

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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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.

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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

U.S. – CENTRAL ASIAN RELATIONS: GOING BEYOND AFGHANISTAN

Roman Muzalevsky

The recent U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee Hearing on Central Asian Affairs affirmed the significance of Central Asia for U.S. regional and global security interests. Even more so, it pointed to efforts of the U.S. government to link its faltering Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy with what it hopes will be a more robust regional policy toward Central Asia and the region more broadly. However, these dynamics appear to be primarily driven by the U.S. need to finish its “business” in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas rather than by the potential of the U.S.-Central Asian cooperation in its own right.

BACKGROUND: Held on 15 December 2009, the hearing came two weeks after U.S. President Obama announced plans to deploy 30,000 additional U.S. troops in Afghanistan and conclude the military campaign by 2011. The hearing, centered on testimonies of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs George Krol, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia David Sedney, and local experts, painted two divergent but co-existing realities: Central Asia is important to U.S. regional and global security interests, but no corresponding level of regional engagement has been pursued, let alone achieved, to fully utilize the capacity of U.S.-Central Asian relations.

Indeed, Central Asia is critical for long-term U.S. interests in maintaining a balance of power in Eurasia and integrating some of the Eurasian sub-regions into global economic frameworks. The region can also better support U.S. objectives of defeating Al-Qaida, weakening jihadist networks, and diversifying energy sources and transit routes. Kroll seems to share this view, but necessary resources to do the job are not there. In addition, the U.S. related efforts today are frustrated not only by

the rise of China and resurgent Russia, but also by the U.S. own failure, well before 2001, to pursue a serious regional engagement in the areas of trade, infrastructure investment, political and economic reform.

Even in the U.S.-Central Asian relations concerning Afghanistan one can discern a narrow regional perspective on part of the U.S., largely resting on the U.S. need to pursue and end the military campaign in Afghanistan. Before 9/11 Central Asia was an insignificant item on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. In 2001, however, the U.S. needed the region to launch its war in Afghanistan. Today, it needs Central Asia to end the war, as well.

This is not to underestimate the interconnection of security in Afghanistan and Central Asia. As Kroll stated, “A stable future for Afghanistan depends on the continued assistance of its Central Asian neighbors – just as a stable, prosperous future for the Central Asian states depends on bringing peace, stability and prosperity back to their immediate neighbor Afghanistan.” However, other important interests should be further explored as part of U.S.-Central Asian cooperation, with



George Krol

an equally significant share of resources, including on the human rights front. Legal and moral questions of pursuing security relations with authoritarian Central Asian states to support operations in Afghanistan, for instance, still remain, especially after the alleged Uzbek government's massacre of protestors in 2005 and forced and child labor practices in the region. As Senator Edward Kaufman quipped at the hearing, "The good news is these governments repress terrorists, the bad news is they repress everybody."

IMPLICATIONS: It took the U.S. almost 3 administrations to not only better realize the importance of Central Asia in bringing what seems to be an ill-defined victory to Afghanistan, but also take concrete practical steps, albeit insignificant, to start implementing a regional strategy. A more dynamic and multifaceted cooperation, incorporating the Afghanistan-Pakistan framework, has clearly been missing in U.S.-Central Asia relations for years now.

But now that the U.S. plans to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by 2011, the regional states are even more likely to question the willingness of the U.S. to pursue a serious engagement with Central Asia. Uzbekistan has already pushed for "6+3 format negotiations" to bring lasting stability to Afghanistan and the

region. As regional expert Martha Olcott stated in her testimony, now "the Central Asian states have to start worrying about how they are going to protect their interests when Washington departs."

The question thus remains whether the U.S., having long-term security interests in Central Asia, is ready to commit a corresponding share of resources, especially if it leaves Afghanistan in 2011. Considering the insignificant level of the U.S.-Central Asian cooperation, the U.S. military "departure" from the region, and with it the related economic and political benefits, could severely undermine regional security and the ability of the regional states to effectively balance the pressures of great powers and "spillovers" of instability emanating from the Afghanistan-Pakistan areas.

Moreover, Central Asia is of rapidly growing importance to China, which is well-positioned to outpace all major powers in the region economically, politically and militarily. The regional states welcome China's engagement as



David Sedney

a counterbalancing act in respect to other powers and as a source of investments. Last year, for example, China lent US\$ 10 billion to Kazakhstan to help its financial and energy sector, US\$ 3 billion to Turkmenistan to develop a gas field in South Yolotan, and pledged large-scale power, transportation, and trade infrastructure projects for Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Yet as China becomes an assertive player in the area, the Central Asian states will have to devise intra- and extra-regional arrangements to uphold their security and sovereignty.

In this connection, Kroll's remarks that the U.S. "does not consider Central Asia a forgotten backwater" need now be put into practice. A word of optimism is in order here. Sedney and Kroll stated that the U.S. intends to place more importance on human rights issues as part of the renewed bilateral dialogue, reinvigorate regional aspects of the still poorly-functioning Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, utilize Northern Distribution Network (NDN) to promote regional and continental trade, and strengthen food security, counter-narcotics programs, and border security. The administration has also launched Annual Bi-Lateral Consultations to pursue and monitor practical progress on issues of cooperation.

Sedney further mentioned a significant increase of shipments through the NDN, from 20 containers per month last January to 350 containers per week today. The Department of Defense has also started implementing the Central Asia local purchasing program to procure goods in Central Asia for use in Afghanistan, supporting regional transportation and trade infrastructure development. It has

also been training security professionals through the support of the George Marshall Center.

However problems remain. Only two flights of military cargo passing through Russia have taken place after Russia's agreement last July to allow transportation of U.S. military goods through its airspace. In addition, there are no rail lines into Afghanistan that would otherwise help shipping supplies and expand regional and continental trade. Regional cooperation among Central Asian states is a sham rather than a working partnership, not to mention the strategic gains of the Chinese and lack of progress by the West on energy diversification (the protracted Nabucco project being a case in point) and trade expansion issues.

CONCLUSIONS: The U.S. Senate Hearing demonstrated that the U.S. views the region as a significant foreign policy component of its grand strategy. But this view is largely conceptual, given the lack of committed resources, and reactionary, given the U.S. failures in Afghanistan and the need to reach out to Central Asian states to solve the Af-Pak dilemmas. What is needed is a practical blueprint that would indicate in bright colors the importance of Central Asia for U.S. foreign policy and significance of U.S. engagement for the regional states, both within and outside the Afghanistan-Pakistan framework. Until this is done, it is not difficult to foresee how Central Asia might turn from the "backwater" for the U.S. to the "backyard" for China.

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

AFGHANISTAN AWAITS LONDON CONFERENCE COMMITMENTS

Richard Weitz

The late-January London Conference on Afghanistan, co-hosted by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, President Hamid Karzai and United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, has many tasks, but one of the most important is to secure more durable military and economic commitments from the 43-nation coalition supporting the Afghan government. Most NATO governments frame their commitments in one- or two-year intervals, but President Karzai has argued that the Afghan government needs at least five years of sustained Western assistance to develop an Afghan military and police force capable of countering the Taliban insurgents without NATO combat support.

BACKGROUND: According to the remarkably frank briefing by a senior NATO intelligence officer in late December, the coalition troops in Afghanistan must reverse the deteriorating security situation in 2010 or the war against the Afghan Taliban insurgents could be irretrievably lost. The Afghan Taliban has already established a government in waiting. Not only have the insurgents appointed a shadow governor in 33 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, but Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar has selected ministers to administer the country if his fighters re-capture Kabul. The Taliban has also developed an elaborate system of logistics and financing that has in many localities displaced the weak Afghan government administration.

According to NATO intelligence, the insurgent movement's annual budget amounted to US\$ 100-200 million, derived from al-Qaeda and other subsidies, narcotics trafficking, and levying taxes on local Afghans. With these funds, NATO calculates that the Taliban fields 25,000 to 30,000 fighters, but perhaps half a million Afghans would assist the insurgents due to their economic sufferings or the Afghan government's weaknesses.

During the past few months, NATO governments have committed to deploy more troops in Afghanistan than ever before in the eight-year war. There are presently 110,000 foreign troops in the country and this number should rise further in the coming months. The United States has already started sending 30,000 additional troops. While other countries have pledged 7,000 more, a close examination of this figure shows that the total includes at least 1,500 troops that were scheduled to withdraw in 2010 but will now stay through this year. In addition, NATO governments have yet to designate 1,500 of the remaining 5,500 troops. France and Germany may fill this quota, but only after the January 28 European-sponsored conference on Afghanistan. Finally, of the 4,000 firmly pledged new troops, approximately half come from non-NATO countries such as Australia, Georgia, and South Korea. All non-American troops in Afghanistan serve as part of the NATO-run International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), whereas some U.S. soldiers remain under an independent command.

