

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING

VOL. 10 NO. 18

17 SEPTEMBER 2008

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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst is an English-language journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing Central Asia and the Caucasus. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports, however authors are encouraged to suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in *The Analyst*, described below.

The Analyst aims to provide our industrious and engaged audience with a singular and reliable assessment of events and trends in the region written in an analytical tone rather than a polemical one. *Analyst* articles reflect the fact that we have a diverse international audience. While this should not affect what authors write about or their conclusions, this does affect the tone of articles. Analyst articles focus on a newsworthy topic, engage central issues of the latest breaking news from the region and are backed by solid evidence. Articles should normally be based on local language news sources. Each 1,100-1,500 word analytical article must provide relevant, precise and authoritative background information. It also must offer a sober and analytical judgment of the issue as well as a clinical evaluation of the importance of the event. Authors must cite facts of controversial nature to the Editor who may contact other experts to confirm claims. Since *Analyst* articles are based on solid evidence, rather than rumors or conjecture, they prove to be reliable sources of information on the region. By offering balanced and objective analysis while keeping clear of inflammatory rhetoric, *The Analyst* does more to inform our international readership on all sides of the issues.

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Submission Guidelines:

Analytical Articles require a three to four sentence Key Issue introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples. The ideal length of analytical articles is between 1,100 and 1,500 words. The articles are structured as follows:

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.

Svante E. Cornell

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

XINJIANG, CHINA'S PRESSURE COOKER

Stephen Blank

Despite the immense publicity generated by the Georgian crisis and the Olympics, those events are by no means the only important developments affecting Central Asia and the Caucasus. During August alone, China experienced a rash of major violence in Xinjiang. Three separate incidents from August 4 to 29 left almost thirty security personnel dead and more wounded. To the Chinese government, these attacks validated their claims even if many outside observers suspected that the claim of a terrorist threat was a pretext for readying another round of a crackdown in Xinjiang. The Chinese government says that the proscribed East Turkestan Islamic Movement or ETIM, an organization recognized as well by Washington as a terrorist group, is carrying out these attacks.

BACKGROUND: Xinjiang has been experiencing unrest for at least a generation due to China's policies of relentless Han colonization, cultural and religious Sinification, and oppression of Muslim religious practices and groups. This unrest and the demands by increasingly radicalized Muslim groups for autonomy

or less centralization are among the most important factors shaping China's overall Central Asian policy. That policy aims to deny these opposition elements a foothold in neighboring Central Asian countries while China, acting on hallowed Leninist principles, has simultaneously argued that the root cause of unrest is

economic

backwardness, leading it to invest billions in its "Go West" program to develop Xinjiang. That program entails both large-scale economic development in Xinjiang and its opening up to Central Asia, on the one hand, and a large influx of Chinese settlers on the other hand. Hence it contributes to both the Sinification of the region, and as



students of ethno-national identification know all too well, to increased ethnic and religious tensions. Since Xinjiang is also China's largest oil-producing province, and the site of its Lop Nor nuclear testing grounds, its strategic importance has grown considerably over time.

While Chinese policies have led to the creation of terrorist groups as well as to so-called Jundullah groups (Soldiers of Allah) comprised of angry young Muslims not belonging to any organization, the attacks in August seem to be conducted not by externally based groups, but rather by internally constituted groups in retaliation for the public execution of two Uyghurs in Kashgar on July 9. In retaliation, Chinese police have been raiding Mosques and have heightened their surveillance of religious sermons, literature, and organizations. But this is likely to be ineffective in quashing the Xinjiang-based unrest once and for all as these tactics have been repeatedly tried in the course of the last generation and have failed to achieve their goals.

These attacks and the Tibetan uprising earlier this year suggest that China's hold on these provinces is rather more precarious than the authorities in Beijing would like to believe. Neither has economic development stanching the flow of national and religious opposition to China's authoritarian rule, nor is it likely to do so in the future. Instead we can expect continuing, if not growing unrest in these provinces as development continues. But if China should run into an economic crisis that sharply reduces economic growth, then it is likely that unrest in both provinces could spike upwards sharply and create a much bigger crisis.

Even more of an ominous sign is the fact that terrorist groups are not only staging larger attacks but also are

claiming to have staged attacks in the interior, including in Shanghai and Kunming. There is a very great danger for China's rulers that such ethnic violence and unrest could link up with the widespread and well-recorded instances of social and economic unrest among Han Chinese communities and the large number of floating unemployed people whose number



is dozens of millions. The confluence of multiple streams of unrest presents a major challenge to Beijing; and as suggested by its post-March 2008 crackdown in Tibet, it is ready to take draconian action to prevent it.

IMPLICATIONS: The external reaction to the unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang as well as the continuing unresolved Taiwan issue have heightened China's sensitivity to the issues of its territorial integrity and secessionism. It should not be forgotten that one of the three evils for which members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are obliged to cooperate is secessionism; and another terrorism. The third, religious extremism, can also plausibly be invoked by China as a response to the unrest in Xinjiang. Since it responds to this pressure by strongly asserting that its integrity is not open to question by anyone and that all three provinces' issues are exclusively China's internal affair, any forcible attempt to redraw a state's

boundaries on the grounds of coming to the assistance of oppressed ethnic or religious minorities triggers a very reserved, if not negative Chinese response. Clearly, Beijing worries that such activities, specifically Russia's unilateral recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence, will constitute precedents that can then be used to pressure it or even attack it in order to force it to yield sovereignty in Xinjiang, Tibet, or Taiwan. This is a major reason why it adopted so reserved an attitude towards Russia's war in Georgia even before the SCO summit on August 28. The summit in turn failed to recognize Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence and failed to support Russia's actions

The cycle of ongoing violence and heightened repression that is currently taking place in Xinjiang is also occurring in Tibet. In both provinces, it is likely to continue simply because China apparently has no other answer to the problems posed by this unrest to its current policies and will not contemplate any reforms that it regards as a diminution and erosion of its sovereignty and thus also of China's territorial integrity. Therefore we can expect that over time, this cycle will continue, and the episodes of terrorist violence may become larger and more spectacular as the purveyors of unrest in Xinjiang may also attempt to spread their violence further into the interior of China. It is a very important issue to watch if they can succeed in linking their message with the frustrations of other marginalized social and economic groups and thus rattle the foundations of the party's rule among the Han Chinese population.

Moreover, these episodes of domestic unrest will intensify the main lines of China's foreign policy as applied to Central Asia – to bind those neighboring states ever more closely to it in order to forestall any possibility of their support for their Uyghur kinsmen,

and to sustain Xinjiang's growing economy. But behind the reality of economic growth and integration lies also the abiding Chinese threat of retaliation against these states for any support of this unrest. Moreover, it is likely that the simultaneous occurrence of this upsurge in violence with the Georgian crisis will intensify both Chinese and Central Asian resistance to Russian claims that it has the right to intervene, even with force, on behalf of its supposed citizens who are being oppressed in Central Asian states.

CONCLUSIONS: Moscow's now overt claim to a sphere of influence in Central Asia and of the concurrent and concomitant right to undertake such intervention unilaterally under Article 51 of the UN Charter (the clause pertaining to self-defense of states and their legitimate right to defend themselves against attack) can only unsettle states who resist the doctrine of such intervention which they see as a landmine placed underneath their sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence. Though China has long maintained that how it treats its Muslim minorities is strictly an internal affair that admits of no foreign interest, in fact this is no longer the case. Xinjiang and its implications have for some time been a driver of foreign policy and influenced by the latter's requirements. The intersection of this new violence with the Georgian crisis can only sharpen the contradictions in China's policy and in its relations with Russia in Central Asia.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Professor Stephen Blank, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013. The views expressed here do not represent those of the US Army, Defense Department or Government.

THE RUSSO-GEORGIAN WAR AND GREAT POWER POLITICS

Gregory Gleason

The Russo-Georgian war is a demonstration that Russia has embarked upon a new grand strategy. Russia's goal is to establish a dominant position in the post-Soviet space by creating a special sphere of Russian influence. The Kremlin seeks to project an image of the willingness and ability to employ armed force. But the longer-term strategic Kremlin goal is to divide opposing interests by forcing a wedge into foreign coalitions that have crystallized along the lines of shared government and values. Russian leaders envisage Georgia's breakaway provinces as pawns in a new phase of Great Power politics. The Kremlin sees conflict as a means to divide foreign coalitions along the lines of energy, power, and perception. The "Five Day War" is only the first skirmish in this plan.

BACKGROUND: Newly elected Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, speaking in Berlin in June 2008, sketched his foreign policy plans for Russia. Medvedev's "Berlin Initiative" outlined a plan for creating a new pan-European security organization that would basically replace NATO and divide the Euro-Atlantic community. Medvedev's plan leaves no place at the European table for the United States. The plan to form a new European security community would form stronger links with the western countries of "old Europe", and diminish the influence of Russia's closer neighbors of "new Europe."

Medvedev's plan is not merely diplomacy; it is grand strategy. Russia's resurgence is fueled by soaring oil prices. Russia's renewed foreign policy clout flows from Europe's dependency on natural gas from eastern suppliers. Russia, stung by the humiliation and indignity of a grueling period of post-communist economic recovery has been able to use its "energy advantage" and neo-mercantilist economic policy to regain an important measure of its historical role. But Premier Putin's and President Medvedev's considerable popular success in Russia is not because they rule well; it is because they promise to restore a role for Russia in today's world.

The appeal of these leaders is more psychological than political.

Russia's long-practiced policy of dividing opponents comes as no surprise to Russia's geographical neighbors. After the Russo-Georgian war broke out, political leaders of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland and Ukraine were quick to throw support behind Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili and condemn Russia's military occupation of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and neighboring Georgian regions.

