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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

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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.

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

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

Svante E. Cornell

Research Director; Editor, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst
Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University
1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, USA.
Tel. +1-202-663-5922; 1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785

TURKMENISTAN SIGNALS READINESS FOR NABUCCO

Robert M. Cutler

A recent series of statements and concrete actions by leaders from Ashgabat shows a clear willingness and desire to implement the “European direction” as a component of the country’s international gas export policy. Technical obstacles are mainly solved, and the only remaining political obstacle appears to be Europe’s difficulty in concentrating its attention to take the necessary steps from its own side. The last chance for this seemingly will begin to expire early next year.

BACKGROUND: In the last years of Saparmurad Niyazov’s presidency of Turkmenistan, in the middle of the past decade, his country was exporting as much as 40-50 billion cubic meters per year (bcm/y) of natural gas to Russia. Since his death at the end of 2006, his successor, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, has been moving decisively to reorient the country’s international economic policy. Until the opening of a gas pipeline to China last year with a planned final-stage volume of 30 bcm/y, the only other export direction for the country’s gas was to Iran, where a small pipeline took about 2-6 bcm/y (the volume varying widely from year to year, usually at the low end) to the latter country’s northeast exclusively for domestic consumption.

In December 2007, Russia, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan signed a draft agreement for refurbishing and reconstruction of the Caspian Coastal Pipeline (CCP, also called “Prikaspiiskii” or “pre-Caspian”), part of the western branch of the Soviet-era Central Asia-Center pipeline, which historically took Central Asian gas to Russia. The state (or para-statal) enterprises Gazprom, Turkmengaz, and KazMunaiGaz were to make arrangements for carrying out the work on their respective national territories. The subsequent crash of world energy prices, however, meant that

Gazprom had less available investment capital and thus less interest in doing the agreed work. At nearly the same time, the outbreak of the global financial crisis entailed an economic recession that depressed European demand for gas from Russia by nearly 30 percent.

As a result, Russia became less dependent upon imports from Turkmenistan and tried to renegotiate lower the price for Ashgabat’s gas. Relations between Turkmenistan and Moscow further worsened dramatically after an explosion on the Central Asia-Center-4 gas pipeline in April 2009, for which Turkmenistan blamed Gazprom. During the months-long closure of the pipeline Russian imports declined to near-zero. Moreover, considered as an “act of God” (*force majeure*), the pipeline explosion relieved Gazprom of the obligation to purchase large volumes of contracted gas from Turkmenistan, for which the Russian firm had no evident buyer. Nor have quantities rebounded: Russia, which bought 40 bcm of gas from Turkmenistan in 2008, will be buying a maximum of only 10 bcm this year.

IMPLICATIONS: Against that background Russia’s president Dmitry Medvedev visited Ashgabat at the end of last month, and also had the opportunity to meet Berdimuhamedov again briefly at the Caspian littoral heads-of-

state summit held in Baku last weekend. At the Ashgabat meeting, the plans for the renovated CCP were finally officially shelved, as it became clear that Gazprom had no intention to execute its part of the bargain. This also followed Ashgabat's decision six months ago, after considering 70 international responses to a tender offer including one from Gazprom, to reconstruct the so-called "East-West Pipeline" running across the southern part of the country using its own national resources. Gazprom had stated its willingness to help on the condition that it would receive the gas across the border in Russia.

Turkmenistan was officially miffed, and not for the first time, at the spin that Russian reports put on the bilateral meeting: an unnamed Russian official (widely believed to be Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin on the basis of his previous public comments) was quoted as saying that there is no demand for Ashgabat's gas in Europe. Turkmenistan's official reply rejected that proposition as well as the contention that Gazprom was being actively considered for participation in the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project, which has recently received renewed diplomatic momentum not only from Turkmenistan but also from Pakistan and the Asian Development Bank.

