines Tajik light and textile industry.

During his visit, Jinping announced the official construction start of Tajikistan's part of the Central Asia – China gas pipeline. This is the fourth branch of a massive system of gas pipelines designed to supply China with natural gas from Turkmenistan. The construction agreement for the fourth branch was signed on September 12, 2013, in Bishkek at the SCO summit.

The two first branches go through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and deliver 69 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually (bcm/y). The third branch went into service in May 2014. It was constructed alongside the first two with a projected capability of 25 bcm/y. The fourth branch will transit 25 bcm/y from Turkmenistan to China through Tajikistan. The total length of the pipeline which also passes the territory of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is 3,700 kilometers. The length of Tajikistan's part is 400 kilometers. China is the primary investor, constructor, and consumer of the project.

According to Saidakhmad Sharofiddinov, the head of Tajiktransgas (a state company representing Tajikistan in the project), there is no immediate plans of importing Turkmen natural gas to Tajikistan although the country desperately needs gas for its industrial and residential consumer purposes. The completion of the pipeline is expected in 2016. Putting high hopes on the pipeline, Tajikistan cherishes the idea of constructing a railroad alongside the pipeline. The realization of this idea

will completely depend on China's willingness to invest in it as Tajikistan lacks financial, technological, and other capabilities to initiate the project.

As expected, the meeting between Rakhmon and Jinping in its form and content repeated the previous meetings of Tajik and Chinese leaders. China continues its aggressive expansion in Tajikistan's economy through credits and grants, which serve China's needs while simultaneously suppressing the political will of Tajikistan's government who sees no other alternatives to China's financial aid and investment. The presumable development of Tajikistan's energy sector is another backdrop for the country's economy as its industrial complex has become a passive observer in a China – Tajikistan project with China supplying material, equipment, and even the workforce for constructing energy infrastructure for its own consumption. The reluctance of Tajikistan's government to recognize China's one-sided approach in their bilateral relationship is increasingly hollowing out Tajikistan's political and economic independence.

SIGNS OF FISSURE WITHIN GEORGIA'S RULING COALITION

Eka Janashia

A dispute between Georgia's President Giorgi Margvelashvili and Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili gained momentum in mid-September, as both the head of state and the head of government decided to attend the September 23 Climate Summit at the UN headquarters in New York.

PM Gharibashvili declared his intention to participate September's UN General Debates in July. Meanwhile the President's office declared that Margvelashvili received a personal invitation from the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon though the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) withheld the letter.

Deputy Foreign Minister David Zalkaniani later explained that the UN invitation was initially mistakenly addressed to former President Mikheil Saakashvili and the MFA had to resend it, causing the delay. To verify their respective versions, both sides disclosed their correspondence while Georgia came close to the diplomatic embarrassment of sending two simultaneous delegations to the UN.

Finally, Margvelashvili was dissuaded from attending the UN Summit. Commenting on the outcome, he said that "serious, organized efforts were undertaken against the visit of the Georgian President and as a result of these efforts the visit to the United States is thwarted."

The embarrassing episode was not the first sign of discord between Margvelashvili and the leadership of the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition in general, and between the president and PM in particular.

According to former PM Ivanishvili, the disagreement started with Margvelashvili's decision to use the glass-dome presidential palace constructed during Saakashvili's presidency and, in Ivanishvili's words, associated with "violence, evil and indecency" (See the [04/02/2014 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)). Margvelashvili, however, claimed that the tensions stemmed from the ruling coalition's attempts to make him an "obedient" figure complying with the instructions of GD and the PM.

Another spat took place ahead of Georgia's signing of the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU in June. The question of who would sign the AA became a subject of heated debate among constitutionalists, politicians, analysts and even ordinary people. Margvelashvili expressed his readiness to delegate his right to sign the treaty to the PM but the latter argued that Georgian constitution grants him sufficient competence to sign the agreement. Although most lawyers maintained that the AA should be signed by the president, it was the PM who signed it and the president was not

even invited for the AA's ratification ceremony in the parliament.

On August 1, Gharibashvili did not attend a session of the National Security Council (NSC) presided by Margvelashvili. The meeting was intended to discuss Georgia's preparation for the upcoming NATO summit in Wales. Notably, the role of the NSC itself has been marginalized since November 2013 when the PM formed the Security and Crisis Management Council partially duplicating the NSC's functions. On the same day, the GD parliamentary majority [voted against](#) the president's Supreme Court judge nominees.

Several days later, the Prosecutor's Office lamented that despite its request, Margvelashvili did not declassify a portion of the 2009-2013 spending records from the Special State Protection Service (SSPS). Part of those secret documents were publicized in April 2013. Another part, falling under President Margvelashvili's competence, remained confidential.

