

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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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.

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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.

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THE EU'S CONFLICT PREVENTION FAILURE IN GEORGIA

Nicu Popescu

On September 30, the EU fact-finding mission published its report on the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008. The report argues that Russia is responsible for a number of illegal acts in Georgia's conflict zones, but that the escalation to large-scale hostilities on 7 August came following Georgia's decision to launch an attack on South Ossetia. Importantly, the report is also critical of the international community's behavior in the run up to the war. Given the prominent role assumed by the EU during and after the war, as well as the broader ambitions of the EU to be a 'global force for good', emphasizing multilateralism and conflict-prevention, it is worth assessing the EU's performance as a security actor in the run up to the conflict.

BACKGROUND: In August 2008 a short, but full-fledged, war between Russia and Georgia managed to shake the foundations of the post-Cold War security order. Relations between Russia and the West hit their lowest point in over two decades. But the war also constituted an impetus for more soul-searching among the main European security actors.

Since 2003 the EU has deployed an increasing number of instruments to promote conflict settlement in the South Caucasus. It appointed a special envoy to the region, tried to join the Russia-led conflict-settlement formats in South Ossetia as an observer and financed the rehabilitation of the conflicts zones around Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Over the years, the EU spent over EUR 30 million before 2008 on post-conflict reconstruction around the conflict zones of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but failed to develop a political and security strategy vis-a-vis these conflicts. The EU spent money on the conflict zones in the hope of promoting reconciliation between the parties to the conflicts, but also to become more influential in the conflict resolution efforts.

However, the EU has been quite divided on its potential engagement in the South Caucasus.

Some EU states feared that a greater EU role in the South Caucasus would complicate EU-Russia relations and wanted to avoid that nearly at any cost. Russia clearly opposed a greater EU role in conflict resolution. This internal and external opposition to a greater EU involvement in conflict resolution in Georgia resulted in a number of policy failures by the EU. The EU report, written by Heidi Tagliavini, refers to some of them *en passant*: "over the years there was a gradual increase in European involvement in Georgia, which may be called forthcoming in terms of economic aid, politically friendly on the bilateral side, cooperative but cautious on contentious political issues and ... mostly distanced [from] sensitive security issues. A good case in point was the European reluctance to take over the Border Monitoring Mission on the Caucasus range facing Russia, after Russia had vetoed the hitherto OSCE engagement in 2004."

Behind this carefully calibrated phrase lies the story of EU's failure to engage in conflict resolution. In late 2004, Russia vetoed the extension of the mandate of the 150-strong OSCE border monitoring mission in Georgia. Tbilisi invited the EU to take over the



(AP/Georgy Abdaladze)

international monitoring of the Georgia-Russian border. Back in 2005 France (which later led the peacekeeping effort in 2008) led the 'Nyet' camp with the diplomatic support of Spain, Italy, Greece and partly Germany against EU involvement in the messy Caucasian affairs. As a result, instead of the requested 150 monitors, the EU only sent 3 persons as part of a so-called EU Special Representative's Border Support Team. The team was later extended to 12 persons. This clearly was the most important EU failure to deploy conflict prevention mechanisms in Georgia and engage in conflict settlement.

Throughout 2007-2008 the EU also tried to beef up the team with two police and two border liaison officers who were supposed to develop an institutionalized dialogue with Abkhazia and

South Ossetia on police and border management related issues. Internal foot-dragging by some EU member states, concerned that this would irritate Russia (especially Greece), and subsequently the August 2008 war, disrupted the process of extending the EU border support team.

IMPLICATIONS: With the benefit of hindsight, one cannot help wonder whether the war would have occurred had there been a strong international presence on the ground (read an EU monitoring mission). Chances are it would not have.

The breakout of the war demonstrated the inadequacy of EU conflict prevention and management policies in the region. Despite significant funding disbursed to mitigate the consequences of the conflicts, EU assistance could not replace a political and security strategy for conflict prevention. The deterioration of the security situation on the ground quickly invalidated the potentially stabilizing effect of EU financial efforts to promote long-term conflict resolution. The EU's long term approach to conflict resolution simply did not keep pace and was overturned by a rapid deterioration of the security situation on the ground, led by an ever more assertive Russia and a new government in Georgia that sought to unfreeze the conflict resolution processes.

In the end, the EU paid twice. After avoiding the deployment of 150 monitors in Georgia in 2005 in order not to irritate Russia, the EU ended up deploying close to 300 monitors in 2008 and paying close to EUR 1 billion to the international fund for post-conflict rehabilitation of Georgia. The war of 2008 became one of the worst crises in EU-Russia relations since the end of the Cold War.



(AP)

Thus the EU's involvement in Georgia's conflicts is a clear-cut case of failure to use conflict-prevention strategies, one of the EU's key declared foreign policy principles. The European security strategy also says that the EU "should be ready to act before a crisis occurs. Conflict prevention and threat prevention cannot start too early."

A number of key lessons stem from the EU's conflict prevention failure prior to the August 2008 conflict. First, 'not irritating Russia' is not a policy. Security crises in the neighborhood such as in Georgia end up worsening EU relations with both Russia and its neighbors. The EU has to do what it takes to contribute to stability in the neighborhood, hence creating a basis for good relations with Russia as well as with the EU's Eastern neighbors. Ignoring conflicts makes matters worse for all actors and processes involved, including the EU-Russia partnership. Conflicts need to be managed and prevented, and "avoiding irritation" is a poor excuse for inaction.

Second, it may be late to pursue conflict prevention in Georgia (though the EU can still help prevent new outbreaks of violence), but it

is not late to engage in serious conflict prevention and/or management measures in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria and Crimea. In the last two, there is little danger of war, and the EU's preferred strategies of conflict prevention through socio-economic instruments are just the right thing to do.

Third, the EU monitoring mission in Georgia will have to stay engaged for the long term. International peacekeepers have been deployed in Cyprus for 35 years leaving room for wounds to heal and bona fide negotiations to be conducted.

CONCLUSIONS: The EU may not be to blame for the war in Georgia. However, some stock-taking and lessons for the EU as a conflict resolution actor are indispensable if the EU is to fulfill its ambition of being a foreign policy actor. A key EU failure in the South Caucasus was its inability to play any meaningful security or diplomatic role in Georgia's conflicts. Fear of irritating Russia by some EU member states prevented the EU from acting as a force for conflict prevention in Georgia's conflicts. The EU deployed some financial instruments to contribute to conflict settlement, but failed to produce a coherent political approach to the conflicts. Its failure to act – even in the field of soft security, such as through deploying border monitors – contributed to an environment where war became a distinct possibility.

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TAJIKISTAN REACTS TO INCREASING UNREST IN AFGHANISTAN

Dmitry Shlapentokh

The situation in Afghanistan is becoming increasingly grave, at least from the perspective of the Western alliance. The Central Asian states bordering Afghanistan, Tajikistan being a prime example, seem increasingly alarmed, implying that they may put their hopes to Russia for security guarantees. Tajikistan nevertheless recently demonstrated that its elite does not trust anyone, Russia included, and is possibly looking for other ways of dealing with the Taliban threat.

