

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst is an English language global Web journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing the Central Asia-Caucasus region. 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 may 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 (www.cacianalyst.org) and 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 author's 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 1000-1200 word analytical article must offer a concise and authoritative statement of the event or issue in question. An article must provide relevant, precise and authoritative background information. It also must offer a sober and analytical judgment of the issue as well as a clinical evaluation of the importance of the event. Authors must cite facts of controversial nature to the Editor who may contact other experts to confirm claims. Since *Analyst* articles are based on solid evidence, rather than rumors or conjecture, they prove to be reliable sources of information on the region. By offering balanced and objective analysis while keeping clear of inflammatory rhetoric, The Analyst does more to inform our international readership on all sides of the issues.

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Submission Guidelines:

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KEY ISSUE: A short 100-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: Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGdO. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed has for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 700-800 words.

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

Svante E. Cornell

Research Director; Editor, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program

Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University

1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, USA.

Tel. +1-202-663-5922; 1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785

KAZAKHSTAN STEPS OUT TO THE WORLD

Stephen Blank

An analysis of Kazakhstan's foreign policy makes it clear that President Nursultan Nazarbayev's government is about to embark on a major international campaign to establish and ensure Kazakhstan's place as a significant regional power broker capable of projecting economic power abroad and playing a significant role in global politics and economics, especially in the energy sector. While Astana continues to prioritize its relations with Moscow and Beijing, it has already become America's main partner in Central Asia and the EU is displaying ever more serious interest in Central Asia as it seeks to escape dependence upon Russian energy.

BACKGROUND: Kazakhstan's rising economic profile is the motor behind this process, and the foreign and domestic policies of the Nazarbayev regime intend to ensure the continuity of this growth and its international deployment. By 2008, The country's GDP is expected to be double that of 2000, and GDP per capita is expected to reach \$6,500 in 2007. Thus Nazarbayev aims to turn Kazakhstan into a regional locomotive of economic growth, a status that can only enhance its attractiveness to other major actors like Russia, China, America and the EU as a partner and that is actually what is happening.

Kazakhstan's rise to prominence entails its continuing a multivector foreign policy in the hierarchy listed above and reiterated by Nazarbayev in his annual "state of the union" speech on February 28. Nonetheless, Kazakhstan seeks to branch out not least because Moscow and Beijing frequently do not take its interests into account, or dismiss them in their own foreign policy. So an increasingly global foreign policy, even one that occasionally contradicts Moscow and Beijing, is becoming ever more important. In Central Asia, Nazarbayev not only seeks the status of a regional locomotive and continuing development of energy, extractive industries in general, infrastructure, and education and health. Beyond those goals he has also stated that it is "crucial" to have a transport corridor through the Caucasus and beyond to Europe, is considering building a refinery in Georgia that would

allow it to overcome its energy problems, and has signed an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with several international companies to transport Kazakh oil across the Caspian using the planned Eskene-Kuryk pipeline to a terminal on the Caspian coast. From there, tankers would take the oil to Azerbaijan for pumping into the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, thereby strengthening its utility and justifying the hopes first vested in it a decade ago. This Kazakh Caspian Transport System (KCTS) should be launched by 2010-11, and is worth an estimated \$3Billion.

This is not the only way in which Kazakhstan is escaping Russia's monopolistic policies. Its oil deals with China have paved the way for discussions about gas pipelines. Kazakhstan also is creating a financial sector in Almaty that is expected to compete with Russia as a regional hub. And it is already exporting capital to neighboring states, e.g. Kyrgyzstan. Nazarbayev's speech also called for negotiating with neighbors to create a more favorable climate for the export of Kazakh capital in Central Asia and in creating a dynamic market not only around the Caspian Sea but also in the Black Sea region. The aforementioned economic initiatives indicate this grand design, which has led to intensified discussions with Germany and Romania about energy shipments to those states. Both Germany and Romania, as well the EU as a whole, seek increased entry into the

Kazakh energy market to escape dependence upon Russia and its pipelines by offering, as does Romania, alternate routes for the export of energy to Europe, namely the Constanza-Trieste pipeline. And Astana is more than happy to oblige them as it seeks intensified contacts with the EU and an enhanced reputation throughout Europe as it campaigns for being granted the presidency of the OSCE in 2009. Kazakhstan is also exploring with Ukrainian President Yushchenko a second projected energy corridor to Europe using the Odessa-Brody-Gdansk oil pipeline.

IMPLICATIONS: It also is very likely that Kazakhstan will seek increased ties to NATO and America in order to help its armed forces achieve standards of interoperability with Western forces. Although it has recently signed agreements with Russia to equip its armed forces, this is most likely due to the fact that the Kazakh armed forces began with Russian equipment and is able to obtain spares and weaponry from Moscow based on its original park at concessionary prices. Nevertheless, it appears that Russian assistance will not suffice to reform the Kazakh armed forces to a Western standard and that ties with NATO and Washington will continue. And the Kazakh government does not see anything amiss with such ties, undoubtedly to Moscow's discomfiture.

Despite these shows of independence from Moscow, Russian analysts are increasingly aware of Kazakhstan's capabilities and acknowledge that it has the power to influence the stabilization of the situation in Turkmenistan under its new leadership. Certainly its view of regional integration is not equivalent to Moscow's and it will be interesting to see if either version or a third, alternative one, makes progress. But it must always be remembered that Kazakhstan is and has been able to succeed up till now precisely because it always takes Russian and Chinese interests into account and conducts a genuinely multipolar foreign policy. It will not be anyone else's stalking horse in Central Asia and clearly opposes efforts to subordinate the region to outside forces even as it seeks good relations with all the major actors. So at one and the same time, for example, its officials have stated that the greatest threat to international security is nuclear

proliferation, but also that Iran has the right to a peaceful nuclear program. Inasmuch as the latter point is guaranteed by the Non-Proliferation Treaty and is not an issue here, this is an anodyne way of telling Iran to submit to the IAEA and forego nuclear weapons since the issue of Iran's alleged treaty rights is a red herring as long as it refuses to fulfill its treaty obligations.

CONCLUSIONS: Assuming continued economic growth, Kazakhstan is well on the way to becoming what used to be called a regional influential that happens to enjoy good relations with all of its major interlocutors. This is an enviable achievement and is very much due to Nazarbayev's foreign policy that combines vision with prudence and realism. It also is on the way to becoming a major actor in world energy politics which will enhance its importance to European, Asian, and American governments for a long time to come. And it will also be a strong proponent of regional integration, if not economic leadership in Central Asia. Admittedly, its democratization program is not compatible with Western standards. And the succession to Nazarbayev is another troubling problem since it is unclear what will happen should it be necessary to appoint a successor to him. But while these weaknesses should be factored into any assessment of Kazakhstan's policies, this should not obscure the achievements of the regime in economics and foreign policy, and prospectively in defense. Kazakhstan is already a major Central Asian player and aims to project its initiatives for regional cooperation, global cooperation against proliferation and terrorism, and its role in global energy markets into a positive and reinforcing foreign policy of economic dynamism that will ensure not only its own stability but to some degree that of Central Asia as well.

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

ARMENIA ADOPTS A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

Harutioun Khachatrian

On February 7, President Robert Kocharyan adopted the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia, the first document of this sort in the country's history. It is expected to be a guide for the actions and statements done on behalf of Armenia, and coordinate the actions of the government bodies in a large variety of spheres, the moral and cultural ones being a large part of it. Being presented on the eve of the coming two national elections, the Strategy may serve the purpose to secure the continuity of the current administration's policy and even make its replacement more difficult.

BACKGROUND: According to the Strategy, there are five “fundamental values” of Armenia’s national security: Independence, Safety of state and the people, Peace and international cooperation, Protection of Armenian identity (“Hayapahpanutiuñ”) and Well-being. Protection of Armenian identity will be the job of the Armenian state both in Armenia and in the Armenian Diaspora, which is at least twice as numerous as the population of the Republic of Armenia. The document divides the threats to national security into two categories: the external and the internal realm. The former group includes eight elements: 1. Application of military force from Azerbaijan, probably supported by Turkey; 2. Internal conflicts in bordering countries; 3. Sabotage of transit routes in bordering countries; 4. Terrorism and trans-border crime; 5. Energy dependency; 6. Isolation of Armenia from regional programs; 7. Weakening of national-cultural identity of Diaspora; 8. Epidemics and catastrophes. The list of internal threats includes the following 12 items: 1. Decrease of the efficiency of the state governance system, and lack of confidence towards the judicial system; 2. Imperfection of the political system; 3. Insufficient level of democracy; 4. Polarization of

society; 5. Urbanization; 6. Challenges of the formation of market economy and fiscal management; 7. Unsufficient level of infrastructural network; 8. Low efficiency of the science and education systems; 9. Shortcomings of moral-psychological and patriotic training; 10. Negative demographic trends; 11. Environmental problems and inefficient management of natural resources.