On November 18, in a statement to the press following the third heads-of-state summit of Caspian littoral countries in Baku, the deputy chairman of Turkmenistan's cabinet of ministers, Baymyrad Hojamuhamedov, said that his country's president had proposed there that an agreement between "any two of the five countries on the Caspian" should suffice to lay an undersea pipeline, and that "the majority" had agreed. This is a signal from Ashgabat that it is ready to supply gas to the EU through the

Nabucco pipeline, the principal participating firms of which have postponed their final investment decision from autumn 2010 to the first quarter of 2011. Both Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan have stated that their disagreement over delimitation of offshore natural-resources sectors under the Caspian Sea is no longer an obstacle to cooperation on a pipeline (or any other means of transit) for natural gas from the eastern to the western shore.

At an international oil and gas forum in Ashgabat held only days after the multilateral Baku summit, Hojamuhamedov further publicly announced that Turkmenistan would provide gas for the Nabucco project. He had earlier specifically pointed to the East-West Pipeline's capacity of 30 bcm/y as being complementary to Nabucco's requirements, and he has even suggested a total of 40 bcm/y could be found. There is an existing Memorandum of Understanding between Turkmenistan and the EU, first discussed when Berdimuhamedov visited Brussels in November 2007 and then formalized in an agreement signed April 2008 with the EU's then-commissioner for external relations (and European Neighborhood Policy) Benita Ferrero-Waldner, for 10 bcm/y in the first instance. While the interconnection of Turkmenistani and Azerbaijani offshore rigs in the Caspian Sea has always been a possibility for realizing this intention, now it also happens that the Malaysian state oil company Petronas will be producing 5 bcm/y from an offshore Caspian block next year and at present has nowhere to ship it.

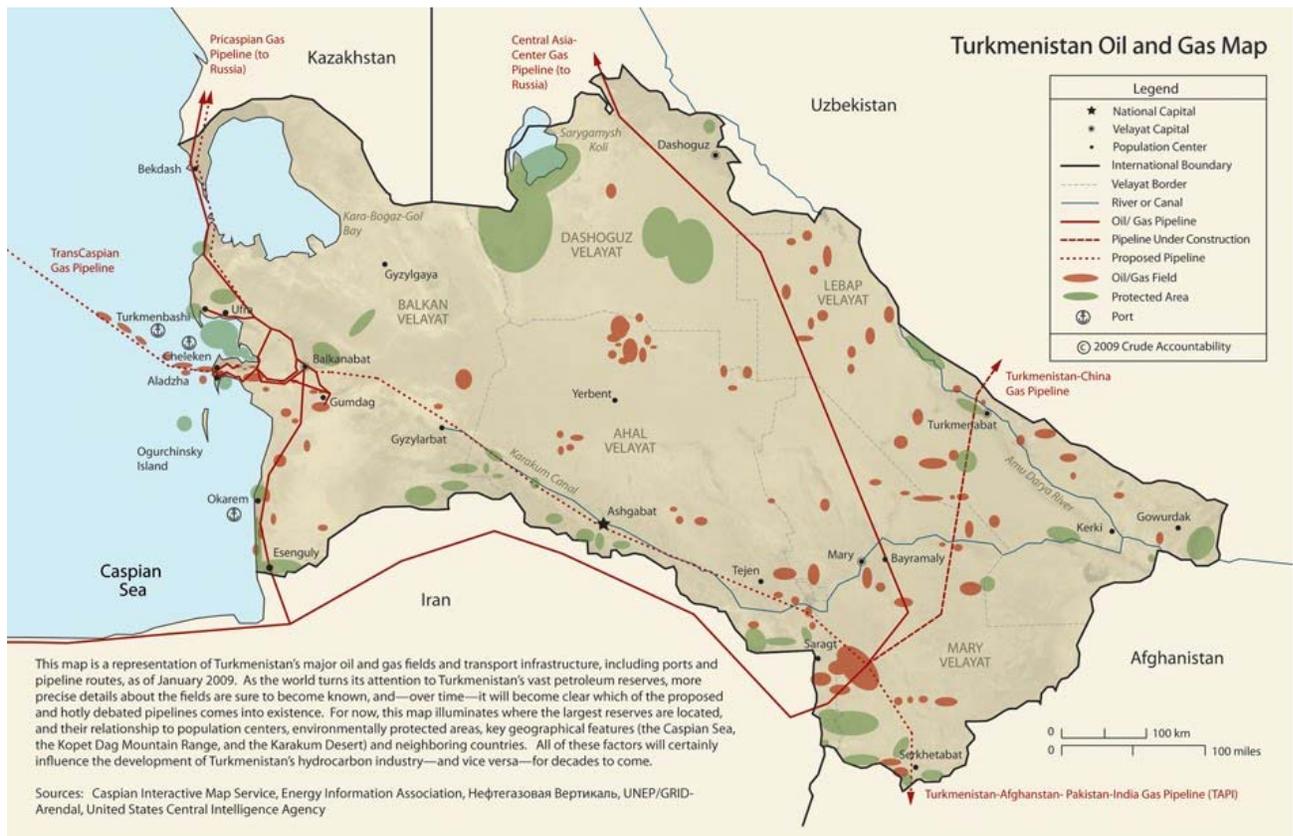
Meanwhile, it has been announced that a European consortium headed by the Italian firm ENI seeks to negotiate a project to build a fleet of at least four tankers to ship 3-4 bcm/y of compressed natural gas (CNG) across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan, where it could enter

