

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING VOL. 15 NO. 03 06 February 2013

Searchable Archives with over 1,500 articles at <http://www.cacianalyst.org>

ANALYTICAL ARTICLES:

**AZERBAIJAN BREAKS THROUGH INTO
EASTERN EUROPE**

Stephen Blank

**GAKAYEV BROTHER KILLED IN
CHECHNYA**

Emil Souleimanov

**PAKISTAN HANDS OVER DEVELOPMENT
OF GWADAR PORT TO CHINA**

Naveed Ahmad

**PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN BEYOND
2014**

Rizwan Zeb

FIELD REPORTS:

**KAZAKHSTAN EMBARKS ON FAR-REACHING
ECONOMIC REFORMS**

Georgiy Voloshin

**GEORGIAN PM IVANSHVILI STRIPS DEFENSE
MINISTER ALASANIA OF VICE PM POST**

Eka Janashia

**OPPOSITION LEADERS ARRESTED AFTER RIOT
IN AZERBAIJANI TOWN**

Mina Muradova

OMBUDSMAN REELECTED IN KYRGYZSTAN

Aigul Kasymova



*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING
VOL. 15 NO. 03
06 FEBRUARY 2013

Contents

Analytical Articles

- AZERBAIJAN BREAKS THROUGH INTO EASTERN EUROPE** 3
Stephen Blank
- GAKAYEV BROTHER KILLED IN CHECHNYA** 6
Emil Souleimanov
- PAKISTAN HANDS OVER DEVELOPMENT OF GWADAR PORT TO CHINA** 9
Naveed Ahmad
- PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN BEYOND 2014** 12
Rizwan Zeb

Field Reports

- KAZAKHSTAN EMBARKS ON FAR-REACHING ECONOMIC REFORMS** 15
Georgiy Voloshin
- GEORGIAN PM IVANSHVILI STRIPS DEFENSE MINISTER
ALASANIA OF VICE PM POST** 17
Eka Janashia
- OPPOSITION LEADERS ARRESTED AFTER RIOT IN AZERBAIJANI TOWN** 18
Mina Muradova
- OMBUDSMAN REELECTED IN KYRGYZSTAN** 20
Aigul Kasymova

THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

Editor: Svante E. Cornell

Associate Editor: Niklas Nilsson

Assistant Editor, News Digest: Alima Bissenova

Chairman, Editorial Board: S. Frederick Starr

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.

The Editor reserves the right to edit the article to conform to the editorial policy and specifications of *The Analyst* and to reject the article should it not be acceptable to our editorial committee for publication. On acceptance and publication of the edited version of the article, The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies will issue an honorarium to the author. It is up to the individual author to provide the correct paperwork to the Institute that makes the issuing of an honorarium possible. The copyright for the article or field report will reside with the Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst. However, the author may use all or part of the contracted article in any book or article in any media subsequently written by the author, provided that a copyright notice appears giving reference to the contracted article's first publication by the "Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University, Nitze School of Advanced International Studies."

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. +1-202-663-778

AZERBAIJAN BREAKS THROUGH INTO EASTERN EUROPE

Stephen Blank

On December 7, 2012 Russia began construction of its South Stream gas pipeline. Earlier in 2012 the European consortium behind the Nabucco pipeline formally submitted a revised scenario called Nabucco West to Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan and Turkey announced plans to build the Transanatolian pipeline or TANAP from the Shah Deniz gas field to Turkey's border with Bulgaria. Nabucco West would then take gas all the way into Central Europe. Hence, Azerbaijan is now emerging as a potential major gas supplier to Eastern European states, whose governments are now eagerly courting Azerbaijan. This also means that Azerbaijan is emerging as Russia's rival in this market.

BACKGROUND: Russia's efforts to dominate Eastern Europe, isolate Ukraine from Europe or from leverage over Russian gas shipments, and control Caspian producers through the South Stream pipeline are well known and longstanding. Hitherto the only rival plan was the EU's Nabucco project which has never gotten off the ground and may never do so. Instead in late 2011 the Turkish and Azerbaijani governments buried their differences and agreed to build the TANAP line which would be the first dedicated pipeline bringing Azerbaijani and potentially Central Asian natural gas to Europe through non-Russian means. If TANAP does become a reality, it will then be possible to connect Azerbaijan to Europe through several existing or planned interconnectors like the Italy-Turkey-Greece Interconnector (ITGI) or the TAP, or potentially Nabucco West which represents a substantially scaled down version of Nabucco and therefore a much less costly variant. Although only 10 billion cubic meters per year (bcm/y) is currently available from Shah Deniz to Europe through these pipeline plans, Azerbaijan's increasing importance is fully on view. Indeed, Azerbaijani officials like SOCAR President Rovnag Abdullayev claim that by

2025 Azerbaijani gas exports will reach 40-50 bcm/y, thereby putting it fully in competition with South Stream.

Since the announcement of TANAP, Russia, already under pressure from the EU, the discovery of shale gas, and Europe's ability to import liquefied natural gas (LNG), has accelerated construction of South Stream to preempt all competitors and preserve its hegemonic position in the CIS. But while Russia is still trying to acquire a dominant leverage in the Balkans, those governments appear ready to deal with anyone, while the EU now sees TANAP as a key element of its projected southern gas corridor. Ukraine has expressed an interest in buying into it to escape dependence on Russia, and SOCAR has become the major distributor of gas in Georgia.

Beyond that, Hungary's State Secretary for Foreign Affairs and External Economic Relations, Peter Szijarto, called Azerbaijan a guarantor of European energy security, while many Eastern European governments are actively soliciting Azerbaijani gas and investments. Latvian Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Artur



Rasizade, urging them to consider investing in Latvia's ports and infrastructures as well as aviation and energy. Romania's Foreign Minister has discussed energy and transport cooperation with Azerbaijan's ambassador. Bulgaria has publicly indicated its desire to develop bilateral energy relations with Azerbaijan and has indicated that it is interested not only in South Stream within which it participates, but also in the EU's Southern Energy Corridor and in obtaining gas from Azerbaijan and TANAP either through Nabucco West or through the TAP, depending on which one is implemented. In Montenegro SOCAR is investing over 250 million Euros in resort areas.