Accordingly, the document discerns two strategies, for internal and external security. Strategies in internal security has four components. Whereas the first two, “effective state governance” and “development of the Army”, are relatively standard and contain more or less typical provisions, the two others, “liberal economy” and “new quality of life and the moral-psychological atmosphere”, are less banal. The liberal economy section contains an elaborate description of the complex of interconnected measures aimed at securing sustainable economic growth. Among the main components are: deepening of financial intermediation, prevention of monopolies, stimulation of knowledge-efficient economy, enhancement of energy security (via diversification of supplies), utilization of environment-friendly

technologies, etc. The last section includes an even longer list of ambitious measures ranging from those aimed at “constant increase in living standards” to those for stimulating “continuous development of the spiritual-cultural sphere.” Examples of measures in this category include the commercialization of the scientific production, prevention of brain drain, cooperation with foreign countries in preserving cultural monuments on their territories, protection of the ethnic identity of national minorities living in Armenia, and the development of Armenian content on the Internet.

As for the foreign security strategy, it is based on the trademark of Armenian foreign policy, complementarity, that is a policy of having as good relations as possible with all powers with an interest in the region in an effort to harmonize these interests and avoiding conflicts. This section presents the traditional lines of Armenian foreign policy in recent years. These include the strategic partnership with Russia together with multilateral (including military) cooperation with the U.S. and Greece, membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization and close co-operation with NATO, as well as a priority task to develop relations with the EU. That said, there is no stated goal to become a member of the EU, contrary to Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian’s 1999 statement. The importance of membership in the CIS and OSCE, importance of friendly ties with Iran and Georgia and openness for improvement of relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan (e.g., through regional and cross-border programs), are also stressed. A separate section states that Azerbaijan’s threats to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict “through achieving military supremacy over Armenia” is a threat to the national security of Armenia. The document claims that any solution to the problem should be a compromise aimed at fixing the *de facto* existence of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Finally, the complex of issues related to the Armenian Diaspora is recognized as an “important peculiarity” of the national security of the country. Armenia is said to undertake efforts to prevent the assimilation of the Diaspora

Armenians, and the Diaspora is expected to be an important factor of development of Armenia as it is seen as “a bridge between Armenia and the world community.”

IMPLICATIONS: As the first-ever attempt to coordinate the activities of all state bodies of Armenia, the strategy is set as a guide to develop specific spheres of activity. The document’s concluding section stipulates that the government has to develop special programs in eleven specific spheres, from military to cultural, based on the provisions of the Strategy. The Presidential decree on the adoption of the Strategy also contains a commission to the government to start developing the mentioned branch programs, although not specifying the terms. Despite the suggestions made during two-year long public discussions, the Strategy was not given the status of a law, in order to leave the executive branch more room for amending it if necessary.

The Strategy was developed by a task force headed by Defense Minister Serge Sargsian, who is also the Secretary of the National Security Council. Sargsian is a leading candidate to replace Kocharyan as President, and the elaboration and discussion processes served, among other, as a pre-election tool for the minister. The adopted Strategy will likely serve the same purpose in the future.

However, its value in the long run looks even more significant. The current government has two months of life left before the May 12 parliamentary elections. For now, it is not evident that Sargsian’s Republican Party of Armenia will be able to keep its lead in the government. The prospects of the presidential elections to be held in March 2008 are even less clear. Nevertheless, it is likely that the current policy, as detailed in the Strategy, will be there for several years to come. Whatever the outcome of the two national elections, the provisions of the Strategy are unlikely to be seriously revised in the near future. This is the case first of all because the most likely successors to the current government are members of the current ruling elite and share their approaches. In particular, the Bargavach Hayastan (“Prosperous Armenia”)

party, which is the RPA's most serious rival (and evidently sponsored by Kocharyan), does not differ from the RPA in terms of either programs or tactics. The second reason is that the majority of the provisions of the Strategy have few alternatives that are being supported in Armenia. Among the few provisions of the Strategy that are challenged are the relations with Russia and the West. However, the parties having a strong pro-Western orientation, such as Orinats Yerkir ("Country of land", led by the former speaker Arthur Bagdasarian), are very unlikely to take the lead. Another controversy regards the policy of supporting recognition of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 by other states. Some parties claim that Armenia should not do so, in order to improve relations with Turkey. However, this issue has not even been touched upon in the Strategy, and future governments can freely abandon these tactics, if necessary.

CONCLUSIONS: The National Security Strategy of Armenia may be helpful in making the policy of

the Armenian government more coordinated and straightforward, especially when special programs for specific spheres are prepared. A key issue is that, while remaining allied with Russia, Armenia declares itself to adhere to Western values, democracy and market economy, and to consider these the fundamentals of its national security. A novel element brought about by the Strategy may be a much more extensive intervention of the government in the spheres of culture, moral and psychological issues. Finally, it is likely that, if the strategy starts being enacted immediately, then the current ruling triumvirate – President Robert Kocharyan, Prime Minister Andranik Margarian and Defense Minister Serge Sargsian – will secure the continuity of their current policy, no matter if they personally will keep top government positions or not.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Haroutiun Khachatrian is an analyst on political and economic issues based in Yerevan, Armenia.

The cover of the Silk Road Paper is dark blue. At the top, the title "The State-Crime Nexus in Central Asia" is written in white. Below it, in a smaller font, is the subtitle "State Weakness, Organized Crime, and Corruption in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan". In the bottom right corner, the author's name "Erica Marat" is printed. At the very bottom, the text "SILK ROAD PAPER October 2006" is visible. The logo of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, featuring stylized buildings, is located at the bottom left. Below the logo, the text "Central Asia- Caucasus Institute" and "Silk Road Studies Program" is written.

New Silk Road Paper!

**The State-Crime Nexus in Central Asia:
State Weakness, Organized Crime and Corruption in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan**

by Erica Marat

This paper analyzes the divergent forms that relationships between organized crime and the state have taken in the two worst hit Central Asian states in the past decade.

This 138-page paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

POST-SOVIET RADICALS AND SPREAD OF TERRORISM

Dmitry Shlapentokh

The February 2007 explosion at a McDonald's in St. Petersburg and the terrorist alert throughout Russia that ensued indicates that terrorist threats, originally emanating from the Caucasus, have not ended. The terrorist campaign was launched by the Chechen resistance, but it became contagious in the sense that the idea of terror and types of terror-related violence were reinforced among people who were neither Chechens nor Muslims. The philosophies of some of those who could be defined as Russian radicals, such as Limonov and, especially, the recently imprisoned Stomakhin, are of great importance for understanding possible avenues for recruiting terrorists.

BACKGROUND: Most of the Left's agenda in the modern West – racial and ethnic equality, ecology, women's rights, etc. – has fallen on deaf ears in post-Soviet Russia. Even those who describe themselves as Leftist radicals pay little if any attention to the rights of workers, the hallmark of the traditional Left. The Russian extreme Left can be described only by a few general characteristics: being outside and hostile to the government; not being racist; being willing to engage in actions such as demonstrations and attacks on officials; and advocating/engaging in violence.

The radical Left emerged soon after the collapse of the USSR, with some groups resembling the traditional Left in Europe, for example, "Toilers Russia" (Trudovaia Rossiiia), led by Viktor Anpilov (b.1945). These groups usually accused mainstream Communists of betraying the Marxist-Leninist creed, even actually supporting Yeltsin's counter-revolutionary dictatorship. At the beginning of Yeltsin's rule, these groups staged several noisy demonstrations, but they soon disappeared, leaving no political legacy.

The major reason for the lack of an intellectual legacy was that traditional Leftists who appealed to the interests of the workers had no social base. Rather than rising to defend their rights and repeat the 1917 revolution, the workers have been basically passive. There was sporadic worker unrest at the beginning of Yeltsin's rule, but it never reached the level of the 1905-1917 revolutionary violence, which threatened the very existence of the regime. Widespread disappointment in the ability of the workers to be a revolutionary force was felt not only by the radical Left (e.g., Anpilov's supporters) but also by Ziuganov's Communists. When these groups started to lose the belief that the workers, the Russian masses in general, could be a lead toward the end of the regime, they began to look for someone who could play that role.

The ethnic minorities emerged as a possible alternative. From this perspective, these Russian radicals were similar to the European Left in the 1960s and 1970s, who, also disillusioned about the revolutionary potential of the workers, looked to radical minorities as well as those who were engaged in any sort of deviant behavior as the force

that could overthrow the existing order. They were also prone to justify any type of violence, including terror. In Russia's case the appeal was made either to ethnic Russians, transformed into minorities in the republics of the former USSR (Limonov), or to Chechens (Stomakhin).