the pipeline network to Turkey. CNG technology has never been used over long maritime distances, so the costs would be difficult to estimate and certainly non-competitive with an undersea pipeline; but according to the announcement by Turkmenistan's honorary consul to the EU, the feasibility study has been completed, and the conclusions on necessary commercial conditions have been finalized.

CONCLUSIONS: Russia has more or less come to terms with the fact that it will no longer have monopsonistic control of Turkmenistan's exports but still strongly prefers that Ashgabat's gas should go anywhere but Europe. However, it is clear that Berdimuhamedov is following his own path. It remains for the EU to come through with the necessary conditions and guarantees to make possible, finally, a trans-Caspian link. The European Parliament's postponement of a vote approving for the new Trade and Cooperation

Agreement (TCA) with Turkmenistan is not an absolute necessity for the implementation of concrete energy relations with Ashgabat, but it sends a bad signal; it results from Russia's lobbying in Brussels, including through third parties. With the final investment decision for Nabucco already postponed from this autumn to the end of March 2011, Europe may well be facing its last chance to diversify its energy dependence in the direction of the Caspian Sea basin.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr Robert M Cutler (<http://www.robertcutler.org>), educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and The University of Michigan, has researched and taught at universities in the United States, Canada, France, Switzerland, and Russia. Now senior research fellow in the Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Carleton University, Canada, he also consults privately in a variety of fields.



ELECTIONS IN AZERBAIJAN: NO SURPRISES

Alman Mir Ismail

Azerbaijan's recent parliamentary elections once again highlighted the economic factor in the country's domestic politics. In an era of rapid economic growth, the opposition finds it very hard to compete with the ruling party. At the same time, the latest elections showed the changing dynamics within the ruling party. Compared with previous elections, The Yeni Azerbaijan Party spoke with a more unified voice and fewer party members dared to run against each other, as had been the case in 2005.

BACKGROUND: On November 7, the citizens of Azerbaijan went to the polling stations to elect the fourth Parliament in the country's post-Soviet history. 690 candidates contested 125 seats in the legislative body. Almost half of them represented 14 parties, blocks of parties as well as initiative groups, while the rest were independent candidates. It should be noted that all major political parties in the country, including the opposition Musavat, Popular Front, Liberal and National Independence Parties participated in the race, as opposed to previous elections, where boycotts were common. The ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party nominated 111 candidates, most of which were registered, while the tandem of the Musavat Party and the Popular Front Party managed to register only 37 candidates, mainly in Baku and its surrounding regions – many opposition candidates failed to achieve registration. Candidates were given four minutes on the Public TV to address the voters. Town hall meetings were held in almost all of the constituencies, and posters and banners were widespread. However, mass rallies in the streets were prohibited.