Albania's Foreign Minister Edmond Panariti announced in August 2012 that Albania, Italy, and Greece would sign an accord on the TAP to enhance their chances of getting the projected Southern Gas Corridor for Europe from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz gas fields routed through their territories, linking up with the TANAP project. Albania is clearly seeking to upgrade its relations with Azerbaijan, presumably in the hope that it becomes a favored junction for the TANAP pipeline. For his part, Prime Minister Sali Berisha hailed the TAP pipeline accord and Memorandum of

Understanding among the parties, as did EU Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger. That will presage further multilateral economic and energy cooperation among the parties.

IMPLICATIONS: Once South Stream is completed, it is supposed to ship 63 bcm/y of gas to Europe from Russia and Central Asia although there are reasons to doubt the availability of such quantities and Russia's ability to produce it. Moreover, the costs will likely far exceed what has already been announced. For now Azerbaijan can only export 10 bcm/y of gas through the TANAP pipeline but that is the only game in town. If indeed, Azerbaijan can increase its gas production to the figure mentioned above or if the West can actually persuade other Caspian producers like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to ship gas through a Trans-Caspian pipeline and bypass both Iran and Russia, then there will be a competition in Southeast Europe from which European gas consumers and non-Russian producers such as Azerbaijan can only gain. Turkey will then be able to realize its cherished dream of being a real energy hub for all gas coming from the Caspian and for South Stream. It is also clear that Azerbaijan is gaining influence among East European states who are soliciting its investments as well as its gas and is in a position to contribute to this process of mutual strengthening of their economies and politics against Russian efforts to dominate them.

But for this virtuous circle to come into being and realize its full potential, major Western diplomatic support for Azerbaijan and associated other Caspian producers to thwart Russia's likely efforts to intimidate them, as well as major investments in those countries,

are equally necessary. Russia is clearly doing everything in its power to subordinate states throughout the CIS to its dictates, whether through the Customs Union (EURASEC), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the emplacement of Russian bases in Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and Central Asia, or obstruction of any independent Trans-Caspian pipelines. Nevertheless, Russia is feeling the strain. It will now leave the Gabala air defense base and radar station in Azerbaijan and is apparently under similar pressure in regard to the Baikonur space center in Kazakhstan. At home, Gazprom is now forced to lower prices to European consumers who have other outlets from which to buy and there are signs of difficulties in maintaining production levels of oil and gas.

These pressures along with the EU's investigation of Gazprom's price fixing activities and efforts to impose the Third Energy Directive on EU members, which would bar Gazprom from owning both the sale of gas and its distribution throughout individual European countries, have led Russia to accelerate the construction of South Stream. The advent of the TANAP project undoubtedly plays a role in this too. But it is also entirely possible that as Azerbaijan becomes more capable of meeting European energy demands, Moscow will attempt to take action against it. This energy rivalry is at heart geopolitical because energy is the main export weapon of these countries and an instrument for acquiring lasting political and economic influence abroad. At the same time, Russia can only conceive of operating a monopoly and suppressing the independence of CIS producers, dreams which are far removed from Azerbaijan's horizons. Moreover, Azerbaijan's plans coincide fully

with long-standing Western goals of diversification of producers and the ensuing enhancement of consumers' energy security. Thus the question is whether or not the West will recognize what is now happening and finally step up to meet the challenge of defending its own interests and those of non-Russian energy producers like Azerbaijan in furtherance of its interests.

CONCLUSIONS: We must understand that it is not only Azerbaijan whose future depends on its ability to meet European and other consumers' demands for energy, but also states like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Russian pressure forced Turkmenistan to go into debt to the tune of US\$ 8 billion to China to escape Russian hegemony. Given the successful obstruction to date of any viable outlet for its gas to Europe, it has announced a new emphasis on the Asia-Pacific. But it should not be hard to imagine what Ashgabat's reaction would be if the road to Europe became open. In these efforts Azerbaijan has now become a trailblazer and much depends on the outcome of its newfound inroad into Eastern Europe.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Stephen Blank is Professor at the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College. The views expressed here do not represent those of the U.S. Army, Defense Department, or the U.S. Government.

GAKAYEV BROTHERS KILLED IN CHECHNYA

Emil Souleimanov

Since January 17, a special operation has been underway in the wooded mountains of Chechnya's Shatoy and Vedeno districts. Following a week of intense fighting, the infamous Gakayev brothers, in command of the Southeast Chechen wing of the Caucasus Emirate, were killed, along with around eleven members of their group including emir Abuyezid Jabrailov. The recent success of the kadyrovtsy units is likely to considerably weaken the Chechen sector of the North Caucasus insurgency, even though it is still premature to anticipate the end of hostilities in this war-torn region of Russia.

BACKGROUND: The Gakayev brothers, Muslim and his elderly brother Huseyn, belonged to the most reputable commanders of the East Chechnya front of the North Caucasus insurgency, being in charge of Chechnya's Southeastern sector. They are said to have enjoyed close ties with some West Dagestani jamaats, as well as with Europe-based Chechen diaspora inclined toward the notion of a separate Chechen nation-state rather than a regional theocracy.

Along with Aslambek Vadalov, Tarkhan Gaziyeu, and emir Muhannad, an Arab commander in the ranks of the Chechnya insurgency, Huseyn Gakayev was one of the key figures of the 2010 mutiny against the authority of Doku Umarov, the formal leader of the Caucasus Emirate. In August 2010, following Umarov's resignation in favor of Vadalov and his quick retraction of his own decision three days later, Huseyn Gakayev alongside Vadalov, Gaziyeu, and Muhannad renounced their oath of loyalty to Umarov, pulling out of obedience to Umarov's forces a group of their supporters that according to some estimates numbers up to 80 people. In fact, Umarov had been criticized by the rebels

for his authoritarian leadership and his use of indiscriminate violence that inflicted high casualties among non-combatants in Russia (for instance, the January 2010 bombing in the Domodedovo airport in Moscow for which Umarov claimed responsibility), antagonizing world opinion as well as many ordinary Chechens against the case of Chechen independence.