Political leaders in Russia's other neighboring states chose discretion over valor; Most withheld any statement. Even Belarus President Alexander Lukashenka, generally a dyed-in-the-wool defender of all things Soviet and post-Soviet, withheld comment on the Georgian imbroglio for nearly two weeks until the Russian leaders twisted his arm and prodded him into such obsequious statements as those reported in the widely read Russian newspaper *Kommersant*, that the Russian military operation was done "calmly, wisely and beautifully."

The leaders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the recently established anti-

separatist alliance in which Russia plays a major role, met on August 28, 2008 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Russia urged the leaders to endorse Russia's actions and recognize national independence for South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The SCO communiqué which followed the meeting mustered lukewarm endorsement of Russia's military operation but no diplomatic recognition of the breakaway territories.

The members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a 7-member post-Soviet security organization which Russia largely controls, rattled sabers speaking of the importance of the CSTO reorganizing to form a counter-bloc to NATO and managed to endorse Russia's Ossetia operation. But the other CSTO members also stopped short of diplomatic recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

IMPLICATIONS:

Intercession to prevent a renewal of armed conflict was the first priority in the six-point cease-fire brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Now attention has turned to the importance of Georgian reconstruction. Georgia occupies a pivotal position in the key East-West energy corridor. This energy corridor is of vital importance to both European consumers and Central Asian energy producers, not only due to the risk of higher prices in the short term but also due to the long term importance of countering tendencies toward supply-side monopolization. In the long run, ensuring the diversity of energy supply routes is no less important than the assurance of continued supply. Consequently, the viability of a democratic

and independent Georgia is one of the greatest challenges facing Euro-Atlantic unity.

In efforts to counter the influence Russia's expansionist tendencies, a lesson should be learned from the reticence of Russia's closest neighbors and staunchest supporters to welcome the idea of a resurgent Russian empire. The "common eastern experience" of these countries has taught them that wedge politics is a double-edged sword; it cuts both ways. A unifying influence of Russian foreign

policy throughout the Eurasian region would be advantageous to many of the countries if it did not also imply such great risks. Medvedev's idea of a new all-European security community to prevent "frozen conflicts" from breaking into violence runs counter the chief lesson of the Russo-Georgian war. The leaders in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Moldova and the Central Asian states also look at the Russo-Georgian war from their own perspectives, all of which are different and sometimes contradictory.



Dmitry Medvedev, Vladimir Putin, and Sergei Lavrov have uniformly stressed that the Russian military operation in Ossetia was to save lives and to give recognition to the principle of national self-determination in a way that upheld international law. But few of Russia's neighbors have forgotten the brutal Russian resistance to national independence movements in the adjoining breakaway region of Russia in the north Caucasus during the two Chechen wars. Few have forgotten Russia's resistance to separatist movements in Dagestan or Tatarstan. It is widely appreciated that the principles of national sovereignty and national

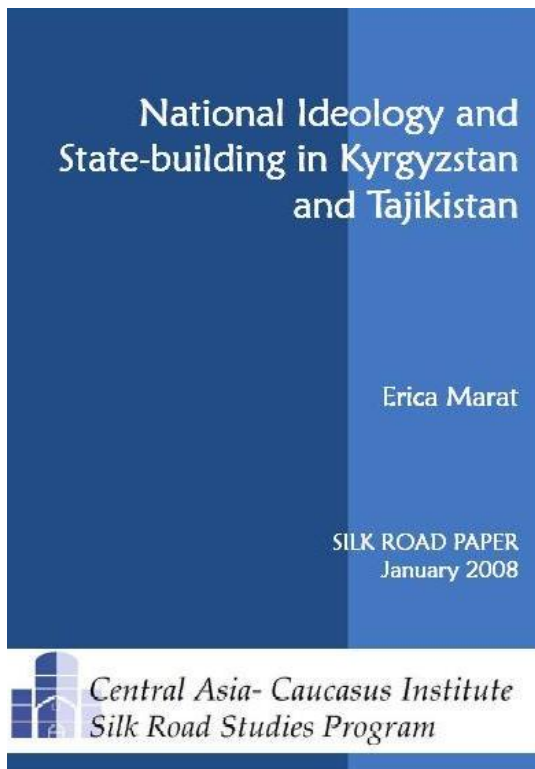
self-determination are sometimes 180 degrees in contradiction. No set of solutions that depends on fiat or even less, on violence, is going to permanently resolve these issues anywhere in the modern world.

CONCLUSIONS: Russia's rapid economic recovery has fueled growing prosperity, but it has also encouraged a resurgence of foreign policy ambitions that are not in Russia's best long-term interests. What Russia needs to do now is not to increase reliance on primary commodity exports and the expansion of its foreign sphere of influence. What Russia needs to do is to stimulate retooling of its society based on the country's best values and the emerging demands of the twenty-first century, emphasizing an information-based economy oriented towards improved business practices, innovation, and increased productivity.

Indeed, Russia's development strategy which relies on its ability to divide European interests is not the best approach from the point of view of Russia's material interests.

The west should not ignore this strategy. But nor should the west fear this strategy to the extent that it overreacts. Responding to Georgia's existential threat must be first on the agenda. But beyond that, it should be recognized that there are many assets in Great Power politics that go beyond and are often more effective than confrontation and demonstrations of resolve. Russia's neighbors are sufficiently realistic in their assessments of Russia's foreign policy that they are unlikely to bandwagon in support of a bloc opposing generally accepted values of democracy, fair play and the rule of law. In any case, Russia's neighbors are unlikely to do that unless they have no other alternative. Efforts should therefore focus on ensuring that there are other alternatives.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Gregory Gleason is professor of political science at the University of New Mexico and professor of security studies at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. The views expressed here do not represent those of the U.S. Government.



New Silk Road Paper:

National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

This 99-page Paper discusses the policies adopted, and the challenges confronted, by the weak and multi-ethnic states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to build national ideologies catering both to the titular nationality and to the inclusion of ethnic minorities.

The Paper can be downloaded free at www.silkroadstudies.org. Hardcopy requests should be addressed to Alec Forss at forss@silkroadstudies.org.

WHEN TWO ENDS MEET: JAPAN'S GROWING ENGAGEMENT IN KAZAKHSTAN

Nargis Kassenova

This summer, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Japan. He signed a joint communique supporting Japan's climate change initiative and participated in the Kazakhstan-Japan business forum trying to lure more investments into the country's growing economy. He invited Japanese companies to use Kazakhstan as the base for expansion to neighboring markets and, more importantly, defined the guideline for Kazakhstan's cooperation with international companies – exchange of natural resources for technologies. Thus, it was signaled that technologically advanced but resource-poor Japan is becoming Kazakhstan's partner of choice. Japan's deepening engagement in Kazakhstan can reshape its approach to the region of Central Asia at large.

BACKGROUND: Until recently Kazakhstan, as the rest of Central Asia, has not featured prominently on Japan's foreign policy agenda. There were no hard-core interests that would propel Japanese engagement in the region. It was too remote and inaccessible for trade. Rather, the relations with five Central Asian states were shaped and driven by the role of Japan as a major donor, which provided 30 percent of all the Official Development Assistance (ODA) by the member countries of the OECD Development Assistance Committee to the region. It helped to build infrastructure, improve the business environment and promote the protection of the environment.

However, at present the relations between Japan and Kazakhstan are undergoing a transformation. They are becoming more intense and changing in substance. Small trade and donor-recipient relations are giving way to more substantial economic partnership schemes. The developments are triggered by the new role of Kazakhstan as the 'economic power-house' accounting for 70 percent of the GDP of the region in general, and the revival of the Kazakhstani uranium industry in particular.

In August 2006, former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited Kazakhstan and signed a memorandum on cooperation in the field of nuclear power, including the development of uranium

mines. The importance of this agreement is underscored by the fact that Kazakhstan is one of the main producers and Japan one of the main consumers of uranium. Kazakhstan holds about 20 percent of world reserves of uranium and aspires to become the largest producer by 2010, surpassing the current leaders, Canada and Australia. Japan hopes eventually to import up to 40 percent of its use of this strategic material from Kazakhstan.

In the aftermath of Koizumi's visit, a number of deals were signed between Japanese companies and Kazatomprom (the national company in charge of the atomic industry). In April 2007, a 150-member strong delegation from Japan consisting of government officials and private sector representatives came to Astana. During the visit, the Japanese trading company Marubeni bought a stake in a uranium mine, and Toshiba Corporation pledged to help Kazakhstan with building nuclear power plants. To follow up on this promise, in October 2007 Toshiba sold Kazatomprom a 10 percent share in Westinghouse Electric Co., one of the top world producers of nuclear reactors. As a result, Japanese companies got access to Kazakh uranium, and Kazatomprom could enter the world of top nuclear technologies. Domestically, the deal was lauded as exemplary for further economic cooperation with other countries. Kazakhstan

should use its natural resources to build a high-tech economy.

Nazarbayev's recent visit to Japan (June 18-22) was accompanied by the signing of another round of deals and agreements. Toshiba Corp agreed to expand its partnership with Kazatomprom to include rare metals and reactor components, the move falling into the same scheme of securing raw materials in exchange for technical expertise. That should help the company avoid the excessive dependence on China's rare metals used in electronic devices and nuclear reactors.

Marubeni Corp. signed an agreement with Kazakhstan's Environmental Protection Ministry to jointly promote the development of projects to cut greenhouse gas emissions in Kazakhstan. The company is considering undertaking renewable energy (hydroelectric and wind power) projects once Kazakhstan signs the Kyoto Protocol. The agreement supported the joint communiqué

signed by the Japanese Prime Minister and Kazakhstan's President in support of Japan's climate change initiative to halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Thus, Kazakhstan can receive access to Japanese energy-saving technologies, and Japan acquired a supporter for this major international initiative.

