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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

Editor: Svante E. Cornell

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Submission Guidelines:

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

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

BACKGROUND: 300-450 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

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

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

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

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

Svante E. Cornell

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IS KAZAKHSTAN DISENGAGING FROM GEORGIA?

Marlene Laurelle

The Russia-Georgia conflict has had repercussions throughout the post-Soviet space. While Western states have decided to increase their material support to Georgia, Central Asian governments find themselves in a more complex and difficult situation due to their dependence on Russia. For example, Astana announced it would abandon a project to build a grain terminal in the Georgian port of Poti and oil refineries in Batumi, doubly bad news for the already weakened Georgian economy.

BACKGROUND: Relations between the South Caucasus and Central Asia are relatively tense. The two regions have had difficulties coordinating their political and economic policies, both during the Soviet period and following its collapse. However, since the beginning of this decade, Kazakhstan has emerged as the principle power center in Central Asia-South Caucasus relations, particularly as they pertain to Georgia. In 2007, despite already strained relations between Georgia and Russia, Astana and Tbilisi continued to develop their economic relations. Kazakhstan became the first post-Soviet investor and the third largest foreign direct investor after Great Britain and the United States in Georgia. By 2006, Kazakhstan had invested more than US\$150 million in the construction, tourism, telecommunications, and most of all energy sectors of Georgia.

The core of Kazakh-Georgian cooperation has focused on ways to separate from Russia. In addition to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (BTC), there are the Baku-Poti and Baku-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway projects, which would connect Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey by 2010, and enable Tbilisi to partially circumvent the Russian embargo. This new line of triangular

cooperation between Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia was confirmed during the three-party negotiations held in Baku in April 2007. There, the Kazakh transportation minister stated that his country planned to transit by rail over ten million tons of various products to European markets. Oil is obviously the first priority, followed by grain. KazMunaiGas and the private investment company Greenoak Group, which turned Batumi into one of the biggest oil ports on the Black Sea, signed an agreement for the construction of a one billion dollar oil refinery in Batumi. Thereafter, in February 2008, Greenoak Group sold its entire stake to KazMunaiGas for US\$220 million, making the latter the sole owner of the Black Sea oil terminal at Batumi. In June 2007, Astana and Tbilisi also signed a ten million dollar contract to construct at the port of Poti a grain warehouse with an annual capacity of 350,000-500,000 tons.

The war in August between Russia and Georgia seems to have stopped, perhaps temporarily, these joint projects. On September 22, Kazakh Minister of Agriculture Akylbek Kurishbayev stated that Astana had abandoned plans to build the grain terminal due to "the current situation in Georgia." That same week, KazMunaiGas announced the suspension of the oil refinery project, but refused

to cite the conflict as a cause. It claimed the decision was based purely on economic reasons, saying that “our experts have carefully studied it and decided that it is not feasible.” At the height of the conflict, Kazakhstan suspended oil shipments through Batumi, but flows were restored in early September. The Georgian authorities have not hidden their disappointment, noting that other foreign partners had not stopped their investment projects.

Kars railway has not yet received such support from the European Union and the United States, due to the exclusion of Armenia.

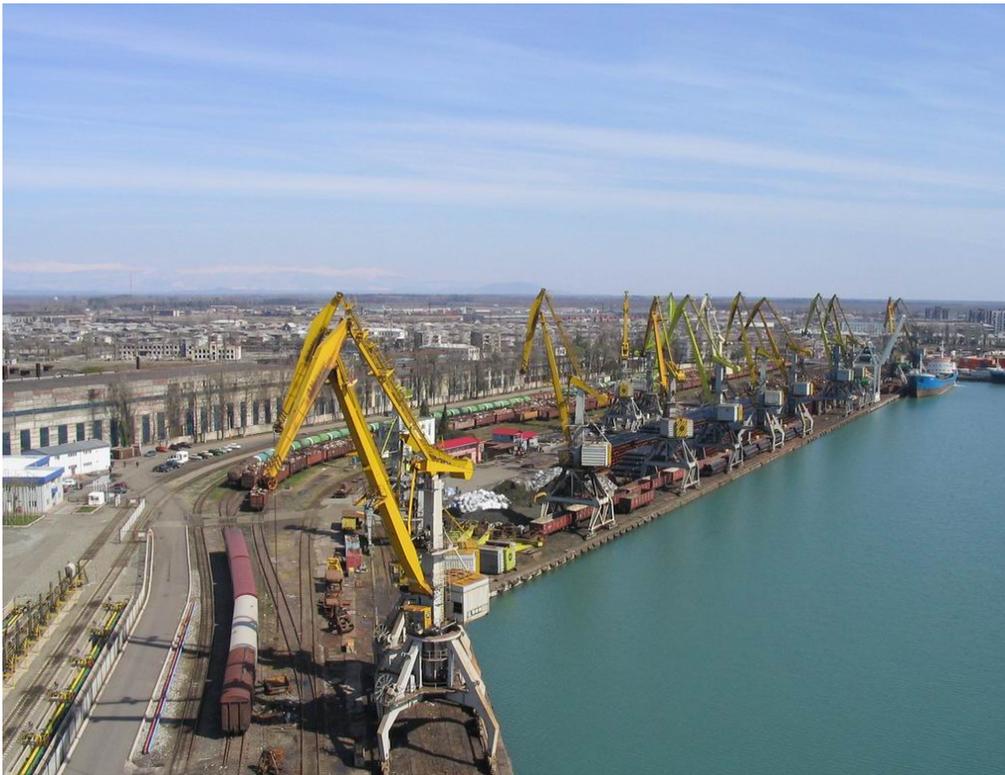
Yet Astana’s indecision hampers these prospects. The Georgian economy is being increasingly squeezed by the Russian embargo, and the conflict in August did put Georgia’s role as an energy transit route bypassing Russia into question. Thus, turning the ports in Batumi and Poti into Georgia’s gateway to Southeastern Europe is

crucial to Tbilisi’s effort of recovering economically from its conflict with Moscow.

Kazakhstan’s pullback is not only due to political reasons. The delay in the operation of the Kashagan oil field, originally scheduled for 2008 but postponed to 2013, and the difficulties at the Tengiz field, hamper Astana’s economic ambitions. Kazakh authorities have been forced to acknowledge, albeit grudgingly, that the country will not reach the 150 million ton oil production mark by 2015,

most likely delaying its entry into the group of the world’s ten largest exporters of crude oil. This announcement came to the chagrin of neighboring countries like Kyrgyzstan, for which Astana is a major investor.

Baku is also rightly concerned over the negative impact that the Russia-Georgia conflict could have on Kazakhstan’s involvement in the BTC pipeline. The launch of the Kazakhstan Caspian Transport System (KKST), operational in 2012, will enable



Poti Port (The Tbilisi Times)

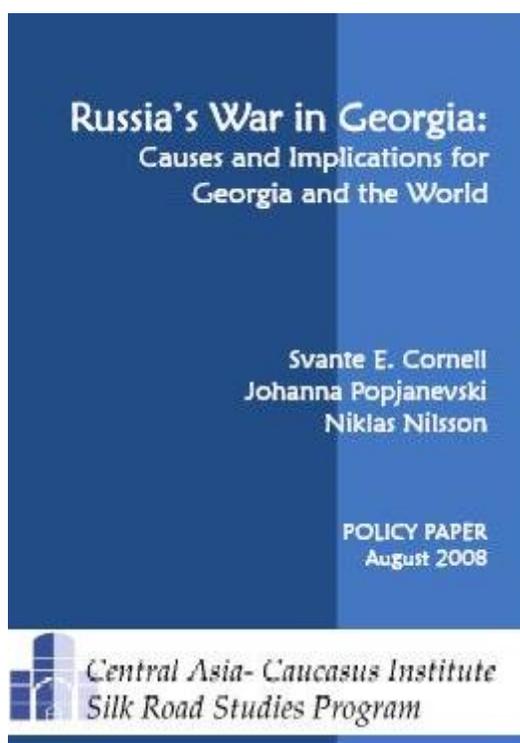
IMPLICATIONS: This turning point in Kazakh-Georgian relations indicates a possible geopolitical shift in the South Caucasus. In early September, Turkish president Abdullah Gül made a much-discussed trip to Armenia. It revealed the concerns of Ankara, which appears to have recognized the need to establish normal relations with Yerevan. A Turkish-Armenian rapprochement, although fragile, would allow states in the region to begin a new era of cooperation, supported by the international community. The Baku-Akhalkalaki-

Kazakhstan to transport through the BTC pipeline twenty million tons of oil each year. It will transform the small Kazakh processing port of Kuryk, located 70 kilometers south of the regional capital Aktau in the Mangystau peninsula (one of the country's most isolated regions), a hub of Kazakh oil exports and economic development. It will receive shipments of 500,000 barrels of oil per day through a 600-kilometer pipeline to the reserves of Atyrau, located further to the north. A complex system of barges will then carry the oil to Azerbaijan, where the KCTS consortium has established storage structures and connections to the BTC. The Azerbaijani authorities are strongly opposed to any delay by Kazakhstan of this project, which is important for Baku's geopolitical positioning toward Europe.