IMPLICATIONS: While skeptical about the Russian populace, Eduard Limonov (b. 1943), like many other post-Soviet oppositionists believed that the Russians would finally rise. But he differed from the Communists and other "Red to Browns" in thinking that Russians in Russia needed encouragement from abroad. Limonov looked to the Russian enclaves in the former Soviet republics, where ethnic Russians had been converted into powerless and often discriminated minorities, quite similar to what happened to ethnic Germans in fragments of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire after World War I. In Limonov's view, these "Sudeten" Russians were much more nationalist than their brethren in the Russian Federation, and their position made them nationalistic firebrands, so they should be a revolutionary vanguard of the "national-socialistic" revolution. Following this paradigm, Limonov planned to stage an uprising in northern Kazakhstan with its big Russian population, and even tried to get weapons for uprisings. Nothing came of the enterprise; Limonov was arrested and spent some time in prison.

Limonov's belief in the ability to raise at least some of the Russian populace was dashed, but a new trend started to emerge some time before his ill-fated attempt. The best representative of this trend is Boris Stomakhin (b. 1974), recently imprisoned for five years. Stomakhin's intellectual and political evolution is quite different from that of Limonov, who is still grounded in the "Red to Brown" legacy and Soviet era socioeconomic arrangements. Stomakhin is a strong supporter of the West and a libertarian of a sort.

Limonov and Stomakhin were on opposite sides of the barricades (in fact, Stomakhin had a very negative feeling toward Limonov), but they were structurally similar: both had been disappointed with the Russians. Stomakhin has become even

more disappointed than Limonov. He sees no hope for Russia, a nation that could produce no one but slaves to render complete support to the brutal regimes that shaped the course of Russian history from the very beginning. In his view, Russians were also an imperial people that had subjugated and murdered all other ethnic groups of the empire. Russia and Russians have always been a major threat for humanity. So the destruction of Russia, the dismantling of the Russian state, is a major goal of mankind.

In Stomakhin's view, the West is too complacent for a resolute struggle against this ultimate evil, and true Russian revolutionaries like himself are still a tiny minority and cannot do much. Only one force could batter the Russian Empire—the Muslim minority, mostly Chechens. Stomakhin became a contributor to Kavkaz.org, the Chechen extremist Internet site, and supported all acts of terror—including taking hostages in Moscow in 2002 and killing hundreds of children in Beslan in 2004. His publications also provide advice to Chechen radicals and other enemies of the state and Russia as to where to strike. He stated that Putin should be assassinated in the manner of Alexander II, killed by revolutionaries in 1881. The Russian militia should be killed, and nationalists from the Baltic states should blow up the underwater pipelines designed to supply gas to the West but not to the Baltic states and Eastern Europe. He even advocated nuclear terrorism, for all means should be used to destroy the absolute evil – the Russians and their state.

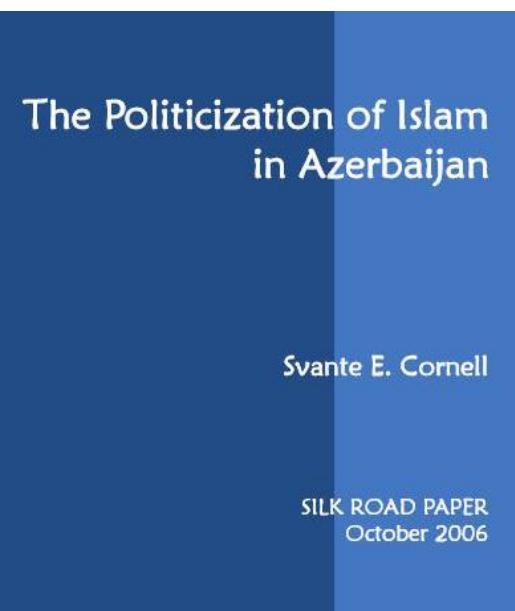
CONCLUSIONS: What are the implications of the views of Stomakhin and similar people who, whatever their original positions, have moved to the extreme Left in at least some aspects of their ideology? The number of people who hold these views is still extremely small. But their very existence should be of great concern to both Russia and the global community. To start with, they offer possible recruitment sources for Chechen terrorists and Islamic terrorists in general. Usually, Islamic converts are regarded as the important pool for potential terrorists. But people such as Stomakhin

indicate that radicals with no religious affiliation can also join. These potential terrorists would bring important assets to Islamic terrorists. Indeed, ethnic Russians and others who do not look like people from the Middle East and the Caucasus could more easily move around and engage in acts of terror or help the terrorists.

Finally, people like Stomakhin provide important clues about the terror culture in a broad segment of Russian society, not just among Islamic militants. It might even be an indirect indication that the terrorist tradition is part of the tradition of those

who fight terrorists – the Russian government. And this might shed light on mysterious events from the 1999 Moscow apartment explosions to the 2006 poisoning of defector Alexander Litvinenko in the United Kingdom.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Dmitry Shlapentokh, History Department, Indiana University at South Bend.



 Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program

New Silk Road Paper!

The Politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan

by Svante E. Cornell

This 75-page Silk Road Paper analyzes the increasing Islamic revival in Azerbaijan, as well as the potential for politicization of Islam. The report discusses the background and reasons for increasing Islamic sentiment in the country, as well as external influences linked to this phenomenon and government policy toward the issue.

The paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

THE THREAT OF CONSCRIPTION: A NEW SABRE FOR UMAROV TO RATTLE?

Kevin Daniel Leahy

Chechnya's pro-Moscow authorities will reportedly be obliged to provide Russia's armed forces with 30,000 conscripts this year alone. Previous attempts to enforce conscription in Chechnya, however, have proved futile. Potential conscripts and their families are fearful of the age-old practice of "dyedovshchina", a type of institutionalized bullying in which Chechens and other ethnic minorities have traditionally been specifically targeted.

Historically, the threat of conscription has often served as a bountiful political theme for political oppositionists to capitalize on. In the case of Chechnya, there is one obvious political constituency which stands to gain from the introduction of conscription: The Chechen rebel movement.

BACKGROUND: The dangers of military service in Russia were highlighted last year by a high-profile case involving one Andrei Sychev, a private in the Russian army who had to have both his legs amputated following a particularly brutal assault by other servicemen. The Sychev case clearly illustrated that ethnicity alone does not determine who shall bully and who shall be bullied; but it is clear that the Russian army has a long-standing reputation as a particularly inhospitable environment for ethnic minorities. Hence minority groups within the Russian Federation are naturally especially apprehensive about military service. Apart from the threat of "dyedovshchina", servicemen from a minority background must also contend with a barracks culture which is often entirely alien to them. The majority of Muslims presently serving in Russia's armed forces come from the North Caucasus region. The vast majority of North Caucasians who object to conscription worry less about cultural alienation than they do about dyedovshchina, however. Simply put, they do not trust the army to safeguard their rights should they, or their sons, choose to enlist. Essentially, the Russian state has failed to secure the "contingent consent" of the local population. As the social scientist Margaret Levi has put it: "To the extent that a group of citizens perceives its interests as insufficiently represented, government actors as

untrustworthy, and institutions incapable of compelling promise-keeping, that set of citizens will refuse their consent". Without the contingent consent of the republic's populace, therefore, how can Chechnya's pro-Moscow government hope to recruit 30,000 conscripts? Although in private they must surely realize that their chances of sourcing that many conscripts are virtually nil, the Grozny administration is not, in principle, opposed to the concept of conscription. Early last year, for instance, recently deposed pro-Moscow Chechen President Alu Alkhanov stated: "I am convinced that young men in Chechnya must go through army service. This will have a positive effect on their upbringing, enhance their feeling of patriotism and give them life experience." It should be noted, however, that Chechnya's strongman and recently appointed President, Ramzan Kadyrov, has yet to weigh in decisively on this issue. Although Kadyrov is known to hold the Russian army in very low esteem, this does not necessarily mean that he would reject the introduction of conscription out of hand. Quite the opposite in fact, for the mass provision of Chechen conscripts could function as a useful bargaining chip in his future relations with Moscow.

IMPLICATIONS: With the term of obligatory military service set to be cut to a single year in 2008, it is estimated that Russia will have to adapt by

calling up 700,000 recruits yearly instead of 350,000. With most speculation now suggesting that President Putin will indeed relinquish office in 2008, a resultant reappraisal of relations between Kadyrov and the federal centre would seem to beckon. Kadyrov's political pre-eminence in Chechnya arises mainly from his excellent personal relations with Putin. Should Putin leave office, then Kadyrov will be forced to cultivate a new relationship with his successor. What better way to inaugurate this new relationship than by offering to help bail Russia out of its conscript shortfall through the provision of Chechen manpower? Should Russia's current Minister of Defence, Sergei Ivanov, accede to the presidency, then Kadyrov's offer would be particularly welcome given that Ivanov's structural reforms are directly responsible for the projected shortfall.