Nazarbayev took part in the Kazakhstan-Japan business forum and called on Japanese entrepreneurs to invest in Kazakhstan. He promised support and suggested using Kazakhstan as the base

for expansion to neighboring markets (Russia, China, Central Asia, Iran, Pakistan and the Caucasus). He emphasized that Kazakhstan's government is interested in establishing innovative enterprises and will support such projects. Apart from nuclear energy, direct investments are welcome in developing processing industry, machinery, energy, transport and communications industries, construction, pharmacy and agriculture.

Last but not least, during the course of the visit, the Japanese and Kazakh transport ministers signed an

agreement providing for direct international flights between the countries. At present, one has to fly via Seoul or even Frankfurt – in Central Asia, only Uzbekistan has a direct connection with Japan – which hampers the development of economic and human ties.

IMPLICATIONS:

President Nazarbayev's visit to Japan and the signed agreements show the growing mutual interest. Japan is interested in

Kazakhstan's

resources and unlike many other investors is ready to share its technological expertise in return for access to resources. Kazakhstan is no longer desperate to simply bring its mineral riches to world markets but rather wants to use them for moving its economy upscale. In this regard, Japan and Kazakhstan are highly compatible partners, one technologically advanced and the other rich in natural resources.

Kazakhstan can acquire a reliable partner who will help its economic development and can also

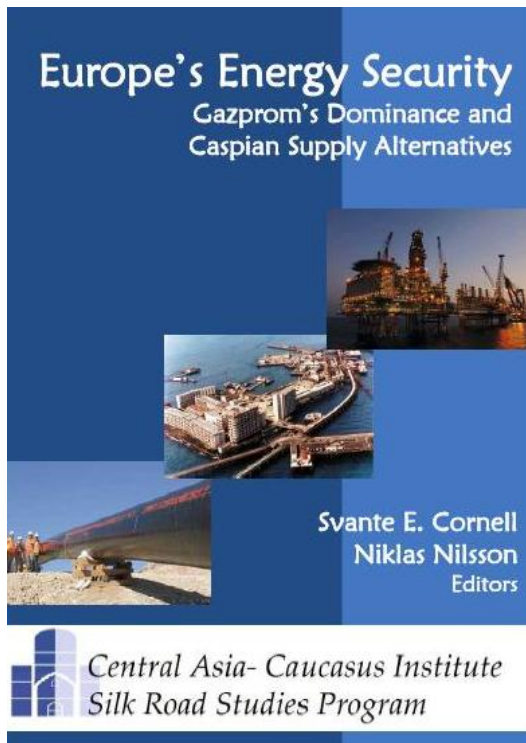


contribute to the strengthening of its political independence. Japan can receive a new supporter in Asia without any negative historical baggage and with a pro-Western orientation. Kazakhstan and Japan are lying on the peripheries of Asia, one in the West, and the other in the East. Neither feels entirely Asian, as both have some affinity with the Western club of nations. In this sense, they can find common themes and approaches to the emerging Eurasian geopolitical architecture, especially taking into account that they share two powerful neighbors – Russia and China.

The deepening of cooperation between Japan and Kazakhstan can translate into more engagement of Japan in the region of Central Asia. So far, the attempts of Japanese policy-makers to formulate a strategy for Central Asia consisted of rather abstract and broad stroke schemes and did not contain clear policy guidelines. The introduction of considerable interests in Japan-Kazakhstan relations could make the regional approach more focused and give Japan a firmer base to build its Central Asian policy.

CONCLUSIONS: Japan and Kazakhstan are entering a new stage in their relationship. Kazakhstan is no longer a poor recipient of aid, but an ambitious country trying to use its rich pool of energy resources to establish a more technologically advanced economy. Japan uses its competitive edge to acquire access to Kazakhstan's minerals. The emerging cooperation is mutually beneficial. Apart from economic and developmental benefits, it can bring both sides considerable political perks. Japan and Kazakhstan can become political partners sharing common agendas; Japan can develop a stronger approach toward the Central Asian region. Consequently, their cooperation can contribute to shaping the overall Eurasian geopolitical context.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Nargis Kassenova is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Political Science, Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research, Almaty.



New Book!

Europe's Energy Security: Gazprom's Dominance and Caspian Supply Alternatives

168 pages, Edited by Svante E. Cornell and Niklas Nilsson

With contributions by Pavel Baev, Zeyno Baran, Robert Larsson, Nicklas Norling, Volkan Özdemir, Vladimir Socor, Elin Suleymanov, Mamuka Tsereteli, and Temuri Yakobashvili.

THE EVOLUTION OF RUSSIAN NATIONALISTS AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF RUSSIANS' RELATIONSHIP WITH CAUCASIAN MINORITIES

Dmitry Shlapentokh

Russia's Movement Against Illegal Immigration has recently forged alliances with various political groups and individuals. This serves first to coordinate the efforts of various nationalist groups and unify their supporters as a political force; second, to transform the Russian nationalists into a force that would be more acceptable to the general public. An interesting aspect is that Gary Kasparov, the chess champion and leader of the liberal and pro-Western opposition, is part of the alliance, indicating that racist/traditionalist ideology has started to spread not just among the marginal groups but increasingly permeates the view of upper and middle class ethnic Russians, leading potentially to increasing nationalism directed especially at people the Russian Caucasus. But it also paradoxically suggests Russia continues to drift toward the West.

BACKGROUND: Throughout post-Soviet history, authorities have employed several models to define the identities of residents of the Russian Federation. During the Yeltsin period, when the desire to copy the West, mostly the USA, prevailed among the Russian elite, the authorities tried to construct an identity for those who lived in the Russian Federation in the same way as identity is defined in the United States — mostly through citizenship. The system does not work, for the idea of citizenship in the West is deeply connected with the sanctity of contractual obligations, the product of modern capitalism. And it is precisely this that was foreign to Yeltsin's Russia. Later, "neo-Eurasianism" emerged as a model of a sort. Eurasianists believed that Russians and the mostly Muslim minorities of the Federation belong to an "Eurasian" people — a unique blend of Slavs and mostly Turkic peoples, as well as other traditional peoples of the Russian/Eurasian space; and a cultural blend of Orthodox and Islam. The ties between these people are not formal or legalistic, and are not defined through citizenship but are

spiritual and cultural ties forged by centuries of coexistence.

Elements of Eurasianism are easily detected in the notion of "Rossiane," which is the official way of defining those who are citizens of the Russian Federation. At the same time, Russian nationalism has emerged as the alternative semi-official "Neo-Eurasianism." This nationalism has emphasized "Russianness" as a racial and biological characteristic; and besides a deep hostility to "Caucasians" and people from Central Asia, these nationalists are implicitly supporters of a neo-fascist type dictatorship. This was especially clear with Aleksandr Barkashov, the founder of Russian National Unity (RNE). RNE's relationship with the West, including Europe, was also rather guarded. Its appeal to Nazi symbols implied the dream of a resurrection of a strong imperial state fashioned after Nazi Germany.

Russia's Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) emerged several years ago, and represents a different type of nationalism. The DPNI, while preserving some of the ideological and external

attributes of the RNE, increasingly changed the focus of its program. While for the RNE, “Caucasians” and other non-Slavic minorities were a rather marginal aspect of their political program, they became the central element of DPNI philosophy. The drive against “Caucasians” was directly related to the affirmation of the dominant position of ethnic Russians. Still, this affirmation has no connection with the strength of the Russian state, re-inventing it from a “bad” Eurasian empire where minorities lived at the expense of ethnic Russians, to the “good” empire where ethnic Russians would enjoy the good life at the expense of the minorities. Nothing of this sort could be found in DPNI programs. The glorification of the idea of empire has practically disappeared. The stress is actually on the opposite: on what DPNI sees as the

Stavropol riots against “Caucasians,” mostly Chechens.

IMPLICATIONS: The DPNI’s approach to the West is also telling. The RNE’s vision of the West was apprehensive and openly hostile toward the U.S.; and in this case the RNE reflected the prevailing view among Yeltsin’s opposition on the right. Indeed, not only was the “red-brown” resolutely against the West as a civilization absolutely hostile to Russia, but even Dugin’s Eurasianists, with a generally benign vision of Germany and France, were strongly anti-American. Nothing of this sort could be found in DPNI, which has a positive view of not just white Europeans but even white Americans who, similar to Russians, are seen to suffer from the invasion and domination of

non-Europeans, such as Arabs, blacks and Latinos. Similar to ethnic Russians, the DPNI implied that whites in Europe and America have suffered from the same as the proponents of “Eurasianism,” who insist on “symbiosis” in the form of “multi-culturalism,” which is nothing in its practical application but the domination of the ethnic/racial groups hostile to the white man.

All white men—Russians, Europeans and Americans—should be united against the common threat, as alien races are ready to engulf them. This preaching of “white”

internationalism has led to other peculiarities of the DPNI philosophy—in particular, the absence of anti-Semitism. Jews are implicitly seen, if not as part of the “white” community, at least as closer to it than “Caucasians.” And in this, the DPNI is quite different from the mainstream nationalist opposition of the Yeltsin era. Thus, if one would look closely at this aspect of DPNI philosophy, one could easily note that its members are quite similar



corruption of the state bureaucracy by “Caucasians” and Central Asians. This, in their view, alienates the state from the majority ethnic Russians; and their goal is to make the bureaucracy more accountable.

The practical implication in this theory is a sort of decentralization of power and increasing reliance on self-government. It is not accidental that the DPNI has hailed the “people accomplices” (*Norodnyi skhody*) who took part in the Kondopoga and

to those found among representatives of the present Russian middle class.