In addition, the rebels had nurtured a long-term disaffection for Umarov's abandonment of the cause of an independent Chechen state in favor of a North Caucasus theocracy that Umarov proclaimed unilaterally as early as in 2007. The rift in the ranks of the Chechen insurgency then caused serious concerns about their ability to survive the increasingly fierce and focused counterinsurgent campaign carried out by the forces of the Chechen Ministry of Interior. The overwhelming part of the Chechnya-based insurgents still considered Umarov the legitimate leader of the virtual emirate, blaming Gaziyeu, Vadalov, Gakayev and Muhannad for the dangerous split (see the [08/19/2010 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)). Yet in July 2011, Umarov and the rebel commanders – with the exception of Muhannad who was killed in April 2011 and



Gaziyev who apparently refused to accept Umarov as leader – managed to achieve some sort of reconciliation, reaffirming their allegiance to Umarov as the legitimate leader of the North Caucasus insurgency, and tying their cause back to that of a transnational Islamic theocracy embracing the entire region.

IMPLICATIONS: The majority of commentators agree that while Umarov, an aging commander with increasingly deteriorating health and limited control over developments on the ground, has served as some sort of symbol of the North Caucasus resistance with limited capacities to wage an effective insurgent war, the Gakayev brothers ranked highest in the hierarchy of the Chechnya-based insurgency leaders.

Respected even among many ordinary Chechens for their selection of military and state-related targets, they proved their abilities as successful guerilla leaders during a range of audacious attacks carried out both in Chechnya's southeast and the rest of the republic, including the capital city of Grozny. Insurgents in their groups belonged to the militarily strongest, most experienced, and best equipped units of the Chechnya-based insurgency. The Gakayev brothers were key personal foes of Ramzan Kadyrov not least

because of their unprecedented attack on the Tsentoroy village in August 2010, the native and heavily fortified area of the Kadyrov family, and due to their no less impudent assault on administrative buildings in downtown Grozny in October the same year, claiming the lives of dozens of people.

Testimonies from local sources assert that it was the Gakayev brothers who Kadyrov feared most among the insurgent leaders, since they represented a serious threat to him, his closest associates, and his family. Moreover, eliminating the Gakayevs had become a matter of honor for Kadyrov. Accordingly, in the course of the last two years, Kadyrov made a concentrated effort to track the brothers down. For that purpose, he obtained a number of SU-34 aircraft as well as drones to continuously screen the wooded mountains and gorges of the country's southeast, particularly in the winter months.

Importantly, the majority of suicide attacks that took place in Chechnya recently are believed to have been mastered by the Gakayev brothers, who were in command of a group of shahids. This, in turn, raised concerns not only in Grozny, but according to some sources even in Moscow since the possible employment of effective terrorist tactics by insurgents has been much feared by the federal authorities on the eve of the upcoming Sochi Olympics (2014). In this regard, it is obvious that Moscow has had a solid intention to provide significant backing for the kadyrovtsy in recent years to liquidate the feared commanders.

The killing of the Gakayev brothers can be considered a serious blow to the Chechnya-based insurgency that is likely to further

deteriorate its overall situation. The Chechen insurgency has in recent years failed to generate field commanders enjoying indisputable support across the movement that could substitute for the loss of the Gakayev brothers and a number of other military leaders of their scope. Owing to the relatively successful, yet highly controversial counterinsurgency campaign led by Kadyrov, the Chechen insurgency has found itself in a defensive position without the ability to carry out attacks that would resemble their successes in the not very distant past. This further illustrates that fighting a guerilla war in the environment of contemporary Chechnya requires much larger sources and capacities than are currently available to the Chechen insurgents, while carrying out terrorist attacks in Russia proper might be more feasible.

CONCLUSIONS: Given the harsh reprisals at the hands of the kadyrovtsy units against those who might even consider providing any kind of material support to the insurgency, as well as their increasing control of particular villages in the peripheral areas of the republic coupled with quality intelligence from the ground, the material base of the insurgents has shrunk significantly. The most effective guerilla units still operational in Chechnya are believed to be concentrated on the borders with Dagestan and Ingushetia, from where they obtain the majority of their supplies. However, waging an effective insurgency in the severe circumstances of the mountainous terrain is technically impossible without a continuous inflow of food, medicine, and clothing, aside from new recruits. An insurgency stands and falls with popular support which has been seriously limited in the case of Chechnya where, as many of the republic's inhabitants

allege, even breathing does not go unnoticed by the kadyrovtsy. This is one of the causes for the ongoing transformation of the North Caucasus insurgency from a rural guerilla to an urban-style guerilla, a fact that explains the reduction of the Chechen sector favor of the Dagestan-based insurgency that has gained momentum in recent years (see the [09/29/2010 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)).

Accordingly, it is quite likely that many of the Chechen insurgents still remaining in the republic will follow the established trend of finding temporary shelter in either Dagestan or Ingushetia. In this regard, the ability of the Dagestani or Ingush law enforcement agencies, aided by federal army and police units, to effectively control the border passes in the mountains, as well as the roads from the western part of Chechnya to its center and east appears to be of crucial importance.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Emil Souleimanov is assistant professor at the Department of Russian and East European Studies, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. He is the author of *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict: Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia Wars Reconsidered* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming in 2013) and *An Endless War: The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007).

PAKISTAN HANDS OVER DEVELOPMENT OF GWADAR PORT TO CHINA

Naveed Ahmad

Pakistan has handed over the management of its southeastern Gwadar deep-sea port to the China Overseas Port Holdings after failing to turn the strategically located port into a financial success. With an outpost on the entry to the risk-prone Strait of Hormuz, China not only secures its petroleum supply through the shortest land route but also mounts a challenge to the U.S. and India in the Arabian Sea. Pakistan's reliance on China as a partner has increased significantly during its post-9/11 engagement with the U.S. While Islamabad seems relieved by its belated act, Beijing seems to shift some pressure it has been withstanding in South China Sea.