There are other reasons why Kadyrov might wish to furnish the Russian armed forces with Chechen conscripts. Firstly, a steady stream of conscripts departing Chechnya for foreign postings might act as a pressure valve domestically. Despite Kadyrov's protestations to the contrary, Chechnya is certainly not on the verge of an economic boom. Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Dimitri Medvedev, another presidential contender, recently described the progress of Chechnya's reconstruction scheme in distinctly prosaic terms, labelling it "fairly good." Thus, with high levels of unemployment set to endure for the foreseeable future, Kadyrov may undertake to occupy Chechnya's idle youth through introducing compulsory military service. It is also possible that Kadyrov might use the conscript shortfall as a bargaining chip in order to gain greater autonomy for Chechnya. Of course, whether or not Moscow would be willing to make a deal along these lines is very much open to question. There is, however, considerable historical precedent of governments bargaining with representatives of minority constituents in this manner. For instance, during the First World War the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, seemed willing to offer Ireland Home Rule in return for a plentiful supply of Irish conscripts. In the final analysis, however, it was not the Home Rulers who prospered from this agreement, for the unwelcome

spectre of conscription helped to drive large numbers of otherwise apolitical Irish into the arms of the radical, anti-conscription party, Sinn Fein.

So unpopular is the prospect of compulsory military service among Chechens that it is quite feasible that a concerted attempt to enforce conscription in the republic might lead to a dramatic upsurge in popular support for the rebel insurgency. Dokka Umarov and his followers must be hoping that Kadyrov's undisguised political ambition, allied with his ever-lengthening list of political opponents and the uncertainty engendered by Russia's pending presidential succession, will lead the young prime minister to take a rash gamble and play the conscription card.

CONCLUSIONS: Given the present political climate in Chechnya, any attempt to enforce conscription would play directly into the hands of Dokka Umarov. In the minds of most ordinary Chechens, conscription into the Russian army is synonymous with beatings, overt discrimination and mistreatment generally. The rebel movement represents a natural political sanctuary for those (and their families) who might be threatened with forcible enlistment at some future point. Chechens' aversion to military service is evidently shared by the Russian masses who continue to evade conscription in their droves. In the future, mutual opposition to conscription might aid in bringing down the cultural and political barriers that presently separate Russians and Chechens. Indeed, such is the undisguised political potential of popular anti-conscription sentiment that the *Economist* was moved in 2005 to opine "...if anything could alienate ordinary Russians from Mr. Putin's still popular regime, the prospect of tens of thousands of their sons being called up just might be it." This warning also rings true for Chechnya's pro-Moscow rulers, whose popularity (according to most anecdotal accounts) pales in comparison to that enjoyed by Mr. Putin.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Kevin Daniel Leahy holds a postgraduate degree from University College York, Ireland.

FIELD REPORTS

CELEBRATING NOVRUZ IN CENTRAL ASIA

Erica Marat

On March 21, states whose territory was part of the Silk Road trade route between China and Europe celebrate Novruz, a holiday rooted in the Zoroastrian tradition and translated as “new day” from Farsi. These include the five Central Asian states, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Afghanistan, parts of Turkey, India, Pakistan, China and Russia.

Novruz, spelled differently in each state, has become one of the attributes illustrating ethnic peculiarities among the Central Asian nations. Every year, massive celebrations are staged in the Central Asian capital cities. Along with some common rituals prepared and performed under Central Asian governments’ supervision, Novruz is also a venue for parading national costumes, dances, and food. The holiday is associated with values of unity, forgiveness and new beginning.

For some Central Asians, the historical background of Novruz was largely unknown until 1991, when the holiday was introduced after the collapse of the Soviet regime. Although Novruz does not signify any religious identity, its celebrations quickly incorporated a blend of Islamic and pagan traditions. The scope of Novruz celebrations is usually similar to national independence days. Celebrations of both Novruz and independence days are primarily promoted by Central Asian political

elites. Public employees and students are mobilized to prepare celebrations. Streets are cleaned and decorated with Novruz banners.

In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan Novruz is gaining increasing importance and popularity among the local public. Of all Central Asian states, these two states have the most eclectic collection of religious and cultural holidays. Urban Kazakh and Kyrgyz publics celebrate Christmas according to Western and Russian Orthodox calendars.

In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the celebration of Novruz has always been a well-planned and extravagant activity. Former Turkmen president Saparmurat Niyazov merged Novruz with women’s day, thus attributing the holiday a peculiar connotation. Niyazov cancelled International Women’s Day on March 8 and instead sought to emphasize women’s role in Novruz celebrations. Both the Turkmen and Uzbek governments usually tighten security in public places during Novruz celebrations, fearing mass unrests. In Uzbekistan, the scope of Novruz celebrations at times depends on current security situation in the country.

For Tajikistan, Novruz has a special meaning. By celebrating Novruz, the Tajik government primarily emphasizes the country’s links to Persian civilization. On March 11, Tajik president Emomali

Rakhmonov organized a forum of Farsi mass media outlets to further promulgate his idea of creating a common Farsi TV channel in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. The channel would foster a common Farsi information medium. Although Rakhmonov's project is far from being implemented, it raises a number of sensitive issues in each of the three countries.

For Tajikistan, the emphasis of its Persian roots distances the country from its Central Asian neighbors and Russia. Domestically, incorporating Zoroastrian symbols into the national ideology reduces the role of Islam in state politics. Arguably, Rakhmonov's ideological projects based on Zoroastrian history sought to alienate the Islamic Renaissance Party, Tajikistan religious opposition. In Afghanistan, Rakhmonov's project may find opposition among Pashtuns, who deny their belonging to Persian civilization. Furthermore, building ties with Iran is counter-intuitive to Afghanistan's relations with the U.S.

In their public speeches on Novruz celebrations, Central Asian presidents usually promote values of national unity and the importance of state sovereignty. Novruz is used as a sign of strong ethnic identity that survived seven decades of the Soviet rule, when the holiday was forbidden.

After gaining independence, some Soviet holidays were discontinued in the Central Asian states. These mainly included November 7, the Day of the 1917 Revolution, and April 22, Lenin's birthday. A number of professional holidays, such as Cosmonauts' Day (April 12), were forgotten during the independence period as well. However, some Soviet holidays, usually containing loose political connotations and celebrated internationally, continued to be part of the local culture. Among them are New Year's Eve, International Women's Day, and International Labor Day. The Day of the National Defender on February 23, although not an official holiday in any of the Central Asian countries, is still popular. Except for Turkmenistan, these holidays are not banned by governments and sometimes are even encouraged.

For most Central Asians Novruz is part of their imagined pre-Islamic past. The Central Asian public's knowledge and skill in celebrating Novruz is growing, with more people associating themselves with the holiday. As Novruz is gaining popularity throughout the region, more people follow traditions of cooking "sumolok", a traditional wheat-based dish, as well as celebrating the holiday in family settings.

FISTFIGHT IN AZERBAIJANI PARLIAMENT INDICATES CONTROVERSY WITHIN RULING BLOCK

Azer Kerimov

Last week, a rather rare fistfight broke out between two members of the Azerbaijani Parliament. Independent MP Huseyn Abdullayev and the chairman of the pro-government Ana Veten party Fazail Agamali turned words into action right on the floor of the legislative body. While it may seem rather ordinary at first sight, the incident contains

deep elements of the known tensions within the ruling block.

Foremost, it should be noted that the incident took place right after the speech of Prime Minister Artur Rasizadeh. The latter came to the Parliament with the whole Cabinet of Ministers to deliver the government's annual report to the Parliament. Some opposition papers predicted a day before that

tensions will break out in the Parliament after Rasizadeh's speech. The Prime Minister gave a rather dull report about the progress of the economy and social welfare in the country by showing facts and figures known to most of the public.

Immediately after his report, Abdullayev took the floor and harshly criticized the report and the general performance of the government. Specifically, he lashed out at the business climate in the country. Speaker of the Parliament Oktay Asadov tried to interrupt him, but Abdullayev would not stop. Then Agamali stepped in and in a very vulgar way demanded that Abdullayev stop his remarks. The cursing and swearing quickly turned into a rather ugly fist-fight on the floor of the newly refurbished and repaired Parliament.

Subsequently, on Monday Abdullayev was arrested and charged with hooliganism and causing trauma to another person. The court of Baku found him guilty and Abdullayev was detained for two months. Prior the arrest, Parliamentarians were assembled for an emergency meeting to lift Abdullayev's immunity. Heated discussions broke out in the Parliament regarding this issue. Some MPs argued that the punishment was too harsh for the fist-fight and that Abdullayev should simply apologize. Opposition MPs expressed concerns that the incident could turn into a bad precedent in the future and every time the government wants to get rid of opposition deputies, they would provoke such fights. Finally, there were those who could not understand why Abdullayev was being punished and Agamali not, if both of them participated in the fight with the latter even throwing the first punch.