CONCLUSIONS: For now, it remains unclear whether the disengagement of Kazakhstan from Georgia is only a response to pressure from Moscow at a time of high tension, or if it is a

turning point in long-term relations between the two countries. It is likely that Astana will henceforth look in retrospect at its economic partnership with Tbilisi. Although Kazakh authorities continue to promote a multi-vector policy that does not please Moscow, they were aware of the risks of political destabilization in the South Caucasus. At any rate, the conflict this summer has already weakened the flexibility of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states vis-à-vis Russia, and could leave a permanent mark in the Central Asian capitals, which are now more hesitant to defy Moscow's opinion.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Marlène Laruelle is a Senior Research Fellow with the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. She is the author of, among others, the recently published book, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Press/Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).



New Policy Paper:

Russia's War in Georgia

By Svante E. Cornell, Johanna Popjanevski, and Niklas Nilsson

This Policy Paper provides a detailed chronology of the time leading up to the war in Georgia, as well as to the war itself, while providing an analysis of its implications for Georgia and beyond.

The Paper can be downloaded free at www.silkroadstudies.org. Hardcopy requests should be addressed to Katarina Lesandric at caci2@jhu.edu.

RUSSIA ACCUSES TURKEY OF VIOLATING MONTREUX CONVENTION

Alexander Murinson

In order to demonstrate its growing presence in the Black Sea and express support for Georgia, NATO sent a small flotilla of warships through the Turkish Straits in late August in the wake of the Russian-Georgian hostilities. The flotilla comprised of three American warships and support vessels from Spain, Germany and Poland. Moscow has subsequently accused Turkey of breaching the 1936 Montreux Convention, an allegation that may have consequences for Turkey's energy security.

BACKGROUND: The Turkish Straits, comprising of Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus, are in the Turkey's territorial waters. As the sovereign over the Straits, Turkey is entrusted by the international community with regulation of the traffic of merchant and naval ships through them. The Montreux Convention provides the legal basis in international law for passage of warships of non-Black Sea states through the Turkish Straits. In peacetime, only light and support naval ships with a tonnage under 15,000 tons during their transit through the Straits are allowed, and their number must not be more than nine with a 15-day notification of the Turkish government.

On the other hand, the passage of warships is allowed if, under Covenant obligations, they were proceeding to the aid of an attacked nation. On September 3, U.S. authorities announced that the USS Mount Whitney, the flagship of the Mediterranean 6th Fleet, would arrive in Georgia to deliver 17 tons of humanitarian goods, including blankets, fruit juice, dry milk and hygienic supplies. On September 4, the USS Mount Whitney landed at the Georgian port of Poti, while Moscow

accused Turkey of breaching the Montreux Convention.

The US government claimed that the objective was to deliver humanitarian aid to Georgia, which suffered from Russian military intervention and thus in accord with the Montreux Convention. Russian authorities have nevertheless claimed that the passage of the US warship was in breach of the Convention by claiming that the USS Mount Whitney might be delivering military supplies to Georgia. Russian MFA spokesman Andrey Nesterenko emphasized that "if there is a breach of the convention, then it should become a matter for deliberation in the United Nations and, possibly, other international institutions, because the matter at hand is about the violations of a well-known international agreement and should be the matter of concern for every country that signed this convention." In conclusion, the Russian official said: "We hope that if the facts of a serious violation of the Montreux Convention will be established, appropriate steps will be taken to correct the situation." He added that he did not imply any military action.

IMPLICATIONS: This Russian stance – whether based in fact or not – nevertheless has serious consequences for Turkey, which is critically dependent on imports of natural gas from Russia, especially through the Blue Stream pipeline, locking Russia and Turkey into a symbiotic, but unequal relationship.

In the Blue Stream project, Russia has imposed "take-or-pay" provisions on Turkey in the event that the Turkish government fails to purchase contracted gas. According to the provisions, Turkey is not allowed to re-export Russian gas to third parties. Expected heavy financial penalties compel Turkey to re-negotiate the clauses of the contract that ban it from re-exporting natural gas to third countries. But this remains at the discretion of the Russian

signatories to the agreement. The Justice and Development (AKP) government Energy Minister, Hilmi Guler, has harshly criticized the gas deal concluded by previous governments, and has urged sharp reductions in Turkey's reliance on Russian natural gas. Guler declared to the Turkish Parliament in April 2003 that the AKP government had a "strategic goal" to reduce Russian supplied natural gas from 70 percent to 30 percent within five years. But as a result of the Blue Stream project that transports 16 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas each year, Turkey will be locked into importing 50 percent of its gas from Russia by 2010. This further undermines long-term Turkish energy independence and security.

Turkish authorities are concerned that the



USS Mount Whitney (US Navy)

deterioration of relations with Russia could precipitate an economic crisis in the country. Foreign trade analysts in Turkey are concerned that Russia would declare an energy war against their country, as Russia did against Ukraine in the winter of 2006. As a result of these events, Russia's reputation as a reliable supplier of energy for Europe diminished. In October 2007, the world's largest producer of natural gas once again threatened to shut off gas supplies to Ukraine over a US\$2.2 billion debt.

The deteriorating political climate following the Russian-Georgian military conflict is likely to affect trade between these two major trade partners. Russia introduced new restrictions on and harsh customs regulations for imported goods from Turkey. In fact, the imports of Russian gas are increasing, and substantially affect the trade balance between the two countries. Turkey's exports to Russia are estimated to be US\$4.7 billion, whereas Turkey's imports from Russia reach US\$23.5 billion annually.

Russia introduced these measures in direct response to Turkey's consent to let the NATO flotilla transit the Straits into the Black Sea. The increasing tensions between two regional powers might further precipitate international tensions and Russia's refusal to deliver gas or curtail its delivery in the future. Turkey can find alternative sources of oil, such as Arab oil-producing countries, but the dependence on Russian gas exposes the weakness in the Turkish economy.

CONCLUSIONS: As the last war in the Caucasus showed, Russia is not about to give up

on its strategy of controlling energy resources of the former Soviet Union and using them as a political weapon in relations with its neighbors and the European Union. In particular, Russia is preoccupied with the possibility of losing control over energy networks and pipelines for the export of oil and natural gas from the Caspian basin. In particular, the BTC pipeline, which transports oil from Azerbaijan through Georgia to the Turkish terminal at Ceyhan, suffered a stoppage, as the Turkish section of the pipeline suffered from an explosion allegedly engineered by the Kurdish separatist PKK. Russia's threats to use the energy weapon against its neighbor and major trade partner makes it even more urgent for Turkey and other Western countries to pursue energy independence from Russia.

Russia seeks any pretext in international law, including the Montreux Convention, to demonstrate that it is the main regional power in the region and the final arbiter of all conflicts in the Caucasus. Simultaneously, the United States has sought to assure Turkey that it does not intend to undermine the international Convention adopted in 1936. Adm. Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told journalists during a recent visit to Turkey that "we have no plans to change the Montreux Treaty. All the U.S. ships that pass through the straits complied with the treaty and we will continue to do so".

AUTHOR'S BIO: Alexander Murinson holds a Ph.D. from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

UMAROV'S CAUCASUS EMIRATE: ZERO-SUM OR CAPABLE OF COMPROMISE?

Kevin Daniel Leahy

To be sure, the chances of Russia's leadership pursuing a negotiated settlement to its conflict with Islamic insurgents in the North Caucasus – at least in the short-to medium term – are low. Nevertheless, modern history continues to demonstrate how yesterday's 'terrorists' often become tomorrow's negotiating partners. With that historical truism in mind, it is perhaps worth pondering what sort of a negotiating partner the insurgency's leadership would make. Is the Caucasus Emirate capable of compromise?