The NATO intelligence officer's one-year timeline coincides with various statements by U.S. officials that some American troops may

leave Afghanistan as early as July 2011. Other NATO governments have established similar deadlines. Even before the killing of five of its citizens on December 30, including a female civilian journalist, the Canadian government had announced plans to withdraw all its 2,800 troops by 2011. The Netherlands intends to remove its entire 2,200-person contingent this year.

The Taliban has sought to sustain, and ideally accelerate, these timelines by fighting a vicious war of attrition this year, presumably to be followed by major offensives in 2011 and beyond. Although the guerrillas still engage in firefights, employ suicide bombers, and conduct a few high-profile operations such as attacking public ceremonies and the latest Kabul attack, ambushes using improvised explosive device (IED) have become the insurgents' weapon of choice. IED incidents have increased threefold since 2007. Foreign troops encountered 7,228 IEDs in 2009, as compared with only 81 in 2003 and 2,718 in 2007. The weight of the typical IED has also increased, with the heaviest growing to almost 1,000 kilograms, sufficient to destroy even heavily fortified vehicles that might drive nearby.

The guerrillas' improved ability to use roadside bombs against NATO troops, along with the growing contingent of Western combat forces in Afghanistan, has resulted in a substantial growth in the number of foreign military casualties in Afghanistan in recent years. Last year, 506 international troops died in Afghanistan, as compared with 295 in 2008; 310 of the combat soldiers killed in 2009 were American. Precisely half that number, 155, died in 2008. Casualties among Afghan government troops have also risen.

The December 30 killing of seven CIA contractors also demonstrated how the surge in

civilian support personnel for military operations in Afghanistan will likely increase non-combat casualties in 2010. With the endorsement of the Obama administration, U.S. General Stanley McChrystal, the new commander of the international forces in Afghanistan, has placed renewed emphasis on promoting economic development, improved intelligence, better governance, and other non-combat missions assigned to civilian agencies.

IMPLICATIONS: The issue of NATO burden sharing, which dominated alliance deliberations on Afghanistan during the Bush administration, was much less visible in 2009. The main reason is that the Obama national security team has essentially given up trying to secure a major influx of European troops into Afghanistan. The White House has decided that the only large source of new foreign combat troops will come from the United States. The continued drawdown in American forces from Iraq, a process begun by the Bush administration, has facilitated this process.

Although Secretary of Defense Robert Gates no longer engages in high-profile public chastising of the Europeans for their limited military support in Afghanistan, sustaining a large European security presence there is still seen as essential in Washington. The reason is less for their combat contributions — which vary considerably by national contingent, and are often degraded by various restrictions on how their forces can be used — than for their political importance in legitimizing the mission and for countering congressional criticisms about inadequate burden sharing within NATO. While there are approximately 110,000 foreign soldiers in Afghanistan, from more than 40 countries, almost two-thirds of them are American.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen is playing a pivotal role in helping to hold the alliance's Afghan mission together. During his transatlantic travels, he has been seeking to inject European views into the current strategy debate in Washington, while interpreting U.S. perspectives to other NATO governments. For example, Rasmussen has encouraged NATO governments to focus on training Afghan security forces, stressing that, by increasing the capabilities of the Afghan army and police, they will eventually reduce the need for NATO combat troops. "We have to do more now," he said in a speech at the Atlantic Council last September, "if we want to be able to do less later."

Rasmussen has also sought to help NATO leaders balance between their two prime audiences. On the one hand, they must convince their domestic constituents that their national military missions in Afghanistan will end or substantially decrease soon. On the other hand, they must reassure Afghans that they will not be abandoned; otherwise, they risk having people in both Afghanistan and Pakistan seeking to accommodate the Taliban, whose key strategic advantage — besides ruthlessness — is perseverance.

The Secretary-General has sought to bridge this gap by highlighting the importance of sustaining an allied commitment to develop and empower strong Afghan political, security, and other institutions that can assume burdens now being undertaken by foreigners. Rasmussen told the Atlantic Council that both allied and Afghan publics want to see "the beginning of transition to Afghan lead" in the security and other dimensions. In addition to Afghan security forces assuming larger roles, "it means Afghans running their own schools, their own hospitals, [and] their own government." He

explained that, "if we can show transition actually happening, our publics will continue to support this mission through to success." If not, "it will be impossible to sustain public support for this mission over the long term."

As the same time, the Secretary General has also striven to reassure Afghans that NATO troops would not abandon them prematurely. This was the main theme of the message he delivered during his visit to Kabul a few days before Christmas. In a joint news conference with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Rasmussen insisted that, "the international community will stand with you and help in rebuilding your country until you are ready to stand on your own, and ensure that terrorism will never take root again." Nonetheless, he added that, while "in 2010 there will be new momentum" due to the influx of new ISAF troops and NATO's focus on population protection and economic development, the objective is to "lay the groundwork for greater Afghan leadership in its own affairs... begin[ning] already next year."

CONCLUSIONS: Despite these admirable efforts, Rasmussen has yet to overcome the problem of the misaligned coalition calendars. Most NATO governments are still envisaging their role in one- or two-year intervals, but President Karzai has plausibly argued that the Afghan government will need at least five years of sustained Western funding, training, and military assistance to develop an Afghan military and police force capable of countering the Taliban insurgents without NATO combat support.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Richard Weitz is Director of the Hudson Institute Center for Political-Military Analysis. He is the author, among other works, of *Kazakhstan and the New International Politics of Eurasia* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2008).

THE IMPACT OF THE CIS INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY ON KYRGYZ PARLIAMENTARISM

Asel Murzakulova

The functioning of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of the CIS (IA CIS) in post-Soviet countries will in 2010 be celebrating its 18th anniversary. Although this organization is often left out of the analysis on the transformation of regimes or state institutions in the CIS, it serves as a key channel through which the values of adaptive parliamentarism and techniques of political control are being spread.

BACKGROUND: Established in 1992, the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of the CIS is one of the main institutions of the CIS. In contrast to other CIS institutions (the Council of the heads of states, the Council of the Heads of Governments), the Assembly has a unique right to approve international agreements in the name of member states (this right has not been confirmed by the Azerbaijani parliament). The specific function of the IA CIS in contrast to many other Inter-parliamentary organizations of the world (such as the OSCE/PA or PACE) is its right to pass model legislature, on the base of which the member states are recommended to establish national legislature.

During its 18 years, the Assembly has passed 250 model laws, which encompass almost every aspect from issues of defense and security to the bases of library crafting. These laws are initiated and passed by deputies representing member states. After their approval during Assembly sessions, deputies lobby model laws prepared in St. Petersburg, the seat of the Assembly, in national parliaments.

The CIS institutions are generally dominated by Russia and the IA CIS is no exception. Russia acts as a veto wielder, who establishes the international agenda and vectors of development. Although in order to preserve this

right, Russia is interested in providing minimal overall benefit from these institutions for participating states. The main collective benefit of this institution for the political regimes of the CIS is the legitimacy of elections provided by IA CIS observers.

The 2009 presidential elections in the Kyrgyz Republic again provoked discussions about their legitimacy, conduct and results, and the widespread use of administrative resources. The observer missions from OSCE/ODIHR and IA CIS diverged significantly in their reporting and assessments of the results, which has almost become a tradition. Before the 2002 adoption of the Convention on Democratic Elections as a post-Soviet mechanism for monitoring and assessing elections for the seven signatories of the Convention, the OSCE procedures served as a basic marker.

As Vladimir Churov, the Head of the Central Election Committee of the Russian Federation and deputy head of the Russian Duma committee on the CIS, stated in one of his speeches, the success of the CIS standards in monitoring and assessing elections is based on the fact that the mission of CIS observers “takes into account local and national peculiarities and norms in a broader context, and acts in respect of the principle of sovereign



Vyacheslav Oseledko/AFP/Getty Images

democracy”. This is obviously in sharp contrast to the approaches of the OSCE.

The main attraction of cooperation within the IA CIS for President Bakiev’s administration, as well as for other political regimes of CIS, is the right of state institutions holding elections to apply the IA’s recommendations. Hence, the assessment of the observer mission does not differ from the position of state authorities, granting the approval of held elections in the international parliamentary institution.