Margvelashvili responded that he is empowered to contemplate sensitive matters such as declassification of secret information as long as the law allows him to do so and that no one can pressure him to do otherwise.

Some analysts suggest that vague and implicit clauses of the amended Georgian constitution, which came into force in 2013, fueled the conflict between the head of state and the head of government. Clause 69, paragraph 2 of the Georgian constitution states that "the president represents Georgia in foreign relations." Nevertheless, clause

78, paragraph 1.4 entitles this competence to the PM as well, saying that the "prime minister ... represent[s] Georgia in foreign relations within his competence" and meanwhile charges the cabinet with the responsibility to implement foreign policy. These clauses of the current constitution are likely to prompt confrontation rather than clarifying responsibilities.

However, the true reason for the disagreement between the president and PM likely has little to do with disagreements over foreign policy. Both politicians emerged through Ivanishvili's clout, thanks to the allegiance they proclaimed to him. As Margvelashvili's loyalty faded, the GD leadership increased pressure on him. As soon as Ivanishvili began to publicly criticize the president, the PM and other ministers quickly replicated the move. This suggests that political power in Georgia is still concentrated to Ivanishvili's informal rule.

After months of simmering conflict, it is still not clear whether Margvelashvili will stay within the GD coalition or endeavor his own political game. However, he recently reminded the public that in the case of a political crisis, he retains a right to resign or dismiss the parliament.

YEREVAN AND ANKARA EXCHANGE MESSAGES

Erik Davtyan

In late August and early September, Armenia and Turkey entered a short period of activated bilateral relations that was generally stipulated by Armenia's participation in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's inauguration and an exchange of messages between foreign ministries of the two countries.

On August 28, Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Edward Nalbandian attended Erdoğan's inauguration in Ankara. During his meeting with representatives of Armenia's youth on August 24, Armenia's President Serzh Sargsyan had already announced the official invitation from the Turkish side, adding that "the participation will probably be at the level of Foreign Minister." The last meeting between Armenian and Turkish Foreign Ministers took place on December 12, 2013, in Yerevan within the framework of the 29th meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. The Armenian delegation's presence during the Ankara event received considerable attention and public scrutiny in Armenia. Nalbandian's visit to Turkey took place on the eve of preparatory works for the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide.

During a meeting with students of Yerevan State University on September 1, Nalbandian described the visit as an opportunity to hand Erdoğan an official invitation from President

Sargsyan to attend the commemoration ceremony of the Armenian Genocide Centennial, which will take place on April 24, 2015 in Yerevan. In an article published in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, Nalbandian stated that "Turkey should reconcile with its own past," hoping that Armenia's official invitation "will not be a missed opportunity and that Turkey's President will be in Yerevan on that day." Armenian authorities perceive the visit to Ankara as a necessary step towards establishing a firm dialogue between the two states.

Nalbandian's was highly controversial in Armenia, demonstrating that Armenian-Turkish relations constitute one of the most debated issues in Armenia's foreign policy. The Prosperous Armenia party argues that since Armenia has no diplomatic relations with Turkey, the country should not send representation at the level of the Foreign Minister. Speaking on behalf of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Giro Manoyan stated that Nalbandian's visit to Ankara was unwarranted due to Erdoğan's strictly anti-Armenian statements during his recent electoral campaign in Turkey. Sharing the same view, the vice-president of the Armenian National Congress party, Levon Zurabyan, stated that "this gesture is intended to start a diplomatic process with Turkey," leading to the

implementation of the Zurich protocols signed by the Armenian and Turkish Foreign Ministers in 2009.

Nevertheless, some Armenian analysts believe that the visit was a positive step. The vice-president of the Caucasus Institute, Sergey Minasyan, says the visit indicated that the “Armenian side proved that Armenia is ready to launch initiatives in Armenian-Turkish relations.” Commenting on Armenia’s participation in Erdoğan’s inauguration, turkologist Vahram Ter-Matevosyan shares the viewpoint that Armenia needs to open its border with Turkey, hence any steps that do not damage Armenia’s national interests and national security should be taken to change the situation.

The reactivation of relations between Armenia and Turkey was also stipulated by statements given by Turkey’s new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, shortly after the formation of the new government headed by Ahmet Davutoğlu. On September 1, in an interview to Azerbaijan Press Agency (APA), Çavuşoğlu said that Turkey and Azerbaijan “will unite their efforts and forces in all issues,” underlining that Turkey “will fight together with fraternal Azerbaijan against the so-called Armenian Genocide.” Shortly after the appointment, the Turkish Foreign Minister blamed Armenia for the failure to reestablish Armenian-Turkish relations, which obtained a corresponding reaction from Armenian officials. Appearing on Arajin News in Armenian Public Television on

September 10, Armenia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Shavarsh Kocharyan stated that “Turkey consistently implements a policy of denial regarding the Armenian Genocide and continuously makes failed attempts to deny and falsify historical facts. This very approach of the Turkish side continues to be an obstacle to the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations”.