BACKGROUND: This month, the most senior British military commander in Afghanistan, Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith, conceded publicly that his forces were incapable of achieving a 'decisive military victory' over the Taliban. In a significant strategic departure, the Brigadier went on to warn the British public to prepare itself for the prospect of a negotiated settlement with the Taliban. 'We want to change the debate from one where disputes are settled through the barrel of the gun to one where it is done through negotiations,' he said. Britain's current predicament in southern Afghanistan is a fine historical example of how a zero-sum military mindset – underpinned in this case by the familiar slogan 'we do not negotiate with terrorists' – can quickly transmogrify into a polar-opposite mindset focused on securing a negotiated cessation of hostilities with the enemy.

Without a doubt, the acknowledgment by a senior British military official that the Taliban rebels of Helmand province have all but forced the British to the negotiating table, will encourage insurrectionist movements elsewhere in the world. In the North Caucasus, those who follow the standard of Doku Umarov's Caucasus Emirate will surely be paying close attention to any contacts between the British

and the Taliban over the coming weeks and months.

The similarities between Umarov's movement and the Taliban, in terms of ideology and circumstance, are patently obvious. A quick glance at Umarov's primary media outlet, the Kavkaz-center website, reveals just how closely the leadership of the Caucasus Emirate identifies with the Taliban and its goals. Unfortunately for Umarov, unlike their British counterparts in Afghanistan, Russia's political and military leaders are presently quite unwilling to speak with representatives of the Caucasus Emirate.

The reasons for this reticence are, alternately, political, geo-strategic and societal in nature. Sensitivity regarding the issue of Russia's territorial integrity – which Russia's elite is, naturally, determined to ensure – is one example of a geo-strategic impediment to a negotiated solution. Indeed, should Moscow ever come to a negotiated arrangement with Umarov, whose avowed goal is the dismemberment of the Russian Federation as we know it via the creation of a Caucasus Emirate, it would inevitably impact on the integrity of Russia's sovereignty to a greater or lesser degree.

The indifference of Russian society at large to the conflict in the south also contributes to the perseverance of the Russian leadership's zero-sum attitude. As long as the conflagration in the North Caucasus remains a political non-issue in the Russian heartland, and as long as Vladimir Putin and certain *siloviki* remain in the ascendancy, Russia's leadership will feel under no pressure to change its policies in respect of the North Caucasus. But what of Umarov and his advisors: what, in their view, is the utility of negotiating with Russia, and under what hypothetical circumstances can they envisage such negotiations becoming a reality?

IMPLICATIONS: It is widely believed that this prevailing zero-sum mentality cuts both ways, that Umarov is as disdainful of the prospect of entering into negotiations as the Kremlin is, and that he and his followers are determined to fight this war to a decisive military conclusion – 'victory or paradise' as they put it themselves. No representative of the Caucasus Emirate has ruled out the prospect of negotiating with Russia *per se*. Even Movladi Udugov, one of the principle architects of the Emirate project who is regarded as a hawk on the subject of relations with Moscow, has conceded that 'sooner or later negotiations are inevitable'. The point of contention here seems to be 'when', rather than 'if', representatives of the Caucasus Emirate should enter into negotiations with Russia. Udugov, for example, foresees entering into negotiations precisely when the military situation is balanced decisively in favour of the Emirate's forces, and at a point when Russia's military potency has been degraded to such an extent that she 'cannot commit another aggression in the future'.

This last stipulation – a veiled reference to the ill-fated 1996 Khasavyurt peace accords, which failed to prevent a renewal of hostilities between Russia and Chechnya in 1999 – amounts to a hostage to fortune and, taken at face value, would seem to further reduce the chances of bilateral negotiations commencing any time in the near future. Indeed, were Russia to acquiesce to Umarov's agenda and permit the establishment of a sharia-based state in the North Caucasus, it is difficult to imagine how its enormous military might be sufficiently weakened so as not to pose a future threat to the Emirate. Even so, we cannot assume that Udugov will have the final say on when it would be acceptable to commence negotiations with Russia, or what would constitute a negotiable, or non-negotiable, point of interest for the Emirate in determining its future relations with Moscow. Nor, for that matter, can we assume that Udugov is immovable on this point. He is worldly and intelligent and surely realizes that any set of negotiations is effectively a bargaining process where the objective is to safeguard your primary interest(s) – in this case, independent statehood – while making the least amount of concessions possible.

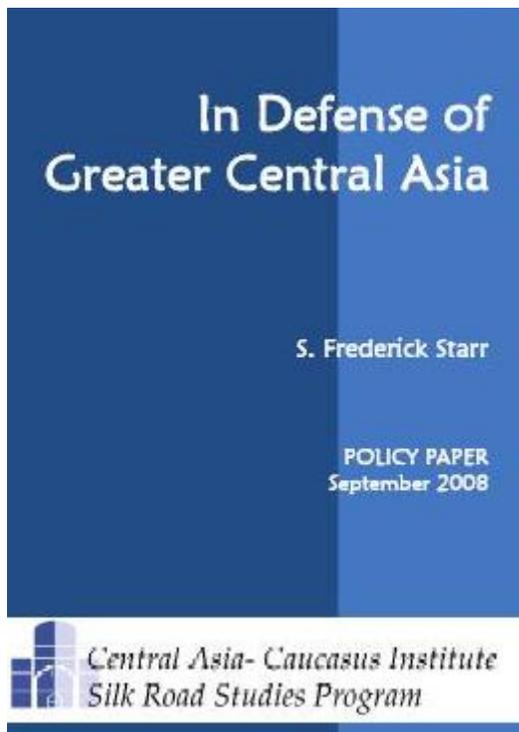
Political realism of this hue can also be discerned in the writings of another of the Emirate's leading lights, the chairman of its sharia court, Anzor Astemirov. Astemirov's account of a discussion he had in 2005 with the late Chechen rebel leader, Shamil Basayev, shows categorically that he is able to settle for a less than optimal outcome. For Astemirov, the ideal outcome of the current war would be the establishment of a pan-Caucasus, sharia-based state stretching from the Black Sea to the Caspian. However, in conversation with Basayev, Astemirov stated that were Russia to

grant independence to Chechnya forthwith, he would be willing to forsake the struggle elsewhere in the region (including in his native Kabardino-Balkaria) and relocate to Chechnya with his followers – on condition that independent Chechnya would be governed according to sharia.

CONCLUSIONS: The prospect of Russia entering into negotiations with Umarov certainly seems less fantastic when one considers Britain's current predicament in Afghanistan. Moreover, there exist numerous historical precedents of Russia attempting, and actually establishing, a *modus vivendi* with advocates of sharia-based states. When considered objectively, Umarov and his supporters appear far less intractable and zero-sum orientated than is commonly asserted.

They do not reject the idea of negotiating with Russia per se, but would prefer to do so from a position of strength and regard the realization of their own independent, sharia-based state as a non-negotiable point of interest. On other issues, they are flexible. For instance, the borders of the Emirate have yet to be defined – Umarov and Udugov have admitted as much – and there are indications that they may be willing to settle for a smaller parcel of territory than the entire North Caucasus. In sum, they seem capable of bargaining. As yet, however, the Russian leadership shows no inclination to enter in a dialogue with them.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Kevin Daniel Leahy holds a postgraduate degree in international relations from Ireland's University College Cork.



New Policy Paper:

In Defense of Greater Central Asia

By S. Frederick Starr

The idea of an open Greater Central Asia that is an economic and transport center rather than a periphery, and a self-determined subject of international affairs rather than a pliable object, stands in contrast to the territorial colonialism of yore and to the energy-driven colonialism which threatens the region today.

The Paper can be downloaded free at www.silkroadstudies.org. Hardcopy requests should be addressed to Katarina Lesandric at caciz@jhu.edu.

FOOD SECURITY IN CENTRAL ASIA: A PRIORITY FOR WESTERN ENGAGEMENT

Matteo Fumagalli

The international community has responded rapidly to the 2007-2008 food crisis in Central Asia, through ad hoc measures aimed at reducing the impact of both natural and economic disasters, especially on Tajikistan's population. As the Central Asian populations brace themselves for yet another harsh winter with disrupted heating, electricity rationing, and food insecurity, time has come for a concerted strategy complementing humanitarian aid. Addressing the issue requires adopting a systemic and long-term approach that views food (in)security as one dimension of a broader nexus, linking water, gas and food in the Central Asian region, as well as parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Failing to address the crisis entails risks of social unrest due to economic grievances, which may escalate into political instability.

BACKGROUND: The global rise in fuel and food prices is having a dramatic impact on the lives of millions in Central Asia. This is particularly – albeit not exclusively – the case for Tajikistan's population of seven million, which has faced a combined series of natural calamities and economic hardships over the past few years. After a summer marked by electricity blackouts and water rationing, Kyrgyzstan is also heading into the winter season with more worries than certainties.