In the beginning of Putin's tenure, fearful of "bespredel," the anarchical lawlessness of the Yeltsin era, the Russian middle class was ready to accept Putin's drive to authoritarianism as the only way to security. But it became more assertive and more used to the increasing Western normality in daily life. And here, they looked at a strong centralized state as not so much a source of stability as of corruption. The representatives of the middle class see the state in the hands of powerful interest groups, with "Caucasian" mafias as one of the most important among them. They also have an increasingly skeptical look at "derzhavnost," the imperial might so important in the early Putin era. They want not an awe-inspiring empire but a predictable, safe state concerned with the basic needs of the majority—ethnic Russians in this case—and fully accepted by the West, Europe first of all, to which the middle class gravitates despite all Russia's friction with Europe. All of these aspects of the ideology of the middle class are fully acceptable to increasing numbers of Russian liberals; they also accept the increasing nationalistic prejudice and phobias of the middle class. Moreover, similar to their European counterparts and in sharp contrast to Americans, they seem not to be opposed to political association with those who openly proclaim nationalistic or racist slogans. And this explains why Gary Kasparov, who was one of the most well-known symbols of liberal opposition to Putin's rule, accepted political cooperation with DPNI.

CONCLUSIONS: What is the implication of this alliance of some Russian nationalists and liberals and an increasing segment of the Russian middle class whose interests they represent? One could, of course, approach this phenomenon from a different perspective. One could state, following prevailing

stereotypes, that rising nationalistic and openly racist feelings among increasing numbers of the Russian population indicate that Russia is following its century-old tradition where the rise of nationalism in this or that form has corresponded with the rise of a strong authoritarian state and hostility to the West. This, however, is not the case now. Indeed, Eurasianists who preach a peculiar form of "internationalism," with emphasis on "symbiosis" between ethnic Russians and various minorities of the Federation including those from the Caucasus, are unabashed authoritarians and see Russia's destiny in confrontation with, if not the entire West, the U.S.. On the other hand, an increasing number of present Russian nationalists combine racist intolerance with the liberal postulate of the modern West. Possibly for the first time in Russian history, its representatives see not just an empire but even a strong authoritarian state as an evil that benefits minorities but not ethnic Russians. The stress here is not on strengthening Putin's famous "vertical of power," but on self-government and serving the vital interests of the majority. The representatives of a sort of Russian nationalism—once again possibly for the first time in Russian history—preach not just an alliance with the West but maximum Russian integration with the West, particularly Europe. Thus, if one would stress not the absorption of racism by liberals like Kasparov but the liberal ideas of DPNI leader Belov (Potkin), one could conclude that recent developments among Russian nationalists indicate a continuous, albeit twisted, moving closer to the West. At least, this could be said about the Russian middle class.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dmitry Shlapentokh is Associate Professor of History at the University of Indiana, South Bend.

FIELD REPORTS

NEW EVIDENCE EMERGES ON START OF GEORGIAN- RUSSIAN WAR

Niklas Nilsson

The Georgian government has put forth new evidence in support for its claim that Russian military had entered South Ossetia before its advance on Tskhinvali. The Georgian version of events during the war in August maintains that Georgia launched its incursion into South Ossetia in response to Russian forces crossing the border through the Roki tunnel, the border passage between Russia and South Ossetia in the morning and during the day on August 7. In response to this, Georgia saw itself as forced to respond through taking Tskhinvali and blocking the Russian forces from moving further into Georgia. According to the Russian version, its army was not sent into South Ossetia until the morning of August 8, in response to a Georgian invasion of South Ossetia and in order to protect its peacekeeping forces and civilians in the region.

The main new evidence, supplied by Georgian authorities, circulated among US and European intelligence agencies and provided to the *New York Times*, consists of three recorded telephone calls between a South Ossetian border guard posted at the Roki tunnel and his commander. According to the *Times*, the phone calls were made using the Georgian mobile network MagtiCom and intercepted by Georgia's Ministry of Interior. The newspaper reported on September 16 that in a call recorded 3:52 AM on August 7, a border guard asked by his commander whether armor has arrived, confirms this, saying that armor and personnel has indeed crossed into South Ossetia. At 3:41 AM, the same border guard tells his commander that he has been requested to inspect vehicles that have

“crowded” the tunnel and asks for permission to do this. At 3:52, the border guard tells the commander that the vehicles are through the tunnel. These accounts would imply that Russian units entered South Ossetia through the Roki Tunnel as early as in the morning of August 7.

Georgian officials interviewed by the *New York Times* regard the recorded phone calls to be indisputable evidence that Tbilisi's version of events on August 7 is correct: the Russian army did enter Georgian territory and Georgia's attack on Tskhinvali was in response to this. When asked why the recordings emerged more than a month after the phone calls took place, Georgian Minister of Interior Vano Merabishvili stated the files were lost due to relocations of the surveillance team during the war, and that it took due time to retrieve them. Russian military officials, however, told the *Times* that any troop movements through the tunnel before the Georgian attack were only rotations of its peacekeeping contingent in South Ossetia or transports of supplies to these troops. Interviewed U.S. military officials state that while the recordings seem genuine, a full assessment of their implications cannot be made until more intelligence is gathered.

Other information indicating a Russian military presence in South Ossetia on August 7 has seeped out through the Russian media. The Russian Army newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star), published on September 3 an interview with Captain Denis Sidristy of the 135th motorized rifle regiment, who was wounded in the war. An observant Swedish blogger, Kalle Kniivilä, noted that in the original

version Sidristy states that his unit was on exercise in North Ossetia, close to the Georgian border. On August 7, his regiment was ordered to move to South Ossetia, toward Tskhinvali, where it settled in. He then says he witnessed the Georgian attack on Tskhinvali around midnight. Kniivilä however noted that the original version was later changed on the *Krasnaya Zvezda* website, so that Sidristy is reported to say that the order to move into South Ossetia came on August 7 *at night* and that the attack on Tskhinvali was witnessed on August 8 *in the morning*. The *New York Times* also comments on the issue, stating that after *Krasnaya Zvezda* had been approached on the subject of the story, the paper published a new interview with Sidristy on September 11, where the captain corrected his previous statement, now claiming to have entered South Ossetia on August 8. Clearly, these inconsistencies and changes on the website indicate a cover-up, which in turn seems to lend credence to

the assertion that Russian forces moved in long before Moscow acknowledges that fact.

According to blog site “A Step at a Time”, the Russian newspaper *Permskie Novosti* has also reprinted a transcript of a mobile phone message from a Russian conscript, stating that he had been stationed in South Ossetia since August 7. The site also quotes reports that the Russian missile cruiser “Moskva” left the port of Sevastopol in the morning of August 7. Other reports, however, claim “Moskva” left port on August 9.

Light is yet to be shed on what really happened during August 7, a process which will require many additional pieces of information on the nature and size of Russian troop movements on that day. Nevertheless, the evidence now becoming available may prove to be an important piece of this puzzle, and is useful in explaining the level of threat perceived by the Georgian government ahead of its decision to march on Tskhinvali.

THE CSTO PLANS TO INCREASE ITS MILITARY POTENTIAL

Nurshat Ababakirov

The Central Asian states’ ambiguous statements on the conflict in South Ossetia during the Dushanbe SCO summit was obviously a source of distress to Russia. The member states clearly condemned Georgia’s so-called aggression, but at the same time they made it clear that negligence of territorial integrity and sovereignty is not justifiable. The conflict disclosed long-cloaked inconsistencies within both the CIS and SCO over sensitive issues. Therefore, the CSTO may well prove the only feasible regional structure for Russia’s steadfast influence in Central Asia. Yet, it is still to be seen how warmly the Central Asian states will welcome this development.

On September 12, CSTO Secretary-General Nikolai Bordyuzha, revealed plans on the nature of the

Organization. He stressed two main objectives: transforming the CSTO from a political and military bloc into a multi-functional international structure which will be able to respond to a wide range of issues; and equally strengthening its military component. The decision was followed by the CSTO summit in Moscow on September 5, which was, to a large extent, dedicated to the conflict in Georgia.

“If agreed by the Central Asia states, we will have a collective force, which will be big enough to include large units,” Bordyuzha said. A 10,000-strong rapid deployment force, a pivot of the CSTO, will be located in each respective state to ensure “political deterrence” in the region in light of the “worsening” situation in Afghanistan. According to Mr.

Bordyuzha, the drug flows from Afghanistan's borders northward have not been strangled so far, and will not be anytime soon. Thus, *inter alia*, a breeding ground for international criminal organizations capable of destabilizing the region has been laid out, he stressed. Notably, unlike the previous practice of gathering on an infrequent basis, a permanent body for drug control is going to be established.

Mr. Bordyuzha seems interested more than ever in setting up direct cooperation with Kabul. During the September 12 meeting with the CSTO committee against drug trafficking, he remarked that for the past year, Kabul failed to directly collaborate with the CSTO working group, which had been established in 2005 on the post-conflict development of Afghanistan. By showing his suspicion of third party involvement, he stressed that the CSTO should seek to consolidate the efforts of its member states for assistance in Afghanistan.

A Russian think tank expert, Alexander Pikaev, thinks it is important to highlight Bordyuzha's statement that the CSTO is becoming a "real military organization," whose joint headquarters will be able to "seriously" control large forces. In his view, it is a signal to the West that the CSTO is preparing to fight the Taliban, a task that was not successfully accomplished by NATO.

Nevertheless, technically, the strengthening of the CSTO's military component clearly envisages enhancing of the compatibility of both management and weaponry through regular joint operations. The most immediate military exercises will take place this September in Kazakhstan. Also, Russia's plans for the ten-battalion strong CSTO Rapid Deployment Force to provide security for the Central Asian states against "threats to sovereignty" will provide for the concentration of military control in a coordination center. It will enable the mobilization of forces at short notice, with the obvious result of taking little notice of the member states' defense ministries. Plus, to maintain the effectiveness of the forces, Moscow plans to establish an anti-aircraft defense system.