AZERBAIJAN INCREASES PRESSURE ON CIVIL SOCIETY

Mina Muradova

Whereas Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev intensively uses social media platforms for promoting Azerbaijan as a prosperous and democratic country, human rights observers condemn the authorities of this post-Soviet country for a recent escalation of repression against civil society activists.

"A free society has emerged in Azerbaijan. All democratic institutions are available and they operate successfully," – @presidentaz, the official account of President Aliyev tweeted in early September. In a minute, another tweet said, "All freedoms, including the freedom of speech, the freedom of conscience, the freedom of the press and free Internet, are available." And later, "Azerbaijani society is a free society, and this is our great achievement."

The regional analyst and blogger Arzu Geybullayeva said that for anyone familiar with Azerbaijani realities, "the presidential feed is bitterly ironic, if at times darkly entertaining ... Elsewhere in the post-Soviet world, [authoritarians](#) have [figured out](#) that succinct means success in social media. But Aliyev's feed reads like [one long speech](#) regularly interrupted by a pesky 140 character limit," she wrote on GlobalVoices, a citizen media platform.

The reason for Geybullayeva's concern is the fact that the number of politically motivated detentions has increased

sharply in the country after the defeat of a Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) resolution on "The follow-up to the issue of political prisoners in Azerbaijan" on January 26, 2013. Amnesty International has recognized 24 people as "prisoners of conscience" in Azerbaijan, who were "jailed solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression" in recent months.

The latest in a series of attempts to silence government critics is the case of journalist and human rights defender Ilgar Nasibov, who was found unconscious with severe head trauma and broken bones in his face, in late August. "He was called from home to go the office in the evening," his wife Malahat Nasibova told Azadliq radio. "They said some petitioners had come. They attacked him suddenly in the office and inflicted numerous injuries." Unidentified people stormed the office of the Democracy and NGO Development Resource Centre in the Nakhchivan exclave of Azerbaijan, which he heads. Amnesty International reported that the Nasibov couple has long faced regular intimidation because government officials want them to leave the region, as they are "the only remaining independent voices there." Even though the authorities reportedly detained one of Nasibov's assailants, they have not initiated a criminal investigation.

Among the total number of politically motivated arrests, more than ten members of the media and bloggers are behind bars or awaiting trial. It is the highest number that the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has observed in Azerbaijan since the office was established. The OSCE's representative Dunja Mijatović called the government of Azerbaijan to stop "the continued persecution of media and free voices in the country." According to Mijatović, "These cases and accompanying smear campaigns have resulted in worrying setbacks for the development of free expression in Azerbaijan that create a chilling effect on media and society as a whole ... While I do not challenge the lawful right of the authorities to scrutinize the activities of non-governmental organizations, such actions should not be aimed at silencing critical voices."

On September 15, local media published a letter from prominent human rights activist Leyla Yunus to her husband Arif Yunus. The couple are kept in different pre-trial detention centers. She compared the political climate in contemporary Azerbaijan with the massive political repressions in the Soviet Union orchestrated by Joseph Stalin. "They began to arrest whole families, as Stalin did. The tyrant behaves as if there is no CE or EU or other international organizations," she stated. Yunus reported that her cellmate verbally harassed her and threatened "to break her arms and legs" immediately after Yunus had met with representatives of the UN Commission

against Torture in the Kurdakhani prison.

Three days later, the European Parliament (EP) called on Azerbaijan to undertake "long-overdue human rights reforms without further delay and cease their harassment of civil society organizations, opposition politicians and independent journalists and lift the ban of public gatherings in Baku." Members of the EP condemned "in the strongest possible terms" the arrest and detention of human rights activists and demanded their "immediate and unconditional" release.

The Azerbaijani leadership continues to brush off any allegations that it is behind the serial arrests of its critics and the closure of their organizations. "It is regrettable that these NGOs and individuals – and some journalists – fall back on the foreign forces that fund them and regard themselves as above national law, refusing to report their grant-funded projects, file accounts, pay their taxes and comply with other legal requirements set out by the government," Ali Hasanov, political affairs chief in the presidential administration, told the AzerTag news agency. "In those circles, the appropriate actions that state institutions have taken are sadly being misrepresented as 'pressure on civil society' and as 'restrictions' on the functioning of NGOs and the media. It's a campaign to blacken Azerbaijan's reputation."