In May 2008 the UN World Food Program estimated that the food crisis had left almost two million Tajikistani citizens in a condition of food insecurity, unable to access food either due to an inability to afford it or supply shortages. On 21-22 July, 2008, international and non-governmental organizations met in Almaty (Kazakhstan) to assess the current food crisis in the region and develop an appropriate response. The result still falls short of a long-term strategy to tackle a chronic crisis. The gravity of the situation in the Central Asian region varies, of course. It is most acute in Tajikistan, considered a 'food-deficit country'. Part of

Kyrgyzstan's and Uzbekistan's populations, in cities and the countryside alike, also suffer from food insecurity. Earlier this year, Kazakhstan had to resort to a ban on grain exports as a result of the shortage in domestic production. In September, Astana announced that it would not resort to such admittedly harsh measures this year despite a disappointing harvest.

The Central Asian republics have not been exempt from the combined global fuel and food crisis that has affected both the developed and the developing world. Utility prices have risen dramatically. Due to harsh weather conditions, upstream water storage had to be used for electricity production during the winter to ensure domestic heating, although needed for agricultural purposes in downstream countries (especially Uzbekistan, but also Turkmenistan and southern Kazakhstan). Thus, water levels in the reservoirs in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan shrunk dramatically, and significantly reduced the flow to the neighboring countries for farming in the summer. A vicious circle of shocks all feeding into one another followed, setting the stage for the current crisis,

simultaneously affecting food and energy security in the region.

IMPLICATIONS: As the crisis became apparent in February 2008 the Food and Agriculture Organization launched a US\$27 million Compound Crisis Flash Appeal for Tajikistan. Kazakhstan even produced an emergency plan to assist Tajikistan pledging the creation of a US\$100 million investment fund in the country. It also undertook to continue its food supplies to Tajikistan. As one of the country's main suppliers of humanitarian aid, the EU has continued to channel aid through its humanitarian program ECHO (about US\$227 million during 1993-2006). European assistance to the country and the region now takes place through the DCI (Development Cooperation Instrument), which has replaced and expanded ECHO's original purpose. The 2007-2010 Regional Indicative Program for Central Asia has a budget of around US\$433 million to be distributed to the region until 2011 (approximately US\$1 billion for 2007-2013). Improved food security

constitutes one of the five thematic programs of the DCI, which signals the EU's new approach to aiding development by adopting LRRD (Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development) as the new guiding philosophy.

U.S. assistance has also materialized. As the proportions of this year's crisis became apparent, about US\$1 million was approved by USAID's Foreign Disaster Assistance to provide health services and relief commodities. Daily rationing of the value of US\$1.6 million was channeled through humanitarian organizations. More comprehensively, USAID's Food for Peace Office provided Tajikistan with US\$8 million worth of humanitarian aid for the FY2007 and FY2008.

Food security, alleviating poverty and an environmentally sound use of natural resources are vital to sustainable economic growth in Central Asia. The problem is that food insecurity in Central Asia is chronic, not temporary. A combination of internal and external shocks, including harsh winters, droughts, a locust invasion, and supply cuts

from neighboring Uzbekistan, have brought the case of Tajikistan to the attention of the international community, but the factors triggering the crisis existed long before the current combination of economic and natural disasters.

Humanitarian aid, however promptly this may have been provided, is not a comprehensive strategy.

The international community should work to ensure



(International Potato Center)

that future reoccurrences will not take on such dramatic proportions. One way of thinking about reducing food insecurity in the region would be to stop conceiving it as a stand-alone challenge. Food insecurity is a result of problems originating at both the political (slow policy reform at the domestic level, tense bilateral relations leading to supply cuts of gas, oil and water) and the economic (poor natural resource management) levels. This in turn has spillover effects in other sectors, for example agricultural production, which again feeds back into the local population's access to food.

CONCLUSIONS: Addressing the food crisis requires adopting a systemic and long-term approach that looks at food insecurity as one dimension part of a broader nexus in which water, gas, and food in the Central Asian region (and beyond) are inter-twined.

Because of the complex and long-term nature of the effort, as well as the significant financial implications, action to reduce food insecurity in Central Asia needs to be concerted and reflect long-term strategic planning rather than an *ad hoc* response to the outburst of an emergency. Tackling the crisis is a priority for Western engagement, out of humanitarian concerns, of course, but also for two other reasons. First, western presence and influence in the region are at an all-time low, despite the occasional high-

profile visits of US and EU officials. Cooperating with the local governments and other interested parties (Russia, who would not benefit from an additional wave of refugees fleeing hunger from its southern neighbors) would provide an opportunity for mutual confidence-building in an area where action would have high visibility and recognition, as well as tangible effect, something that the local population has long wanted to see from western engagement in the region.

Additionally, food insecurity has a direct impact on the potential for political instability. Disruption of energy supplies (in terms of heating, water, and electricity), a decline in living standards, and rampant inflation, coupled with a widespread perception of the governments' incapacity to deal with the crisis effectively have led to occasional outbursts of social dissatisfaction across the region. This exposure to social unrest, if left un-addressed, could well lead to food refugees, increased criminal activities to cope with the hardship, and ultimately jeopardize an already fragile social (and political) balance.

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FIELD REPORTS

EU FORUM ON PRESS FREEDOM HELD IN TASHKENT

Erkin Ahmadov

On October 2-3, 2008, a media seminar was held in Tashkent. The event titled “Liberalization of Mass Media: An Important Component of the Democratization of Society” was the first to allow discussion on the freedom of speech, human rights and regime deficiencies. Representatives of several Western NGOs attended the forum, speaking up for the local media representatives unable to make their way to the event. The sole fact that the forum was held was considered significant progress by many experts. Several days after the event, however, the participants provided quite critical reflections. Their reports term the forum another maneuver to demonstrate progress in democratization processes in Uzbekistan to the international community, while in reality it was just a move to appease the EU, which is considering suspending the sanctions imposed back in 2005.

The event was characterized as careful by many local experts. From the first day of the forum it was clear that two different agendas were being promoted: one on the government’s part and one on part of the representatives of foreign NGOs. As stated by one of the local newspapers, the forum was held in two languages: the one of the government and the one of the guests. Thus, there was no dialogue as such, just an expression of praises by one side and of discontent by another.

Representatives of the pro-governmental side focused on presenting information about expanding the horizons of mass media communications in the republic, as well as solid legal basis for journalists and mass media workers. However, when the floor was taken by representatives of the International Crisis Group (ICG), Human Rights Watch

(HRW), Amnesty International (AI) and the Open Society Institute (OSI), issues of real concern were addressed. For instance, they tried to call for a dialogue on the harsh censorship of mass media, the refusal to accredit western mass media and their representatives in the country, and persecution of human rights activists, to name a few issues. None of those received adequate responses, but was either completely ignored or politely rejected.

It is not clear if answers to these questions and issues were actually expected. Ever since the EU imposed sanctions on Uzbekistan, it has been engaged in a “constructive dialogue” with the state on human rights issues. As the Uzbek side was reluctant to make concessions, it seems that a nominal compliance with minimal standards and requests became quite sufficient for the EU representatives. Thus, the “constructive dialogue” gradually transformed into “critical dialogue”. In the essence of the latter lie some basic “democratization” transformations that already took place in Uzbekistan. Adoption of a moratorium on the death penalty, allowing the Red Cross and Crescent into the prisons, and the present admittance of HRW, ICG, AI and OSI representatives are among those. How much of a change all these gestures of goodwill count for remains an open question.

In light of these developments, could such a media forum still count as a positive change? The answers would probably vary depending on the respondent. For representatives of Western NGOs, the event accounted for little success, but rather another confirmation of the regime’s stability and persistent non-cooperation. For the public, which will be

presented with very limited information on the matter, it might seem as progress. No doubt, after careful filtering and extensive censorship of the event's records, only positive aspects will be left for readers. And finally, it was most likely a factor when the EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs met in Brussels on 13 October 2008 and decided to lift the sanctions imposed in 2005.

In general, the forum on the liberalization of mass media provided just another example of different interpretations of key terms. In the West, "liberalization" would stand for more freedom and opportunities, but has a quite different definition in states like Uzbekistan.

TURKMENISTAN ADOPTS NEW CONSTITUTION

Chemen Durdiyeva

On September 26, the *Khalk Maslahaty* (the People's Council), the supreme legislative branch and a body of popular representation met for its special XXI session in Ashgabat. The main issue of this grandiose session of the Council was the official endorsement of state policies of "national revival" and accepting the new draft of the Turkmen Constitution initiated by President Berdimukhammedov and prepared by the Turkmen Parliament, the *Mejlis*.