BACKGROUND: Even if the U.S. and its allies would increase their numbers in Afghanistan, these numbers would still be smaller than that of the Soviet troops in the Soviet-Afghan War; and even these numbers were not enough to exercise efficient control over the entire territory. The attempt to replace the Western forces with the Afghan national army does not seem very promising either. The problem is not so much the numbers involved but the Afghan troops' sense of identity, as most of the soldiers do not yet fully perceive themselves as citizens of Afghanistan primarily, with regional or ethnic identities often paramount.

Those who point to Iraq as an example should remember that even that national army plays quite a limited role; moreover, Afghanistan is much more ethnically divided than Iraq. All of this implies that Western forces cannot just be replaced by Afghan forces with a few Western advisors. At best, the Afghan army could be an auxiliary force and Western forces would still need to stay in Afghanistan for many years, if not indefinitely. Neither the U.S. public, nor the Congress appear inclined to accept such arrangements. This is certainly the reason why the request by Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to send "more U.S. troops" and engage in a "rapid

increase in the size and capability of the Afghan army" faces increasing opposition in Congress. Both Democrats and Republicans increasingly wish to see American troops out of Afghanistan.

The prospect of a Taliban victory has also clearly alarmed members of the Russian elite who saw problems not only in Central Asia but also in the Caucasus, which has undergone what one observer termed "Talibanization." This has pushed Russia to build forces in Central Asia; engage in military exercises with China; and, recently, provide the U.S. with the ability to transfer military cargo through Russian territory. The Central Asian states, and especially those that border Afghanistan such as Tajikistan, could be expected to cling together and request Russian protection in order to brace for a possibly quite dangerous future. Still, in a recent move Tajikistan demonstrated that its elite does not trust anyone, Russia included, and is possibly looking for other ways of dealing with the Taliban threat.

President Imomali Rakhmon has engaged in tense negotiations with Russia regarding a Russian military base in Tajikistan. Judging by available information, Rakhmon has clearly expressed doubts that the base, and implicitly the entire Russian contingent in the country,



Ilmars Znotins/AFP/Getty Images

would protect the country in case of a crisis. Not only has he demanded a drastic increase in payments for the base but also increased control for Dushanbe over “the weapons and military hardware,” which are under Russian control. He demanded Russian reassurances that in the case of political strife similar to that which occurred in the Tajik Civil War, Russian forces would come to his aid. It is clear that Rakhmon is unsure that the Russian forces would be of value as defense forces and, if they were to depart, it would not be of much concern to him. Such efforts to reduce Russian influence have been accompanied with recent legislation making the Tajik language the only official language of the country.

IMPLICATIONS: Why is Rakhmon skeptical about Russia’s potential role in defending Tajikistan against possible Taliban attacks and general instability? One could possibly understand Rakhmon through comparing with the position of Afghan President Hamid Karzai who has a cultural outlook quite similar to that of Rakhmon.

Since the middle of George W. Bush’s presidency, Karzai had taken steps that hardly increased his popularity among the U.S. public

and Congress. With the advent of the Obama administration, Karzai stepped up his criticism of the Allied forces for air strikes that led to numerous civilian casualties; he does not seem overly concerned either with U.S. accusations of regime corruption and rigged elections, or the possibility that the U.S. could withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.

Karzai may well conclude that the U.S. will eventually depart anyway, and the West’s ability to subdue the

Taliban is increasingly questionable in spite of its military preponderance. In this situation, he needs to increase his support base elsewhere, including among Afghans or at least large segments of them. And he appears to believe he has a chance to do this only if he positions himself as appearing to be more than a Western puppet.

Rakhmon might well follow the same line of thought. Watching events in the North Caucasus, he may have concluded that while Russia could easily defeat Georgia in a regular war, Russia has not been able to sustain long anti-guerilla warfare in the North Caucasus where Kadyrov-style Chechenization is increasingly challenged by the rebels. Russia was also unable to handle insurgency in Afghanistan in the past. Rakhmon knows that Russian isolationist nationalism is quite strong in the country and that a considerable part of the Russian public assumes that Russia should not be engaged in protracted guerilla conflict either in the Caucasus or in Central Asia. He is also aware that some Russians believe that Russia could well build new borders and insulate itself from these regions completely. In addition, he likely believes that the Taliban will

stay concerned with the Americans and would hardly turn to the North.

Finally, Rakhmonov also believes that Russia could play a double game and might seek to utilize its military presence to replace him. He likely expects the use of Islamic opposition against him, which would explain recent Tajik press reports of “Russian citizens” being killed by Tajik law enforcement in some regions of Tajikistan. Thus, Rakhmon seems to calculate that distancing himself from Russia would not be a great loss, while it could bring to him the benefits of consolidating his position both as a national leader and as a “good Muslim”. This would be helpful both in managing domestic politics and in the case of a Taliban victory.

CONCLUSIONS: While the situation in Afghanistan has become increasingly ominous neither the American public, nor its Western allies, have demonstrated any intention to close ranks. Even the elites of the Central Asian

states are becoming increasingly skeptical about the ability of the U.S. and Russia to stand against the Taliban threat. They are afraid – and this fear is apparently shared by Rakhmon’s government – that both the U.S. and Russia could well strike a deal with the insurgents behind their backs and at their expense. Increasingly, they either ask for assurance that they will not be left in the cold, or demonstrate their independence from both Russia and the West as to ensure their support domestically and possibly among the very same Islamists against whom they supposedly engage in the war. All of this hardly bodes well for Afghan war, which above all needs solidarity and understanding that success could be achieved only after a very long stay in the country.

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New Book:

The Guns of August 2008

Edited By Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr

M.E. Sharpe, New York, June 2009,
290pp

This book is designed to present the facts about the events of August 2008 along with comprehensive coverage of the background to those events. It brings together a wealth of expertise on the South Caucasus and Russian foreign policy, with contributions by Russian, Georgian, European, and American experts on the region.

GENERAL McCRYSTAL'S CONFIDENTIAL ASSESSMENT: A CASE FOR REDEFINING VICTORY IN AFGHANISTAN

Roman Muzalevsky

A confidential assessment of the situation in Afghanistan by the head of NATO troops, General Stanley McChrystal, points to a light in the dark tunnel that can only be sustained if President Barack Obama approves McChrystal's request for up to 40,000 additional U.S. troops in Afghanistan. McChrystal's proposed options might be correct and timely, but they are also an indication of the allies' inability to achieve strategic victory in Afghanistan. In the circumstances of mismatched original ends and currently available means, as well as decreasing domestic support for the war, the proposed strategy appears a mere attempt to maintain an acceptable level of security on the ground, where narcotics cultivation has increased but the probability of strategic victory has declined. It may be time to redefine victory in Afghanistan.

BACKGROUND: After 9/11 the U.S. and its NATO allies invaded Afghanistan to destroy Al-Qaida, demolish the Taliban regime, and reconstruct Afghanistan as a secure and accountable state in the international system. That a strategic victory in Afghanistan, involving reconstruction of major state institutions, is currently unachievable without substantial troops is understandable. But failing attempts to assure political and military gains over the course of eight years now are not.

McChrystal's assessment, sent to Defense Secretary Robert Gates on August 30 and currently under review by the Obama administration, and leaked in the *Washington Post* on September 21, put it well: "Failure to gain the initiative and reverse insurgent momentum in the near-term (next 12 months) - while Afghan security capacity matures - risks an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible." In short, "while the situation is serious" - says McChrystal - "success is still achievable." Hence a request for up to 40,000 additional U.S. troops, increased focus on civilian-military interaction, and

protection of civilians. McChrystal envisions the Afghan army and police to be 240,000 and 160,000 strong respectively, but he needs more troops to achieve that, as well.