To support it in the long run, signaling a new trend within the CSTO, Russia intends to revitalize the Soviet military-industrial complex by strengthening its cooperation among the weapons-manufacturing ventures spatially dispersed among the CSTO member states. It should grow into a united military-economic long-term program covering the period until 2015. Some fruitless attempts to promote military-economic cooperation had been made earlier within the CIS. However, the obstacle will be that most of them were turned into joint stock companies and were reformed to meet civilian needs.

Another absolutely new trend is the idea of installing an information security system within the CSTO. The conflict in Georgia has evidenced how information provision can be extensively employed for political purposes as an indispensable part of military operations. During the peak of the conflict and amid intensive flows of contradictory information, Russia had a hard time collecting supportive voices among the states of Central Asia.

Dmitriy Medvedev stressed that the CSTO has a "special mission", and to support it in its early years of operation, it is crucial to develop the organization's military potential. It is expected that Russia will support it with cheap armor, whereas other states may contribute with fuel, foodstuffs etc. Central Asian states will likely understand Moscow's assertive drive to strengthen and upgrade the CSTO as a testimony to its willingness to materialize this goal chiefly by its own means.

Yet it is still difficult to predict how eagerly and fast the Central Asian states will welcome the CSTO's evolution, and how much military control they are willing to cede to the CSTO. Their consent will be likely to largely depend on the initiative's financial aspects, especially given its long-term implications. Additionally, unlike the SCO, which is strongly counterbalanced by China and the CIS, which has chronically suffered from weak leverages, the CSTO has remained the only collective organization through which, with little resistance, Russia is very much interested to promote its agenda.

HU JINTAO'S VISIT TO TURKMENISTAN INTENSIFIES CHINESE-TURKMEN PARTNERSHIP

Chemen Durdiyeva

On August 28, Chinese president Hu Jintao visited Ashgabat following his state visits to South Korea and Tajikistan. Having met with his counterpart Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov on August 29, the Chinese president and a broad state delegation held extensive talks on expanding bilateral relations in many sectors. Particularly, reaching a new agreement on increasing the volume of gas yet to be pumped to China in 2009, opening up new areas of cooperation in textile and chemical industries for Chinese counterparts conveyed a historical impact on the Sino-Turkmen partnership.

Hu Jintao's visit to Turkmenistan matched the anniversary of last year's launching of the grand Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline project in Samandepe, on the right bank of the Amu Darya River in eastern Turkmenistan. On April 3, 2006, late president Saparmurat Niyazov and Hu Jintao had agreed to construct a 7,000 km gas pipeline that crosses the territories of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Berdymukhamedov's arrival to the presidency greatly expedited the pace of Sino-Turkmen negotiations over the pipeline and its construction. On his visit to the Olympic Games in Beijing, President Berdymukhamedov met with the heads of major Chinese oil and gas companies in Beijing and brought new proposals for investment opportunities in Turkmenistan. High officials of other trade and service companies from the state and private sectors also met Berdymukhamedov to explore business opportunities in Turkmenistan.

Now that the Chinese companies received a "go ahead" by Turkmen authorities, the eastern province of Turkmenistan is becoming a hotspot for major Chinese and several other foreign companies. The Chinese National Petroleum Corporation

(CNPC), the main contractor with the Turkmen government over the gas pipeline, has invited several other subcontractor firms such as the Bureau of Geophysical Prospecting, Sichuan Petroleum, and Sinopec to participate in the construction of the pipeline. Two major seismic projects on the exploration of gas wells in the contracted area have almost finished by now, and drilling rigs have been built. In a field interview in Samandepe and in other field crew locations, the high officials of these companies informed that the preparatory work for pumping the blue fuel to China by mid-2009 is being carried out so intensively that they might even be able to finish the project before the scheduled deadline. Meanwhile, the construction of several gas processing plants is being planned.

Enhancing partnership in the energy sector constituted the main issue during the Chinese delegation's visit this time as well. After extensive dialogue, the sides agreed to increase the annual volume of gas from 30 bcm to 40 bcm for the 30 years starting from the fourth quarter of 2009. But the price of the gas has not been discussed yet, and remains unclear. Many analysts claim that this projected pipeline will immensely challenge Russia's monopoly over the transportation and export of Turkmen gas. For Turkmenistan, however, reaching out to new markets is a means of diversifying the trade routes for its blue fuel, and the authorities promise to continue to take on all of the obligations regarding the bilateral agreements with Russia as well.

Chinese cooperation, and China's involvement in Turkmenistan's economy, have increased over the last two years, making China a reliable trade partner for Turkmenistan. According to statistics taken

from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, the bilateral trade volume constituted \$379.96 million for the first half of 2008, making Turkmenistan China's fifth largest trade partner among the CIS countries. Turkmenistan's state news agency reports that China has so far signed 49 agreements with Turkmenistan worth a total of \$1.3 billion. By implication, Chinese investment in the eastern province of Turkmenistan is expected to rise, and to go beyond the oil and gas sectors. Over the period of a projected 30 years ahead, CNPC officials say the company is planning to invest US\$30 billion into the province's production of oil, gas, silk and mineral resources as well. Particularly, cotton processing factories and plants for producing fertilizers are planned.

This rapid entrance of Chinese companies into the Turkmen market has created a mixed reaction among the local population. The majority of the population in rural areas is absolutely happy to be employed, implying that they no longer have to leave for countries like Turkey or Russia to earn a living for their families. On the other hand, a small part of the eastern province's population feels apprehensive about the sudden influx of a big number of Chinese into Turkmen society, especially in rural areas. Since elements of nationalism have

strongly been imbedded in the people's mind during the previous administration, rural society is open but hesitant toward fully accepting what is considered as foreign. The feeling of confusion was especially noticed recently among the rurals when one of the Chinese employees ceremoniously married a local woman.

That said, most of the population has an optimistic outlook. Many expect that today's small rural towns will soon become quite modernized and relatively developed cities with the help of Chinese investments.

Overall, Hu Jintao's visit to Turkmenistan opened up new opportunities for both sides. Beyond discussions on energy issues, Mr. Hu also visited the *Mejlis*, the Turkmen parliament, where he also showed his interest to establish a close parliamentary partnership. As the sides signed a joint communiqué, a Chinese-Turkmen cooperation committee is going to be founded to bolster bilateral ties in the energy sector, education and culture, telecommunications, textile and chemical industries. In the end, honoring Hu Jintao's state visit with a large Chinese delegation, President Berdymukhamedov conferred the highest state award, the "Turkmenbashi the Great" order on his counterpart.

CENTRAL ASIAN STATES FAIL TO COOPERATE ON WATER MANAGEMENT

Erica Marat

The collapsed negotiations on a regional water regime between the Ministers of Energy of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan held in Almaty on September 9-10 uncovered deep and intractable disagreements between the states sharing the Syr Darya water basin. The main dispute unraveled between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. While Bishkek warned its neighbor that a lack of coordination on water usage in the winter and summer periods has led to alarmingly low levels of

water in the Toktogul reservoir, the main hydro-power site in the country, Tashkent claimed its right for greater control over the Syr Darya.

Once the region's main exporter of electricity, this winter Kyrgyzstan will be bound to purchase electricity from Kazakhstan, and has agreed to buy Uzbek gas for prices as high as \$300 per thousand cubic meters.

Due to an unusually cold winter in 2007-2008, Kyrgyzstan had to release more water than expected from Toktogul for the production of electricity, despite the low water period. Uzbekistan, in turn, was barely affected by the winter crisis and remains able to produce sufficient energy for its domestic consumption from its reserves of coal and natural gas. But because of its need for water for irrigation in summer, Tashkent has expressed its concern with Kyrgyzstan's excessive release of water during the winter period, and over Kyrgyzstan's reckless management of the Toktogul reservoir.

In the meantime, partly due to widespread corruption in the hydro-energy sector, severe shortages of electricity were felt throughout Kyrgyzstan already in spring this year when rolling blackouts became a daily norm. In summer, the water level at Toktogul fell to a critical 9,6 billion cubic meters, more than half its usual level. To prepare for electricity shortages in the upcoming winter, the Kyrgyz government switched nearly 8,000 three-phase capacitors into one-phase connections, further encouraging people to stock up coal and collect cow dung to be used as fuel. In the coming months, power outages will reach ten hours a day, considerably slowing down the economy and feeding inflation.

Uzbekistan is opposed to Kyrgyzstan's plans to build two new hydro-energy plants – the 1900 MW Kambarata-1 and the 240 MW Kambarata-2 on the Naryn River, which is part of the Syr Darya basin. Both plants are at the earliest stages of construction, and it is yet unknown who will become the main investor. The plants would allow Kyrgyzstan to substantially increase the production of electricity for local use, and further permit Kyrgyzstan to decrease water releases from 14,5 to 10,5 billion cubic meters per year. This, in turn, would allow Kyrgyzstan to release less water in winter, when electricity is most needed, and save water for irrigation during summers.

However, Kyrgyzstan's potential ability to control water releases leads to a vicious circle. Downstream countries must make sure that Kyrgyzstan does not abuse its privileges by acquiring a stronger leverage over them, while any potential investor must know what would be the approximate cooperation agreement between Kyrgyzstan's neighbors should both hydro-energy plants be constructed. Tashkent's rebuke of such long-term agreements increases uncertainty, while Kazakhstan's possible investment into Kambarata would hand Astana additional influence over Tashkent. Ultimately, Central Asian leaders seem to be caught in the classic prisoner's dilemma, when each is better off not cooperating while potentially rewarding cooperation is stalled because of lack of trust.

As much the politics in the Syr Darya basin seem to be complicated, the heads of state show little interest in considering the needs of the local population. Water is still considered a commodity controlled solely by the government, and little public access to decision-making is allowed. Talks about water management are conducted behind closed doors, and limited information is shared with the mass media. Should Central Asian leaders be more open to the needs of ordinary citizens, their perceived formulas of financial benefits from regional water and electricity trade would have been complemented with concerns over the populations' well being.