IMPLICATIONS: After the Tulip Revolution in 2005, legitimization of Kyrgyzstan’s elections became a key issue in providing internal stability. In 2008, the IA CIS opened its first International Institute for monitoring the development of democracy and parliamentarism in Bishkek. A corresponding

body was later opened in Baku. The creation of such regional structures of the IA CIS is aimed at forming a monitoring network for political processes in the region of Central Asia and Caucasus. These structures are actively involved in the activities of reforming national electoral legislature.

Central to the activities of the Bishkek office is education and involvement in adjusting the national program for increasing awareness of the legal framework on the part of citizens, election organizers, local observers, representatives of political parties and the mass media. However, the education component of the IA CIS Bishkek office has not had the widespread impact of similar projects held under OSCE or civil society institutions. Here, a lack of trust serves as a key obstacle to

cooperation between the CIS intergovernmental structures and civil society structures financed mainly by western states.

The impact of the IA CIS on the development of parliamentarism in Kyrgyzstan is also connected to the type of socialization, which it contributes to. Joint sessions of the deputies in Tavricheski Hall, in which the first Duma of the Russian Empire also held sessions, symbolically emphasizes the status of Russian parliamentarism as a model containing the 'right mixture' of a strong president and an adaptive parliament. Since the dissolution of the USSR, Russia has in many parameters lost its leadership position as a model of development for other CIS states, although an inclination to its techniques of political control remains popular among the CIS regimes. The cooperation between 'authority parties' has been emphasized through a signed agreement between Yedinaya Rossiya and Ak Zhol on information sharing and launching joint education activities for parliamentarians. But the attitude towards the IA CIS in Kyrgyzstan is ambiguous. In situations where the inter-parliamentary body is needed for supporting the ruling regime during elections, the IA CIS becomes a main partner. However, the fact that the IA CIS is also considered an institution of Russian dominance, also significantly reduces its effectiveness as multilateral organization.

Despite the fact that the degree of parliamentary control exercised by the IA CIS is quite low, it retains a certain influence in terms of soft power. It is clear that the institution of the IA CIS is a symbolic domain, the essence of which lies in the formation and confirmation of adaptive parliamentary values

under authoritarian regimes. The IA CIS is not a mechanism for overcoming democratic values and procedures, it is rather a channel for strengthening 'sovereign' interpretations of democracy, debates about which remain vital in the post-Soviet domain.

CONCLUSIONS: The IA CIS is just one example of how the norms of adaptive parliamentarism are defended, as in the majority of CIS states, authoritarian governments imitate this system of elections. The main function of the IA CIS is the coordination of member states in assessing electoral processes. This has determined the image of the IA CIS as a structure heavily dependent on authoritarian processes and unable to criticize the actions of executive power.

The activities of the IA CIS demonstrates that politicians in Kyrgyzstan still hold certain expectations ('the heritage of the past') from the activities of Russia and the institutions of its dominance to support and help in solving the problems of security and sustainability of its regime. It should be emphasized that these expectations have their own limitations, due to the fact that they are oriented to past, not the future. However, it is clear that the impact of the IA CIS in terms of soft power in Kyrgyzstan and other post-Soviet states has a long-term potential to conserve existing behavior in the structures of power in CIS states.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Asel Murzakulova is a Senior Lecturer at the Oriental Studies and International Relations Department of the Bishkek Humanities University, Kyrgyzstan.

THE EVOLUTION OF JIHADISM IN RUSSIA

Dmitry Shlapentokh

The underpinning ideas of the North Caucasian resistance have undergone several stages of transformation, from a purely nationalistic Chechen movement to an internationalized Islamic jihad. The movement now seems to be going through yet another evolutionary phase, this time for more pragmatic purposes. Due to the enforced Russian surveillance of religious Muslims, the jihadists are now seeking to downplay and adapt their appearance and behavior for the purpose of becoming better equipped to conduct terrorist operations.

BACKGROUND: There is an assumption that jihadists, including those engaged in jihad in the Russian Northern Caucasus, are rigid fanatics and live and fight according to a fixed medieval creed. This is a wrong assumption. Similar to other radicals and revolutionaries of the past, such as the Bolsheviks for example, Russia's jihadists are constantly evolving, and their tactics are constantly tested against reality. Instinctively, they follow the well-known Marxist-Leninist dictum that "practice is the major criteria of truth."

In the beginning of the North Caucasian resistance, it was mostly related to Chechens, who at that time were largely inspired by nationalistic animus. By the beginning of the Second Chechen War, a new trend had evolved. At that point, nationalists became increasingly replaced by jihadists, who discarded nationalism as a dangerous, non-Muslim creed and replaced it with universalistic jihadism, which in a way was a replica of the famous Marxist slogan "Proletarians of all countries unite!" The change was not so much a result of internal ideological evolution but of realities on the ground. On the one hand, the North Caucasian resistance had received an influx of mujahideen from all over the Muslim world. And for them, it was not Chechen independence and its incorporation into the

international community that actually mattered.

For them, the Chechen struggle was a fight of Muslims against infidels. For many, it was the final triumph of the global Caliphate, once again looking like the Islamized form of a communistic ideal society in the end of written history, as visualized by Marxists. While the influence of foreign jihadists played an important role in fostering the universalistic jihadization of the resistance, they were not the only, and most likely not even the major reason for this. Indeed, some observers even assumed that the numbers of foreign fighters would decline over time, mostly due to the cooperation of foreign governments with Russia.

The most important reason for the universalistic jihadization of the Chechen resistance was domestic. After the 2004 Beslan terrorist attack, Moscow had engaged in a steady "Chechenization" of the conflict. The Kremlin installed the Kadyrov clan—first the father, Akhmad, and after his assassination in 2004 his son Ramzan—and made Chechnya increasingly autonomous from Moscow on paper. Moscow also provided Ramzan Kadyrov with huge subsidies that allowed him to rebuild war-torn Grozny and make some visible improvements to the lives of average Chechens. This policy was successful in certain respects;



Kadyrov was able to draw quite a few nationalistic-minded members of the resistance to his side, who were of course worn out by the open-ended conflict.

The percentage of ethnic Chechens in the resistance units declined, and they became increasingly ethnically heterogeneous. At that point nationalism, the battle cry of the early stage of the resistance, became irrelevant. It could hardly provide the glue to keep these members of the resistance together. And at that point, universalistic “jihadist internationalism” became the most appropriate ideology. Logically, in 2007 Doka Umarov, the president of the virtual Chechen republic, had promulgated the creation of an “emirate” and emphasized that he and his mujahideen were fighting for an Islamic state and were part of a worldwide jihad. And their enemy was not just the Russians but the enemies of Muslims all over the world.

IMPLICATIONS: The stress on enlisting dedicated Muslims and using them in terrorist activities outside the North Caucasus, in the Russian heartland, became a daunting task.

Following Dubrovka (2002) and Beslan (2004), Russian authorities increased their surveillance over the mosques and any informal meetings of Muslims in Russia. Even reading the work of Said Nursi, who is a comparatively moderate Turkish theologian whose work is legal in Turkey, could create problems. People with distinctly Muslim appearance, women in hijab and men with beards who assiduously attended the mosque, and

especially Russian converts, increasingly attracted the authorities’ attention. The Russian tactics were successful in the sense that they were able to prevent terrorist acts in the Russian heartland. In this situation, the jihadists started to employ a different tactic, which could be called a “de-Islamization” of the jihadists. The point of this new tactic is that jihadists could, and even should, forsake the external attributes of the believer, if this is essential for successfully conducting a terrorist operation.

The idea behind the new tactic is that military/terrorist successes are more important than formally following the dictums of Islam. The new trend started to emerge several years ago. The author of an article published in *Kavkaz Center* argued that a leader of the mujahideen hardly needed to behave as a good Muslim. He could drink liquor, forsake dietary restrictions, etc. Still, if he is a successful military commander, he should be obeyed and valued by the rest of the mujahideen. Another recently published article on *Kavkaz Center*

went even further. The author stated that not only could non-Islamic behavior be tolerated but even encouraged for those mujahideen who lived amidst infidels and who are preparing terrorist acts or intelligence gathering. Such a mujahideen, the author of one article stressed, should understand that he would be under constant surveillance by Russian officials and, as it was implied, the Russian populace. Thus, he should do his best to blend in among the Russian population. He should not attend a mosque or at least demonstrate no particular religious zeal. He should also refrain from a distinctly Islamic look and do nothing to attract attention. He should not even keep a religious book in his home, as this could create problems for him in case of a search. Instead of books, he should use the Internet to find appropriate texts. This is the right way, the article insisted, because it leaves no trace. The mujahideen should be very cautious in choosing people with whom he wishes to engage in terrorist

operations. The members of the group should see each other only when they undertake operations. At the same time, they should minimize other types of socialization and know as little as possible about each other. This would prevent them from harming each other in case of arrest.