The U.S. had already approved deploying 17,700 troops and 4,000 trainers to Afghanistan early in 2009. Although there are now 65,000 U.S. and 39,000 allied troops in the country, no significant political and military gains have been achieved. Hamid Karzai's rigged August 20 elections have undermined the legitimacy of allied efforts. Corruption has been rampant. Support for the war has been on the decline. A recent CNN poll showed that 58 percent of Americans opposed the war and 39 percent were in favor. A case in point: 2009 marked the year of the biggest number of U.S. casualties in Afghanistan since the war started in 2001, with 48 U.S. troops killed in August.

The problem is further complicated by the drug industry in Afghanistan. A recent CRS report states that drug revenues of US\$70-100 million per year constitute almost half the Taliban annual income. Drug and war lords, terrorists

and officials continue to benefit from this revenue stream, undermining the campaign in Afghanistan.

U.S. political circles recognize the gravity of the situation portrayed by the military, but they are also adamant to find a formula of success in Afghanistan. President Obama, who staked his election campaign on Afghanistan issues, noted: "There is no immediate decision pending on resources. You have to get the strategy right and then make the determination about resources." Vice President Joe Biden called any discussion on future troop deployments premature. The Head of the U.S. Central Command General David Petraeus, however, has backed McChrystal's assessment. Admiral Mullen emphasized that the deployment of more troops was "probable." Initially concerned that U.S. might be viewed as an occupier, Defense Secretary Gates now seems to agree

that additional troops might be required.

IMPLICATIONS: The NATO allies set out to complete what now seems to be unachievable: destroying Al Qaida, the Taliban regime and insurgency, and rebuilding a secure and legitimate state of Afghanistan. While partially effective in dealing with the Taliban in urban areas and destroying Al Qaida, the allies have failed to defeat the insurgency in the tribal regions. The Taliban enjoy support among numerous tribes in Pakistan and Afghanistan who feel alienated by the Karzai regime and detached from policies of the allies. The allies enjoy a technological superiority but lack human intelligence and local popular support.

McChrystal's strategy seeks to extend a protective shield to the Afghans rather than continue unleashing a sword against the Taliban. McChrystal stressed: "Pre-occupied

with protection of our own forces, we have operated in a manner that distances us – physically and psychologically – from the people we seek to protect... The insurgents cannot defeat us militarily; but we can defeat ourselves." The strategy aims to enlist the support of the indigenous population, but corruption and lack of legitimacy of the Karzai government stand in the way of cornering the Taliban



Stanley McChrystal

in the struggle for loyalties.

Not much, at least in the press, has been said about the Northern Distribution Networks (NDN) and its role in the U.S. and NATO strategy in Afghanistan. As supply routes via Pakistan are threatened, deliveries of supplies through NDN in Eurasia are critical, and not only from a military perspective. The economic, trade, and strategic implications of the NDN for Afghanistan and Eurasia are far-reaching and have the potential to reinforce the military aspect of the campaign in Afghanistan, paving the way for an array of strategic gains in the region.

In the end, McChrystal's strategy may herald an impending triumph or create conditions where subsequent force deployments pull the U.S. into quagmire, making the Taliban and Al Qaida, at least from the perspective of informational and ideological propaganda, the true masters of warcraft and strategy (recall their claims on defeating the British and Soviet empires in Afghanistan). The Obama administration faces a number of challenges complicating its agenda in Afghanistan, from doubts of some within the Democratic Party on the issue of additional deployments to accusations of the Republicans for the lack of resolution to do more sooner rather than later. NATO allies are not ready to fully commit either. Britain, Germany and France called for timetables for Afghanistan to assume a greater role in its own security. Political circles in Poland, perhaps spurred by the U.S. decision to cancel the deployment of anti-missile defense systems on Polish territory, have called for talks on the future of its mission in Afghanistan.

Currently, the following three likely options are available for the Obama administration. It can pursue McChrystal's new strategy emphasizing additional troops, civilian-military cooperation, and increased civilian protection. It can continue the failing strategy with existing troop levels in the effort to delay failure or victory for better timing and political circumstances. Lastly, it can choose to withdraw from Afghanistan, but only with face-saving involving substantial gains to the Taliban in return for the latter's denial of sanctuary to Al-Qaeda and moderation of Taliban political rule. On balance, redefining victory in Afghanistan might be a quicker, though not necessarily better, way out.

CONCLUSIONS: The allies have partially succeeded in defeating Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, but have failed to undermine the resurgent Taliban and Al Qaida sanctuaries in Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas. They have also failed to build robust government security forces and attain a strategic victory. It is in this context of limited means that the allies may be forced to redefine victory yet still win the war. McChrystal's strategy in Afghanistan makes sense, but only as far as it matches ends and means and has a clear definition of what an acceptable victory in Afghanistan for US and NATO really is. The next months will show whether this is the case, provided Obama chooses to implement the new proposal.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Roman Muzalevsky is an international affairs and security analyst on the Caucasus and Central Asia. He is also Program Manager at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute.

ONE YEAR LATER: GEORGIAN POLITICAL REFORM AND THE WEST AFTER THE 2008 WAR

Julie A. George

The human suffering and acrimony that accompanied the August 2008 war was accompanied by constructive criticism. One month after the cessation of violence and less than a year after the violent dispersal of protesters in Tbilisi by Georgian police, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Schaeffer encouraged President Saakashvili to “strengthen your democracy.” After much rhetoric and some reforms, much remains to be done. Western support has waned somewhat since the 2008 war and the allocation of reconstruction funds that followed. This change, however, reflects a redirection of U.S. foreign policy, Western economic turmoil, and great game politics with Russia rather than Western disappointment with President Saakashvili’s domestic policies.

BACKGROUND: That a Western entity such as NATO would link Georgia’s domestic political circumstances with the 2008 violence might be surprising. Although some link Saakashvili’s narrowing political circle with the August events in Tskhinvali, most analysts concede that the war’s precursors are far more complex than stagnant democratization in Georgia. The Western democratic admonitions of Saakashvili, rather, reflect an evolving discomfort with the trajectory of Georgian politics since shortly after the Rose Revolution, when the Georgian government began its program of consolidating executive authority by enlarging presidential power over the parliament and judiciary. In February 2008, Saakashvili announced that he hoped to extend parliamentary terms from four to five years to match those of the presidential office, as well as to expand the circumstances under which the president could dissolve the parliament.

The government also centralized its influence over its only de facto Autonomous Republic, Ajara, making the regional executive an appointee of the President and subjecting all legislation passed by the regional legislature (an elected body) to central scrutiny. The

government restructured the system of local governance, in some ways centralizing political power in the provinces. Yet the same reforms also granted district governments their own power to tax and offered budgetary discretion.

Georgian civil society groups questioned the press freedoms available to the media, protested human rights violations by the powerful and judicially protected political elite, and contested the balloting of the 2008 presidential and parliamentary contests. The November 2007 protests that sparked government violence accompanied a government crackdown on Imedi television, the mouthpiece of the media mogul and opposition figure Badri Patarkatsishvili. Accused of spreading dangerous rumors and fomenting sedition, the station lost its license for political programming. It was permitted to go on the air later, but no longer airs critical content. The only stations that currently reflect the views of the political opposition, Kavkasia and Maestro, are private entities, have had trouble maintaining their licenses, and broadcast largely to a Tbilisi audience.