Nevertheless, the final results of the vote were rather bad news for Abdullayev. 79 MPs voted in favor of lifting his immunity and only 15 were against. Others either abstained or did not vote. "This incident is a spit in the face of the ruling party. He should not get away with it," said Siyavush Novruzov, member of the ruling party. "Some people want to return Azerbaijan back into the 1990s, when decisions were made with the power of hands. We will not allow it," echoed his fellow party member Mubariz Gurbanli.

Indeed, common fist-fights in the Parliament during the early 1990s are often used by the authorities as a way to discredit the previous regime led by the late Abulfez Elchibey. Having the same now is not earning the current administration any respect.

Local analysts argue there might be two reasons for the harsh response towards Abdullayev. One is related to his personal character and wealth. Abdullayev is known in general public as a person with a criminal background. He is a wealthy businessman and reportedly even maintains a small group of 60-70 sportsmen/personal bodyguards. His is very emotional and often impulsive, using slang and vulgar language and refusing to recognize any authority. His being in the Parliament (many people still can not understand how he even made it into Parliament) sends a concerned message to the authorities of what the Parliament could look like in several years – a house full of rich businessmen, not subordinated to the executive branch.

This incident may have been used by the central authorities not only calm down Abdullayev himself, as he has been numerously creating scenes in the Parliament before, but also to send a warning message to all other like-minded MPs and future MPs to not misbehave.

Another version circulating regarding his arrest is that he is being punished by Minister of Interior Ramil Usubov. Several months ago, Abdullayev was on the vanguard of the attacks against Usubov, demanding his resignation. At that time, local analysts believed that the fight was within the ruling party itself to get rid of Usubov. But the latter survived and now might be striking back.

Arresting maverick MP Abdullayev might be a necessary step to cool down the ambitions of the rich oligarchs, but two questions still remain: why was he arrested while holding parliamentary immunity, and why does Agamali remains unpunished?

AKSY EVENTS STILL TORMENT KYRGYZ GOVERNMENT

Nurshat Ababakirov

The blood-spattered clashes of locals with law-enforcement officers in the small Bozpiek village of Aksy rayon in the south of Kyrgyzstan, which precipitated the subsequent ouster of President Askar Akaev in March 2005, are still a challenge to the current government. No government official, including President Bakiev who was the Prime Minister at that time, seems to take responsibility for the murder of civilians. An exceptional stress on justice, amplified by the strengthening of the opposition planning to stage mass rallies in April, leaves little room for the president to maneuver.

In his address on 17 March in Aksy, President Bakiev called for deterring the efforts of some politicians to “politicize” the Aksy events. But to the question of seemingly dissatisfied people as to why the involved officials are still not punished, the president once again mentioned that he is not a “czar” to overcome the constitutional framework. Nevertheless, in order to placate the strong demand of the grassroots, the president had to sack the Prosecutor General, Kambaraly Kongantiev, on 19 March, who was believed to have failed to expose the officials that gave the orders to shoot at civilians. Also, as the opposition says, the former Prosecutor General was preoccupied with staging political battles and prosecuting unfavorable people, rather than dealing with criminals and corruption.

Currently, no one has been found guilty and charged with the murder of civilians in Aksy. The investigation was closed on 18 December 2006 with little public acknowledgement. The accused were freed through various means, such as the absence of *corpus delicti*, illegal proceedings, and amnesties. These were mostly low-level state officials and law-enforcement officers, which directly dealt with the matter.

However, discontent grew, looming to be another ground for criticism for the president. This owed

partly to the petition of parliamentarian Azimbek Beknazarov, whose politically motivated imprisonment in 2002 spurred public unrest in Aksy. The special agency dealing with the most important criminal cases has reopened the matter for additional investigation. President Bakiev said he would “personally” oversee the investigation.

Meanwhile, on 16 March the United Front of Felix Kulov initiated an evening-requiem for commemoration of Aksy events in Bishkek. Even though prominent opposition members like Omurbek Tekebaev, Temir Sariev, Kabay Karabekov, Kulov, Rosa Otunbaeva, Omurbek Suvaliev, Asiya Sasykbaeva and others took part in the gathering, it was mostly ordinary people that spoke to the public, something that was planned by the organizers in order to avoid a political slant. In the view of relatives of the murdered civilians, the “Aksy matter” cannot be completed unless high-level state officials that gave orders to brutally suppress the civilians face justice. Also, many come to believe that it will remain highly politicized if it remains unsolved and without legal evaluation.

On 16 March the former president, Askar Akaev, conveyed his letter on the 24.kg news site. He pointed out that no one virtually saw the whole picture of events and he himself did not have sufficient information about the “brewing critical confrontation.” Admitting his guilt as a president, however, he suggests watching the video of a may 2002 Security Council meeting to find the “truth.” He underlined Bakiev’s “unsightly behavior” and his attempt to escape the direct responsibility for the incident. As Prime Minister, Bakiev chaired the Security Council. Shortly thereafter, he resigned from the government and joined the opposition.

However, the ousted president also attempted to provide an explanation: the “democratic deficit” and the limited understanding of democratic norms by

law-enforcement officers. He argues that force was seen as the supreme manifestation of power and its use was accepted by law. Further, he points to the "provocative actions of extremist elements," which intentionally led to excesses and bloodshed.

Parliamentarian Azimbek Beknazarov, representative of Aksy rayon, remaining a leading and ardent critic, said that he does not believe the statements by President Bakiev that the guilty officials will be punished. The president failed to set deadlines for the investigation and evaded the answer with ambiguous words, he reasoned. He was dismissed as Prosecutor General, he believes, because the case of Aksy "tragedy" was almost ready for consideration by the court, with 70 percent of work being completed. However, his silence over this already accomplished work generates criticism on him.

Referred to both by the opposition and the government as a "national tragedy," the Aksy events still remain politically and legally

unevaluated, despite President Bakiev's initial promise to finalize the investigation within several months. Many see political agendas as the main obstacle to the investigation. For example, on live TV, Amanbek Karypkulov, who was the chairman of the presidential administration during the Aksy events, simply requested facts of his involvement, in the face of heavy accusation and discontent, and said that he will turn to courts to dispute "ungrounded" accusations.

In general, it seems this "sore spot" cannot be healed easily as the cadres, remained from the previous regime, find themselves responsible for it at some point and their influence on the president makes the issue more problematic. It seems that President Bakiev will not muster enough political will to solve the issue, since it may entail a further loss of support and endanger his position in power. And the dismissal of the Prosecutor General is certain to prolong the case to some point in the future.

KAZAKHSTAN EXTENDS HELPING HAND TO GEORGIA

Marat Yermukanov

Kazakhstan's deepening economic cooperation with Georgia and Ukraine is increasingly assuming political connotations which go far beyond the boundaries of bilateral relations. A red rag to Moscow and a hopeful development for energy-hungry Western Europe, frequent reciprocal trips between Astana and Tbilisi culminated in the signing of new bilateral agreements during Mikheil Saakashvili's second visit to Kazakhstan.

The Georgian President's brief stopover in Astana on his way to Japan on March 5 could hardly be called an epoch-making visit. Even observers

familiar with Mikheil Saakashvili's distaste for ceremonial pompousness were puzzled by the low profile he upheld in his talks with his Kazakh counterpart and with journalists, dropping casual jokes about tourism and investment. But in Astana, everybody knows that the current state of Georgian economy, especially in the energy sector, is anything but a joking matter. What brought Mikheil Saakashvili to Astana was essentially a desperate need for investment. After last year's gas row with Moscow, Tbilisi is restlessly looking for alternative suppliers of gas. With its war-torn

economy and underdeveloped infrastructure, Georgia offers Kazakhstan a huge investment market. Astana in the past repeatedly stressed that its relations with Tbilisi were based exceptionally on economic rationale, excluding any political components.

Speaking at the business forum in Astana, Nazarbayev reaffirmed this attitude, praising only in passing the “transparency, freedom and good business climate” created by the Georgian government for foreign investors. However, it is becoming increasingly hard for Astana and Tbilisi to avoid political undercurrents of bilateral relations and the risk to poison relations with Russia, which always stood in the way. In November 2005, the Ministries of Energy of Georgia and Kazakhstan signed an agreement on the annual delivery of 2 billion cubic meters of Kazakh gas to Georgia for \$68 per 1000 cubic meters. But the full implementation of the agreement came at an impasse as deliveries had to pass through Russian territory. When Russia threatened to turn off the gas tap to Georgia and Gazprom was urged by Kremlin to hike gas prices for Tbilisi from \$110 to \$230, the Kazakh gas transporting company KazTransGaz offered Tbilisi financial aid, promising to compensate for losses in exchange for shares in Georgian insurance markets. In 2006, KazTransGaz became the owner of Tbilgaz, the main gas distributing network in the Georgian capital. Simultaneously, the insurance company affiliated with KazTransGaz was granted rights to insure all residents of Georgia against gas price increases.