BACKGROUND: Located in the heart of the semi-desert coastal region of Makran, Gwadar sits almost like an island resembling the head of a hammerhead shark. Due to its strategic location and deep natural harbors, the region enjoyed a pivotal status in Cyrus the Great's empire which simultaneously encompassed today's Bahrain, Oman, Makran and the coastal regions of Pakistan's Sindh province. In the 15th century, Gwadar was burnt and ransacked by Portuguese invaders. Pakistan successfully negotiated its control of Gwadar with Oman a few years after its creation in 1947. The region long remained underdeveloped and the natural harbors under-exploited, used primarily for traditional fishing and Pakistan's naval bases.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the landlocked Central Asian states, Gwadar emerged as the shortest potential route to the sea for their petroleum export and various imports. While the idea of developing a deep sea port in Gwadar was floated already in 1993, the construction would not begin until March 2002, with a planned phased completion.

The work on the port's Phase I was completed in 2007 with an initial investment from China of US\$200 million. Indian and Western

concerns increased when Chinese vice Premier Wu Bangguo and General Pervez Musharraf flew to Gwadar for the port's inauguration. Owing to Pakistan's political instability under the military government, Islamabad could not embed the mega-project within local communities and failed to develop the necessary logistical infrastructure such as roads and rail links.

Instead, Musharraf allowed paramilitary forces to launch counter-insurgency operations against Baluch militants in some districts of the sparsely populated Baluchistan province. Islamabad blamed the Indian embassy and two of its consulates in Afghanistan for providing military and financial support for the insurgents in order to offset vital development in the rugged but mineral-rich province. Though New Delhi strongly protested the allegation, later reports in Indian media told a different story. However, Islamabad's own failure to decentralize power and resources is also a major factor.

So far, Pakistan has banned five ethnic militant groups such as the Baluch Liberation Front, the Baluch Republican Army, Lashkar-i-Baluchistan and the Baluch Musallah Difa Organization. Over the past five years, the



Pakistan Peoples' Party-led government has made no significant efforts to curb the militancy except for passing legislation to give more resources and governance rights to provinces. The security situation on the Makran coast and Gwadar in particular has improved over the past few years after several previous attacks on Chinese engineers. Generally, Gwadar's population of primarily Afro-Arab origin does not subscribe to the aspirations of some Baluch tribes pursuing militancy.

Though the port today is linked to Karachi by the 400-mile Makran Coastal Highway, the real value-adding component of an oil refinery with a total capacity of 19 million tons of oil per year remains incomplete following a suspension of work in 2009 due to security reasons.

IMPLICATIONS: Besides reviving the port's commercial activity, the Chinese company will have to take steps to appease the local population which suffers from poor socio-economic conditions. Pakistani political and security authorities face the challenge of averting any interference by external forces in Baluchistan as well as sabotage by the militants.

Though China maintains a policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other

countries when pursuing its business interests, Pakistan's own capacity for conflict resolution is wanting in many respects. Yet, ongoing processes to increase provincial financial autonomy and the creation of employment opportunities would have a stabilizing impact not only on the coastal region of Makran but on several troubled districts of mainland Baluchistan as well. Chinese ships docking at the harbor will bring jobs to local inhabitants and revenue to the provincial and federal government.

The Chinese undertaking for the long-term vital energy supply and export corridor project is obviously huge. Beijing plans to connect the Gwadar port with its western province of Xinjiang via rail and road links. The ancient and historic city of Kashgar is located 2,200 miles from the nearest seaport, compared to 950 miles from the Gwadar port. China would have to invest heavily in the construction of a container capacity highway across the rugged terrain of Baluchistan to the southern Punjab city of Multan. Pakistan's road network in the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces are of international standard and rather secure. The last journey through the Northern Areas and particularly the Hunza region requires additional significant Chinese investment and work is already underway.

The Gilgit-Baltistan region of northern Pakistan, bordering China, has seen severe sectarian clashes, most recently last year when pro-Taliban militants murdered Shi'ite commuters near the Kohistan area. The clashes have damaged trade relations with China as well as the security situation of locals, which has been exacerbated by a presence of external elements including radicals affiliated with Iran

and the Taliban, a lack of business opportunities, and government disengagement. Greater cross-border trade in the mountainous north of Pakistan and China's far west is bound to bring improvements in this regard. While the possibility of a rail link seems too costly in the short and medium term, China is in Pakistan to stay and cash in on the available geographic and political advantages.

After abandoning the Iran-Pakistan pipeline, India has opted to develop the Iranian port of Chahbahar, which may serve as a military base in the long term while serving as an energy hub in the medium term. The Chahbahar project is no less complicated for India than Gwadar is for China. Pakistan is geographically linked with China while Iran is distant from India. Pakistan enjoys access to international trade, investment and banking while Iran is clamped by international sanctions owing to its adventurous security and foreign policy. In a bid to improve Pakistan's relations with India as a counterbalance to China, the U.S. has unsuccessfully called on Islamabad to ease tensions with India over Jammu and Kashmir and give trade a chance. Islamabad is moving cautiously on trade with India knowing that Delhi could use it for greater access to the Afghan market.

Owing to persistent Chinese lobbying of Pakistan's business community, military and political parties, Islamabad continues to defy U.S. pressure to moderate its relationship with Beijing. Washington has argued against Pakistan's handover of the strategic port to the Chinese company as it may "expand the tensions over the Strait of Hormuz to the Baluchistan coastal areas." India's Defense Minister recently stated to media regarding the

Gwadar handover that "In one sentence, it is a matter of concern for us." Moreover, China's presence in the Arabian Sea is problematic for the U.S., not least due to its positions on Iran. However, unlike India, the U.S. has limited its reaction to bilateral diplomatic channels.

CONCLUSIONS: For all practical purposes, Gwadar offers China an ideal and largely reliable route for petroleum supplies from the Arabian Peninsula. Currently, Chinese oil tankers ferry 80 percent of the hydrocarbons imported from the Gulf through the Strait of Malacca, followed by the turbulent waters of the South China and Yellow Seas. Imports via Gwadar will not only reach China sooner and safer, but also at a lower cost.