Finally, there is a general disquiet regarding the relationship between the judiciary and the state



(AP)

apparatus, particularly with the leniency offered interior ministry defendants in the high-profile murder investigation of Sandro Girgvliani. This perception lingers to the current day, particularly with the September 2009 amnesty of the convicted killers three years after their sentencing, halving their already controversially “short” sentences. While the regime has avoided overt crackdowns of the sort that occurred in November 2007 during opposition rallies in downtown Tbilisi from April to June 2009, there were some smaller skirmishes between protesters and police.

At the institutional level, however, some decentralizing reforms have been made, although few have occurred since the war. Saakashvili rescinded his proposal to further weaken parliament and even suggested some roll back of presidential power (although this change is still to be realized). The May 2008 parliamentary elections marked the decrease of the voting threshold for representation from 7% to 5%, a concession made after the November 2007 government crackdown. In his September 2009 U.N. address, Saakashvili announced a

reform that would permit the direct election of mayors, which would further decentralize power. As a result, Saakashvili’s key rival, Irakli Alasania, has announced his candidacy for mayor of Tbilisi. Saakashvili also has set up a democratization task force, but little of constitutional import has changed since the war.

IMPLICATIONS: If one examines popular perceptions of civil liberties, there are reasons to believe that the fragility of Georgian democracy might be overstated. [In a recent analysis](#), Hans Gutbrod and Koba

Turmanidze measured an increasing trend from 2007 to 2009 showing that over 70 percent of Georgians affirm that democratic institutions are the most appropriate mechanisms for governance and that they feel comfortable engaging in political speech. Those numbers have remained stable. Although their poll also highlights some areas for growth, Gutbrod and Turmanidze conclude that the mass level political culture is becoming more, not less, democratically oriented.

Recent statements by representatives of the EU, the U.S. government, and the United Kingdom all pledged support for Georgia’s independence and territorial integrity, cited economic support for its continued development, and encouraged the leadership to invigorate democracy.

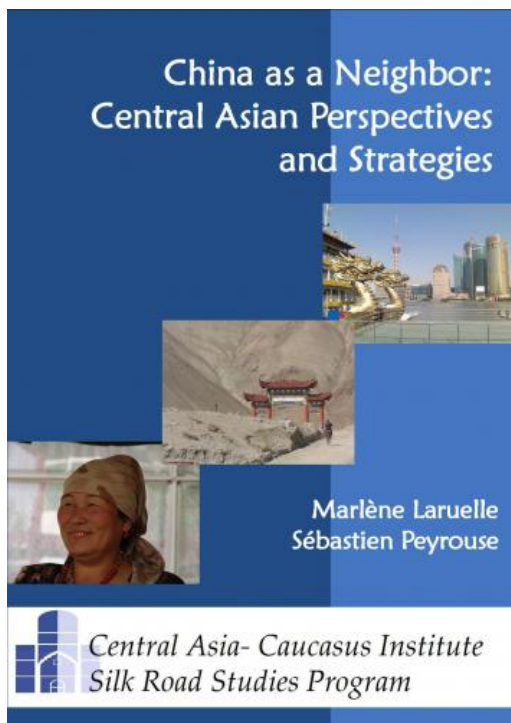
Yet, outside the admittedly remote possibility of EU membership in the very distant future, the West is dangling very weak carrots and brandishing fewer sticks for political change. The vast monies pledged for reconstruction after the war will not be renewed, and while the West continues to proffer aid in the post-recession era, it does not do so in amounts akin

to those after the Rose Revolution or 2008 war. The Georgian economy, in the meantime, languishes: FDI in Georgia is down 80 percent and unemployment, already a problem prior to the war, is increasing. NATO membership, a powerful motivator before the April 2008 Membership Action Plan rejection, is increasingly unlikely after the war with Russia. The U.S. presidential transition has shifted that country's priorities away from the unabashed support for Georgia during the Bush years. And Russia's regional influence, particularly its natural resource domination in Europe, makes the politics of befriending Georgia an increasingly risk-acceptant endeavor for all Western countries, including the U.S.

CONCLUSIONS: The political and security environment after the war, coupled with the economic downturn and increasing Western isolationism has decreased the Western engagement in terms of real tangible pressure. In the early days of the 2009 opposition rallies, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden issued a statement congratulating Saakashvili on his

“measured response” and for not resorting to the tactics of November 2007. That demonstrates rather low expectations and may be an indicator of what Western players have come to anticipate from Georgia. They seem to be waiting for 2013 and the next election, if not different economic and political circumstances of their own. Coming to terms with its own political ambitions within its difficult geopolitical environment may be just what is needed for Georgia, however. With an active opposition and a population that craves good governance and responsible leadership, it might be that Western support for specific administrations only prolongs the pain of transition rather than furthering democratic consolidation.

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FIELD REPORTS

TAJIK PRESIDENT APPOINTS DAUGHTER AS DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER

Alexander Sodiqov

On September 29, Tajik president Emomali Rakhmon appointed his daughter, Ozoda Rakhmonova, as the country's deputy minister of foreign affairs. Ms. Rakhmonova studied economics and politics at the Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and the University of Maryland at Baltimore, and worked for two years in the Tajik embassy to the United States as culture and education attaché. After returning to Tajikistan in September 2007, the then 27-year-old Ozoda was named head of the Tajik foreign ministry's consular department and worked there until the latest promotion. Ms. Rakhmonova is married to Djamoliddin Nuraliev, who in 2008 was appointed as Tajikistan's deputy finance minister, at the age of 30 becoming the youngest senior government member in the country.

Ozoda Rakhmonova's appointment has been interpreted widely as demonstrating the president's resolve to further consolidate power in Tajikistan in the hands of his family members. Earlier this year, the Tajik leader's 22-year-old son, Rustam Emomali, was named deputy chief of Tajikistan's youth union. Following the appointment, Mr. Emomali who had previously been known mostly for his passion for soccer, racing cars and high speed driving, began to participate in major government meetings and high-level international summits, a privilege not extended previously to the leaders of the youth union. This has led media and analysts in the country to speculate that Emomali Rakhmon was preparing his son for succeeding him upon his retirement.

It is most likely that Emomali Rakhmon will run for re-election in 2013 and will easily get another seven-year term in office. However, in 2020 Rakhmon will have to step down unless he amends the constitution for a third time. According to Tajik political analyst Abdulazim Abdulvahobov, in an autocratic society like Tajikistan, the son of the president automatically becomes a potential candidate for the presidency. Therefore, it is no coincidence that president Rakhmon has given his son a position in the youth union, a political organization that can nominate candidates for parliamentary and presidential elections. Tajik opposition journalist Dodojon Atovulloev, who lives in exile in Russia, argues that president Rakhmon has long been looking for a person within his family who could succeed him. According to Atovulloev, the recent promotions of Ozoda Rakhmonova and Rustam Emomali to high government posts support this point.

Other analysts have argued that economic rather than political motives have led members of the Tajik president's family to seek positions in the government. Professor Christopher Bluth, a Central Asia expert at the University of Leeds in the UK, believes that it is common for Central Asian leaders to "try to make as much money as possible out of their position as long as they can." Bluth suggested that for the children of authoritarian leaders in the region "it is not a matter of being good at their jobs, their main role is to remain in there for a long time and make as much money as possible."