The sudden intensification of Central Asian states' predisposition to stage talks on water management is preconditioned by the shocking winter of 2007-2008, when sub-zero temperatures coincided with a low water period. Central Asian leaders are aware of the possible repetition of such crises. But a viable water regime seems impossible with the current state of affairs. But, as one Kyrgyz expert says, the Central Asian states have no choice but to keep trying.

NEWS DIGEST

IMF, GEORGIA AGREE ON USD 750 MLN LOAN

3 September

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on September 3 it had “agreed in principle” with the Georgian authorities on a USD 750 million financial package in the form of an 18-month stand-by arrangement. The proposed arrangement requires the approval of the IMF Executive Board, which is expected to consider Georgia's request in mid-September. The IMF said the arrangement was intended to support “the economic policies of the Georgian authorities and to help mitigate the adverse economic and financial consequences of the recent conflict.”

Eka Sharashidze, the Georgian economy minister, said on September 3 that the government had revised economic growth forecasts for 2008.

“Because of the war, we expect economic growth to slow to 5-6% from our initial estimate of double-digit growth,” she told journalists.

“Georgia’s strong record of reform and sound macroeconomic policies has strengthened the resilience of the economy and bodes well for a solid recovery from this shock,” The IMF, whose mission visited Georgia on August 23-September 3, said in a statement. “The main objectives of the Stand-By Arrangement are to cover part of the expected temporary external financing gap, and to help sustain the confidence of markets and investors by supporting policies that will ensure continued macroeconomic stability and promote the recovery of private sector investment and economic growth.” Kakha Bendukidze, chief of the government’s administration, who once served as state minister in charge of economic

reforms, said in an interview with the Georgian weekly *Kviris Palitra* this week that the Georgian economy hadn't collapsed and it had proved to be very flexible as a result of reforms carried out in recent years. (Civil Georgia)

U.S. OFFICIAL: TBILISI ATTACKED TSKHINVALI ON AUGUST 7, BUT WAR STARTED EARLIER

4 September

Although Georgia attacked Tskhinvali on August 7, which was “a mistake,” that was not the actual start of the war, Matthew Bryza, the U.S. deputy assistance secretary of state, has said. “You know, we have our differences with the narrative coming out of Moscow about how this conflict began,” Bryza told journalists in Washington on September 3. “It did not begin on August 7th with the attack on Tskhinvali by Georgia, which we do believe was a mistake; but it began much sooner, thanks to provocations by South Ossetian militias, under the command, by the way, of Russian officers.” “So Georgia did not launch a war. Georgia was drawn into one. It’s a peace-loving country,” he added. Regarding Russian calls for an international arms embargo on Georgia, Bryza said that Georgia was “a sovereign state, a peaceful state, a democracy that has a right to develop its own military, to defend itself, as well as to contribute to Coalition operations as it did so effectively in Iraq.” Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told journalists on September 3 that Russia was not honoring its commitments under the six-point ceasefire agreement, brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. “Russia has not yet

carried out the obligations that President Medvedev has repeatedly given as assurances to the French president," she said. "It's high time that Russia met its obligations to the ceasefire to withdraw its forces, to – if it is going to carry out additional security measures, they need to be in accordance with the Sarkozy understandings. And that is not for Russia to be setting up checkpoints along Georgian highways, standing at Georgian ports, which are international commercial entities, and interfering with normal commerce and traffic." (Civil Georgia)

SON OF LATE PRESIDENT ARRESTED FOR ALLEGED ESPIONAGE

4 September

Police arrested Tsotne Gamsakhurdia, son of late Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, at Tbilisi airport on Wednesday evening, September 3, the Georgian Public Broadcaster reported. Tsotne Gamsakhurdia, who was wanted by Georgia for alleged espionage in favor of Russia and for alleged conspiracy to overthrow the government, was reportedly arrested upon arrival from Moscow via Baku. Charges against Gamsakhurdia were brought in November 2007. On November 7, after riot police broke up anti-government demonstrations, the authorities released a video tape showing Tsotne Gamsakhurdia, who is a brother of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, the leader of the opposition Freedom Party, meeting with a diplomat from the Russian embassy in Tbilisi. In a separate taped phone conversation, Tsotne Gamsakhurdia tells his brother, Konstantine, how the opposition could lose momentum after gathering 150,000 people outside Parliament on November 2. Tsotne Gamsakhurdia's lawyer told the Georgian Public Broadcaster that her client strongly denies the charges against him and had refused to plead guilty. Similar charges were brought against Shalva Natelashvili, the leader of the opposition Labor Party, in November, but were later dropped. (Civil Georgia)

RUSSIA WILL NOT RESPOND WITH MILITARY ACTION TO STRENGTHENING OF NATO GROUP IN BLACK SEA - RUSSIAN FOREIGN

MINISTRY

5 September

Russia will not respond with military action to the strengthening of the NATO group in the Black Sea, but may raise this issue with the UN, said the Russian Foreign Ministry. "We are not talking about any possibility of military actions or anything like that," Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko told reporters on Friday commenting on the entrance of the U.S. command ship Mount Whitney in the Georgian territorial waters. Nesterenko said the stay of foreign naval vessels in the Black Sea is governed by international agreements, specifically, the 1936 convention. "If the Convention is violated, the issue should probably be considered by the United Nations and possibly other international organizations because we are talking about violations of the provisions of a well-known international agreement," said Nesterenko. If the allowed number of foreign battle ships in the Black Sea is exceeded, it should also raise concerns in the countries that have signed the Convention, he said. "Here, everything should be decided on the basis of international law, We are hoping that, if major violations of the Convention are registered, appropriate measures will be taken," he said. According to Western media reports, the Mount Whitney is a floating headquarters of the 6th Fleet of the U.S. Navy and will coordinate the work of the group of NATO ships in the Black Sea. (Interfax)

TURKISH, ARMENIAN HEADS HOLD RARE MEETING

6 September

Turkish President Abdullah Gul met with Armenian President Serge Sarkisian in Armenia Saturday in a bid to thaw relations frozen since World War I. The meeting -- at Sarkisian's office before an unprecedented World Cup qualifying soccer match between the two nations -- marked "a new symbolic start in the countries' relations," Sarkisian said. The two leaders -- who met despite heavy public opposition in each nation -- "shared opinions on how to bring stability and cooperation to the Caucasus region," including a Turkish proposal for a regional forum to encourage political and economic links with five

neighbors, Armenia among them, Gul said at a news conference with Sarkisian. Turkey proposed the forum following Russia's incursion in Georgia, which borders Armenia and Turkey. Gul is the first Turkish leader to set foot in Armenia since the former Soviet republic declared independence in 1991. Some observers believe the meeting could lead to the full diplomatic relations in the near future, Euronews reported. They have had no diplomatic relations and their border has been closed since 1993. Turkey won Saturday's World Cup qualifying match 2-0. (UPI)

RUSSIA REINFORCES OUTPOSTS IN POTI 8 September

Georgia said that Russian troops, instead of showing signs of withdrawal, had reinforced their outposts outside the port town of Poti over the weekend. "The Russian occupation force is reinforcing - rather than vacating - its checkpoints near the strategic commercial port of Poti," the Georgian government said in a statement released on September 7. It said that one checkpoint was reinforced with five armored personnel carriers (APC) and about 50 troops, while another was reinforced with one APC and about 10 troops. A Poti-based journalist working for the RFE/RL Georgian Service also reported that the checkpoints had been reinforced. She wrote on her blog that the outposts had been reinforced by six armored vehicles. The Georgian government also said that two Russian aircraft entered Georgian airspace on September 7, flying for about 45 minutes over Tskhinvali, the capital of breakaway South Ossetia, and Shatili, a region in northern Georgia close to the Russian border. The Georgian government said the Russian aircraft were "presumably on a reconnaissance mission." (Civil Georgia)

RUSSIA AGAINST INDEPENDENT EU MONITORING MISSION

8 September

Russia said on September 8 that although it was not against the presence of international monitors in Georgia, it thought "an autonomous EU monitoring mission" would be inappropriate. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said after an informal meeting of EU foreign

ministers in Avignon on September 6 that an agreement had been reached to send "an autonomous ESDP [European Security and Defence Policy] mission [to Georgia] as part of the OSCE presence in the first instance." "We believe that [the EU's autonomous mission] will lead to unnecessary fragmentation of international monitoring efforts, which currently are already underway by the UN [in the Abkhaz conflict zone] and the OSCE [in areas adjacent to South Ossetia]," Andrey Nesterenko, a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman, said on September 8. He, however, also said that Russia supported a further increase in the number of unarmed OSCE military monitors on the ground. Last week, Russia has submitted a draft resolution to the OSCE Permanent Council calling for the introduction of a civilian police operation in Georgia under the organization's aegis. According to the draft resolution, Russia is proposing the deployment of civilian police in the so-called "security zone" adjacent to South Ossetia, currently occupied by Russian forces, between the South Ossetian administrative border and the key east-west highway. Russia also said that the EU could provide human, material and financial resources for the deployment of such an OSCE civil police operation. Russia, like any other OSCE member-state, has veto-wielding power in the OSCE. (Civil Georgia)