In the first half of the session, Berdimukhammedov abolished the People's Council's existence under the new Constitution. Under the past president Niyazov, this council with a membership of 2,500, consisting of elderly people, had been functioning virtually as a rubber stamp body for justifying the country's most idiosyncratic policies. Created by Niyazov in 1992, the Council has been meeting once a year with the purpose of becoming a unique type of governance mechanism in the region. While reading out his visionary policies for national revival, Berdimukhammedov claimed that there was no more need for its existence in light of the "democratization of the state and society" in Turkmenistan. Now, the powers of *Khalk Maslahaty* are divided between the president and the parliament of Turkmenistan.

In particular, certain rights of the Council such as amending and adopting the Constitution,

conducting referendums, announcing Presidential and Parliamentary elections, ratifying and denouncing international treaties, and addressing issues of border delimitation and territorial division within Turkmenistan are now delegated to the expanded 125-member parliament. As opposed to the old one, the new constitution gives the president the right to lead the State Security Council and to select its members. The authority over appointing the regional and city mayors has also been returned to the president.

The new draft also states Turkmenistan's commitment to a market economy based on "private, state, and other forms of property." In particular, article 10 says that "the state encourages entrepreneurship and supports the development of small and mid-size businesses." Moreover, the state also promises to protect private property including land ownership. Setting up private educational establishments is also officially allowed under the constitution.

In the second part of the session, the People's Council unanimously adopted Berdimukhammedov's recently announced policies of so-called "national revival." Speaking in front of 2,500 Council members and foreign guests, Berdimukhammedov called for the modernization of the Turkmen economy, and the rational use and protection of the environment in the process of

exploration of hydrocarbon resources. His passionate speech about the renaissance of Turkmen society has also touched civil society advocates both in and outside the country. For example, the People's Council also endorsed a new plan to integrate Turkmenistan with outside world and also create a civil society by engaging the population in major decision-making processes.

New amendments to the constitution are part of Berdimukhammedov's continuous reforms since his election as President in February 2007. The majority of these reforms appear to be aimed at dismantling what the past president Niyazov had built up during his 16 years as president. Earlier this year, Berdimukhammedov also accepted the conventional names of the months of the year, instead of the ones

carrying Niyazov's name, his holy script Rukhnama, and that of his mother. "Some articles and rules of the constitution are outdated, lagging behind times, even hindering progress", Berdimukhammedov was quoted as saying earlier, while speaking of constitutional reforms to the public. It is noteworthy that Turkmenistan's constitution underwent amendments in 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2005. Experts skeptically believe, however, that this new constitution is mostly incomplete and may not necessarily lead to a smooth transition to market economy and the democratization of the state. For example, there is still no clear-cut separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government in the country.

HIGH MILITARY OFFICIAL RESIGNS IN KYRGYZSTAN, WEAKENING THE RULING REGIME

Erica Marat

On October 10, the Secretary of Kyrgyzstan's National Security Council, Major General Ismail Isakov, resigned from his position, accusing President Kurmanbek Bakiyev of corruption and of seating his cronies at key public positions. Isakov is among the few Kyrgyz military officials to gain an officer rank during the Soviet regime and earn a reputation of a righteous military man.

Upon becoming defense minister on March 24, 2005, Isakov quickly began to implement reforms in the Kyrgyz army. Among his foremost goals was lifting the spirit in the army by providing better conditions for service and living to army personnel. He also tried to diversify cooperation with western partners, while continuing to foster links with Russia and within the Collective Security Treaty Organization. He had been sacked from the position of Deputy Defense Minister in 1999, following the clash between the Kyrgyz military and guerrillas from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Then, Isakov criticized former president Askar Akayev

and the military brass for underestimating the role of the army in national security. According to Isakov, Kyrgyz military structures acted unprofessionally and were unable to combat the IMU guerrillas adequately. He then was largely labeled as poor patriot of his country.

In 2000, Isakov won a seat in the parliament and joined the opposition to Akayev, later becoming among the most active members of the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan that eventually ousted Akayev's regime. As a Defense Minister, he was expected to join Bakiyev's Ak Zhol party that was formed two months before the parliamentary elections in December 2007. Although for some period Isakov was part of Ak Zhol, he still served as the Secretary-General of the Zhany Kyrgyzstan opposition party. In June this year, Isakov was appointed to head the National Security Council, however most of his deputies were not offered alternative positions.

Zhany Kyrgyzstan released a public letter to the president, where Isakov complains that numerous distinguished military and civilian officials were left outside of the political establishment because of their disagreement with the regime. Among them were his deputies, Kubanychbek Oruzbayev and Boris Yugaj. He criticized Bakiyev for repeating many of Akayev's mistakes and sinking the country into an energy crisis. Although not mentioned directly in the letter, Isakov was likely pressured by other officials from military institutions who were more loyal to Bakiyev. He wrote "in the course of my service as a Secretary of the Security Council, I tried to be as helpful as possible in dealing with pitfalls [of the current governance system], but the existing one does not allow me to eliminate these problems."

Indeed, Bakiyev has already seated loyal supporters into the security structures – his brother Zhanysh heads the National Security Guard, while he promoted its former head, Bakytbek Kalyev, to the position of Defense Minister. Both Bakiyev cronies seem to lack interest in the enhancement of military institutions but rather tailor their functioning to the regime's need.

Bakiyev responded with sarcasm to Isakov's resignation, mocking the Major General for being overly sensitive to his criticism. But by losing Isakov, Bakiyev is undermining his support base among a number of military officials, as well as in the population at large. Isakov was praised as a war

hero in southern Kyrgyzstan for his bravery during the Batken clashes. Moreover, he is not the only respected military or security official to be forced into opposition. Omurbek Suvanaliyev, former Minister of Interior and a popular military official, was sacked by Bakiyev in early 2007 (see 21 February 2007 issue, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4459>). Losing support among the military will increase Bakiyev's risk of finding himself surrounded by popular officials antagonistic to his regime. Along with other former Bakiyev supporters, Isakov is likely to join the active opposition and begin challenging the regime.

Isakov's resignation coincided with the CIS summit held in Bishkek and followed another scandalous quitting in Bakiyev's government – that of Klara Kabilova, Chair of the Central Elections Committee. In late September, Kabilova released a video statement accusing Bakiyev and his son Maksim of pressure and threats prior to local government elections.

Aside from his family members, only few of Bakiyev's key supporters are left in the government. They are the Head of the Presidential Administration, Medet Sadyrkulov, and State Advisor Usen Sydykov. As the presidential elections of 2010 approach, Bakiyev's former supporters are likely to repeat the experience of their opposition to Akayev's regime in 2005, consolidating against Bakiyev.

TAJIKISTAN PREPARES LAWSUIT AGAINST STUDENTS

Sergey Medrea

The issue of using child labor for picking cotton has been on the table for a long time in Uzbekistan. However, the existence of forced child labor as such was strongly rejected by the Uzbek authorities, claiming that "children work in the agricultural industry on a legitimate and secure basis, as all other kids in the world". This summer, four influential European import unions and cloth

manufacturers sent an official letter of request to President Karimov, asking to stop the use of child labor in the cotton fields of Uzbekistan. Such calls for banning child labor have been made before, but have not brought any results. This year, however, it seems that the Uzbek authorities have finally responded to international concerns and opened for a dialogue. Nevertheless, while international

conventions on child labor and child protection are being ratified, it seems that the issue is not yet closed.

Cotton, often called the “white gold” of Uzbekistan, is one of the major sources of state income. Last year’s production of raw cotton was about 3,7 million tons, and the production of cotton fiber reached 1,2 million tons. Apart from local consumption, Uzbekistan annually exports about 900,000 tons of cotton fiber, and is the third largest cotton exporter in the world.

The four associations that signed and sent the letter of discontent to the Uzbek authorities control 90 percent of the cotton production volumes sold in the U.S. and other states of the world. Therefore, it is their assumption and a plausible outcome that if Uzbekistan decides to maintain its current labor policy, the result will be a full boycott of Uzbek cotton exports, resulting in a significant reduction of export revenues.

The prospect of such losses may have convinced the Uzbek authorities to consider the consequences of international discontent. A conference addressing the issue of forced child labor in Uzbekistan was held on August 11, 2008. It brought together the representatives of several Western states’ embassies, the International Labor Organization, and UNICEF. The option of revising Uzbekistan’s status as a country included in the common system of trade preferences was one of the key issues considered at the conference.