Economic motivations can indeed serve as an explanation for the recent promotions of President

Rakhmon's children, given especially that other children in the family already have serious business interests. The Tajik president's first daughter, Firuza, owns several boutiques in the capital. Another daughter, Tahmina, owns a bank, a cotton processing factory, a wine production plant, and a large supermarket in Dushanbe, while her husband owns a large construction company.

Whether pursuing political ambitions or economic gains, the Tajik leader's children are no different from the children of other presidents in Central Asia. In Uzbekistan, for example, President Islam Karimov's daughter, Gulnara Karimova, had

worked as a deputy foreign minister before she became Uzbekistan's permanent representative to the United Nations office in Geneva in 2008. Ms. Karimova is also a high-end jewellery designer and a singer. The daughter of the Kazakh President, Dariga Nazarbayeva, heads a political party which in 2006 merged with the ruling party Otan. Still, president Rakhmon's children should be very careful when seeking top jobs and lucrative businesses to avoid generating resentment both within the government and among the wider population.

ALASANIA'S CANDIDATURE FOR TBILISI MAYOR'S OFFICE HINTS AT HIGHER AMBITIONS

Oscar Pardo Sierra

This summer President Saakashvili offered the opposition the possibility of directly electing all mayors of Georgia, a promise made in 2004, shortly after the Rose Revolution. This is especially relevant for the capital Tbilisi, where until now the mayor has been elected indirectly by a city council, similar to the British model with the exception of London. Obviously, controlling the government of the capital is an important political asset in the Georgian context. Saakashvili himself was head of the Tbilisi Assembly (Tbilisi City Council) between 2002 and 2003, a post that gave him a powerful platform to mobilize resources and social relevance for organizing the so-called Rose Revolution in November 2003.

The decision of allowing the direct election of mayors can be understood in the context of the failed protests held in Tbilisi between April and June this year, and as a Presidential concession to those opposition parties that look for a compromise with the governing elites. In this context, Irakli Alasania announced on September 22 that he would run for Tbilisi Mayor in elections expected to be held in May 2010. Alasania, a former close ally of

Saakashvili who stepped down as Georgia's ambassador to the UN in December 2008, joined the opposition in early 2009, heading the Alliance for Georgia with two other political parties and forming his own party, the Free Democrats. He has become a prominent opposition figure and kept a moderate profile during the protests otherwise largely demanding Saakashvili's resignation. As part of his strategy, the option of becoming a directly elected mayor of Tbilisi is an obvious move which to some extent replicates Saakashvili's pre-Rose Revolution strategy.

The next presidential elections are due in 2013, and the opposition has failed to obtain the president's resignation or early presidential elections, in spite of Georgia's defeat in the August war, complaints of autocratic practices and the world economic crisis. In that context, the option of holding the office of Tbilisi's mayor during three years until the presidential elections is clearly a strategic and clever move. In addition, Tbilisi is considered the opposition stronghold, where Saakashvili was defeated in the 2008 presidential elections. Crucially, too, the democratic accountability of any

election process in the capital is higher than in the rest of the country given the concentration of NGOs and international observers and diplomats there. This is extremely important for the opposition, as the population of Tbilisi is to a great extent critical of Saakashvili and have access to media that is not under government control or influence. Maestro TV and Kavkasia TV, both private cable TV stations critical of the current government, can only be viewed in Tbilisi. As an illustration of the difficulties experienced in public access to different sources of information, when the opposition blocked the main streets of the capital for two months and held regular demonstrations and rallies, some of them quite large, residents of some regions of the country were unaware of these facts. In essence, controlling the capital will certainly be an important political asset for any potential candidate ahead of the next presidential elections.

Finally, the candidature of Irakli Alasania for the Tbilisi mayor's office may have important implications for future Georgian politics. Elections to the mayor's office will probably be a matter between the official candidate and Alasania, given

the reluctance of the rest of the opposition to compromise with the government. At the same time, Alasania has enough resources and international connections, especially in the West. A victory in Tbilisi and his potential for winning the next presidential elections would not be catastrophic for the government either, as he prefers an accommodating and compromising stance, in contrast to the more radical opposition factions. In addition, Saakashvili cannot constitutionally run for a third presidential mandate. Thus, given his profile, Alasania can prove capable of providing some continuity to the Saakashvili regime, along with international respectability. Importantly, he would also be in a position to grant certain security guarantees to the main leaders of Saakashvili's United National Movement against political reprisals from certain factions of the opposition and those who have been losers in the sometimes radical reforms and changes undertaken during Saakashvili's time in power. What remains to be seen is whether Alasania manages to secure a sufficient level of popularity among the Georgian public.

TAJIK PRESIDENT PROMOTES ENERGY-SAVING LAMPS

Suhrob Majidov

In April 2009, Tajikistan's President Emomali Rakhmon proposed to the people of his country to switch from tungsten bulbs to energy-saving lamps. On April 27, the President issued a decree "On additional measures on economical use of energy and energy-saving", calling for a compulsory switch to energy-saving lamps by October 1. To promote the idea and expedite the process, the Government of Tajikistan adopted a decree in August, banning the import of bulbs to Tajikistan starting October 1. Tajikistan annually experiences severe electricity shortages during the winter season, lacking 4.5 billion kilowatt/hour. President Rakhmon thinks the new initiative will allow the country to save up to 3.12 billion kilowatt/hour a year. At first glance,

the President's idea has many advantages. However, not all aspects of the campaign are well-considered.

Primarily, the initiative does not pay enough attention to the fact that the much advertised energy-saving lamps are six times more expensive than bulbs. In Dushanbe, one can buy a bulb for 5-25 U.S. cents, and the price for energy-saving lamps varies from US\$1.5 to 10. With an average salary of US\$80 per month, the new lamps may become a disaster for the budgets of many Tajik families. Perhaps aiming to address this problem, during the holy month of Ramadan President Rakhmon donated up to eight energy-saving lamps each to 360 low-income families in Dushanbe. Moreover, he

appealed to the people of Tajikistan to give alms during Ramadan not in money, but in energy-saving lamps. In any case, while there are still some bulbs available in the markets, people do not seem willing to buy expensive lamps.

The financial aspect of the issue is closely related to the quality and origin of production of the newly introduced lamps. The Tajik market is currently full of lamps produced in China and Turkey. The former are cheaper and seem to burn out faster; the latter are more expensive and supposedly last longer. As was stated by the President, Tajik authorities purchased two million energy-saving lamps from China, at a total cost of over US\$3.5 million. In connection to this it was stated that, in the long-term perspective, Tajikistan will open two plants producing energy-saving lamps, one of which will be assisted by Russia. Thus, it is expected that by 2011 bulbs will not be used in Tajikistan at all.

Another aspect of the issue is the efficiency of the energy-saving lamps. Viktor Lyadskiy, head of the Enterprises and Cooperatives Association of the city of Chkalovsk, estimated that on average, a house or an apartment would need 8-12 lamps. Considering the fact that Chinese lamps need to be changed three times a year, an average family would have to spend about US\$ 50 a year on these lamps. Nonetheless, he estimates that using the new lamps saves up to 80 percent of the electricity used by the old ones. For instance, one tungsten bulb with the incandescence of 100 watt consumes 1 kilowatt-hour

in 10 hours, and a luminescent lamp of 20 watt consumes the same amount of energy in 50 hours.