It seems the ongoing political standoff between Georgia and Russia blows a fresh wind into the sails of Kazakh gas companies. While Gazprom and the Georgian government are wasting time in endless reciprocal accusations and agreements on gas deliveries from Moscow are still in limbo, KazTransGaz is reportedly conducting talks with Iran to ensure Iranian gas supplies to Georgia this year. Some sources say talks are under way between Russian Gazprom and KazTransGaz over the

purchase of 420 million cubic meters of gas to supply Tbilisi's municipal services.

It may all look like a generous sacrifice on the part of Kazakhstan for the sake of maintaining friendly ties with Georgia. But in the final analysis it is nothing more than a part of Kazakhstan's effort to find alternative export routes for its oil and gas. Kazakhstan's gas transporting facilities were previously designed to bring Turkmen and Uzbek gas to Russia and to supply domestic consumers. With the projected increase of oil and gas output and discouraged by Moscow's energy disputes with Ukraine, Belarus and Western Europe, Kazakhstan is looking for politically reliable alternatives for Russian transit. One of the promising projects for Kazakhstan seems to be the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline, which is being considered by the Kazakh government and which would link to an existing pipeline, creating a link from Aktau in West Kazakhstan to the Turkish city Erzurum via Baku and Tbilisi. The Trans-Caspian undersea pipeline project, however, is a technically complicated and politically unpredictable enterprise which demands unanimity among all littoral states. Russia already balked at the project, arguing the pipeline would cause environmental damage to the region. The Kazakh government was encouraged by the European Commission and the US Trade and Development Agency, which promised financial backing for Kazakhstan's participation in the project.

Western-sponsored energy projects look attractive to Kazakhstan and Georgia, and offer a solid ground for long-term cooperation, albeit fraught with some political dangers. Kazakhstan's state-controlled KazMunaiGaz Company announced its plans to purchase a controlling stake in the Georgian Black Sea Batumi seaport which provides new export routes for Kazakh grain and oil to Western Europe. The company's further projects include the construction of a \$1 billion oil terminal and oil refinery in Georgia. The estimated amount of Kazakh investments in the Georgian economy exceeds \$300 million. Recently, TuranAlem, one of the leading banks in Kazakhstan, acquired 49 percent

of the shares in the Silk Road Bank and the state-controlled stake in the Unified Telecommunications Company of Georgia. Mikheil Saakashvili expressed hope that Kazakh investments will boost the tourism industry of his country, and will facilitate the construction a highway linking Georgia and Kazakhstan.

Under the watchful eye of Kremlin, bilateral cooperation between Georgia and Kazakhstan is gaining momentum. In fact, there is very little

Moscow can undertake to hamper these relations. Tbilisi is apparently aware of Kazakhstan's potential role as a mediator in its difficult energy negotiations with Russia. Moscow, in turn, cannot overestimate the political price to be paid if it loses its foothold in Kazakhstan. Astana hopes to benefit from Georgia's pro-western stance to get Tbilisi's support for its OSCE chairmanship in 2009. So everyone in the game has something to bargain for.

**The Wider Black Sea Region:
An emerging Hub in European Security**

Svante E. Cornell
Anna Jonsson
Niklas Nilsson
Per Häggström

SILK ROAD PAPER
December 2006

 Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
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by Svante Cornell, Anna Jonsson, Niklas Nilsson, and Per Häggström

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NEWS DIGEST

ABKHAZIA'S SECURITY COUNCIL SECRETARY: SITUATION IN KODORI GORGE WAS INITIATED BY GEORGIAN SECURITY SERVICES

12 March

"We repeatedly warned international community about the tense military and political situation in the upper part of Kodori Gorge. Now it deteriorated on the eve of parliamentary elections," Abkhazia's Security Council Secretary Stanislav Lakoba told a Regnum correspondent commenting on reports of Georgian media about bombardment of the gorge. Lakoba noted "it was, probably, not the first case of bombardment heard there: there are tensions between military police and local Svan population in Kodori Gorge." Meanwhile, the official reminded that ten days ago a wounded Georgian serviceman was taken out of the gorge with the help of the UN mission and Russian peacekeepers. "We gave permission for taking him out of there. However, later the soldier died of serious wounds in Zugdidi hospital in Georgia," he said.

Stanislav Lakoba said that the Abkhaz side registered no aerial targets. "Our aviation did not take off," he said. Lakoba believes "the situation worsens in turn now in South Ossetia or in Abkhazia." "The situation deteriorated before the parliamentary elections in Gali District of Abkhazia. On March 18, second voting will be conducted in the republic: the tension will move to Kodori Gorge," he said reminding on behavior of Georgian students on the eve of the parliamentary elections near the Abkhaz-Georgian border along the Ingur River. The Security Council secretary stressed that such provocations, be it in Gali District or upper part of Kodori Gorge are initiated by Georgian security services. "It is done in order not to implement the UN Security Council Resolution. International community must interfere in the unlimited chaos," Lakoba said. Earlier, Georgian media reported that Kodori Gorge was

bombarded last night. As they say, two military helicopters entered Kodori Gorge from the Russian side and opened fire in direction of Ajara and Chkhalta villages. According to Rustavi 2 television, houses were destroyed in several villages, including administration and police offices. One of the shells exploded at a school yard. The bombardment lasted for about 25 minutes. According to the company, no casualties are reported, local residents hid in nearby woods. (Regnum.ru)

GEORGIAN ARMED FORCES ON ALERT

12 March

The Georgian Defense Ministry confirmed bombardment of Kodori Gorge (Upper Abkhazia), Georgia's Deputy Defense Minister Levan Nikoleishvili told reporters today. According to him, in connection with the incident, Georgian armed forces are confined to barracks. Under information of the Georgian side, bombs were thrown to Kodori Gorge from Russian helicopters last night. After that, from the direction of Tkvarcheli District controlled by Abkhazia, the strikes were directed towards Chkhalta, Gentsvisi and Ajara villages in Kodori Gorge. There are no casualties reported; however, the bombs damaged several buildings, including the building of the legitimate government, a school and police offices. Georgian governmental officials, including the interior minister, are now in Kutaisi Airport expecting flight to Kodori Gorge, which is delayed because of bad weather conditions. The Georgian interior ministry also confirmed the fact of bombarding Kodori Gorge. Investigation started on the accident. (Regnum.ru)

ANOTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRY IS EXPECTED TO RECOGNIZE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE SOON

12 March

In the near future, another European country is

expected to recognize Armenian Genocide. Head of the Hay Dat European Office, Member of Hay Dat (*The Armenian Cause*) commission in Greece Gaspar Karapetyan told reporters. Karapetyan is participating in an Hay Dat conference in Yerevan on March 12. He refused to say which country intends to recognize the genocide, saying that from the point of view of its territory the country is not that large, however, it takes a special position in Europe and plays substantial role in European processes. Commenting on the verdict imposed by Swiss court to leader of the Turkish Labor Party Dogu Perincek for denial of the Armenian Genocide, he noted that it once again confirmed impossibility of unpunished denial of a historical fact. Speaking on Hay Dat's achievements in Europe, Karapetyan cited recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Greece, where on April 24, according to him, for several years running people have been revering memory of the Armenian Genocide victims. (Regnum.ru)

TURKMEN, AZERBAIJANI TO BOOST TIES

13 March

Turkmenistan's new president and his Azerbaijani counterpart agreed Tuesday to expand ties between the two energy-rich ex-Soviet nations which have been at odds over the Caspian Sea division. Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguli Berdymukhamedov and Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan reached an agreement to set up bilateral commissions to boost relations in different fields, the Turkmen presidential press service said. The two presidents also agreed to exchange visits. Berdymukhamedov was elected last month to succeed Saparmurat Niyazov who died in December. Aliyev's office said the two leaders emphasized the need for "taking joint steps in the regional cooperation." Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan both claimed some of rich oil deposits located on the seabed, the dispute that has been one of the obstacles in the long-stalled talks between the Caspian nations. Talks on the division of the Caspian between five littoral states -- Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran -- remain deadlocked. Iran has insisted that each of the five coastal states get an equal portion of the seabed, while most other countries want the division based on shoreline, which would give Iran a smaller share. The Caspian, which is believed to hold the world's third-largest oil reserves, has acquired strategic importance as the United States and other Western

nations seek alternatives to Persian Gulf oil. Multinational oil companies are eager to play a role in developing the sea's energy resources, but the unresolved legal status of the sea has fomented tension and hindered exploration of its reserves. (RFE/RL)