CONCLUSIONS: Despite the doctrinal rigidity, the members of the Islamic resistance are constantly changing their goals and tactics in response to the changing reality. And this explains their recent stress on actual “de-Islamization” of the members of the underground. Indeed, this trend should be taken seriously; it may be helping many members of the Islamic resistance to actually create terrorist cells in any place in Russia’s heartland.

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



New Book:

The Guns of August 2008

Edited By Svante E. Cornell and S.
Frederick Starr

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

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

FIELD REPORTS

EARTHQUAKE IN TAJIKISTAN LEAVES HUNDREDS HOMELESS

Suhrob Majidov

The Government of Tajikistan has adopted a new decree that will come into effect on January 1, 2010. According to the decree, all state institutions will be able to charge fees for providing any kind of information to media representatives and ordinary citizens. The decree states that one page of information provided should cost up to 35 somoni (ca US\$8). Many observers in the country already interpret the decree as yet another impediment to accessing information for the citizens of Tajikistan.

The new decree “On approval of the order of reimbursement of costs related to provision of information” enables state officials to charge citizens and representatives of the mass media for accessing open official documents and regulations, for photocopying official documents or extracts of official documents and for obtaining information from governmental officials in writing. Moreover, payment can be collected not only for the provision of printed information, but also for verbal information and clarifications on legislative acts, decrees and regulations. It should be noted that the above refers only to information open to the public, as distinct from information relating to state or official secrecy and official correspondence.

State institutions intend to open special accounts to which the collected fees will be transferred. State officials will then decide how to spend the money. Interestingly, the government enables officials themselves to set a ‘flexible’ price for particular pieces of information, on the basis of its relevance, urgency and importance. The decree, however, does not provide or suggest any categorization scales, i.e. the size of the fee will exclusively be based on the

decision of the government official. After obtaining the payment, officials should process the request and provide the information within seven days.

In light of the precarious situation for independent media and free access to information in Tajikistan even before the decree, representatives of the media are now concerned that things will become even worse. They see the decree as a tool that state officials may use to impede free and prompt access to information by independent media at least in two ways. Firstly, the demanded price could be set too high. Secondly, the requested information may become outdated as officials will have up to seven days to process the request.

Furthermore, experts are concerned over the financial issues that most independent media in Tajikistan would have to face if fees for obtaining information are introduced. As most independent media outlets in Tajikistan have very limited budgets, the decree’s provisions will inevitably bring some of these to bankruptcy. In addition, the media will be impelled to use information from alternative sources that are often less reliable.

The Government justifies the decree by the fact that state bodies need to streamline the process and reimburse all expenses related to providing information. Furthermore, state officials believe that the new regulation will not restrict access to information; on the contrary, it will make the process more open and ordered. For instance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative Davlatali Nazriev claims that “the new decree will not affect the media’s access to information in any way”, as

the law on media guarantees the right of free access to information to media representatives. Moreover, he emphasized that the provision applies not only to state media, but also to the independent and foreign media accredited in Tajikistan. Nevertheless, Nazriev expressed the opinion that the price for information suggested by the new decree is "quite feasible".

Human rights advocates, lawyers and journalists emphasize that the decree is in conflict with the Constitution of Tajikistan, which guarantees citizens free access to information. Media representatives also point out that the new decree contradicts the law on media, which guarantees media free access to information from state officials. However, the government has not yet provided any feedback or explanations on these issues.

The Tajik Government has seemingly been looking fervently for any sources of revenue lately. Some experts view this initiative as being in line with other unconventional decisions by the government to replenish the budget. The Parliament earlier approved a decree on levying fees for the use of roads, while the President recently launched a campaign for selling shares in 'the dream' Roghun hydropower station to the people of Tajikistan. In light of such initiatives, the decree on charging people and media representatives for obtaining information from state institutions is viewed by many as just another way to draw resources to the

state budget. The story will most likely develop further. Regardless of the reasoning behind the state decrees, an average salary in Tajikistan is US\$80, and few will be able to afford the services offered.



BAKU CONCERNED OVER WEAKENING U.S. ENGAGEMENT

Mina Muradova

Azerbaijani officials have recently expressed their criticism with U.S. policies, hinting at cooling relations between the two countries. Observers are concerned that disappointment with Washington's policies after President Obama's ascent to power can damage the "strategic" partnership and redirect Baku's foreign policy towards Moscow.

Azerbaijani officials have criticized Washington for "inconsistency". While in the past, visits of American high-ranking officials to Azerbaijan were frequent, these seem to have declined and Baku has even accused Washington of passivity.

In early November, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Araz Azimov stated that the bilateral relations between the two countries needs to be

balanced and mutual. "Azerbaijan does not see such an attitude from the United States. Efforts that Azerbaijan has made [towards the U.S.] are much greater than those of the United States. Official Baku considers this an inconsistency of Washington's policy in the region."

Official Baku believes that thanks to Azerbaijan, the United States could enter the Caspian oil-rich region in the early 1990s and weaken Russian interests in the region. Strategic projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline laid the foundation for U.S.-Azerbaijan relations in the region and opened a new transportation route to the West for post-Soviet countries in the Caspian region.

In response, Baku expected that Washington would revoke the Freedom Support Act's Section 907, prohibiting most government-to-government aid to Azerbaijan, which has been in force since 1992 due to the embargo of Armenia resulting from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Baku considers the section unfair, especially as about 20 percent of its territory is under the control of Armenian troops.

Azerbaijani political circles have expressed disappointment with Washington's weak position in convincing Armenia to compromise in the peace process on the Karabakh conflict, while great efforts were made to convince Armenia and Turkey to normalize their relations. "Nobody does such things to resolve the Karabakh conflict", said Novruz Mammadov, head of the presidential administration's foreign relations department.

The West and in particular the U.S. received heavy criticism at the Baku conference on November 20, which was organized by the presidential administration's Center for Strategic Research. According to the Turan news agency, the deputy speaker of Azerbaijan's parliament, Ziyafet Askerov, stated that "U.S. foreign policy is a hostage of the Armenian lobby". At the event, Mammadov added: "While the U.S. provides strong moral and financial support to Armenia, which occupies Azerbaijani lands, we do not see significant

assistance to Azerbaijan on the part of Washington".

Moreover, the U.S. Congress' allocation of US\$8 million in humanitarian assistance to the internationally unrecognized Karabakh region in fiscal year 2010 provoked major protests in Baku. Azerbaijan's foreign ministry sent a protest note to the U.S. Government on December 18 and pro-governmental MP Zahid Orudj blamed the U.S. for using oil revenues earned from Azerbaijani oil against Azerbaijan: "The U.S. produces oil here, sells it and collects revenues ... and then spends funds on assisting Armenian separatists", he said at a parliamentary session on December 15. Another member of parliament, Jamil Hasanli, even called for a reconsideration of the strategic partnership with the U.S.

Both official and non-governmental circles have expressed their disagreement with Washington's policies, arguing that it helps strengthening the illegal regime on occupied territory and damages the U.S. reputation as a neutral mediator.

The annual Freedom House report on "Freedom of the Press 2009", which presented Karabakh as a joint Armenian-Azerbaijani territory, added fuel to the fire. Official Baku considered this as an insult and a biased position towards Azerbaijan by an organization funded by the U.S. government.

Observers are concerned that cooling ties between Baku and Washington can lead to closer relations between Baku and Moscow. On November 26, MP Gudrat Hasanguliyev proposed that Azerbaijan should join the Moscow-supported Collective Security Treaty Organization and allow Russia to establish a military base in Azerbaijan, in exchange for Russian recognition of "Azerbaijan's sovereignty over Karabakh."

Baku's distress over the lack of progress in the Karabakh peace process could push it towards Moscow, which has over the last two years appeared an active mediator by holding trilateral meetings between the presidents of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia. In particular, President Ilham Aliyev recently termed the memorandum signed in

Moscow by the three presidents in November 2008 one of the most significant achievements since the cease-fire agreement in 1994.

However, it is difficult to imagine that Azerbaijan, which publicly states its adherence to Euro-Atlantic integration and western values, would completely redirect its foreign policy towards Russia. This

appears unlikely, especially since Azerbaijan has a strategic partnership with the U.S. on security and energy issues. In addition, Azerbaijan has an ambitious intention to deliver its oil and gas to European markets independently, without Russian assistance.