The qualitative feature of the energy-saving lamps is another issue to be discussed. Energy-saving lamps usually means luminescent or light-emitting diode lamps. The former could be of different types, color, power and amount of mercury. Since mercury is a liquid heavy metal and its evaporation may cause oncological diseases, representatives of Tajikistan's medical institutions insist that detailed examinations of the effects and consequences of using such lamps should be conducted before allowing them to be used by the wider public.

Directly related to this issue is the utilization of such mercury-containing lamps. These lamps should not be disposed of as a common waste, but buried in the soil. Thus, if the authorities of Tajikistan plan a massive switch to new lamps, certain measures should be taken to ensure that this waste will be handled in an environmentally safe manner.

All of the abovementioned aspects of the President's new initiative imply some major weaknesses of the idea. There are no doubts that the use of energy-saving lamps will substantially improve the situation of energy shortages in Tajikistan, especially during the winter season. However, the question remains of how reasonable and feasible common people of Tajikistan consider the plan to be.

ARMENIAN-AZERBAIJANI DISAGREEMENT ON MADRID PRINCIPLES STALLS KARABAKH SETTLEMENT PROCESS

Haroutiun Khachatryan

The latest meeting of the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Chisinau, Moldova, brought no visible progress in the efforts to reach a political settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh process. This is clear from the conflicting statements made by the two leaders after the October 8 meeting. They

imply, in turn, that the latest efforts of the mediators to reach a breakthrough in negotiations based on the so-called Madrid Principles may prove fruitless due to the conflicting positions of the two countries on those principles.

The Madrid Principles, which are a vague framework for the future political solution of the 20-year conflict, were proposed in December 2007 by the three co-chairs of the Minsk group (the OSCE body in charge of the mediation process in Nagorno-Karabakh), the U.S., France, and Russia. They have since been the basis for extensive talks between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and have reportedly undergone changes in the process. The principles were not made public officially until the G8 summit in L'Aquila on July 10. As declared by the presidents of USA, France and Russia on July 10, the Principles include "inter alia": 1) returning the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control; 2) an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance; 3) a corridor linking Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh; 4) a future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding public expression of will through a referendum; 4) the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence; and 5) international security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation.

Although the order of implementation for these steps has never been clearly indicated, it was expected by default that their order would be approximately that indicated above. In particular, all comments made on the principles (including those made by the Minsk group co-chairmen, i.e. the official representatives of the three great powers), have indicated that the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied regions around Nagorno-Karabakh and the return of refugees would be followed by actions aimed at determining the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh (and providing it with an interim status as one of the initial steps in that

process). Azerbaijan, which considers Nagorno-Karabakh to be Azerbaijani territory, has previously supported this sequence of actions. Armenia, which supports self-determination for the enclave that is currently de-facto independent from Azerbaijan, has not protested against such a vision officially, although it has not presented details of an Armenian standpoint for a long time either.

Meanwhile, in an interview on Russian state TV (*Vesti* program) on September 21, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan declared that according to his understanding of the Madrid principles, the return of refugees and Armenian withdrawal from the territories around Nagorno-Karabakh can be implemented only after the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh is determined, thus reversing the order of events expected by Azerbaijan. In fact, the Armenian leader demonstrated he was continuing to seek settlement of the conflict by the formula of "status in exchange for lands." This and other details of the interview implied that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is still far from resolution, a fact further evidenced by the outcomes of the Chisinau meeting.

The parallel process of normalizing Turkish-Armenian relations can create additional difficulties. Whereas Turkey, an ally of Azerbaijan, seeks to force Armenia to make concessions on Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian leaders on the contrary make every effort to demonstrate to both its domestic opposition and Armenians worldwide that the normalization with Turkey is by no means linked to the Karabakh resolution process. Such conflicting approaches came close to prevent the signing of the normalization protocols on October 10 in Switzerland, and it is obvious that concessions on the Karabakh issue will continue to be extremely difficult on part of both sides.

NEWS DIGEST

FOES SAY SAAKASHVILI DISTORTED WAR REPORT

1 October

Georgia's opposition rounded on President Mikheil Saakashvili after a damning report on last year's war with Russia, and one former ally accused him of distorting its findings to deceive the Georgian people. The Georgian government and the country's main television broadcasters said the independent report, commissioned by the European Union and released on September 30, pinned the blame for the five-day war on Russia. Opposition leader and former Saakashvili ally Nino Burjanadze said the government was concealing the report's key finding -- that Georgia began full-scale hostilities with an unjustifiable assault on the pro-Russian breakaway region of South Ossetia. The report said the assault was the culmination of a long period of increasing tensions, provocations and incidents, and added that Russia's military response went beyond reasonable limits and violated international law.

But it said the five-day conflict began with Saakashvili's order to unleash heavy artillery on South Ossetia on August 7, which was followed by a devastating Russian counter-strike. "Again, the Georgian authorities have tried through their controlled media to hide the truth from their people," Burjanadze told a news briefing in the capital, Tbilisi. "The hiding and mutilation of the facts in the report is also a crime." Saakashvili himself has so far been silent on the report. He survived months of opposition protests earlier this year against his record on democracy and last year's war. Analysts forecast renewed pressure after the report's publication, but say another leadership challenge from a weak opposition appears unlikely. Another defector from Saakashvili's camp, former UN ambassador Irakly Alasania, said in an interview with Reuters that the 41-year-old president had damaged Georgia's international standing with his "irresponsible" actions. "It was his

decision that really triggered full escalation," he said, speaking in English. "But there were the whole set of preconditions and provocations that we can also blame the Russian Federation for." The opposition has been careful to balance criticism of Saakashvili's conduct with contempt for Russia's military action, for fear of being labeled traitors by the authorities. The Georgian government insists the war was the result of Russian aggression after years of intensifying Russian political and military support for separatists in South Ossetia and Georgia's other rebel region, Abkhazia. (Reuters)

CHINA BUYING KAZAKH ENERGY ASSETS

2 October

China is continuing its purchases of Kazakh energy assets. Xinhua news agency reported Thursday that the China Investment Corp., the country's sovereign wealth fund, Wednesday announced it had paid \$939 million for a stake in Kazakhstan's JSC KazMunaiGas Exploration Production oil and gas company. The CIC is China's sovereign wealth fund, with a capitalization estimated at \$300 billion. According to a statement on the CIC Web site, the corporation purchased about 11 percent of KMG EP's Global Depository Receipts through its Fullbloom Investment Corp. subsidiary, which is wholly owned by CIC. KMG EP's stock is listed on the Kazakhstan Stock Exchange and its GDRs are traded on the London Stock Exchange. Following the CIC announcement of its purchase KMG's GDRs rose 9.95 percent to \$22.10 in London trading. In April China National Petroleum Corp. agreed with Kazakhstan's state oil firm KazMunaiGas to jointly buy oil producer MangistauMunaiGas for \$3.3 billion. (UPI)