According to the Central Election Commission, some 47,000 local and more than 1,000 international observers monitored the election process. The latter represented the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of

Europe, the representation of the European Union in Baku, the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Speaking Countries, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE Bureau for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the GUAM countries, the embassies of the U.S., Great Britain, Kazakhstan, Norway, Bulgaria, Poland, Japan, Finland and Belgium, as well as the European Election Observation Academy and the Central Election Commission of Kazakhstan (including individuals from 48 countries). In 500 election precincts, web cameras were installed in order to ensure the transparency of the process. Several NGOs have exit poll surveys on election day.

Voter turnout was reported to be 50.14% of 4.9 million registered voters. The results of the elections showed an overwhelming victory for the ruling party, which gained 69 seats, with 35 seats going to independents, whereas the opposition gained only 11 seats. These results were confirmed by exit poll data. The number of women in the new Parliament increased from 14 to 19.

Paul Wille, Head of the Delegation of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly said that “in a welcome departure from the past, the run-up to the elections and election day were peaceful and not marred by violent



(RIA Novosti)

incidents, all opposition parties opted to participate in the political process, sometimes running as part of electoral blocs, rather than to boycott it as was the case in the past. A positive environment was created by good co-operation between the authorities, international institutions and the domestic actors." Observers from CIS and Turkic Parliamentary Assembly also praised the process.

Other international observers have noted that the technical aspects of the elections have been administered well, while the overall situation with democracy in the country remains to be improved. "It is never easy to do justice to a country which is developing its democratic institutions, especially in a difficult environment. We have seen the many efforts made to make progress and the areas in which the country does very well, and we welcome them as much as the hospitality demonstrated by all our interlocutors. However, despite all the efforts made, the country needs to do much more to make progress in developing a truly pluralist democracy," said Wolfgang Grossruck who led the short-term OSCE observer mission and headed the delegation of the OSCE

Parliamentary Assembly. The Joint Statement of the major electoral observation missions concluded that the conduct of the elections "was not sufficient to constitute meaningful progress in the democratic development of the country".

Opposition parties refused to recognize the results of the elections, pointing out to the prohibition to hold rallies in the streets, the lack of media time to address their voters, the shortened official

electoral campaign period, and the general low voter turnout in the elections.

IMPLICATIONS: The conduct of the Parliamentary elections once again showed that the balance of power in the country is unlikely to change with President Aliyev and his ruling party being more confident than ever, and in firm control. Primarily, this has to do with the fast pace of economic development, the large-scale infrastructure projects going on in the country, as well as a successful foreign policy. Azerbaijan in the past five years not only increased its GDP to US\$50 billion and its national budget from \$3 Billion to \$15 billion, but also maintained friendly relations with regional powers Russia, Iran, Turkey, avoided major conflicts like the war between Russia and Georgia and channeled skyrocketing oil revenues into the construction of roads, bridges, hospitals, schools and other transport facilities. All of these efforts not only increased the welfare of people but also contribute to long-term sustainable development and to the much-needed diversification of its economy. "The economic growth and stability are evident in

Azerbaijan," said Anneli Jäätteenmaki, Head of the delegation of the European Parliament, adding that the "sustainability of this situation can only be reinforced by greater political liberalization and democratization of the country."

Under these conditions, it is not a surprise that the voters prefer stability and certainty over the populist promises by the opposition. The latter, although claiming that the majority of the population supports change, in reality appears to have further lost a basis of serious support. The fragmentation of the opposition, the lack of a clear message, poor electoral tactics, as well as reliance on old rhetoric further weakened its position. Most of the opposition parties have had the same leaders and chairmen for the past 15 years. The old guard in the opposition rarely uses modern communication tools to reach out to the voters. While Azerbaijan is rapidly moving forward, opposition parties remain stuck in 1990s. The frustration of the opposition leaders with their situation was illustrated by their refusal to meet with the leaders of the international observation mission, something the latter's members termed "unique".

Unlike the case in the 2005 elections, external assistance to the opposition parties has also weakened, which further had an adverse effect on the opposition's performance. In 2005, inspired by the color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, many international organizations trained the Azerbaijani opposition. The international attention to the election was much higher in 2005 than was the case this year, when the results seemed considered a foregone conclusion. Moreover, the opposition was more united in 2005 than it was this year.