CHINA, TURKMENISTAN, KAZAKHSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN LAUNCH TURKMENISTAN-CHINA GAS PIPELINE

Chemen Durdiyeva

On December 14, 2009, the presidents of China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan officially launched the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline, which will pump five billion cubic meters (bcm) of blue fuel annually with a planned increase of up to 40 bcm by 2012. While the Russian gas giant Gazprom has been reluctant to reach a price agreement with Ashgabat, China is overtaking a large portion of the energy market in Central Asia and breaking Russia's monopoly over Turkmenistan's gas export routes.

This 7,000 kilometer (4,349 miles) long gas pipeline taking Turkmen gas to China's Xinjiang Province through the territory of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan was initiated by Turkmenistan's past president Saparmurat Niyazov in 2006. According to the initial agreement, Turkmenistan would deliver an annual 30 bcm of gas to China for 30 years. Since the official start of the project in 2007, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), the main contractor with the Turkmen government, completed the construction of the pipeline in three Central Asian countries within two years.

On December 14, the arrival of presidents Hu Jintao, Nursultan Nazarbayev, Islam Karimov and Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov in the city of Turkmenabat was accompanied by unprecedented security measures. One day prior to the summit of these four presidents, firefighters took extreme

precautionary measures by warning the city residents not to create any type of smoke during the day of the summit. In addition to massive police enforcements, security was also monitored by air through military helicopters. Road traffic on the main highways from the only city airport to Saman Depe (the starting point of the pipeline) was been closed from early morning until late afternoon. A live corridor of school students and public sector workers lining up and waving flags accompanied the roughly 85 kilometers (52 miles) from the airport to Saman Depe from morning till late afternoon.

According to CNPC officials in Saman Depe, currently one Gas Treatment Plant (GTP) is in full operation, capable of pumping 5 bcm per year. The construction of the second and third GTPs is underway and will be finalized next year. This will increase the pumping capacity to 40 bcm by 2012 as stated by Turkmen authorities. In order to reach 40 bcm per year, Turkmenistan has also allowed the CNPC to carry out the exploration and development of gas deposits in the major South-Yoloten-Osman field, which contains an estimated 14 trillion cubic meters of gas and is ranked as the world's fourth largest gas deposit as confirmed by the British firm Gaffney Cline's independent audit in 2008. Turkmenistan's decision to increase the export of gas from 30 bcm as initially agreed to 40 bcm per annum came following the price dispute

with Russia's Gazprom over Turkmenistan's gas exports to Russia.

Turkmenistan halted the delivery of gas to Russia after an explosion along the Central Asia-Center-4 pipeline on April 9, 2009. The Turkmen authorities accused Gazprom for the pipeline blast along the lines of a price dispute, but Gazprom executives have denied the charges and did not accept any responsibility in this regard. Turkmenistan had been delivering up to 40 bcm to Russia annually until the incident caused a major rift in trade relations. However, Turkmenistan appears to have struck a new lucrative deal with Russia upon President Dmitri Medvedev's visit to Ashgabat on December 22, 2009.

After bilateral talks in Ashgabat over the gas price dispute, the sides finally reached an agreement under which gas export was to resume starting from January 2010, and Russia will purchase 30 bcm a year on the basis of a formula that matches the gas price in the European market. In November, Gazprom and Ashgabat were reportedly contemplating an agreement for the delivery of only 10 bcm per year. However, the rapid expansion of China's investment in Turkmenistan's energy sector and the launch of the Turkmenistan-China pipeline seem to

have expedited the new deal with Russia. In addition, President Medvedev spoke about the construction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline, the future of which was left uncertain due to the halt of gas deliveries to Russia since April 2009.

The significance of the Turkmenistan-China pipeline lies in the fact that this is the first high-volume gas export route for Turkmenistan beyond its main transit routes through Russia. The launch of the pipeline also boosts cooperation among these Central Asian countries as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan collect transit fees. Accordingly, the construction of the pipeline as well as the Gas Treatment Plants (GTP) created new jobs, especially in the eastern regions of Turkmenistan, plagued by high unemployment. On the other hand, the Turkmenistan-China pipeline provides China with a secure and cost-efficient delivery of energy sources from Central Asia. As opposed to China's main energy imports from West Africa and the Middle East via maritime transport, transporting energy through land routes such as the Turkmenistan-China pipeline enables China to diversify its imports through secure means of transportation.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN UZBEKISTAN

Erkin Akhmadov

Two rounds of parliamentary elections took place in Uzbekistan on December 27, 2009, and January 10, 2010. About 87.8 percent of the electorate voted in the first round, and 80 percent in the second. President Islam Karimov stated that these elections were "significantly different" from previous polls. In line with the President, official media reports that "the elections were obvious proof of President Islam Karimov's effective initiation of transition from strong state to strong society." The results of the elections, however, did not show much progress.

In terms of changes, it should be noted that the representation of political parties in the lower chamber increased from 120 to 135 deputies, setting aside 15 seats to the Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan, and totaling 150 deputies. The decision to allocate 15 seats to the Movement was explained by the increasing importance of environmental issues, the struggle for improvement of environmental conditions, people's health, etc. These issues were considered vital for all layers of society, regardless of their political views. The other 135 deputies were elected on a multi-party basis, i.e.

only those who gained more than 50 percent of the votes of the active electorate. It should also be emphasized that the practice of candidate nomination by initiative groups of voters was abolished.

The results of the elections, as announced by the Central Election Commission (CEC) Chairman Mirza-Ulugbek Abdusalomov, were as follows: 53 deputies from the Liberal-Democratic party of Uzbekistan, 32 from the National-democratic Party of Uzbekistan, 31 from the democratic party of Uzbekistan "Milliy Tiklanish", 19 from the Social-democratic party of Uzbekistan "Adolat", and 15 from the "Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan". The results indicate an improved gender balance as out of 150 deputies, 33 were women. They also indicate a degree of satisfaction with the performance or loyalty of the electorate to some deputies as 47 of the winning candidates were former deputies. Furthermore, Mr. Abdusalomov stated that 34 of the elected deputies are lawyers and 37 are economists, representing a structure that reflects upon the objectives of the lower chamber.

In spite of the variety of parties represented, there is still no opposition in Uzbekistan as such, and all the parties are pro-governmental. Thus, the most important component of democratic elections was still missing in the Uzbek parliamentary elections.

Mr. Abdusalomov reported that the CEC did not record any serious violations of election conduct. He also noted that the elections were monitored by more than 270 observers from 36 states and four international organizations like the OSCE, the Executive Committee of the CIS, the Shanghai

Cooperation Organization and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, as well as over 60,000 observers and authorized representatives of the political parties that nominated their candidates. Thus, Uzbek mass media claimed that "the publicity and openness of the elections are ensured by the presence of observers".

The observers' capability to evaluate the elections, however, is quite controversial. For instance, the head of the CIS observers' mission Sergey Lebedev reported that "the election process was conducted in an organized way and held high standards – not only in the center, but also in the regions". He also noted that the elections demonstrated "political maturity". This view sharply contrasted with the OSCE representatives, who declined Uzbekistan's invitation to observe its parliamentary elections, since "the basic freedoms in the country are still limited, the existing political spectrum does not give the electorate opportunities for a genuine choice among the competing political alternatives, the previous key recommendations of the OSCE remain incomplete, and there is no progress in putting the existing legal system in accordance with the OSCE rules".

The CEC representatives reported quite high electoral turnover in both rounds. However, these numbers are unconvincing to many experts, as some of the voters reported they were not asked for their identification documents, or were allowed to cast multiple votes; one woman reported getting only one invitation letter to vote for her whole family. Thus, the elections in Uzbekistan still can hardly be called transparent and fair.