TAJIK CAPITAL SUFFERS POWER CUTS

14 March

Dushanbe is experiencing limits on electricity usage in connection with low water levels at Tajikistan's Nurek power station. Nozim Yedgori, a spokesman for national power company Barqi Tojik said that "Energy deliveries will be cut in some Dushanbe residential districts from 0800 until 1700 local time due to electricity shortages and a critical situation at the Nurek hydropower plant." Water levels at the Nurek reservoir have fallen to critical levels because mountain snow has not yet melted and because Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have not been able to supply electricity to make up the deficit because unusually cold weather has led to a higher demand for power in those countries. (Asia Plus-Blitz)

KYRGYZSTAN INSTITUTES SMOKING BAN

14 March

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev has signed a law banning smoking in educational institutions, public-health facilities, movie theaters, museums, libraries, buses, ships, and aircraft. The law, which makes provisions for smoking areas in restaurants and cafes, establishes fines of up to 300 soms (\$7.87) for individuals and up to 50,000 soms (\$1,312) for institutions that violate the new law. (Interfax)

PROBLEMS HIT KYRGYZ-UZBEK BORDER AGREEMENT

14 March

Turuspek Koenaliev, the head of Kyrgyzstan's Agency for Information Resources and Technologies, told a news conference in Bishkek on March 14 that Uzbekistan has temporarily halted a visa-free travel agreement between the two countries. Uzbekistan is requiring that Kyrgyz citizens present a special insert in addition to their national ID card when crossing the border in order to register their arrival and departure. Koenaliev said that Kyrgyzstan's interior and foreign ministries are working to resolve the issue. (24.kg)

PREMIER SAYS PAKISTAN TO WORK TOWARD FULL SCO MEMBERSHIP

15 March

Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said during a visit to Tashkent that his country hopes to obtain full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Aziz said, "Pakistan shares the views of SCO member states regarding the response to terrorism and would like to develop efficient cooperation." Pakistan currently holds observer status in the SCO along with India, Iran, and Mongolia. SCO members are China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. (Interfax)

ARMENIAN, AZERBAIJANI FOREIGN MINISTERS MEET**15 March**

Vartan Oskanian and Elmar Mammadyarov met in Geneva on March 14 under the aegis of the OSCE Minsk Group to continue their efforts to resolve differences with regard to the finer points of a Karabakh settlement plan drafted by the Minsk Group co-chairmen, RFE/RL's Armenian Service and Azerbaijani media reported. Oskanian told RFE/RL in a telephone conversation after the talks that the two sides failed to make any progress and still have "deep differences" over unspecified key details of that draft. He added that he will nonetheless meet again with Mammadyarov at some point in April. Azerbaijani media quoted Russian Minsk Group co-Chairman Yury Merzlyakov as saying that the basic principles outlined in the draft address two key issues: the withdrawal of Armenian forces from districts of Azerbaijan bordering on the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and the intermediate status of the region prior to the conduct of a referendum on its final status. The online daily echo-az.com reported on March 15 that the co-chairs believe the two conflict sides should hold direct talks on the return to Karabakh of both Armenians and Azerbaijanis who fled during the fighting of the late 1980s and early 1990s. (RFE/RL)

FORMER CHECHEN MINISTER REQUESTS POLITICAL ASYLUM IN ITALY**15 March**

Umar Khanbiyev, who served from 1997 until early 2000 as health minister under Chechen Republic Ichkeria President Aslan Maskhadov, arrived on March 13 in Italy, where he has formally applied for political asylum. Speaking at a press conference the same day with Italian Prime Minister Prodi,

President Putin suggested that Khanbiyev return to Chechnya, kommersant.ru reported, while Ziyad Sabsabi, who is Chechnya's official representative in Moscow, described him as a good doctor who does not represent any political force, and who could find employment within the Chechen health service. Khanbiyev remained in Grozny, personally operating on war casualties, after the second Russian military intervention in Chechnya in late 1999, but was apprehended by pro-Moscow Chechens in January 2000 and held for a while in the infamous Chernokozovo detention center. On his release, he left Russia for Baku and then settled in Europe, where he was named Maskhadov's special representative in February 2004. Khanbiyev's brother Magomed, who served as defense minister and then as a field commander under Maskhadov, surrendered to the pro-Moscow Chechen leadership three years ago, reportedly to shield his family from reprisals. He currently represents the Union of Rightist Forces in the pro-Moscow Chechen parliament elected in November 2005. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA, GREECE, AND BULGARIA GIVE GREEN LIGHT FOR BURGAS-ALEXANDROUPOLIS PIPELINE**16 March**

Russian President Putin, Greek Premier Costas Karamanlis and Bulgarian Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev signed an interstate agreement in Athens on March 15 on construction of a 280-kilometer oil pipeline that will link the Bulgarian Black Sea port of Burgas with the Greek oil terminal at Alexandroupolis. Discussion of the project dates back to 1994, when Turkey again announced restrictions on the passage of oil mega-tankers through the Turkish straits, but implementation has been delayed due to uncertainty whether enough crude will be available to render the project economically viable. Burgas is a shallow-water harbor, which limits the capacity of tankers it can accommodate. It is still unclear whether the pipeline will transport Kazakh as well as Russian crude. The pipeline has a throughput capacity of 35-50 million tons, and will be completed by 2010 at the earliest, according to the "Financial Times." Construction costs are currently estimated at \$1 billion, compared to \$700 million in 2005 when the initial memorandum on construction was signed. Russia will have a 51 percent stake in the pipeline, while

Greece and Bulgaria will each have 24.5 percent. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT DELIVERS STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

16 March

Mikheil Saakashvili delivered a 90 minute state-of-the-nation address to the Georgian parliament on March 15, but declined to field any questions from parliament deputies. Saakashvili said that over the past year Georgia has made "a giant leap forward" and achieved 10 percent economic growth despite the ban in its imports imposed by Russia; has solved problems with energy supplies; and has "broken the back" of organized criminality. He said Georgia is internationally recognized as a successful democracy and a leader in implementing reforms. He said the conflicts between Georgia and its breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were inspired "from outside," meaning by Russia, and thus constitute a "conflict with empire," rather than with the Abkhaz and Ossetian people. He claimed Georgia "is already succeeding" in having the Russian peacekeepers deployed in the conflict zone replaced by contingents from international organizations. Saakashvili expressed his gratitude to parliamentarians for the declaration in support of NATO membership unanimously approved by 160 deputies earlier this week, and which he said reflects the will of the entire Georgian people. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION PARTY STAGES PROTEST DEMONSTRATION

17 March

The opposition Musavat party convened a demonstration in Baku on March 17, with the permission of the municipal authorities, to protest the price rises for gasoline, gas, and electricity introduced in January. Participants appealed to the authorities to write off all arrears owed by the population for communal services, to crack down on corruption, and to ensure transparency in spending oil revenues. Police estimated the number of protest participants at 600-700, while day.az calculated the figure at 1,500-2,000, more than at Musavat's two previous protests. It is not clear whether the higher turnout was due to more clement weather or to popular response to Tebrizli's appeal. (day.az)

GEORGIA READY TO RESUME POSTAL LINKS WITH RUSSIA

17 March

Director general of the Georgian Postal Service David Khutsishvili has disputed Russia's statement that the Universal Postal Union had allegedly deprived the Georgian Postal Service of the right to vote and participate in the activities of the authoritative international organization. "This is pure disinformation," Khutsishvili told journalists on Saturday. "We got in touch with the authorities of the Universal Postal Union, and the organization refuted such information point blank," he said. The Georgian Postal Service is ready to resume postal links with Russia at any time, the general director said. "When Russia cut postal links with Georgia we immediately called for the resumption of the links. Unfortunately, we are still waiting for a reply," he said. Mail that earlier was directly delivered to Georgia from Russia now has to transit through Ukraine, he said. As of now, the Georgian postal service owes money only to airlines involved in the delivery of state mail, Khutsishvili said. "As far as Russia is concerned, it owes us \$100,000," he said. General Director of the Russian Postal Service Igor Syrtsov told journalists on Thursday in Moscow that his department was interested in resuming postal links with Georgia and that he hoped the situation will be settled soon. At the same time, he said: "The Georgian Postal Service, a member of the Universal Postal Union, has failed to pay membership fees for several months," thus the organization has deprived Georgia of the right to participate in the work of the organization and to vote.