DIPLOMAT SAYS UN MUZZLED CRITICISM OF AFGHAN VOTE

4 October

A U.S. diplomat fired in Afghanistan has said that the United Nations not only ignored massive fraud

in the August election but also told him to keep quiet, then dissembled about his firing. Peter Galbraith, former deputy to U.N. special envoy Kai Eide, wrote in the Washington Post on October 4 that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's final instruction before firing him last week was "Do not talk to the press." He agreed, then received assurances from an immediate supervisor that his dismissal statement would cite a dispute over how the U.N. mission was handling Afghan electoral fraud. Instead, he said, U.N. officials announced his firing was in the "best interests of the mission" and leaked that there was personality clash with Eide, his longtime friend. "I might have tolerated even this last act of dishonesty in a dispute dating back many months if the stakes were not so high," wrote Galbraith, an ally of Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. point man for Afghanistan and Pakistan. "But in my view, the fraud was a fact that the United Nations had to acknowledge or risk losing its credibility with the many Afghans who did not support President Hamid Karzai," wrote Galbraith, a former U.S. ambassador to Croatia. Galbraith, son of the late Canadian-American economist John Kenneth Galbraith, chronicled U.N. efforts to ignore fraud allegations for fear of raising tensions in the country. He said he was told to stop talking about 1,500 polling stations so insecure they could not open on Election Day. "Eide ordered me not to discuss the ghost polling centers any further," he wrote. "On Election Day, these sites produced hundreds of thousands of phony Karzai votes." At other critical stages in the election process, I was similarly ordered not to pursue the issue of fraud." Those included evidence collected by his staff on hundreds of individual cases of fraud as well as information on southern provinces where more votes were reported than cast, he said. Galbraith called the elections, which he said were managed by a pro-Karzai election council "a foreseeable train wreck". He said the fraud "handed the Taliban its greatest strategic victory in eight years of fighting the United States and its Afghan partners." (Reuters)

NAZARBAEV SAYS PRESIDENCY-FOR-LIFE DEFINED BY KAZAKH CONSTITUTION **6 October**

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has said that the issue of him being granted the presidency-for-life has already been determined by Kazakhstan's Constitution, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Nazarbaev told journalists after

talks with visiting French President Nicolas Sarkozy in the Kazakh capital on October 6 that according to the constitution the first president of Kazakhstan has the right to be elected president an unlimited number of times, making it unnecessary for him to be granted the lifetime post because he could presumably continue winning elections. The idea of making Nazarbaev president for life has been discussed extensively in Kazakhstan in recent weeks after it was reportedly suggested to him by a professor while on a trip in western Kazakhstan. Nazarbaev has been president of Kazakhstan since the country gained independence in 1991. He was last reelected to a seven-year term on December 4, 2005 in an election that was deemed by international observers to be neither free nor fair. Kazakhstan will assume the chairmanship of the Organization for Cooperation and Security (OSCE) in Europe on January 1. (UPI)

BAKU PREPARING FOR ANOTHER ROUND OF TALKS BETWEEN AZERI, ARMENIAN PRESIDENTS

6 October

Baku is preparing for another round of negotiations between Azeri President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan on settling the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh to take place in Chisinau on October 8, Azeri Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov said at a news briefing on Tuesday. "The subject of the upcoming negotiations is well known, some of the issues will be discussed more thoroughly and will be given more attention, and some others will perhaps be left to be discussed at the next stages," Azimov said, adding that the situation in the negotiating process is quite difficult. The settlement of the conflict envisions a number of consecutive steps, i.e., the abandoning of all occupied areas by Armenia, the return of Azeri refugees there, normal co-existence of the Azeri and Armenian communities in Nagorno-Karabakh, and then the determination of the region's status, he said "This logic cannot and must not be changed or reversed," Azimov said, adding that such attempts by Armenia causes perplexity in Azerbaijan. The settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is very significant in regional terms, Azimov said. "The fact that the conflict has not been resolved is causing great damage to the development of the entire region, but, despite this, Azerbaijan has made great achievements in its economic development. Thus, in my view, the Armenian leadership should

take all these factors into consideration and analyze them," Azimov said. (Interfax)

FRANCE ENTERS KAZAKH ENERGY MARKET

7 October

The French and Kazakh presidents have agreed that France will participate in building a Caspian pipeline to Azerbaijan and Europe. Interfax-Kazakhstan news agency reported Tuesday that following their discussions, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and French President Nicolas Sarkozy held a joint news conference in which Nazarbayev told journalists, "An agreement has been reached on the French side's participation in the project to construct the main export oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea to Baku and Europe. This is an exceptionally important project which forms the base of the arteries of the transport system for Kazakh gas and oil to Europe." Nazarbayev added that Kazakhstan and France have also agreed to cooperate in prospecting and developing Kazakh oil and natural gas deposits. The total value of agreements reached by the two presidents is more than \$6 billion and position France as a key investor in the Kazakhstan's resource-rich energy sector. (UPI)

750 REBELS SLAIN OR CAPTURED IN CAUCASUS

7 October

Russian police and interior ministry troops have killed or arrested 750 militants in the North Caucasus so far this year, officials said. A spokesman for the Russian Interior Ministry said Wednesday that the actions in the region, which include Chechnya, have been instrumental in reducing terrorism there, RIA Novosti reported. "This year we have prevented 64 terrorist attacks on the territory of the Southern Federal District," the unnamed spokesman said. "At least 289 militants were killed, including 25 leaders of armed groups and 11 foreign mercenaries. Some 457 militants were also detained, including three leaders of armed groups." The Interior Ministry took charge of anti-terrorism efforts in the North Caucasus in June 2003, and on Oct. 1 those responsibilities were handed off to the Russian Federal Security Service. The Interior Ministry remains in charge of the Russian joint force in the North Caucasus, the news service said. (UPI)

17 DEAD IN BLAST OUTSIDE INDIAN EMBASSY IN KABUL

8 October

A large bomb has exploded outside the Indian Embassy in central Kabul, killing 17 people and wounding 76 in the latest of a series of militant attacks on diplomatic and government buildings in the capital. The blast tore through a market building across the street from the heavily fortified embassy compound, leaving rubble and debris strewn across the road, where the Afghan Interior Ministry is also located. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. Violence has reached its worst levels of the eight-year war with Taliban insurgents spreading their attacks to previously secure areas. Since the start of last year, militants in the capital have targeted the German Embassy, the headquarters for the NATO-led force, the Information Ministry and the Justice Ministry buildings, the airport and a luxury hotel near the presidential palace. India said its embassy had been the target of the October 8 attack but that all its staff were safe. In July 2008, the same embassy was the scene of the war's deadliest attack on the capital. Then a Taliban suicide car bomber killed 58 people, including two senior Indian diplomats, and wounded a further 141. "I believe the suicide bomb was directed against the embassy because the suicide bomber came up to the outside perimeter wall of the embassy with a car loaded with explosives obviously with the aim of targeting the embassy," Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao told reporters in India. Rao said the blast was similar in size to the 2008 attack but that measures taken since then to secure the embassy had worked effectively in protecting its embassy staff. The road, which is also home to the Interior Ministry and the Indonesian Embassy, had been closed to traffic since the 2008 attack and was only reopened in the last few weeks. A large concrete blast barrier was erected down the center of the road. Indian authorities blamed the Pakistani intelligence service for last year's blast. Eleven civilians and one policeman were killed in the October 8 blast. (Reuters)