INVESTIGATORS COMPLETE PROBE AGAINST SEVERAL HIGH-PROFILE FIGURES IN ARMENIA UNDER MARCH 1 UNREST CASE

5 September

The Armenian Special Investigations Service have completed a preliminary investigation against a number of high-profile figures charged with involvement in the public unrest in Yerevan in March, the Prosecutor General's Office told Interfax on Friday. The investigation established that, following opposition candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian's defeat in the presidential elections on February 19, parliamentarians Myasnik Malkhasian, Sasun Mikaelian, Asop Akopian, and Khachatur Sukiasian, former Armenian Foreign Minister Alexander Arzumanyan, and also Shant Arutyunian, Grigor Voskerchian, and Suren Sirunian "organized and committed

actions aimed at destabilizing the internal political situation, overthrowing the constitutional system, seizing power," the Prosecutor General's Office said. A court earlier accused Nikolai Pashinian, the editor-in-chief of the opposition newspaper Aikakan Zhamanak, and newspaper employees Amlak Ovannisian and Virab Manukian of the same actions. Akopian, Arzumanyan, Arutyunyan, Voskerchian, and Sirunian have been indicted for the organization of mass unrest and usurpation of power, and Malkhasyan and Mikaelian, in addition to these crimes, have also been charged with illegal possession and carrying of weapons. Pashinian, Sukiasyan, Ovannisian, and Manukian are on the wanted list, the Prosecutor General's Office said. As of September 5, 88 cases related to the said events against 103 people have been passed to courts. The courts have already handed down sentences on 74 cases against 86 people. Five people have been acquitted, the prosecution of one person has been dropped, five have been fined, 39 sentenced to prison terms varying from five months to six years, and 36 others received suspended sentences, it said. Meanwhile, the Armenian National Congress (ANC) led by Ter-Petrosian circulated a statement to announce that the opposition planned a rally in Yerevan on September 12. "September 12 will mark the beginning of a decisive phase of struggle against the existing regime," the Armenian National Congress said. According to the ANC, what they described as 76 political prisoners were still held in jails, 13 of them needed urgent medical aid, and the lives of some of these prisoners were in danger. (Interfax)

SAKASHVILI: GEORGIA AT THE CENTER OF WORLD POLITICS

7 September

President Saakashvili said on September 7 he was now convinced more than ever that Georgia's territorial integrity would be restored through "unimaginable" international support, which Georgia had gained after the war with Russia. In a televised meeting with farmers in the town of Telavi in the eastern region of Kakheti, Saakashvili said if before the war the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts were "forgotten" and "frozen," now they were a matter for the entire

world. "Despite Russia's expectations, Georgia has not been left alone [internationally]," he said. "The Russians prepared everything in advance: propaganda; clichés; who started [the war]; how to provide media coverage; [Russia] bribed politicians and journalists throughout the world; they have lots of money; but it was all thwarted." "These conflicts were forgotten and frozen; but today the entire world says that Georgia's territorial integrity should be protected; today the entire world states that this is their issue and not just a matter between Georgia and Russia." "Georgia has become the center of world politics," he added. "Various politicians' popularity and electability is now based on their [views] on Georgia and this is so in huge and very important countries," Saakashvili said without specifying the countries, but added "these are countries of decisive importance." He also said that "the return of our territories" and "the peaceful reunification of Georgia" were major goals. "I am convinced now as never before that Georgia's territorial integrity will be restored. It will not be an easy process. This is now a matter between furious Russia and the rest of the world," Saakashvili said. Two or three months ago some European ambassadors, he said, had been saying: 'we have no time for Georgia, we have firstly to deal with Iraq, Afghanistan.' "But just take a look at what is happening now: both [presidential] candidates in the United States say that they have two major issues: terrorism and Georgia. It [the situation in Georgia] is a major issue of internal politics in Europe, including in Britain, France; and it goes without saying that this is the case in our traditional allies in eastern Europe. And unfortunately this issue has triggered a governmental crisis in Ukraine." Saakashvili also said that apart from the USD 1 billion aid package from the United States, "as far as I know we will also receive several billion from Europe and various international institutions." "That is more than enough to keep our currency strong," Saakashvili said, adding that the financial collapse seen in Georgia in the early 1990s would not be repeated due to huge international aid. He also said that if spend appropriately, the international aid would help the country to develop its economy and infrastructure, which eventually would turn Georgia into "a developed

European country, which will be a NATO member.” “Meantime, I am absolutely sure, that Russian imperialism’s retreat will continue,” he said. “They thought the revival of [Russian] imperialism would start from Georgia.” (Civil Georgia)

AZERBAIJAN SECURITY OFFICERS ARREST 18 SUSPECTS IN BAKU MOSQUE EXPLOSION

8 September

Azeri national security officers have arrested 18 people on suspicion of staging the explosion at the Abu Bakr Mosque on August 17, the National Security Ministry (NSM) Public Relations Center said in a statement. The arrested individuals were found to be in possession of great quantities of firearms, ammunition, explosive substances, communications facilities, and various military devices, the ministry said. A set of comprehensive measures led to the information about the whereabouts of the group of Telman Abdullayev's group in Azerbaijan's Gusarsky district, the ministry's statement said. The anti-terrorist operation conducted by the NSM's "Oryol" special squadron on September 6 revealed that the suspects were hiding at one of the houses. Abdullayev and his accomplices refused to surrender and threw a grenade toward security officers. However, Abdullayev and one of his accomplices were killed in the battle, and another one was seriously wounded and died on the way to hospital, the NSM said. The explosion at the Abu Bakr mosque occurred on the evening of August 17, when somebody threw a grenade into the mosque through a window. The explosion left three people dead and about ten injured. (Interfax)

SAAKASHVILI: WE CAN PROVE GEORGIA DID NOT START WAR

9 September

President Saakashvili claimed that Tbilisi possessed “solid” evidence proving that Georgia did not start the war, as well as rebutting allegations that Georgia went into the Russian trap. Speaking at a news conference after talks with his French counterpart, Nicolas Sarkozy, after midnight on September 9, Saakashvili said

he had handed over to President Sarkozy; President of European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso and EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana in Tbilisi “very strong proof.” “I know people have been asking questions: who started the hostilities?” he said. “Everybody knows now that [charges of] genocide were fake; there was no genocide [a reference to Russian allegations that Georgia committed genocide of the South Ossetian population].” “I gave President Sarkozy, President Barroso and Javier Solana, I think, very strong proof that the Georgians had responded to a large-scale Russian invasion before the hostilities had begun,” he added, without going into the details of the evidence. “We can prove this; it is very solid proof and you will be able to assess it for yourselves,” he continued. “From now on, I don't think there will be any more speculation on whether Georgia started it or whether Georgia fell into a [Russian] trap; we did not fall into a trap; we did not start it. They [Russia] started it; they invaded us in a classic 19th and 20th century manner, and unfortunately it has happened again in the 21st century.” He also said that Georgia was willing to agree to an international investigation of what led to the war. “Any international commission to investigate it would be welcomed,” he told journalist in separate remarks after the news conference with Sarkozy. “We are in favor of a serious international investigation... I’ve heard [German] Foreign Minister [Frank-Walter] Steinmeier speaking about it; I was the first one to say that; we want maximum transparency; we are for transparency.” (Civil Georgia)

MOSCOW WANTS SOKHUMI, TSKHINVALI TO PARTICIPATE IN GENEVA TALKS

9 September

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Moscow would insist on the involvement of South Ossetian and Abkhaz representatives in international talks scheduled for October 15 in Geneva. “Participants of these discussions are not listed in the signed document [referring to the September 8 agreement between President Medvedev and President Sarkozy],” RIA Novosti quoted Lavrov as saying at a news conference on September 9. “But we have made it clear that

South Ossetia and Abkhazia should take an equal seat at the discussion table.” Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said after the talks with his French counterpart, Nicolas Sarkozy, that the agreement envisaged international discussions. (Civil Georgia)

GEORGIA UPDATES CASUALTY FIGURES 9 September

The officially registered number of Georgian citizens killed in the conflict is 295, as of September 8, according to a report released by the Georgian government. One hundred and eighty six of them are military and 109 – civilians. In a previous interim report, the number of civilian dead stood at 69. According to the report, 14 Georgian soldiers are still missing. Three journalists were also killed in the conflict – two locals and one Dutch cameraman. (Civil Georgia)

WORK ON IRAN-ARMENIA PIPELINE CONCLUDES 12 September

Construction on a natural gas pipeline from Iran to Armenia to transport 81 billion cubic feet of gas has been concluded, Armenian energy officials said Friday. Armenian Energy Minister Armen Movsisyan said the pipeline is important to secure energy supplies for his country, noting testing would commence in the coming days, Trend Capital News said. "The opening of the Iranian-Armenian pipeline will guarantee the energy safety of Armenia," he said. "Armenia will receive from 2.3 billion to 2.5 billion cubic meters of gas from Tehran through this pipeline a year." Movsisyan added the Armenian government was entering into trilateral talks with Iran and Russia on the construction of an oil refinery and examinations of a new oil pipeline. The planned \$2.5 billion Armenian refinery would have the capacity to produce around 50 million barrels of oil per year. (UPI)

RARE CLASH REPORTED IN AUTHORITARIAN TURKMENISTAN 13 September

Heavy gun battles between a radical Islamist group and security forces erupted overnight in the capital of Turkmenistan — a rare instance of violence in the authoritarian Central Asian

nation, media reports and a Western diplomat said Saturday. The diplomat said there were unconfirmed reports that at least 20 members of the security forces were killed and some of the suspected fighters had been rounded up. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media. Witnesses in the capital Ashgabat told The Associated Press there was heavy, prolonged gunfire and some casualties in the fighting, though they did not know how many. They said they saw armored personnel carriers patrolling the area and streets there were closed for much of the day. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and a foreign-based opposition Web site named Gundogar said the clash was between a radical Islamist group and security forces. Information is strictly controlled in Turkmenistan, a former Soviet republic with large gas and oil reserves. State media did not report on the incident. (AP)