NEWS DIGEST

RUSSIA SEEKS TO DOUBLE AZERI GAS INTAKE

28 December

Russia is planning to double its intake of natural gas from Azerbaijan in a potential challenge to European efforts to engage the Eurasian nation in the independent Nabucco gas pipeline network. The Russian Novosti news agency quoted senior Azerbaijan official Rovnag Abdullayev as saying supplies to Russia would double to 35.3 billion cubic feet from 2010. It was unclear if a new deal had been signed in addition to contracts initialed in October. Abdullaev, president of Azerbaijan's state oil and gas company Socar, said: "We have held negotiations. Azerbaijan has a potential to increase gas supplies, we will supply Russia with 1 billion cubic meters (35.3 billion cubic feet) of gas in 2010." Azerbaijan and Russia signed contracts Oct. 14 for the supply of 17.65 billion cubic feet of Azerbaijan natural gas to Russia, with the option to increase the volume. The prospect of double the contracted quantity of natural gas ending up in Russia, along with Azeri contracts to supply gas to Iran, further whittles down supplies that may be available if and when the Nabucco pipeline to Europe goes on stream. The \$11.3 billion Nabucco gas pipeline is intended to pool gas supplies from Central Asian and Middle Eastern supplies for transmission to Europe through Turkey. The pipeline is backed by the West as an alternative to European dependence on Russian gas. However, while Nabucco is still in a planning stage, China has opened a 1,138-mile pipeline to Turkmenistan and begun taking delivery of gas from that country, originally a potential participant in the Nabucco project. The pipeline has the capacity to pump about 1.6 trillion cubic feet of gas and has made China one of the largest consumers of gas from Central Asia. The China-Turkmenistan pipeline also signals a geopolitical shift in the region because, until recently, Turkmenistan supplied most of its gas to Russia.

The Nabucco pipeline project likewise aims to wean suppliers from Russia and to bypass Russian territory, passing through Turkey instead. Nabucco would utilize gas supplies from Central Asia as well as the Middle East, except Iran, which is emerging as a major consumer of Azerbaijan gas. Earlier in December, Azerbaijan signed an agreement with Iran to deliver natural gas to the northern Iranian provinces through an existing 916-mile Kazi-Magomed-Astara gas pipeline. The deal involves export of 17.6 billion cubic feet a year of gas -- a fraction of the pipeline's capacity of 353 billion cubic feet per year. Both sides have discussed installing new compression stations on the pipeline to increase its throughput capacity. Mohammad Bagher Bahrami, the Iranian ambassador to Azerbaijan, said his country plans to buy at least 175 billion cubic feet of Azeri gas in the future. If implemented the deal will further reduce gas supplies that may be available for the planned Nabucco pipeline. (UPI)

ARMENIAN POLICEMEN CONVICTED FOR BEATING PROTESTER

29 December

Two Armenian police officers have been convicted of using disproportionate force in breaking up protests following the February 2008 presidential election, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports. A Yerevan court sentenced Gegham Harutiunian and Hovannes Ghukasian to two years in prison on December 25 for beating a man shortly after the predawn break-up on March 1, 2008 of a tent camp set up by the opposition in the capital's Liberty Square. But both men qualify for a general amnesty declared in June and will not be imprisoned. They will, however, be banned for one year from working for law-enforcement or other state bodies. The ruling came just over a week after two other policemen received three-year prison sentences, also covered by the amnesty, for their harsh treatment of two people in Yerevan on March 2, 2009. In both

trials the defendants pleaded not guilty to the charges, saying that they acted in self-defense. Harutiunian and Ghukasian insisted that they hit the unidentified opposition protester with truncheons because he threw stones and verbally abused them. Their lawyer, Arshak Tovmasian, said it is the protester and not his "innocent" clients who should have been prosecuted. State prosecutors said the use of force was illegal and unnecessary because the victim was lying on the ground and no longer resisted police during the incident, which was videotaped. The March 1-2, 2008 clashes in Yerevan between opposition protesters and security forces left 10 people dead and more than 200 others injured. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZ OPPOSITION LEADER CLAIMS GOVERNMENT ORDERED JOURNALIST'S DEATH

5 January

The leading voice of Kyrgyzstan's opposition has alleged government involvement in a recent journalist's murder and claimed correspondence in the hands of investigators sheds light on the motive, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Journalist Gennady Pavlyuk, 51, died on December 22 of injuries suffered six days earlier when he was thrown from a building in Almaty, in neighboring Kazakhstan, with his hands and feet bound. The leader of Kyrgyz opposition Ata-Meken (Fatherland) party, Omurbek Tekebaev, told RFE/RL that he gave Kazakh investigators e-mails between himself and Pavlyuk that help explain why the current Kyrgyz government wanted Pavlyuk dead.

Tekebaev said it is evident from the correspondence that Pavlyuk -- who was working on the creation of a website and a newspaper for Ata-Meken -- supported opposition parties and worked hard to change Kyrgyzstan's political leadership. Tekebaev said the messages reflect the slain journalist's views of the Kyrgyz government along with his civic values and ideals, and added that the e-mails should be a source of pride to Pavlyuk's family and friends. Tekebaev said Pavlyuk had recently been forging the information and ideological policies of Ata-Meken. He said those who allegedly ordered Pavlyuk's death were motivated by the knowledge that it would be hard for the opposition to find anyone who could complete his projects. Tekebaev said Pavlyuk's death should be seen as a warning not only to Ata-Meken but also to all opposition activists, rights defenders, and independent

journalists in Kyrgyzstan. Pavlyuk was the founder of the "White Steamer" newspaper and website and had worked for the newspaper "Vecherny Bishkek" (Evening Bishkek) and the Russian weekly "Argumenty i fakty." Kazakh media quoted police sources in that country saying over the weekend that there were indications that Kyrgyz secret service officers may have been involved in Pavlyuk's murder. Kyrgyz intelligence officials countered that Kazakh media were disseminating lies. The Kyrgyz opposition has called Pavlyuk's death an attack on press freedom and alleged it was part of the government's campaign to silence dissent. The killing was sharply condemned by international human rights organizations, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Reporters Without Borders. (RFE/RL)

RIGHTS GROUPS SAYS UZBEKS MOST-ATTACKED IN RUSSIA

5 January

The Moscow-based Bureau on Human Rights says that Uzbeks were the ethnic minority most attacked by radical nationalist groups in Russia in 2009, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. The report says that some 218 attacks were made in Russia on members of minorities on the basis of "aggressive xenophobia." It said that as a result there were 75 deaths and 284 injuries. According to the report, 14 Uzbeks were killed and 12 others were injured in 2009.

The second-most attacked ethnic minority was Kyrgyz, with eight killed and 10 injured. Third was Tajiks, with seven killed and 18 injured. There are hundreds of thousands of Central Asians working in Russia. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZSTAN PLANS TO BUILD 12 SMALL HYDROPOWER STATIONS

6 January

A Kyrgyz official says that country will build 12 small hydropower stations in 2010, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Valery Dil, head of Kyrgyzstan's office for small and medium-sized hydropower plants at the Development and Investment Agency, told RFE/RL today that small power plants with a capacity of 1.5 to 2 megawatts each will be built in nearly all parts of the country. He added that a government loan of some \$150 million has been provided for the projects. Earlier this week, government officials said the first unit of the Kambarata-2 hydropower station will be operational by May. It is designed to have a capacity

of 360 megawatts. Kyrgyz authorities hope to alleviate the country's electricity problems with the Kambarata-1 and Kambarata-2 power plants, which are on the Naryn River in north-central Kyrgyzstan. Much of Kyrgyzstan's energy is imported from Uzbekistan, which is dependent on Kyrgyz water resources. Uzbekistan has several times in recent years stopped exporting electricity to Kyrgyzstan during the winter, leading to energy shortages. The Uzbek government has complained that the additional hydropower plants in Kyrgyzstan will reduce the amount of water Uzbekistan will receive from its neighbor to irrigate agricultural fields. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJANI VILLAGERS HELD BY POLICE IN EXCLAVE

7 January

Residents of an Azerbaijani village say security forces have arrested scores of people after clashes between police and villagers, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. People in the village of Bananyar, in Azerbaijan's Naxcivan exclave, told RFE/RL that more than 100 people were arrested on January 5 by security forces. They said all the women who were originally detained have been released and only men are now being held. Naxcivan is cut off from the rest of Azerbaijan. Rights activists say it is run like a personal fiefdom by regional head Vasif Talibov, who is a close relative of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. Naxcivan's Interior Ministry has denied both that police attacked residents in Bananyar or that anyone from the village has been arrested. The action by security forces on January 5 followed an incident with police after the Ashura religious ceremony, which was celebrated on December 28. The day after Ashura, police detained several residents of Bananyar, allegedly because of their overly emotional mourning for Imam Husayn. The detained Bananyar residents were reportedly taken to the police station in the neighboring village of Abruganus and subjected to questioning and physical abuse. Villagers said abuse by police against Kamal Aliyev, 66, and his wife and daughters led to a strong protest from Aliyev's son, Yunis Aliyev, who threatened to set himself alight if police did not release his family. The police reportedly ignored Yunis Aliyev as he poured gasoline on his body and set himself on fire. Witnesses said he was taken to the hospital and later over the border to Iran for medical treatment, as reported by Iranian television channel Sahar. Eight days later, security forces entered the village

and began arresting people they said helped to organize the Ashura ceremonies. Vilayat Hadiyev, the head of the detention center, denied there are any people from Bananyar at the facility. Saadat Bananyarli, a human rights activist based in Baku, said that she and a group of human rights activists have requested a meeting with the interior minister to discuss the "negligence of police" in regards to the suicide attempt by Aliyev and the actions of the security forces in the village. Bananyarli met in Baku today with OSCE officials to discuss the situation. She said the police will fail in their attempt to hide the arrest of so many of the villagers. She added that there were "hundreds of witnesses" to the events. A group of Bananyar residents have also sent a request to the office of Ombudswoman Elmira Suleymanova for assistance in ending the attacks against people in the village. Adil Eyvazli, a lawyer in Suleymanova's office, said the application was received and will be processed urgently.