IRAN WANTS EQUAL CASPIAN DIVISION OF WATERS, SEABED

9 October

Iran reiterated its position that any final disposition of the Caspian's offshore waters will require unanimity among the nations sharing its shoreline. Two agreements dealing with the issue were signed

in 1921 and 1940 between Iran and the Soviet Union. Maritime legal specialists have since speculated that the Caspian might be divided under terms of the 1982 U.N. Convention on Law of the Sea. The Islamic Republic News Agency report Thursday that Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, addressing a seminar on the Caspian in the capital Tehran, remarked, "Issues pertaining to the Caspian Sea, as the largest and unique lake in the world, are undoubtedly of the most sophisticated and technical nature. The 1982 Convention on Rights of Seas is not applicable to Caspian Sea because firstly it is a lake and secondly, Iran, Azerbaijan Republic, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have not joined it. Tehran believes that the concepts such as energy and economy should cause the littoral states to neglect issues of security concern." Iran's position since 1991 has been that all five Caspian states receive a 20 percent share of the Caspian's waters and seabed, while Russia has maintained that each state should receive territory proportional to the length of its coastline. (UPI)

KAZAKHSTAN BANS SMOKING IN PUBLIC PLACES

10 October

A law has come into force in Kazakhstan banning smoking in public places, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

According to the legislation adopted last month, smoking is now officially banned in schools, hospitals, clinics, cinemas, theaters, circuses, concerts, exhibition halls, sports arenas, stadiums, and other covered places used for public entertainment and recreation, including night clubs. People will also be restricted from smoking inside airports and railway and bus stations. Tobacco items will also not be available in shops selling goods for children.

Cigarettes can also not be sold to individuals under the age of 18. Violators of the new law can be fined up to \$500. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH SPACE FLIGHT ON SOYUZ POSTPONED INDEFINITELY - ROSCOSMOS

11 October

The flight by a professional Kazakh cosmonaut on the Russian Soyuz spacecraft scheduled for 2010 is not envisaged in the near future, Russian Space Agency (Roscosmos) deputy director Vitaly Davydov told journalists on Sunday. "We do not have such plans for the nearest future," said

Davydov, when asked when the Kazakh cosmonaut will fly to space on Soyuz. Roscosmos does not rule out such an opportunity, Davydov said. "But there are no such plans for the upcoming missions," Davydov said. Roscosmos officials stated earlier that Kazakhstan could send its cosmonaut in 2009. According to unofficial reports, the project was postponed because of unsettled financial issues between Roscosmos and the Kazakh Space Agency. (Interfax)

TALIBAN KIDNAP 16 PEOPLE IN AFGHANISTAN'S NORTH

13 October

Taliban insurgents have abducted 16 people in two separate incidents in northern Afghanistan, a region that has been long seen as relatively safe, officials said. Ousted from power in a U.S.-led invasion in 2001 but still strong in southern and eastern Afghanistan, the Taliban have become increasingly active in the once-peaceful north as they continue to battle coalition forces in the country. In one incident, Taliban fighters stormed a clinic in the rugged Sar-i-Pul Province, seizing eight health workers including women, said Bilal Nairam, a senior provincial police officer.

He said a search was under way to find those kidnapped in the province which has so far escaped the spread of the Taliban insurgency. He said he did not know the motive behind the abduction. In the second kidnapping which also occurred overnight in the neighboring Faryab Province, Taliban fighters staged an attack on a police post and took away eight police officers, the provincial police chief, Khalil Andarabi, said. The Taliban could not be reached for comment. Taliban fighters often stage kidnappings as part of their campaign against coalition forces but abductions have also become a lucrative business for criminal gangs and rival tribes in recent years. This year has seen a dramatic rise of violence in Afghanistan where 100,000 Western troops, two-thirds of them American, are fighting to contain an increasingly fierce insurgency. (Reuters)

TURKMENISTAN GETS READY FOR POST-CRISIS ENERGY CONSUMPTION GROWTH

13 October

Turkmenistan looks forward with confidence and is already now getting ready for a post-crisis growth in the consumption of energy resources, President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov told on Monday a session with heads of state concerns and enterprises

of the oil and gas sector. "During the crisis, when consumption of oil and gas declines, there is no point in listening to those who urge to reduce production," the Turkmen leader stressed. "The crisis develops according to its own laws, but recession gives way to recovery, and then big amounts of energy resources will be necessary. Those states that will be ready for this recovery will be the winners," Berdymukhamedov told the session. The president expressed confidence that the strategic program for the development of the oil and gas sector up to the year 2030 will be implemented. In accordance with that document, this year the country plans to bring the production of natural gas to 250 billion cubic meters, while the production of oil is expected to grow to 100 million tons. (Itar-Tass)

ERDOGAN: NO POLITICS DURING TURKEY-ARMENIA SOCCER GAME

13 October

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has urged soccer fans to keep politics away when Turkey and Armenia face each other on the pitch in a World Cup qualifier, as the two neighbors aim to restore diplomatic ties. Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian has confirmed his attendance at a World Cup qualifier in Turkey on October 14, which will take place days after Ankara and Yerevan signed an accord to end a century of hostility. Turkish leader Abdullah Gul went last year to Yerevan to the first leg of what has been called "soccer diplomacy" between the two countries, whose ties are traumatized by the mass killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turks during World War I. "The Armenian president and the Armenian national team will see what Turkish hospitality is," Erdogan told deputies of his ruling AK Party ahead of the game in the city of Bursa. "I know our soccer fans in Bursa and in the rest of the country will behave like respectable fans. I believe our country and the citizens of Bursa will not bow their heads to politics and to the aims of those who want to use the game to achieve something else," Erdogan said. Turkish media said authorities will undertake tight security measures to avoid possible provocations during the game. "Aksam" newspaper said fans would not be allowed to buy tickets for the match, instead authorities would control ticket distribution. The governor of Bursa has said Azeri flags will not

be allowed into the stadium for the match, media reports said, but Turkish nationalists have made some 10,000 of the flags and are distributing them in the northwestern town. (Reuters)

KAZAKH OPPOSITION PARTIES ANNOUNCE MERGER

14 October

The leaders of two major opposition parties in Kazakhstan have announced a merger between their parties, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Azat party leader Bolat Abilov and Social Democratic Party chairman Zharmakhan Tuyaqbay said at press conference in Almaty that the new united opposition party will be called the All-National Social Democratic Azat Party. They said the founding congress of the new party will be held in Almaty on October 24. The two parties merged in 2007 but decided to split later the same year after they failed to win seats in parliament. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA, BELARUS, KAZAKHSTAN PLAN TO SIGN CUSTOMS CODE TREATY ON NOVEMBER27 – OFFICIAL

14 October

The leaders of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan are expected to sign a treaty on a customs code for the three nations' Customs Union in Minsk on November 27, said Belarusian First Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Petrishenko. "Work is underway to prepare a package of documents that should be signed by the Customs Union heads of state in Minsk on November 27," Petrishenko said at a Wednesday session of the permanent commissions for customs regulation and border policy, which form part of the Eurasian Economic Community's (EurAsEC) Inter-Parliamentary Assembly. The three countries' leaders plan to sign a customs code treaty and to confirm common customs tariffs and lists of commodities, the import or export of which can be either banned or restricted within the Customs Union, he said. "We also plan to sign documents to transfer all sorts of control from the Russian-Belarusian border and to cancel the customs registration of commodities transported within the territories of Belarus and Russia," Petrishenko said. The Customs Union's code is expected to come into force before July 1, 2010, he added. (Interfax)