The perhaps most important development in the elections, thus, were not in the realm of the competition between the government and the

opposition, but developments *within* the governing elite itself. In 2005, just two years after the election of President Ilham Aliyev, the unity within the party was shaky and uncertain. Several prominent ministers, who were later arrested, showed disloyalty to the party line and in many districts the official party candidates faced tight races with challenges not from the opposition, but from fellow ruling party members, or nominally independent candidates close to the government. In a sense, the ruling party was passing through turbulent transition. Yet this year, the Yeni Azerbaijan Party experienced fewer challengers from within the party as compared to the 2005 elections. Indeed, internal rivalry was almost non-existent and internal discipline was much firmer and more consolidated. The trend shows the increasing unity within the party.

CONCLUSIONS: All of these factors indicate that the chances of the opposition to come to power in Azerbaijan are gradually decreasing. As oil and gas revenues continue to fuel the Azerbaijani economy, the ruling party is likely to remain stay in firm control. President Aliyev will aim at further development of the economy in order to provide jobs to the population, and ensure political stability.

The November 7 Parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan showed how economic development has helped preserve the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party's dominance of the political landscape. Foreign powers are unlikely to seek to jeopardize this political stability. The new Parliament will remain dominated by Aliyev loyalists, who will be certain to support his course of economic reforms. The opposition, on the other hand, finds it hard to compete with the ruling party in an era of oil boom.

AGRI PROJECT REQUIRES DIFFICULT AZERBAIJANI BALANCING ACT

Inessa Baban

On September 14, 2010, the Romanian, Azerbaijani and Georgian presidents and the prime minister of Hungary signed the Baku Declaration on the implementation of the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector (AGRI) energy project. This project, which is expected to transport liquefied natural gas from Azerbaijan to Europe via the Black Sea, has received little media coverage, and was almost entirely absent at some important events on energy issues such as the 2010 Baku Caspian Oil and Gas Conference. Experts have been skeptical about the chances of carrying out the AGRI project, which was initially interpreted as a means for Baku to exert pressure on Ankara during a difficult period in Azerbaijani-Turkish relations.

BACKGROUND: In 2009, Azerbaijani-Turkish relations were hampered by Turkey's initiative to normalize its relations with Armenia, which had been frozen since the 1990s. This political step, backed by the new U.S. administration, worried Azerbaijani officials, to whom a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a prerequisite for the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations. In May 2009, the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister, Elmar Mammedyarov, stated that it was "impossible to achieve progress in the region without taking Azerbaijan's position into consideration and without a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict".

The political tensions influenced the ongoing process of negotiations on the conclusion of a new Azerbaijani-Turkish gas agreement after the expiration of the previous bilateral gas supply contract. In April 2009, the CEO of the Azerbaijani state oil company (SOCAR) called for a revision of the price for gas delivered to Turkey because the price agreed in 2001 was below international rates. His position was supported by the Azerbaijani president, who added in October 2009 that given the stalemate with Ankara, Baku would consider alternative

options for its new gas exports from Shah Deniz-2. These statements followed the announcement of provisional roadmap for the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia on April 22, 2009 and the signature of the Zurich Protocol on establishing Diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey on October 10, 2009.

The persistence of difficulties in the Azerbaijani-Turkish bilateral relationship became a serious obstacle to the achievement of EU-backed energy projects such as Nabucco, ITGI and TAP, which were conditioned by Azerbaijani-Turkish *bonne entente*.

Consequently, Romania made a proposal to Azerbaijan regarding the transport of liquefied gas to Europe via the Black Sea. Azerbaijan initially accepted its involvement in the AGRI project, seeing it as a bargaining chip in its political and energy negotiations with Ankara. Since the transit terms and conditions for Azerbaijani gas exports were the main problem between Azerbaijan and Turkey, Baku sought to demonstrate to Ankara that it was considering alternatives to its gas exports via Turkey.