Russia made the decision to stop postal links with Georgia in early October 2006. (Interfax)

NAZARBAYEV INVITES PUTIN TO KAZAKHSTAN TO DISCUSS URANIUM ISSUES

19 March

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev has invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to pay an official visit to Kazakhstan this summer and discuss joint uranium mining and enrichment. "I have invited Vladimir Vladimirovich for an official visit to Kazakhstan this summer," Nazarbayev said at the end of Russian-Kazakh negotiations at the Kremlin. (Interfax)

AHMADINEJAD OPEN FIRST STRETCH OF ARMENIAN GAS PIPELINE FROM IRAN

19 March

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his Armenian counterpart on Monday formally opened the first Armenian section of a natural gas pipeline linking the two countries. Ahmadinejad and Armenian President Robert Kocharian inaugurated the 25-mile section in the town of Meghri, just over the border from Iran. "This is more proof of our friendship," Kocharian said at the ceremony, which was delayed by hours because rain and fog prevented a helicopter flight that was to transport Ahmadinejad. He arrived by road. Under the first stage of the project, Iran is to deliver up to 14 billion cubic feet of gas a year; when the pipeline is completed and extends to the capital, Yerevan, the volume could rise to 88 billion cubic feet a year. The project was launched in 2004 after more than a decade of negotiations. Russia, which supplies most of Armenia's gas, had objected to the project. Armenian officials said last year they were discussing the prospect of Russia's natural-gas monopoly Gazprom purchasing the Armenian section of the pipeline from Iran. Landlocked Armenia has developed its relations with Iran amid economic troubles caused by the closing of its borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan in the wake of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, a region of Azerbaijan occupied by Armenian and ethnic Armenian Karabakhi forces. Iran has also sought projects and influence in other parts of the former Soviet Union, mostly in Central Asia. Last year, Ahmadinejad opened an Iranian-financed tunnel improving connections between impoverished Tajikistan's north and the capital region. Tehran has focused mostly on transport and infrastructure projects and restoring historically close cultural ties. (AP)

2 JOURNALISTS GO ON TRIAL IN AZERBAIJAN**19 March**

Two Azerbaijani journalists accused of inciting religious hatred with an article that criticized Islam went on trial Monday, both accusing authorities of waging a politically motivated prosecution. The case against reporter Rafiq Tagi and editor Samir Huseinov has touched a nerve in Azerbaijan, a mostly Muslim, ex-Soviet republic with a government that has little tolerance for independent media. Tagi's November article in the small newspaper *Senet*, edited by Huseinov, asserted that Islam has suffocated people, pulled them away from

freedom and hindered humanity's development, and said the Prophet Muhammad created problems for Eastern countries. The article sparked angry protests — including calls for Tagi's death — in a village near Baku whose conservative Muslim community has clashed with the authoritarian government. The case has also deepened concerns about freedom of speech in the oil-rich country. Tagi, who was brought into the court in handcuffs, said he committed no crime. "My article — this was purely artistic, a literary discussion and for words one must only answer with words. It is illegal to imprison someone for their convictions," he told the court. Huseinov told the court his constitutional rights had been violated and that authorities were trying to portray him as not being Muslim. If convicted, Tagi and Huseinov could face three to five years in prison. The trial has been postponed twice — once after prosecutors asked for more time to investigate and a second time earlier this month after the judge granted a prosecution request to try the pair in the district where their newspaper's office is located, rather than where they live. The government of President Ilham Aliyev, who took over from his father in a 2003 election denounced by opponents as a sham, has faced persistent criticism over the heavy-handed treatment of independent media. (AP)

AZERBAIJANI PREMIER'S ANNUAL REPORT TRIGGERS FISTFIGHT IN PARLIAMENT**19 March**

Artur Rasizade delivered his traditional annual report to the Milli Mejlis on March 16 on the work of the cabinet over the previous 12 months. In that report, which lasted a little over 15 minutes, Rasizade gave an overall positive assessment of economic trends over the past three years, i.e. since the election of Ilham Aliyev as president in October 2003. Rasizade noted that in 2006 gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to 17 billion manats (\$19.5 billion) and per capita GDP to \$2,400; and that virtually all sectors registered double-digit growth. Deputies representing the majority Yeni Azerbaycan Party (YAP) expressed general approval of the report and advocated endorsing it. But independent deputy Guseyn Abdullayev criticized it as a "fiction" devoid of hard statistical data and an insult to the Azerbaijani people; he further described the government's performance as "unbelievably bad," according to realazer.net.

Abdullayev reportedly responded with verbal insults to an injunction to "shut up" from Fazail Agamaly, chairman of the small pro-government Ana Vaten party, whereupon the two men got into a fistfight and had to be forcibly separated.

Opposition deputies Panah Huseynov and Musa Quliyev also criticized Rasizade's report, which was nonetheless endorsed by a vote of 103 in favor and five against with five abstentions. (RFE/RL)

BOMBINGS TRIPLE IN AFGHANISTAN IN 2006

19 March

Bomb attacks in Afghanistan rose three-fold between 2005 and 2006, figures released by the government on Monday showed. According to Armed Forces Minister Adam Ingram, attacks using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) rose from about 500 in 2005, to 1,525 last year. Ingram said that while the figures were an estimate, most of the attacks were against either International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops, or soldiers from the Afghan National Security Forces. Of the total number of bombings, suicide attacks rose by six times -- from 25 two years ago to 150 in 2006. "In 2006, it is assessed that there were approximately 1,525 IED attacks, of which approximately 150 were suicide IED attacks," Ingram said. "These figures do not necessarily represent the complete statistics but are an estimate." Since the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in November 2001, 52 British soldiers have died there. (AFP)

KAZAKHSTAN DOCTORS ACCUSED OF MALPRACTICE

20 March

Nearly two dozen Kazakhstan doctors are accused of contributing to the country's AIDS epidemic by ordering unnecessary blood transfusions. The 21 physicians are on trial on medical malpractice charges they ordered transfusions from which they benefit financially, the New York Times said Tuesday. About 100 children treated at a Shymkent hospital have tested HIV positive since last summer, the newspaper said. Their parents contend doctors charged patients \$20 for 14 ounces of blood and split the money with the local blood bank. The doctors, whose salaries begin at about \$175 a month, allegedly pocketed up to \$10 per transfusion. Greed may not be the motivating factor, however. Western doctors see a medical culture in parts of

Eastern Europe, central Asia and elsewhere that promotes transfusions to improve patients' health or combat illnesses. "It's dumb medicine," said Dr. Max Essex of the Harvard AIDS Institute. That may be why one baby received 25 transfusions before he was found to have HIV, court documents show. "It's insane," said Dr. Michael O. Favorov of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention who headed an investigation that identified the transfusions of tainted blood as the source of the Shymkent outbreak. "This kid needed no blood." (UPI)

NATO CANNOT DO IT ALONE IN AFGHANISTAN: DUTCH MINISTERS

21 March

Dutch ministers Wednesday urged the Afghan government to step up its presence and development in the troubled south, where Taliban insurgents are most entrenched, saying NATO cannot do it alone. They also announced a three-million-euro (nearly four-million-dollar) project to boost safety in Uruzgan province, where many of the 2,000 Dutch troops here are based, highlighting the incapacity of the Afghan forces. Afghan security forces struggled to fill the vacuum "when we do succeed in liberating a province or region," Defence Minister Eimert van Middelkop told reporters. "That is one of the things that is still worrying me because a vacuum is a very dangerous thing." Van Middelkop and his counterparts for foreign affairs and development cooperation wrapped up a three-day tour of Afghanistan with a meeting with President Hamid Karzai Wednesday. They raised concern about a new law giving amnesty for war crimes committed in Afghanistan's nearly 25 years of brutal war, Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen said. They also spoke against moves by parliament to curb the media, saying freedom of expression was essential for democracy -- the reason international forces were in Afghanistan, he said. Minister for Development Cooperation Bert Koenders said the trip showed there needed to be a "quality and quantity leap forwards in the development field." "We have made very clear to the government here that they have to reach out to the south, and to the Pashtuns in the south, to make clear also that the ministers visit the south regularly..." "NATO cannot do this by itself," he said. "We cannot simply be Western troops showing the flag. It has to be combined by clear development efforts by the administration." (AFP)

TURKISH OVERTURE ELICITS MIXED ARMENIAN RESPONSE

21 March

Armenian Culture Minister Hasmik Poghosian told journalists on March 15 that she will "probably" accept a formal invitation from the Turkish government to attend the inauguration on March 29 of the recently restored 10th century Akhtamar church, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The church, located on an island in Lake Van, is one of the finest surviving examples of Armenian church architecture. The Turkish government paid the \$1.5 million cost of the restoration. As of last week it was not clear whether any other Armenian officials would accompany Poghosian, according to Noyan Tapan on March 16. On March 20, the daily "Hayots

ashkhar" argued that the Armenian government should not send a representative to the inauguration because the Turkish authorities have not yet granted permission for the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul to place a cross on the church steeple. "If [the Turks] are trying to use for propaganda purposes monuments on territory seized by them, then we as a state should have nothing to do with any such attempt," the paper editorialized. The two countries have no formal diplomatic relations. On February 7, Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian wrote in "The Los Angeles Times" that Ankara let slip the opportunity for rapprochement created by the outrage generated in Turkey by the January 19 slaying in Istanbul of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink. (RFE/RL)