He said the Ombudswoman's Office will investigate the whereabouts of the missing villagers as soon as possible. (RFE/RL)

TURKMENISTAN LAUDS GAS DIVERSITY STRATEGY

8 January

The launching of gas pipelines from Turkmenistan indicates the country has the potential to become a consistent supplier to foreign markets, officials said. Leaders of Iran and Turkmenistan this week launched a 16-mile pipeline from the Dauletabad gas field in Turkmenistan to deliver resources to northern Iran. Annamammad Mammadov, the Turkmen envoy to Azerbaijan, said the Iran-Turkmenistan pipeline was indicative of his country's policy of energy diversity, the Trend news agency reports. "The priority of Turkmenistan's policy is diversification of supplies of energy sources," he said. "Foreign countries are interested in energy projects and we are ready to cooperate." Beyond Dauletabad, he added, Ashgabat has several contracts with European and Asian countries to develop Yoloten-Osman natural gas deposits in the country. Ashgabat in December opened a 1,138-mile pipeline to deliver gas from Turkmenistan to China. The pipeline starts at the Turkmen border with Uzbekistan and then through Kazakhstan to the Xinjiang region in northwest China. A second leg of the pipeline goes into operation in this year. Russia was the primary export market for Turkmen

resources prior to a 2009 gas pipeline rupture that Ashgabat blamed on Russian gas giant Gazprom. (UPI)

ARMENIA TO REOPEN SCHOOLS AFTER SWINE FLU CLOSURES

8 January

Schools across Armenia will reopen on January 11 after a one-month stoppage that health officials say helped contain swine flu in the country, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports. The Armenian government closed schools on December 7, citing an upsurge in "seasonal" infectious diseases such as influenza. The measure was attributed to the rapidly growing number of swine flu cases reported by the Health Ministry. Ara Asoyan, Armenia's chief epidemiologist, told RFE/RL that schools could reopen because the swine flu epidemic is easing. Health authorities have so far registered 111 cases of swine flu, which have resulted in at least three fatalities. Asoyan admitted that the real number of swine flu cases is much higher, but he insisted that the spread of the virus has slowed in recent weeks. He said Armenia "definitely had thousands of infected people in November and December. But whereas 25 to 30 people infected with flu were admitted into our hospitals each day then, now the number is between one and three." Lilya Poghosian, a senior doctor at the national ambulance service, gave similar assurances. Poghosian told RFE/RL that the number of daily ambulance calls for people with serious respiratory problems -- which can be caused by swine flu -- has thus far been cut in half this month. (RFE/RL)

TURKMEN GAS FLOWING TO RUSSIA

11 January

Turkmenistan restarted natural gas shipments to Russia during the weekend amid speculation Ashgabat was making strong moves away from Moscow, Gazprom said. Turkmen gas company Turkmengaz signed a December deal with Russian gas monopoly Gazprom for natural gas supplies. A Gazprom spokesman said gas supplies from Turkmenistan started up during the weekend, Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti reports. Russia was the primary importer of Turkmen gas. That relationship was strained, however, following a Turkmen pipeline explosion in April that the government in Ashgabat blamed on Gazprom. Energy analysts pointed to the launch of a natural gas pipeline from Iran to Turkmenistan last week

as a sign Ashgabat was moving away from Moscow. In December, meanwhile, Chinese President Hu Jintao joined the leaders of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for the inauguration of a 1,138-mile pipeline to deliver gas from Turkmenistan to China. The route for that pipeline bypasses Russian territory. Igor Shuvalov, Russia's first deputy premier, said during a summit in Kazakhstan in December that Moscow viewed the Chinese project as a boost to regional energy security, however. (UPI)

KYRGYZSTAN'S EX-DEFENSE MINISTER JAILED FOR EIGHT YEARS

11 January

Kyrgyzstan's ex-defense minister Ismail Isakov was sentenced to eight years in a high security prison by the Bishkek Military Court on Monday after being found guilty of abuse of office during his tenure as defense minister. Isakov will also be stripped of his rank of lieutenant general. He was accused of illegally handing over an apartment that belonged to the defense ministry to his son, at a time when other servicemen were in dire need of better housing. But Isakov was acquitted on other counts, including misuse of budgetary funds and negligence. He was taken into custody in the courtroom. His supporters were chanting "shame" as he was being escorted out of the courtroom. Isakov rejected all charges and he told the media that "the trial was a political reprisal and an attempt to suppress dissent." He also claimed that he was being persecuted in connection with a statement he made when he was stepping down as the country's Security Council secretary in October 2008. He told President Kurmanbek Bakiyev then about the problems in his entourage and about errors in the country's domestic and foreign policies. Once Bakiyev's close associate and an active participant in the Revolution of Tulips in March 2005, Isakov ended up joining the opposition. Isakov's lawyer Azimbek Beknazarov told Interfax after the verdict was announced that it was politically motivated. "We were expecting this verdict and we will appeal," Beknazarov said. (Interfax)

U.S., NORWEGIAN OFFICIALS KEPT FROM AZERBAIJANI VILLAGE

13 January

Officials from the U.S. and Norwegian embassies in Azerbaijan were blocked today from entering a village in the exclave of Naxcivan, where clashes between police and locals occurred earlier last week,

RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. U.S. officials on the fact-finding trip told RFE/RL they were met by a large group of villagers before they could enter the village of Bananyar and were told to leave the area. The embassy officials included Joanna Ganson, the political adviser at the U.S. Embassy. People who live in Bananyar told RFE/RL that the group that blocked the delegation of embassy officials from entering their village were mainly from Abraqunus and other nearby villages and had been organized by government officials to deter the diplomats. Disturbances broke out between police and people in Bananyar first on December 28 -- the day after Ashura -- and again on January 5, with security forces beating and detaining more than 100 people. Most have since been released, although two villagers are known to be held in a mental institution and several others are still jailed, including local opposition leader Rza Nuriyev. Meanwhile, local human rights activists cancelled a planned visit to Naxcivan today. Activist Saadat Bananyarli told RFE/RL they were waiting for official permission from Naxcivan for the visit but received no reply from authorities. Naxcivan is an Azerbaijani exclave that is bordered by Iran, Armenia, and Turkey. (RFE/RL)

U.S. INSTRUCTORS TO TRAIN GEORGIAN SERVICEMEN FOR AFGHANISTAN

13 January

One hundred and eighty-five Georgian servicemen have flown out to Germany from Tbilisi to be trained by American instructors before going to Afghanistan. Defense Minister Batu Kutelia came to the Tbilisi airport to see the Georgian servicemen off, the Georgian Defense Ministry told Interfax. One hundred and seventy-three Georgian servicemen are currently involved in a peacekeeping operation in Afghanistan. By March, the Georgian contingent will become about 1,000 strong, according to the Defense Ministry. (Interfax)

RUSSIA, TURKEY PREPARING TO INTRODUCE VISA-FREE TRAVEL WITH DECISION DUE IN SPRING-SUMMER -- ERDOGAN

13 January

Russia and Turkey have started working towards visa-free travel between the two countries, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan told a press conference after meeting with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. The decision could be made in spring-summer this year, by the time

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's visit Turkey, he said. Hopefully, switching to visa-free travel regime "will not take a lot of time," Putin said. (Interfax)