In April 2010, the Azerbaijani Minister of Energy signed the intergovernmental memorandum on production and transportation of Azerbaijani LNG via the Black Sea with his Romanian and Georgian homologues, which was approved by an Azerbaijani presidential decree in May 2010. Despite the signature of an Azerbaijani-Turkish gas agreement on June 7, 2010, Baku continued to take its participation in the AGRI project seriously. The downturn in Azerbaijani-Turkish relations thus induced Azerbaijan to seriously consider a third energy route to Europe, independent of Russia and Turkey alike. The question is how Turkey and Russia will react to the development of an energy link which is susceptible to damage their geopolitical interests.

IMPLICATIONS: Most Turkish and Russian analysts have expressed doubts over the realization of AGRI, which according to them could face financial, security and political problems. Firstly, they are questioning who will fund this project estimated at US\$ 6-7 billion considering the EU's recent economic problems. On the Russian side, some experts also mention the security aspects of AGRI, because it must transit Georgia, whose political and geopolitical situation is still fragile after the August 2008 war. Turkish analysts discuss the political aspects of this project and how it will affect the strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Turkey. According to a Turkish expert, the solid relations between the two states have recently been reconfirmed by the creation of a Strategic Council for high level cooperation. During the signing ceremony on September 15, Azerbaijan's president said that the Supreme Council for Strategic Cooperation "will strengthen and deepen cooperation between the two countries", ensuring that "future generations will carry forward this

friendship and brotherhood". Consequently, from a Turkish point of view the completion of an energy project like AGRI bypassing Turkish territory is highly unlikely.

Turkish and Russian officials or energy company representatives have so far not officially commented on the AGRI project. A European energy analyst noted a "mysterious" attitude toward the AGRI project on Turkey's part during the CIS Oil and Gas Transportation Conference held on October 2010 in Istanbul, which gathered political officials and energy company representatives of Turkey, Russia and CIS countries. Accordingly, representatives of the Turkish energy companies are very diplomatic in their comments on AGRI project, saying that they are "not concerned by it as long as they are not involved with it". In Russia, there were a few slight reactions in the media according to which Moscow would "welcome" the accomplishment of this project, because it is not viewed as a threat to Russian interests. On the contrary, it would deprive Russia's main cause of concern, the Nabucco project, of gas. Yet, some Russian experts called for a substitution of the South Stream project with a LNG transport project to Europe from Russian Black Sea ports to Turkey.

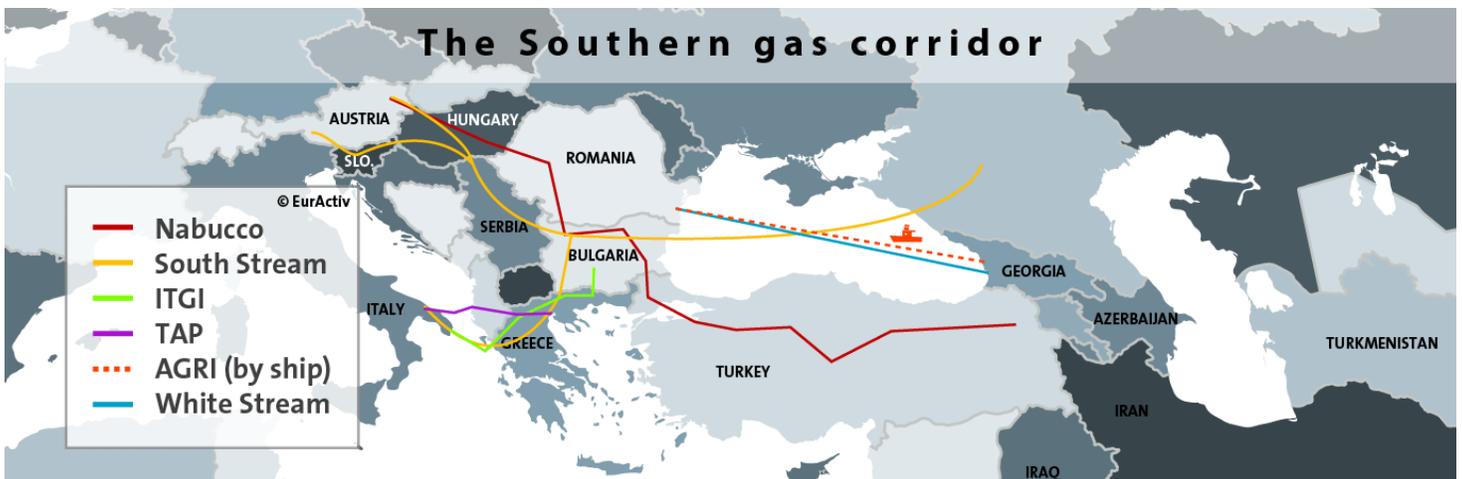
In spite of these modest reactions, AGRI will likely affect Russian and Turkish long term interests. Turkey's ambitions are to maintain and reinforce its status as a Eurasian energy pivot while Russia is seeking to keep and strengthen its status as the main Eurasian energy player. Both want to retain their energy leverage with the EU, even though Turkey's European integration is no longer Ankara's first priority and Moscow does not perceive the EU as a threat or a strong rival. The AGRI project could revolutionize the regional energy