The oil-exporting Gulf nations including Saudi Arabia are also stakeholders in the success of the Pakistan-China Gwadar venture. With their eyes on Chinese economic growth and increased reliance on petroleum, the Arab nations have occasionally impressed upon Pakistan the importance of improving its control over the Balochistan province. While Gwadar is the most valuable among China's touted string of pearls ports such as Bangladesh's Chittagong and Sonadiya, near the city of Cox's Bazar, and Sri Lanka's Hambantota, the deal not only strengthens Pakistan's Middle Eastern linkages but may also solidify its connections with Central Asia.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Naveed Ahmad is an investigative journalist and academic, focusing on security, diplomacy and governance. He is founder of the 'Afghanistan 2014' project. He can be reached at ideas@ideas360.org; and Twitter [@naveed360](https://twitter.com/naveed360).

PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN

BEYOND 2014

Rizwan Zeb

Pakistan understands and realizes that a stable Afghanistan is key to its own stability. A number of issues are of crucial importance for the improvement of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations: the Durand line, the return of Afghan refugees, the Indian presence in Afghanistan, and the implementation of various pipeline projects transporting Central Asian oil and gas through Gwadar. Above all, Pakistan wants a stable and friendly Afghanistan which does not pose a threat or allow any other state to use its territory against Pakistan. After 2014, will Pakistan and Afghanistan develop a neighborly relationship or will Afghanistan become another theatre for India-Pakistan rivalry?

BACKGROUND: Pakistan's security perceptions regarding Afghanistan have to a large extent been shaped by Kabul's territorial claims on Pakistan's North-western Frontier province (NWFP) and Baluchistan. Kabul insisted that Pakistan's Pashtun belt should be allowed to decide on its own future, to opt for independence, to stay with Pakistan or to merge with Afghanistan. Afghanistan was the only country that voted against Pakistan's admission into the United Nations. The border between the two states, the Durand Line, has been a major concern in Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan since 1947. The border situation presents numerous uncontrollable problems: illegal border crossings on a daily basis, illicit drug trafficking, strongholds of criminal networks, terrorist sanctuaries and societal fragmentation in Pakistan's tribal areas.

India's involvement in the internal affairs of Pakistan since the country's inception to create instability in the country through Afghanistan also remains a core problematic issue in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. In the 1970s, Afghan president Sardar Daud Khan provided

sanctuaries to Baluch insurgents. In reciprocity, Pakistan welcomed Afghan Islamists with anti-communist and anti-Daud sentiments. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Ahmad Shah Masood, and Burhanuddin Rabbani were all provided with training and support for incursions and uprisings inside Afghanistan. After Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, Pakistan along with the U.S. and Saudi Arabia supported the Afghan resistance.

Once the Soviet forces withdrew, Pakistan hoped for the evolution of a peaceful and stable Afghanistan with a cooperative government in Kabul that could facilitate the return of over 3 million Afghan refugees. For Islamabad, a stable Afghanistan would become a gateway to the newly independent Central Asian republics in the early 1990s. Despite Islamabad's support, Hekmatyar failed to gain control of Kabul. When the Taliban appeared and gained control of Kandahar, they appeared to be a more feasible alternative. This was the first time in the history of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations that Kabul had a government friendly to Pakistan and without links to India.



Pakistan extended diplomatic and economic support to the Taliban Government. The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. led Pakistan to join the U.S.-led global war on terror. Nevertheless, Pakistan became deeply concerned with the situation in Afghanistan in November of 2001, when despite U.S. assurances to the contrary, the Northern Alliance forces moved into Kabul. The Alliance had close ties to India and its control of Kabul was seen as a profound strategic threat to Pakistan. At the Bonn conference, the Northern Alliance received the portfolios of most of the important ministries, including defense. Its forces physically controlled these ministries and the U.S. and other allies had little interest in evicting them.

Even though a Durrani Pashtun, Hamid Karzai, was elected interim president in December 2001, Pashtuns still remained underrepresented in the government. Relations between the two neighbors soon deteriorated due to the distrust between Islamabad and the Northern Alliance. Kabul accused Islamabad of harboring Afghan insurgents to destabilize government authority while Islamabad responded by pointing to Kabul's alleged support in collaboration with India to the

Baluch guerrilla movement and attempts at creating instability in the tribal areas.

IMPLICATIONS: Pakistan understands that a stable Afghanistan is of crucial importance to its own stability and that Pakistan stands to lose if Afghanistan is not stabilized. Among the most pressing issues in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations are the issue of the Durand line, the return of Afghan refugees, the Indian presence in Afghanistan, and the implementation of various pipeline projects transporting Central Asian oil and gas through Gwadar. Above all, Pakistan wants a stable and friendly Afghanistan which does not pose a threat or allows other states to use its territory against Pakistan.

Islamabad is concerned that the U.S. and NATO forces will leave without addressing Afghanistan's core problems. As a result, instability will continue and will have numerous and predictable consequences for Pakistan: continuing unrest in the FATA; a surge in illegal border crossings leading to another Afghan refugee crisis; a surge in drug trafficking and weapons smuggling and further strains in the India-Pakistan relationship as both states continue to compete for influence in Afghanistan. At the same time, Islamabad understands the need to improve its relations with Kabul and to reach out to other ethnicities than the Pashtun. By engaging the non-Pashtun factions, it would be able to expand its support base and also address their concerns about Pakistani policies and support for anti-Pakistan element in Afghanistan. Islamabad's primary interest in Afghanistan is to have a friendly government in Kabul that does not get involved in any anti-Pakistan activity.

Historically, Islamabad viewed Afghanistan's behavior, its close ties with India, and its support for anti-Pakistan elements as interconnected and a threat to its national security; it would like to see an end to this trend. However, Kabul's persistent refusal to recognize the Durand line as an international border further complicates this picture. Islamabad views the sudden rise of separatist activities in Baluchistan and increased Indian involvement in Afghanistan, especially in provinces bordering Pakistan, as interlinked.