Soon after the conference, on 12 September 2008, the head of Uzbekistan’s government, Shavkat Mirziyoev, signed a resolution “On measures for implementation of the Convention on minimal age of employment and the Convention on banning, and applying immediate measures for, the eradication of grave forms of child labor ratified by the Republic of Uzbekistan”. Both Conventions were ratified in April 2008, and now the government has approved a National plan of action for their implementation. As such, it demands

ministries and departments “to provide control over the banning of forced child labor and following the norms and regulations on the labor conditions of minors”.

While legislative measures are still in the process of coming into force, some local observers report that in certain parts of the country, children still work in cotton fields. For instance, in the Tashkent region, pupils and students have not been forced to go to the fields yet, whereas in other regions (such as Jizzakh and Bukhara), and especially in rural areas, child labor is still common practice. Usually the daily quota that needs to be collected is 80 kilos. Nonetheless, Uzbek authorities have an explanation for this. Now, since the conventions are signed and ratified, it is claimed that children work in the fields voluntarily. Unfortunately, in many cases, this is true. Coming from poor families, they earn their livelihoods by helping out the farmers.

They are paid 40 Sums (\$0,03) per kilo, thus picking about 70-80 kg per day brings them about \$2-3. A situation where children go to the fields willingly to earn money brings up another interesting debate. If they “voluntarily” choose to skip school and work instead, that brings up the issue of improvements of a poor welfare system and economic conditions.

In light of all the issues that child labor brings into discussion, it is remarkable to note that the practice as such was common and acceptable for many years. In spite of internal discontent and calls for prohibition by the international community, very little has been done to abolish or eradicate child labor. Now that important economic interests are at stake, it seems that the children of Uzbekistan are provided with a legal basis to protect their rights. However, in a country that gets its major sources of income from cotton exports and desperately needs “free hands” to do the work, it seems to be quite difficult to secure the rights and freedoms of the most vulnerable, as their economic conditions do not allow them to leave aside even such a hard earned and small income.

NEWS DIGEST

RICE: U.S. NOT TRYING TO POACH KAZAKHSTAN

5 October

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Sunday the United States is not attempting to poach Kazakhstan away from Russia. After meeting with Kazakhstan Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin, Rice dismissed accusations that the U.S. government has begun targeting Russian allies for diplomatic relations. Rice said while Kazakhstan may be a Russian ally, the country is not part of Russia's so-called sphere of influence. "First of all, Kazakhstan is an independent country. It can have friendships with whomever it wishes, and I think Kazakhstan has wished to have friendships and relationships with all of its neighbors," Rice said. "And that is, I think, perfectly acceptable in the 21st century, so we don't see and don't accept any notion of a special sphere of influence." Tazhin said while tensions are building between Russian and the international community, Kazakhstan had long enjoyed a ties with the United States. "At the same time, I should underline that our relationship with the United States has stable, has strategic character," he said. "And in 2006, during meetings of president of United States and president of Kazakhstan, it was very openly stated that our two countries have stable and strategic relationship." (UPI)

ABKHAZIA WANTS UN OBSERVER MISSION IN GEORGIA TO BE RENAMED

5 October

Chief of the UN observer mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) Johan Verbeke has discussed the mission's further work with Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh and Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba. Bagapsh said during "closed-door" talks in Sukhumi that the format of the mission and the number of military observers must be altered and, most important, the name of the organization must be changed. "If it remains the UN observer mission in Georgia, let it do the observation in Georgia, not in Abkhazia," Bagapsh said, according to the presidential press service. However, Bagapsh

showed interest in the UN mission's further peacekeeping activities. Verbeke said that the UN mission's mandate was expiring on October 15 and that the time left was not sufficient to restructure the mission and to change its format. Bagapsh met the argument with understanding, but insisted that the name of the mission be changed. Verbeke promised to inform the UN headquarters of the problems voiced. (Interfax)

TAJIKISTAN JAILS WARLORD FOR KILLING BBC REPORTER

7 October

Tajikistan's supreme court has found a former rebel warlord guilty of murdering a BBC journalist in 1995 and jailed him for 15 years, a court spokesman said on Tuesday. Mukhiddin Olimpur, the BBC's chief Farsi language service correspondent in Tajikistan, was killed at the height of a civil war that pitted Tajikistan's Russian-backed government against an alliance of Islamists and liberals. The court spokesman said Nasrullo Sharifov, who fought on the Islamists' side as a field commander during the war, had been sentenced to 15 years for killing Olimpur.

"Sharifov was directly involved in the murder and confessed during the investigation and court hearings that he personally fired twice at Mukhiddin Olimpur from a Makarov pistol," the spokesman said. More than 100,000 people died on both sides during the war, which started shortly after Tajikistan gained independence from the Soviet Union and lasted until 1997. The conflict ruined the Muslim country's economy and infrastructure. President Imomali Rakhmon, credited at home for bringing stability after years of fighting and chaos, is criticised by liberals for tolerating little political dissent and not doing enough to fight poverty and corruption. (Reuters)

QUAKE IN KYRGYZSTAN KILLS 72 PEOPLE**6 October**

The death toll in an earthquake in southern Kyrgyzstan on Sunday has reached 72 people, Kyrgyz Minister for Emergency Situations Kamchibek Tashiyev said on Monday. The minister said 25 dead bodies have been retrieved from under the rubble. He does not rule out that after search-and-rescue work at the site of the tragedy the number of casualties can grow. The epicentre of the quake overnight to Monday was on the border with China, in the settlement of Nur, where it measured 8.0 on the Richter scale. Sources from the emergencies ministry say 95 percent of residential buildings were destroyed there. About 50 people received different injuries, including grave. Some of them are being evacuated to the regional centre, the city of Osh, on helicopters. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has offered condolences to his Kyrgyz counterpart Kurmanbek Bakiyev over multiple deaths and destructions as a result of the earthquake in Kyrgyzstan's Osh region, the Kremlin press service said on Monday. In particular, in his message the president expressed Russia's readiness for providing necessary assistance in the elimination of effects of the quake and offered condolences to relatives and next-of-kin of those killed, the press service said. (Itar-Tass)

SOCAR OPENS OFFICE IN KAZAKHSTAN**8 October**

The State Oil Co. of Azerbaijan said Wednesday it opened offices in Kazakhstan to facilitate oil exports between the two countries. Vurgun Jafarov with the Astana office of SOCAR told Trend Capital News the Kazakhstan division would allow both countries to work together to form a regional oil transporting system. As much as 375 million barrels of oil per year from the Kashagan oil field off the coast of Kazakhstan will be exported through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline by 2013. The move comes as Western countries are focusing more intently on the Caucasus region and Central Asia as a source of energy. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Astana during the weekend to meet with top officials to discuss energy security in the region in the wake of the conflict between Russia and Georgia. The visit came on the heels of a deal between U.S.-based ConocoPhillips and Mubadala Development Co. of the United Arab Emirates to develop the Kazakh energy sector. (UPI)

LAVROV URGES ARMS EMBARGO ON GEORGIA**8 October**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on October 8 an arms embargo should be imposed on Georgia. "We think the ideal way of ensuring security is an embargo on arms supplies to the present Georgian regime and it is our conviction that an international embargo on supplies of offensive weapons to Georgia is an urgent requirement," Interfax news agency quoted Lavrov as saying on October 8. Speaking at a press conference, Lavrov also spoke about the international talks due to take place in Geneva on October 15. "We will try to ensure that international observers in Georgia monitor areas from where artillery fire was opened against Tskhinvali," he said. The Geneva talks on security and stability in the region will take place at the expert level on October 15. (Civil Georgia)

LAVROV: GEORGIA'S CIS MEMBERSHIP SUSPENDED**9 October**

The CIS foreign ministerial meeting in the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek has suspended Georgia's membership of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on October 9. "A technical decision was made to suspend Georgia's membership of the CIS in accordance with its request," Interfax news agency quoted Lavrov as saying. President Saakashvili announced on August 12 that Georgia would leave the CIS, saying Russian troops would henceforth be deemed "occupational forces." Two days later the Georgian parliament approved a decision to quit the CIS. The decision envisages withdrawing from three agreements – the 1991 treaty on setting up the Commonwealth of Independent States, the charter approved by decision of the CIS heads of states in January 1993 and an agreement on economic cooperation from September 1993. The CIS foreign ministers also decided to suspend the activities of the CIS peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia. "We have also decided to suspend the activities of the Collective Forces on maintaining peace in Abkhazia, which were created by decision of the CIS heads of states," Lavrov told reporters. Russian troops were stationed in the Abkhaz conflict zone under CIS aegis. Their presence in the region was also envisaged in an agreement between the heads of Georgia and Russia, which said they would

withdraw if either side demanded it. Meanwhile, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Denisov said on October 8 that after recognition of Abkhazia's independence by Russia, imposing CIS sanctions on Sokhumi has become senseless. On March 6 the Russian Foreign Ministry announced the country's withdrawal from the 1996 CIS treaty on imposing economic sanctions on Abkhazia. Denisov also said that Russia did not oblige other CIS member states to do the same in respect of the economic sanctions against Abkhazia. (Civil Georgia)