MEDVEDEV SCORNFULLY ASSAULTS SAAKASHVILI 13 September

Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, who has already called President Saakashvili “a political corpse” went further and assaulted the Georgian leader on September 12 by describing him as a person “burdened with a mass of pathologies,” who “takes narcotic drugs.” Speaking at a meeting with foreign academics and journalists in Moscow on September 12, Medvedev said while answering a question on Georgia’s NATO integration: “As far as Georgia’s NATO membership is concerned, I have already told you about it, it will clearly be one of the serious destabilizing factors for NATO itself and for Caucasus. It would have been only a half-trouble if there were balanced, wise politicians in the Georgian leadership – even if they were oriented towards overseas [referring to western orientation]; but it is another matter when there is a person as a head of state, with whom we will not only have any business, but also who is totally unpredictable, a person burdened with a mass of pathologies, who, unfortunately, is in an unbalanced psychological condition, [a person] who – am sorry but – takes narcotic drugs, which is a well-known fact for a western journalists, who have interviewed him recently. Two hours

of interview under the condition of a strong narcotic influence for a head of state – it is too much, it is overdose. If our colleagues from NATO want to have this kind of leader, then go ahead.” Transcript of President Medvedev’s remarks in Russian at the meeting was posted on the Kremlin website. (Civil Georgia)

RUSSIA WITHDRAWS PEACEKEEPERS FROM POTI-SENAKI LINE

13 September

Russian peacekeepers have withdrawn their posts on the Poti-Senaki line and left Georgia's territory in accordance with the September 8 agreements reached by Russian and French Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Nicolas Sarkozy, the Russian Foreign Ministry said. It is done two days earlier than the date set by the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreements, the ministry noted. Russia expects the same strict and conscientious attitude from all concerned, first of all the entire Georgian leadership and the European Union, to the agreements. First of all, it is the EU guarantees that the Georgian side will not use force against Abkhazia and South Ossetia, return of all the Georgian troops by October 1 to their permanent deployment places and timely deployment of international observers in Georgian regions adjacent to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, including at least 200 EU observers. It will allow withdrawing the Russian peacekeeping forces from the regions in ten days after it, the ministry noted. Under the signed agreements between the Russian and French presidents, Russian peacekeeping posts on the Poti-Senaki line must be withdrawn in seven days after September 8 in the light of the EU guarantees of non-use of force against Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov explained last week that all the rest positions of Russian peacekeepers did not change in the security zone, since the European Union was to take its step -- the EU assumed the obligation to deploy at least 200 observers there by October 1. Only after it, Russia will begin to withdraw the peacekeepers, the minister explained. (Itar-Tass)

DRUG PRODUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN GROWS TWO-FOLD SINCE NATO

OPERATION

15 September

Since the beginning of the NATO operation in Afghanistan, drug production in the country has increased two and a half times, director of the Russian Drug Control Federal Service (DCFS) Viktor Ivanov said after a meeting of the CSTO Coordination Council of leaders of competent bodies on opposing illegal trafficking of drugs. “Since the beginning of the NATO operation in Afghanistan, drug production (in Afghanistan) has increased two and a half times. We feel it,” he said. “The military-political situation in Afghanistan remains complex. This is not only my opinion, this is an estimate of the world community and NATO too. Disengaging myself from the problem of combating terrorism, I want to say that drug production in this country is growing with every passing day,” the DCFS director ascertained. (Itar-Tass)

GEORGIA WORRIED OVER WINTER ENERGY SUPPLY

15 September

Despite assurances of adequate energy supplies to Georgia from Azerbaijan, analysts say concerns over Russian activity in the sector loom as winter approaches. “Georgia will not have any problems in electricity and gas supply,” said Georgian Energy Minister Aleko Khetaguri, adding any impact on energy supplies from the recent conflict with Russia was being addressed. Georgia serves as a major transportation hub for energy resources through Europe. Though it had relied heavily on Russian gas imports, the Energy Ministry said Azerbaijan has pledged to meet all of Georgia's energy demands this winter, The Georgia Times reported Monday. A move by Russian energy giant Gazprom to buy gas from Azerbaijan has some analysts concerned, however. “The Georgian government's attempt to receive gas solely from Azerbaijan conflicts with its aim to diversify its gas supply source,” Transparency International Georgia warned in March. (UPI)

AZERBAIJAN TO DOUBLE PEACEKEEPERS IN AFGHANISTAN

16 September

Azerbaijan's parliament is to adopt a law that

would double its peacekeeping contingent in Afghanistan, a senior parliamentarian said Tuesday. "A draft law on doubling the number of Azeri peacekeepers deployed in Afghanistan will be submitted for consideration during the fall session," first deputy speaker Ziyafet Askerov said. A total of 45 Azerbaijani peacekeepers are currently serving in Afghanistan as part of the International Security Assistance Force, a NATO-led security and development mission in the country. The former Soviet republic has also deployed 150 peacekeepers to Iraq since May 2003, and has been part of the NATO Partnership for Peace program since 1994. (RIA Novosti)

AZERBAIJAN PRESIDENT: "GOOD BASIS" FOR SOLVING ARMENIA CONFLICT

16 September

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on Tuesday said there was "a good basis" for resolving a long-running conflict with Armenia after talks with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev near Moscow. "It seems to us that there is now a good basis for a resolution of the conflict, which would fit with the interests of all states and would be based on the principles of international law," Aliyev said. "If the conflict is resolved in the near future, I am sure that there will be new perspectives for regional cooperation," Aliyev said. Aliyev also expressed his concern over the situation in the region following Russia's war in Georgia, saying conflict "should be resolved in a peaceful way, through dialogue, by finding common points and based on mutual respect." Aliyev visited Medvedev at his residence near Moscow for talks on last month's conflict in Georgia and on Azerbaijan's conflict with its neighbor Armenia over the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia and Azerbaijan remain in a tense stand-off over the enclave, which ethnic Armenian forces seized in the early 1990s in a war that killed nearly 30,000 people and forced another 1 million on both sides to flee their homes. A ceasefire was signed between the two former Soviet republics in 1994 but the dispute remains unresolved after more than a decade of negotiations, and shootings between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces in the region are common. (AFP)

BOMB KILLS 4 U.S.-LED TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN

17 September

A roadside bomb killed four soldiers from the U.S.-led coalition force and an Afghan national in eastern Afghanistan on Wednesday, the U.S. military said. The military did not identify the victims, but most foreign troops serving under coalition force in eastern Afghanistan are Americans. The toll is the bloodiest in a single attack in recent weeks in Afghanistan, where the al Qaeda-backed Taliban have stepped up their campaign of suicide attacks and roadside bomb blasts against the government and foreign troops backing it. At least 194 foreign soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan in 2008, the deadliest year for the foreign forces since U.S.-led troops removed the Taliban from power in 2001. The resurgent Taliban have made a come back since 2005 and have gradually extended the depth of their attacks despite the increase in number of foreign troops, now standing at more than 71,000. Separately, the guerrillas freed a member of the upper house of the parliament who they had kidnapped more than two months ago from a province to the south of Kabul, the parliament said on Wednesday. It said the release was secured following the mediation of the area's tribal chiefs, but the Taliban said the government had freed three of their jailed militants in a deal. (Reuters)

COMMANDER WANTS MORE TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN

17 September

The commander of the NATO forces in Afghanistan says more than 10,000 extra troops are needed besides the additions announced by U.S. President George Bush. Speaking to reporters in Kabul, Gen. David McKiernan said with violence up 30 percent in Afghanistan from last year, he needs more combat power and support elements, which could mean an additional 15,000 troops, the Voice of America reported. His call for more troops would be over and above the several thousand announced by Bush last week, the report said. McKiernan's comments came as U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates arrived in Kabul. The general also issued new orders to avoid civilian casualties. Currently,

there are about 33,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. McKiernan was quoted as saying senior Pentagon officials have confirmed the need, adding it was not a question of whether but when he will get the troops, which would depend on troop cuts in Iraq. McKiernan also noted there can be no "right outcome in Afghanistan without some solution to the militant sanctuaries in the tribal areas in Pakistan." He said while Pakistan has taken more action recently, it was too soon to make an assessment of the outcome. (UPI)

ABKHAZIA: RUSSIAN BASES CRUCIAL FOR SOUTH CAUCASUS PEACE

17 September

Abkhazia's leader promised to "do everything possible to have Russian armed forces put up powerful bases on the territory of Abkhazia and South Ossetia" and said this was "not only in the interests of Abkhazia and South Ossetia but in the interests of peace in the entire South Caucasus." "Very soon bases will start being set up, a treaty [to that effect] will be signed very soon. We have come to an agreement on the quantitative aspect as well, the quantity will be sufficient to stop anyone wanting to do or thinking of doing anything similar to the events in Tskhinvali on August 8," Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh told a news conference in Moscow. South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity said the planned bases would shield the two republics from possible Georgian attacks. "There will be as many [bases] as needed, and the conditions that will be provided there will be as favorable as possible so that the soldiers and officers who are on our territory feel at home," he said. (Interfax)

ABKHAZIA, S OSSETIA TO APPLY FOR CIS, CSTO MEMBERSHIP

17 September

Abkhazia and South Ossetia plan to apply for membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), Abkhazian President Sergei Bagapsh said. "Prospects are very good. We will apply for membership in these organizations and hope for a positive decision," Bagapsh told a press conference at Itar-Tass on Wednesday. "I think our membership in the CIS and the CSTO, and especially in the Russia-Belarus Union State, is what we all need," he said. South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity said, "This is another stage in the development of our states. We will strengthen these relations, but this will take time." Asked whether South Ossetia would join Russia, Kokoity said South Ossetia planned to join Russia by way of integration. "South Ossetia intends to join Russia. South and North Ossetia are a part of Russia. We have never made a secret out of this," Kokoity said. At the same time, he noted, "We will not give up our independence." "What happened today vividly demonstrates Russia's determination to strengthen relations. Russia has no intention to annex other territories as others do," he said. "We will build such relations with Moscow that will facilitate the integration of our peoples through different forms of integration, such as the removal of the border, and other forms," Kokoity said. "We are very grateful to the Russian people," the South Ossetian president said. (Itar-Tass)