Islamabad is keen to see the development of a stable and secure Afghanistan due to its desire to establish economic linkages with the Central Asian states. Central Asian energy resources can not only provide Pakistan with an opportunity to meet its ever increasing energy requirements but can also transform Pakistan into an energy hub or corridor via the Gwadar port. Islamabad is hence keen to see projects like TAPI realized. However, it also clearly understands that for Islamabad's Central Asian dream to materialize, a stable and viable Afghanistan is key. For this to happen, Islamabad will have to pay significant attention to improving its relations with Afghanistan and the Central Asian states, which are currently strained due to the continuing problem of religious extremism and terrorism which these countries believe emanates from Pakistan.

It is still not clear what exact shape the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014 will take,

and whether the U.S. will maintain some degree of military presence in Afghanistan. While most analysts point to the risk that Afghanistan will revert to a civil war-like situation after 2014, they also point to the competition for influence between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan.

CONCLUSIONS: Pakistan's concerns over and interests in Afghanistan are first and foremost security related since whichever direction Afghanistan will take; it will have an effect on Pakistan, especially on its tribal areas and the provinces of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Many lessons can be learned from events over the last 30 years. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan means a peaceful and stable Pakistan. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan, along with India, have much to gain by showing some acumen and cooperate in energy and other such sectors. But for this to happen, the leaderships of these states must come to an understanding about the core problem the region is facing. In other words, the region needs a regional approach to make it peaceful and prosperous; an accomplishable target if one has the resolve. As Mao said, a thousand miles journey begins with a single step.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Rizwan Zeb is based at the Centre for Muslim States and Societies, University of Western Australia, Perth. He is a former Benjamin Meaker Visiting professor of Politics, IAS, University of Bristol and a former visiting scholar at the Brookings Institution.

FIELD REPORTS

KAZAKHSTAN EMBARKS ON FAR-REACHING ECONOMIC REFORMS

Georgiy Voloshin

In his December 2012 address to the nation, President Nazarbayev presented an ambitious program of political, economic and social transformations aimed at permitting Kazakhstan to become one of the world's thirty most developed and prosperous countries by 2050. Nazarbayev's decision in mid-January 2013 to reorganize the government, via the establishment of a new ministry in charge of regional development and the optimization of policy functions within existing structures, was the first demonstration of this new course. Later on January 23, the Kazakh president met with members of his government in order to provide concrete guidelines for the short- and medium-term.

The first proposal announced by Nazarbayev was the creation of a single pension savings fund that would regroup assets from 11 existing pension organizations, both state-owned and private, which are currently controlling over US\$ 21 billion worth of private savings (the number of clients is slightly over 8.5 million in a country of almost 17 million people). In Nazarbayev's view, the purpose of this move would be to improve money lending to the non-extracting sector of the Kazakh economy by centralizing the placement of pension funds

within the private sector, under the government's regulatory supervision. This could not only provide better growth opportunities for small and medium businesses but also ensure the preservation of strategic reserves accumulated by the National Fund due to the high oil and gas revenues of the past pre-crisis years.

According to Kairat Kelimbetov, Prime Minister Akhmetov's deputy in charge of economic policies, the merger of separately functioning investment organizations could become operational already on July 1, 2013, while he also suggests placing a single entity under the supervision of the National Bank. However, the Bank's chairman Grigory Marchenko insists on the necessity of keeping the single fund within the government's purview, since the National Bank is not authorized by the current legislation to be a regulator and a custodian at the same time. Whatever the government's final decision on this issue, a recent survey conducted by Kapital.kz has shown that almost 37 percent of Kazakhstanis are skeptical about the utility of such a merger. Only 6.6 percent of them believe that the yield of their pension accounts may

even increase thanks to improved management and stricter oversight.

The second proposal put forward by Nazarbayev concerns Kazakhstan's banking sector. In his *Kazakhstan-2050* strategy, Nazarbayev stated that budgetary funds should hence be used exclusively for the implementation of large-scale investment projects. The participation of the state in private entities is furthermore expected to diminish during the next wave of mass privatizations for which the government will draft a registry of non-strategic assets open to purchase by foreign companies.

On February 4, Nazarbayev ordered the National Welfare Fund Samruk-Kazyna to withdraw from Kazakhstan's three crisis-stricken banks, BTA, Alliance Bank and Temir Bank, by the end of this year. In the case of BTA, Samruk-Kazyna became its majority shareholder in early 2009 after acquiring 81.84 percent of ordinary shares in exchange for urgent financial assistance. In early December 2012, the bank completed the last stage of restructuring aimed at decreasing the level of sovereign debt by more than 70 percent. Although Samruk-Kazyna's participation in the remaining banks has been less significant from the very beginning, their restructuring schemes are also actively supported by Kazakhstan's authorities. Whereas the future of the three institutions remains uncertain, Samruk-Kazyna's Deputy Director Elena Bakhmutova earlier said that they could be either merged

together and then sold to private investors or directly returned to the private sector provided they comply with the new banking rules introduced in the wake of the 2008-2009 financial turmoil.

Finally, Nazarbayev also suggested giving increased priority to the diversification of the national economy, while the development of the extracting sector is now expected to be more beneficial for local populations. In last November, the Kazakh president decided to lift the ban on the exploitation of newly discovered mineral deposits. Asset Issekeshov, the Minister of Industry and New Technologies, earlier said that subsoil users should spend at least one percent of their annual earnings on research and development activities as well as the transfer of technological innovations to their Kazakhstan-based counterparts. Moreover, additional measures are already being discussed with regard to the parity of remuneration between foreign and domestic workers and the volume of purchases of local production by energy companies (the so-called "local content"). Recently, Nazarbayev advised the country's trade unions to demand better working conditions for the locally hired workforce, also insisting on the need to ensure sustainable infrastructure and higher environmental standards. While tightening the rules of the game for such industrial giants as Chevron, ArcelorMittal or ENRC, Kazakh authorities are looking not only for increased revenues but also for improved social justice.