GEORGIAN, U.S. DEFENSE MINISTERS MEET IN BUDAPEST

9 October

Military assistance to Georgia and Georgia's NATO aspirations were discussed during talks between U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates and his Georgian counterpart, Davit Kezerashvili, in Budapest on October 9. The meeting was held on the sidelines of a meeting of NATO defense ministers. After the talks, Kezerashvili told Georgian reporters that a Georgian delegation would visit the United States in late October to discuss issues "on which the U.S. may assist us." According to official reports, U.S. military assistance will be aimed at strengthening Georgian air defenses. "They [the American side] will do their best to persuade countries, which may still have particular doubts about granting MAP to Georgia," Kezerashvili said. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in St. Petersburg on October 2 that it was "too soon" for NATO to provide MAP to Georgia and Ukraine. A NATO ministerial meeting is due to discuss the issue in December. Meanwhile, the NATO-Georgia Commission will hold its first session at ministerial level on October 10 to discuss political and security cooperation matters. (Civil Georgia)

CIS still ready for Georgia to return to alliance
10 October

Heads of the Commonwealth of Independent States member countries said that the alliance is still open for Georgia, which withdrew its membership last month, the organization's executive secretary said on Friday. Georgia notified the CIS executive committee of its desire to quit the Russian-dominated alliance of former Soviet states on August 18, 2008 after a five-day war with Russia over the Georgian breakaway republic of South Ossetia. Its withdrawal will come into effect next

August. "The heads of states said that the doors of the CIS are still open for Georgia," Sergei Lebedev said. The CIS summit was held in Kyrgyzstan, which holds the organization's rotating presidency this year. The CIS comprises Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Ukraine is a founding and participating country but technically not a member state. Turkmenistan holds associate status. (RIA Novosti)

BISHKEK SUMMIT MAKES ENERGY KEY AREA OF CIS COOPERATION IN 2009

10 October

CIS presidents have accepted an initiative put forth by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to recognize cooperation in the energy sector as a key area of cooperation between CIS member-nations in 2009. At their summit in Bishkek on Friday, CIS leaders also approved some 20 documents aimed at advancing joint efforts of CIS member-countries in the economy, security and the social sector. They declared 2009 the CIS' Year of the Youth, adopted a statement calling for more vigorous cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking, and approved a 2009-2011 program intended to help crack down on illegal immigration. CIS presidents also confirmed an action plan designed to help prepare events as part of celebrations for the 65th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi troops. The plan includes a military parade in Moscow involving World War II veterans from the CIS, the Baltic nations and countries of the anti-Hitler coalition. The document also puts focus on fulfilling international treaties offering benefits and guarantees for WWII veterans, civilian workers and the families of killed soldiers. CIS member-countries agreed to consider setting the size of pensions paid to WWII veterans and people related to them at no lower than the subsistence level. They also promised to take measures to provide them with apartments. (Interfax)

TWO PEOPLE INJURED IN EXPLOSION OF ARMY TRUCK IN INGUSHETIA

10 October

Two Interior Troops' soldiers were injured after an explosive device went off near an Ural truck carrying them on a road in Malgobek, Ingushetia at 12.30 p.m. Moscow time on Friday, the press service of the Ingush investigative Committee told Interfax. "Two soldiers of the Interior Troops were

injured in an explosion of an unidentified explosive device on a roadside as the Ural truck was passing by," the press service said. The soldiers were hospitalized, but are not in a critical condition, the press service said. Investigators are working on the scene. A criminal case on charges of an attempt on the life of a law enforcement officer (Article 317 of the Russian Criminal Code) and illegal acquisition, storage and transportation of arms (Article 222 of the Russian Criminal Code) was opened. (Interfax)

'BUFFER ZONES' REMOVED, BUT OCCUPATION CONTINUES – SAAKASHVILI

10 October

Russia has mostly removed its "buffer zones", but Russian forces still remain in the Akhlagori district and the occupation of Georgia's conflict regions still continues, President Saakashvili said on October 10. Saakashvili was speaking at a joint press conference after talks with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner in Batumi. "We have not returned to the August 7 status quo and we plan to work over this issue with the French and other partners at the Geneva talks," he said. Speaking at the press conference, Kouchner said that the Russians had left most areas, but "I know that the Akhlagori district still remains occupied." He acknowledged that the Sarkozy-Medvedev agreement did not directly mention the Akhlagori district, merely "the adjacent areas." "It remains a problem and we should return to this issue at the Geneva talks," Kouchner added. President Saakashvili said his ultimate objective was to see the Russian occupation in all areas of Georgia come to an end. "Georgia will never yield to occupation or aggression," he said. "The struggle of the Georgian people for freedom and de-occupation will continue until the last Russian soldier leaves the territory of Georgia." He stressed that Georgia still faced Russian aggression. He thanked European partners because "they did not leave Georgia alone in front of this aggression." (Civil Georgia)

SAAKASHVILI ASKS EU TO PROBE ETHNIC CLEANSING

10 October

President Saakashvili said on October 10 that Georgia had urged the European Union to send a special mission to assess alleged ethnic cleansing resulting from Russian aggression. Saakashvili was speaking at a joint press conference after talks with

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner in Batumi. The Georgian president welcomed "the most important part" of the resolution adopted by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) on October 2, which deals with alleged ethnic cleansing. "The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly was the first international parliamentary body to underline the ethnic cleansing in the occupied territories of Georgia," Saakashvili said at the joint press conference. (Civil Georgia)

DEADLY QUAKE STRIKES CHECHNYA

11 October

A strong earthquake hit Chechnya and other parts of Russia's North Caucasus Saturday, killing at least 12 people and damaging scores of hospitals, schools and other buildings, emergency officials said. The quake hit around 1 p.m. (0900 GMT) and was centered northeast of the Chechen capital, Grozny, Russian emergency officials said. The U.S. Geological Survey said the temblor had a magnitude of 5.3. At least 12 people were killed in the quake and a series of aftershocks, which were felt throughout the North Caucasus and which rattled Grozny for more than 30 seconds, the regional Emergency Situations Ministry office said. The toll was expected to rise as officials got information from outlying districts. Most victims were killed by falling debris or furniture in homes and apartment buildings, said Oleg Grekov, a regional emergency official. More than 60 people sought medical help in the hardest hit Chechen towns, which included Grozny and Gudermes, he said. Russia's Caucasus Mountain region only sees occasional earthquakes. Most buildings are not reinforced against severe structural shocks and even small quakes can cause serious damage. Emergency officials said buildings in some districts saw serious structural damage, including hospitals in two Chechen districts. Chechnya is one of Russia's poorest regions, having suffered through two devastating wars in the past 15 years. Many people in the region are unemployed, and sporadic fighting between separatist rebels and federal and regional forces erupts regularly. (AP)

NATO-GEORGIA COMMISSION MEETS IN BUDAPEST

11 October

The NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) met on October 10 for the first time at ministerial level to discuss the alliance's assistance to Georgia in

recovering from the recent conflict. NATO defense ministers discussed with their Georgian counterpart, Davit Kezerashvili, the coordination of assistance in areas such as defence and security cooperation, security sector reform and airspace management, NATO said in a press-release. The NGC was established in September 2008 during a visit of the North Atlantic Council to Tbilisi. Georgian Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili said after the meeting that he hoped MAP would be granted to Georgia. "We believe that this issue will be solved in favour of Georgia and we will receive MAP," he told reporters. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in St. Petersburg on October that it was "too soon" for NATO to provide MAP to Georgia and Ukraine. (Civil Georgia)