RUSSIA'S TRADE WITH TURKEY BIGGER THAN WITH U.S. AND UK - PUTIN

13 January

The volume of trade between Russia and Turkey declined 40% last year amid the global financial and economic crisis, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said at a meeting with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "The past few years have seen a very good and effective nature of the development of our business relations. We have managed to significantly strengthen relations between our states in recent years. However, the world financial crisis has affected the development of bilateral economic relations. Our trade reached \$35 billion in 2008, but it dropped 40% in 2009," Putin said. Nevertheless, "Turkey remains one of Russia's biggest economic partners, outperforming the U.S. and the United Kingdom," the Russian prime minister said. The two countries need to diversify their business relations, he said. Erdogan, for his part, said that diversification efforts were under way in bilateral military, business and cultural cooperation, "enjoying the support of both sides' political will." The Turkish PM said he hoped that the two states would soon be able to bring back their trade to the previous level and to achieve the goal of raising the volume of bilateral trade to \$100 billion within the next five years. Russia's exports to Turkey primarily consist of energy sources (70% of exports), metals, metal products and mineral fertilizers. Imports from Turkey are dominated by cars, equipment, transport means, consumer goods and food. Turkey is the second largest market for Russian natural gas. The two countries have been implementing a number of joint promising projects in the energy sector, telecommunications and industry. (Interfax)

INTERIOR TROOPS DESTROY 120 MILITANT BASES, 230 MILITANTS IN N.CAUCASUS IN 2009 - GENERAL

13 January

The situation remains complicated but under control in the North Caucasus, Deputy Interior Minister and Interior Troops Commander, General of the Army Nikolai Rogozhkin has said. "Interior troops killed 230 militants and destroyed 120 militant bases last year," Rogozhkin told the media on

Wednesday at a meeting marking the Day of Russian Press. Seventy thousand interior troops assume duty each day in a vast territory from Vladivostok to the country's western borders, the general said. "Interior troops participated in joint exercises, organized by the federal Security Service and Interior Ministry more than 130 times last year," Rogozhkin said. Interior troops are also switching from heavy to light armor, he said. "Heavy armor is being handed over to the Defense Ministry," the general said. The troops have received more than 50% of the modern equipment they need, he said. (Interfax)

RUSSIA SAYS ISLAMIC MILITANTS TRAINED IN GEORGIA

15 January

Russia says Islamist rebels are being trained in neighboring Georgia to launch attacks in Chechnya and other nearby regions. Russian officials have previously said foreign training and funding has contributed to a surge in violence by Islamist insurgents in recent months in its volatile North Caucasus regions, including Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan. Now, the state-run Russian news agency RIA is quoting Russia's deputy interior minister, Arkady Yedelev, as saying these militants are being trained at military bases in Georgia. He is said to have made the comment in Vladikavkaz, a town in the Russian Caucasus. Yedelev didn't directly accuse the Georgian government of complicity, and did not identify the militants' instructors. Russia has previously accused Arab fighters of training Chechen rebels, though not in Georgia. (RFE/RL)

AFGHAN DISTRICT CHIEF, FIVE POLICE DIE IN AMBUSH

17 January

An Afghan district governor and five police were killed today in a Taliban ambush in the western province of Herat, the province's police chief said. A Taliban spokesman, Qari Mohammad Yousuf, said by telephone from an undisclosed location that Taliban fighters had carried out the attack. An unusually warm winter has allowed the Taliban to continue attacks in the normally quieter cold months in Afghanistan, where violence reached its worst levels of the 8-year-old war last year despite a rising number of foreign troops. The latest attack happened as the officials were driving in a vehicle on a road in the remote Chesht Sharif district of the province, the provincial police chief, Esmatullah

Alizai, told Reuters by phone. "The district chief, a senior district police officer, and four other of his colleagues were killed in the ambush," Alizai said. One policeman was wounded, he said without giving further details. (Reuters)

ENVOY: SOUTH STREAM, NABUCCO NOT ENOUGH

18 January

The South Stream and Nabucco gas pipelines may not be enough to meet European energy demands, Russian officials said Monday in Azerbaijan. Moscow aims to diversify its energy transit options to Europe with its South Stream natural gas pipeline through the Black Sea to southern Europe. The European community, meanwhile, looks to Nabucco to bring non-Russian gas to its consumers through Turkey. Both sides looked for diversification options following a January 2009 row between Kiev and Moscow over gas debt and contracts. Around 80 percent of all Russian gas bound for Europe travels currently through Soviet-era pipelines in Ukraine. Vladimir Dorokhin, the Russian envoy to Azerbaijan, said Moscow does not support Nabucco, though European energy demands are greater than any single pipeline, Baku's News.Az reports. "Europe's need for gas is so great that even Nabucco, South Stream or any other gas pipeline will not be able to meet it," he said. South Stream is designed to carry 2.2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas per year. Nabucco has a design capacity of 1.1 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Europe, however, might require an additional 7 trillion cubic feet of natural gas per year by 2025, creating an urgent need for gas imports. (UPI)

AFGHANISTAN TO REVIEW SECURITY PLAN FOR KABUL

19 January

The Afghan government is to review its plan for securing Kabul a day after militants launched a series of commando-style attacks in the heart of the capital, the president's palace said today. Taliban gunmen launched a brazen assault on January 18 in the center of the capital, with suicide bombers blowing themselves up at several locations and militants battling security forces from inside a shopping centre engulfed in flames. It was the most high-profile attack inside the capital for almost a year and came as President Hamid Karzai was swearing in cabinet members at his palace only a

few hundred meters away. Karzai met the ministers of interior, defense, and national security today to discuss the raids. "In this meeting...all parts of yesterday's events were studied and it was agreed that the plan for Kabul's security should be reviewed and submitted to the president for approval," Karzai's palace said in a statement. The palace did not provide any more details. While the raids were dramatic and well coordinated, casualty figures were relatively low. The NATO-led force in Afghanistan said it had troops on the ground during yesterday's raids but that the Afghan army and police had been leading the operation against the insurgents. Kabul's security was formally handed over to Afghans in August 2008 but many of the international forces have bases inside the city where they conduct frequent patrols. The NATO-led headquarters is also located in the capital. There are more than 110,000 foreign troops, including some 70,000 Americans, fighting a resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan and Washington is sending 30,000 more to try and quell the violence. Other countries are sending some 7,000 more. But Washington has said it will begin to start scaling back troop numbers in 18 months and that it does not want to be in Afghanistan in another eight or nine years time. This has worried many Afghans who feel international troops are looking for a way out and that their own security forces will not be able to secure the country against the Taliban. Western leaders have said any drawdown of troops will be conditions based and security will only be handed over to the Afghans on a province by province basis. (Reuters)

TAJIK PRESIDENT REPLACES ENERGY COMPANY CHIEF

19 January

Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon has signed a government decree on Tuesday, sacking Sanat Rakhimov, the director of public joint-stock company, Barki Tochik ("Tajikistan Energy"), and appointing ex-energy minister Abdullo Yerov to this position, the president's press office said. The reasons for the new appointment were not specified. Barki Tochik is fully state-owned. Rakhimov had spent just one year in this office, during which time the Tajik grid experienced the largest disruption in its history. On November 9, 2009, 75% of the population, and in particular aluminum company Talco, spent nearly four hours with no power supply. More than six-hour-long power outages at an aluminum factory can result in the hardening of

metal in electrolytic baths and can therefore lead to great losses. Yerov served as Tajik Energy Minister in 2000-2004 and then in 2006. In recent years, he led the industry and energy department in the president's executive office. (Interfax)

WHEAT FALLS AS KAZAKH EXPORT COMPETITION MAY WEIGH ON PRICES

19 January

Wheat declined for a third day in Chicago as Kazakhstan's plan to supply Egypt, the world's biggest importer of the grain, threatened to fuel competition in the oversupplied world market and weigh on prices. Kazakhstan plans to sell as much as 1.5 million metric tons of grain to Egypt this year, state-owned AO National Holding KazAgro said yesterday. Egypt's government-run grain-buying agency bought Kazakh and Russian wheat in its latest tender on Jan. 13 and has shunned U.S. imports since September. "International competition remains tough," Paris-based farm adviser Agritel said in a market comment. "A new big player, Kazakhstan, could supply Egypt with a considerable volume of more than 1 million tons in coming months." Wheat for March delivery slid 1.9 percent to \$5.0025 a bushel on the Chicago Board of Trade at 2:14 p.m. Paris time. Milling wheat for March delivery traded on Liffe in Paris fell 0.4 percent to 125.50 euros (\$179.28) a ton. Global stocks of the grain will rise to 195.6 million tons in the current season from 163.9 million tons at the end of the 2008-09 season as production exceeds consumption for a second year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Fundamentals remain heavy," Agritel said. Chicago-traded wheat lost 10 percent last week, while March-delivery milling wheat slid 4.9 percent in Paris. (Bloomberg)