GEORGIAN PM IVANISHVILI STRIPS DEFENSE MINISTER ALASANIA OF VICE PM POST

Eka Janashia

Georgia's Defense Minister and the leader of the Our Georgia-Free Democrats (OGFD) Irakli Alasania, one of the six parties constituting the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition, has dismissed speculations over the possibility of the GD's collapse after his February 2 meeting with Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili. The first signs of uncertainty emerged on January 22 when Alasania stated on the Georgian Public Broadcaster's political talk show Accents that he had "tense" talks with PM over the upcoming October presidential elections. Ivanishvili's concerns were prompted by the fact that the OGFD's discussions over the presidential candidacy were not synchronized with the GD, Alasania said, adding that "I agree fully with him that the presidential candidate should be agreed with the coalition and agreed with the coalition leader Bidzina Ivanishvili."

The next day, Ivanishvili's decision to deprive Alasania of the post of Deputy PM was publically announced. This gave rise to considerable discussion regarding potential conflicts within the GD coalition. Initially, Ivanishvili and his team vigorously sought to present Alasania's demotion as a pragmatic move enabling the minister to focus strictly on defense issues. However, Ivanishvili later stated that Alasania's failure to coordinate the issue with him encouraged rumors and misinterpretations in the provinces. Ivanishvili also provided a more detailed motivation saying that a local police chief had recently

urged the head of the Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia (GDDG) party's local branch in Ozurgeti to leave his post and join Alasania's party as he would certainly become Georgia's next president. According to Ivanishvili, the "elementary carelessness" demonstrated by Alasania had badly affected the GD coalition activists and officials in regions.

Apparently, the root of the differences stems from the divergent visions of the OGFD and the other coalition members regarding the state's constitutional arrangement. The Republican Party (RP) supports a parliamentary form of governance where the president is elected by the legislative body instead of direct elections and has only symbolic powers. The OGFD, on the contrary, favors a strong presidential institution and the election of a president through a popular vote. The same arrangement is stipulated in the constitutional amendments that will enter into force after the October presidential elections if the RP's recently initiated amendments are not approved before that.

The initiative has the support of PM Ivanishvili, who also supports one of the RP leaders, Vakhtang Khmaladze, as a presidential candidate. However, neither the RP in general nor its leaders enjoy strong popular support. The RP thus has small chances of winning a direct presidential election but if a parliamentary form of governance will be established, Khmaladze could well become president with Ivanishvili's support. Such a

scenario will allow the RP's other leader and Speaker of parliament David Usupashvili to secure a high-profile post in the government. This is also very much in Ivanishvili's interest as he struggles to secure unchallenged power over each pillar of the political system but most vigorously over the presidency. A symbolic-representative status of the institution of the presidency will allow Ivanishvili to minimize the possibility of any serious confrontation with the executive branch.

However, a strong presidential institution and Alasania's presumed intention of running for president is a challenge to any such perspective. Alasania has enjoyed considerable popular support since 2008 when he left the United National Movement (UNM) and went into opposition. In the 2010 municipal elections in Tbilisi he obtained 19 percent of the votes and was the major rival of the incumbent mayor Gigi Ugulava.

While Ivanishvili is unlikely to accept a person with such high public ratings at a key political post, the Georgian public may conversely appreciate political diversity in the government. Given the UNM's long-lasting monolithic ruling, a division of power between the political factions is welcomed by many Georgians. This may be a key reason for the coalition's reluctance to submit the issue to a referendum as Alasania requires.

In addition, the OGF's preferences regarding the presidential institution coincide with those of the UNM, which is an additional issue of concern for GD.

Although there is at present little evidence to suggest either a split of the coalition or stronger ties developing between the OGF and the UNM, Alasania's demotion by Ivanishvili demonstrates that the latter does not trust him and will seek to prevent Alasania from gaining more power than he currently possesses.

OPPOSITION LEADERS ARRESTED AFTER RIOT IN AZERBAIJANI TOWN

Mina Muradova

An Azerbaijani court has ordered two opposition leaders, one of whom is planning to run for the 2013 Presidential elections, to be held for two months awaiting trial as authorities investigate their involvement in the staging of riots in the town of Ismayilli.

Ilgar Mammadov, chairman of the REAL (Republican Alternative) movement, and Tofiq Yaqublu, deputy chairman of the Musavat Party, were arrested and charged on February 4 and could face up to three years in jail if found

guilty. Their supporters maintain the arrests were politically motivated. On February 6, the U.S. Embassy in Baku issued a statement urging the government of Azerbaijan "to observe due process of the law and ensure transparency and fairness of the judicial process..., and to respect citizens' freedom of assembly and expression."

Dozens of people have been detained after the unrest in the town of Ismayilli, 200 kilometers northwest of Baku. Mammadov and Yaqublu

visited the town the day after hundreds of local residents staged protests on January 23, demanding the resignation of the district governor and setting his residence, two cars, and to a local hotel, associated with the governor, on fire. The district governor is Nizami Alakbarov, the brother of Azerbaijan's Labor and Social Security Minister Fizuli Alakbarov. Witnesses said hundreds of protesters surrounded the governor's residence on Thursday, chanting "Resignation! Resignation!"

Mammadov and Yaqublu visited Ismayilli to see what was going on, and returned on the same day. They spent no more than one hour in the town, where they spoke with local people and learned about the causes of the unrest.

On January 24, Mammadov posted on his Facebook page: "... we have thoroughly examined the situation in Ismayilli and now we are going back to Baku ... People are angry. They are preparing for further clashes and bought fuel. There are angry and determined people among local residents ... It is already a situation where unrest has turned into a crisis and the government has to find compromises." Like Mammadov, many observers consider the unrest to be a consequence of discontent with the local governor's abuse of power and alleged growing corruption, in addition to the lack of employment and prospects in regions.