SLAIN TALIBAN LEADER WAS PAKISTAN OFFICER

12 October

A Taliban commander killed by British forces in Afghanistan last year was actually a Pakistani military officer, Afghan sources say. The Taliban commander was one of six killed in the past year in Helmand province by British special forces, who allegedly discovered a Pakistani military ID on the body, The Sunday Times of London reported. The newspaper said its sources confirmed that British officials have covered up what was the first physical evidence of covert Pakistani military operations against British forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan claims it is a close ally of the West in its war against terror. The Times said Britain's refusal to acknowledge the incident led to an argument with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who allegedly claims London mistakenly views his country through the filter of Pakistani military intelligence. Many believe elements of the Pakistan service have been helping the Taliban. (UPI)

MOMENTUM BUILDS FOR TALIBAN NEGOTIATIONS

13 October

Afghan President Hamid Karzai and U.S. and British officials have concluded there can be no military victory over Taliban insurgents, Time Magazine says. All are privately, and to a greater degree publicly, advocating negotiation of a political deal with the Islamist militants as military force has proved largely ineffective at eliminating their insurgency, the magazine reported Monday. Karzai

last week appealed to Taliban leader Mullah Omar for peace and offered to talk, it said. The overture came after last month's Ramadan meeting of government representatives, former Taliban leaders and Saudi King Abdullah in Mecca. Brig. Mark Carleton-Smith, Britain's top military officer in Afghanistan, told a British newspaper, "We're not going to win this war," and that at best NATO troops could only hope for is to reduce it "to a manageable level of insurgency that's not a strategic threat." British Ambassador Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles reportedly said in a leaked diplomatic briefing the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan "is doomed to fail." U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates this month said the Bush administration now believes the only way to win the Afghan war is "through political means." (UPI)

EU LIFTS SANCTIONS ON UZBEKISTAN, KEEPS ARMS EMBARGO

13 October

The European Union has dropped its remaining sanctions against Uzbekistan, except for an arms embargo, a source in the French Foreign Ministry said Monday. The decision follows the release earlier this year of several human rights activists. The sanctions, including travel bans for top Uzbek state and government officials, were imposed in 2005, following the shooting of demonstrators in the city of Andizhan. France currently holds the EU's six-month rotating presidency. In May 2007, foreign ministers of 27 European Union nations extended sanctions on Uzbekistan, introduced over the violent suppression of an uprising in the country that came to be known as the Andizhan massacre. The sanctions were triggered by the Uzbek authorities' refusal to allow an international investigation into the events in the eastern city. Rights activists alleged that troops opened fire on thousands of protesters. Official statistics said 187 people were killed but rights groups said the death toll was far higher. The EU previously said it might review the sanctions if Uzbekistan agreed to continue negotiations on civil rights and freedoms in the Central Asian republic. (RIA Novosti)

SENIOR AFGHAN PROVINCIAL OFFICIAL SLAIN

14 October

A senior provincial official was killed by gunmen in Kandahar, Afghanistan, and five Taliban militants were slain in Ghanzi province Tuesday, officials said. Dost Mohammad Arghistani, head of the

Kandahar province's Department of Martyrs and Disabled, was shot dead by armed motorcyclists Tuesday morning, a spokesman for Gov. Zalmay Ayubi told KUNA, the Kuwait news agency. Arghistani's driver was also injured in the attack. Elsewhere in Afghanistan, U.S.-led coalition troops said they had killed five militants during an operation in Ghazni province, including a Taliban commander. A coalition statement said the armed militants fired on coalition troops as they approached. Coalition forces Sunday said they killed five Taliban militants in the same province, KUNA reported. In central Afghanistan's Uruzgan province, a remote-controlled mine struck a bus, killing nine civilians including three boys, provincial officials told CNN. They said most of the victims were on their way to the town of Deh Rawod. Six others were reported wounded in the blast. (UPI)

NATO 'IGNORES' RUSSIA'S OFFER TO HELP FIGHT AFGHAN DRUG TRADE

14 October

NATO has ignored numerous Russian proposals for cooperation via the Collective Security Treaty Organization in the fight against drugs and terrorism in Afghanistan, Russia's UN envoy said on Tuesday. "The alliance has still not responded, although objectively speaking, such interaction would raise the efficiency of efforts of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan," Vitaly Churkin said at a Security Council session on Afghanistan. The Collective Security Treaty Organization is a security grouping comprising Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Churkin said Russia is concerned over increasingly frequent Afghan civilian deaths during operations carried out by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, and urges for measures to be taken to stop the killings. He also said Russia is ready to continue providing economic aid to Afghanistan. He stressed that Russia is taking part in a number of projects to restore the country's energy and transport infrastructure. The envoy also said Russia has made a significant contribution to the country's economic stabilization by writing off last August around 90% of Afghanistan's Soviet-era debt, to a total of \$11.1 billion. (RIA Novosti)

KAZAKHSTAN TO SUPPLY BTC

14 October

Oil from the Tengiz field in Kazakhstan will travel via rail to tankers on the Caspian Sea to move through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, officials said. BP Azerbaijan, the operator of the 1,099-mile BTC pipeline, said Chevron-Exxon, which runs Tengiz, will move oil along several land and sea routes to BTC by the second half of October, Trend Capital News reported Tuesday. Chevron-Exxon said it has plans to improve oil production significantly by the end of the year and is looking to expand transportation capacity to Azerbaijan and to Black Sea ports near Georgia. Chevron-Exxon owns nearly a 9 percent stake in BTC along with its operations at Tengiz. Oil reserves for the field in western Kazakhstan total 8.43 billion barrels. Operations through BTC were interrupted by the August conflict between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia, as well as a fire at a pumping station in Turkey, also in August. (UPI)

DEMOCRATIZATION OF TURKMENISTAN HAS BECOME IRREVERSIBLE - BERDIMUKHAMMEDOV

14 October

The activity of international observers at the upcoming parliamentary election in Turkmenistan should not be restricted, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow said signing into law a bill on the Turkmen parliamentary election. "We should show and prove to the world that the further democratization of Turkmen society has become irreversible after the adoption of the new Constitution. This is a guarantee of building a just and human state which protects people's interests," Berdimuhamedow said. "No one should stand away from the organization of the Turkmen parliamentary election, the result of which will be the election of decent people and high professionals who people respect in the parliament," the president said. In line with the new edition of the Constitution, adopted on September 26, 2008, the People's Council was abolished, and its powers and functions were distributed between the president and the parliament. (Interfax)

GEORGIA SAYS RUSSIAN AIRCRAFT VIOLATE ITS AIRSPACE**14 October**

Five Russian aircraft violated Georgian airspace on October 13, the Georgian Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday. It said that two aircraft entered Georgian airspace over the Kazbegi region at 9:57am local time, flying over the Java area in breakaway South Ossetia, and returned to Russia at 10:01am. At 10:29am and 12:27pm local time three military aircraft flew into Georgian territory, flying over the Oni area in the Racha region, Sachkhere in the Imereti region, Java, Tskhinvali, and returned to Russia through Kazbegi, the Georgian Foreign Ministry said. "Yet another incursion of Russian military aircraft into Georgia's sovereign airspace indicates that Russia is continuing its aggression against Georgia," an MoFA statement reads. The Ministry urged the international community to take urgent measures "to prevent Russian aggression." (Civil Georgia)

EXIT POLLS SHOW ALIYEV SWEEPING AZERBAIJAN PRESIDENTIAL VOTE**15 October**

Incumbent Ilham Aliyev swept to victory in Azerbaijan's presidential election Wednesday, exit polls showed, maintaining his grip on power in the

strategic oil-rich former Soviet republic. Aliyev won the election with 80.5 percent of the vote, an exit poll conducted by the local Rey ("Opinion") polling firm said. Opposition candidate Gulamhussein Alibayli came a distant second with only 5.4 percent of the vote, the head of the firm, Rizvan Abbasov, told reporters. A second exit poll, by the local ELS Independent Research Centre, gave Aliyev 82.6 percent of the vote, the centre's head Irada Yagubova said in televised remarks. She said results for other candidates would be released Thursday. Polling stations closed at 7:00 pm (1400 GMT) after 11 hours of voting. The Central Elections Commission was due to begin releasing preliminary results later Wednesday. Leading opponents boycotted the vote, accusing Azerbaijani authorities of persecuting the opposition, muzzling the media and fixing previous polls. The names of six other candidates appeared alongside Aliyev's on the ballot, but all were loyal to the authorities and some had not even bothered to campaign. Analysts had said the only question was by how wide a margin the 46-year-old Aliyev, son of previous president Heydar Aliyev, would surpass the other contenders. Heydar Aliyev dominated political life here for more than 30 years. By 5:00 pm (1200 GMT), turnout had reached 64.7 percent, the elections commission reported. (AFP)