Order was restored in the town after two days when police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the demonstrators. The violent clash between police and Ismayilli residents started after a traffic incident. According to media reports, Vugar Alakbarov – the son of the aforementioned Minister – and the nephew

of the Ismayilli governor were allegedly in a car that collided with a local taxi outside the Chirag Hotel in the evening of January 23. Witnesses say Alakbarov insulted the taxi driver and other locals. Rioters then apparently targeted property belonging to the Alakbarovs. Later, Azerbaijan's Interior Ministry issued a statement denying that the minister's son had been involved in the incident, stating he was not in the region on that day. An Interior Ministry statement asserted that the unrest was provoked by the hotel manager, Emil Shamsaddinov, and an associate identified as Elmaddin Mammadov. According to the ministry statement, "Both have been detained by police."

The district governor denied that the hotel belonged to his family or circle, and presented registration documents instead identifying VAFI Tourism as the owner. However, on January 28, Ilgar Mammadov posted screenshots of Alakbarov's Facebook page promoting the Chirag motel. The page was later deleted from the account. However, Radio Azadliq reported that Alakbarov is the director of Improtex Real Estate, LLC, which has a contract with Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide to build a Sheraton hotel in Ismayilli. According to the official company registry, he is the official owner of two other companies with similar names: VAFI Construction and VAFI REGION.

The executive secretary of REAL and economist Natig Jafarli said that "the regions [in Azerbaijan] are divided between the oligarch-ministers and their relatives or friends are appointed as governors; they monopolize the local economy and enjoy all the opportunities."

Jafarli, who was accompanying Mammadov in Ismayilli, stated that the detention of the two opposition leaders is “political order” and that the charges against them are absurd. At a press conference on February 5, he announced that “Starting from today REAL is nominating its leader Ilgar Mammadov for the 2013 Presidential elections.”

Since five years, Mammadov is director of the Council of Europe’s School of Political Studies in Azerbaijan. He is also co-chairing the Republicans Alternative Movement (REAL) established in December 2008. REAL’s platform is based on the agenda of Republicanism as opposed to Azerbaijan’s current regime. In addition, he is a member of the advisory boards of the Revenue Watch Institute and the U.S. German Marshal Fund’s Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation. Mammadov was previously affiliated with the National

Independence Party where he served as Deputy Chairman between 1998 and 2003.

The Directors of the Council of Europe’s Schools of Political Studies have condemned the arrest and imprisonment of their Azerbaijani colleague and call for his immediate release. In a statement issued on February 7, they urged Council of Europe and the European Union “to demand the immediate and unconditional release” of Mammadov whose only “crime” is to defend and promote the values and ideals of genuine democracy which underpin the European project.

“Starting from today, REAL’s board members, ordinary members and our supporters have to work hard..., and direct all our forces to Ilgar Mammadov’s campaign as a candidate in the presidential elections, as well as his prompt release, along with Yaqublu and other political detainees,” – posted Jafarli on his Facebook page on February 5.

OMBUDSMAN REELECTED IN KYRGYZSTAN

Aigul Kasymova

On December 10, 2012, Kyrgyzstan celebrated 10 years since the creation of the Ombudsman’s Office or the Institution of the Akyikatchy in Kyrgyz. During the ten years since its creation, the Ombudsman’s office has been recognized as a vital tool of democracy. According to the institution’s statistics, more than 200,000 people have applied for an appeal in 10 years. The Ombudsman is viewed by a majority as a mature state body, whose aim is to protect the rights and interests of its citizens and preserve dignity and honor.

In 2002, then President Askar Akayev signed a law on the Ombudsman. The law was passed by the Parliament’s Legislative Assembly and in November the same year, the first elections to the Ombudsman took place.

In contrast to its neighbors, Kyrgyzstan takes human rights relatively seriously. The current Ombudsman, in office since 2008, is former political dissident Tursunbek Akun. When Akun took office, he not only promised to defend human rights in the country but more importantly talked about reforming and

restructuring the institution to better serve its purpose. One of the most important reforms proposed by Akun was the creation of a special public council, which would be comprised of government officials, lawyers and human rights activists. Its main purpose is to monitor the human rights situation in the country, and then prepare recommendations for the government.

Despite much appreciation for the Ombudsman's office and its work, some view it as problematic that the current Ombudsman was nominated by then President Kurmanbek Bakiev, and claim that this puts the institution's independence into question. Certain human rights activists argue that the Ombudsman should be elected by human rights defenders and then be approved by the Parliament in order to provide stronger guarantees for its independence and the transparency of its work.

Despite such criticism, Kyrgyzstan's Ombudsman's office is arguably more independent and effective in safeguarding human rights than corresponding institutions in neighboring states. For example, in Kazakhstan, the Ombudsman's office is under the direct supervision of President Nursultan Nazarbaev. In Uzbekistan, the situation is very similar if not worse. Turkmenistan does not have an official office of the Ombudsman. Instead the administration of former President Saparmurat Niyazov created an Institute for Democracy and Human Rights. In a country where the head of state enjoys virtually unchallenged power, the institute is under executive control. Thus, the Kyrgyz institution stands out in the region as a uniquely vital tool for the protection of human rights.

In a country where human rights violations still occur, it is vital to ensure that the Ombudsman's office is not only fully independent from the executive body but most importantly carries out its work effectively and serves its true purpose. Despite the relative success of the institution and its positive record in comparison with neighboring countries, gross human rights violations still take place in Kyrgyzstan. According to Human Rights Watch, torture and arbitrary detentions in relation to the June 2010 ethnic violence in the south of the country have largely gone unpunished. There have been numerous reports from both international organizations and domestic civil society highlighting the unfair treatment of Uzbeks in the south by law enforcement officials, and the vulnerability of ethnic Uzbeks to torture by police. Freedom of expression is relatively liberal in Kyrgyz Republic compared to its neighbors, and human rights experts and activists, lawyers and civil society representatives and most importantly ordinary citizens frequently voice their concerns over the human rights situation in the country.

Akun's term as Ombudsman expired in February 2013, and he was reelected by parliament on January 23, facing competition from 17 additional candidates. Opinions differ on the fairness of the selection process. Some observers believe that Akun's reelection was decided in advance and that the selection process was merely a formality, while others believe that a fair consideration of all candidates was conducted. Regardless of these opinions and potential shortcomings in the selection process, the institution deserves recognition for its relatively strong track record

over the past ten years, and will hopefully continue to serve its purpose in the future.