equations, because it could become the first stage of the Southern energy corridor, bypassing Turkey's territory and reducing the Russian energy monopoly on European markets. In the long term, it could become an attractive alternative for other countries of the Caspian region, which are hostage to their geography and regional geopolitics. The Romanian president has already suggested to the Eastern Caspian Sea countries to join the AGRI project with reference to Kazakhstan and most importantly to Turkmenistan, whose president was recently invited to Bucharest. In light of the unresolved demarcation of the Caspian Sea and the obstacles this may pose against the construction of a Trans-Caspian pipeline, the AGRI project could establish the necessary regional infrastructure for transporting Central Asian gas to Europe.

CONCLUSIONS: On the one hand, the AGRI project seems to be advantageous commercially, politically and strategically to Azerbaijan, which is seeking to diversify its energy routes to Europe. It is also highly attractive to

European countries who are trying to reduce their energy dependence on Russia, and is likely to be completed sooner than the Nabucco gas pipeline which is still searching for sufficient gas supply. Yet, Azerbaijan needs to consider several regional parameters and political priorities, since energy export it is its main foreign policy tool. Neighboring two strong and ambitious actors like Russia and Turkey, Azerbaijan is forced to continue its balanced regional game to avoid angering both of them simultaneously. Since Turkey is a more important partner for Azerbaijan than is Russia, the realization of AGRI depends on the evolution of Azerbaijani-Turkish relations and more specifically, on Baku's ability to ensure Ankara that the second stage of the Southern Energy Corridor will transit Turkish territory.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Inessa Baban is a Ph.D. candidate in geopolitics at Paris-Sorbonne University. She is a former visiting scholar at the Center for Strategic Studies under the President of Azerbaijan.



(Euractiv)

FEW OPTIONS FOR THE KREMLIN IN ITS FIGHT AGAINST A DIVIDED NORTH CAUCASUS MILITANT MOVEMENT

Gregory Zalasky and Dylan Myles-Primakoff

On the morning of October 19, as Russia's Minister of Internal Affairs was preparing to meet Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov at the Parliament building in the Chechen capital of Grozny, militants stormed the Parliament compound with assault rifles, RPGs, and suicide vests in an attack that left six killed and seventeen others wounded. This bold assault on one of the region's most significant government institutions was the product of a developing schism within the region's insurgency, which, rather than weakening the insurgent movement, foreshadows a new challenge for a government that appears to have few ideas for addressing the longstanding problem of violence in the North Caucasus.

BACKGROUND: The principle militant organization carrying out attacks in the North Caucasus and other parts of Russia is the Caucasus Emirate, a movement with the stated goal of creating an independent Islamic state covering the entire North Caucasus. Developments in the insurgency's internal politics threaten a new outbreak of violence throughout the region. Doku Umarov has led the Caucasus Emirate movement since 2007, but in recent months one of his former subordinates, Khusein Gakayev, has challenged his authority. The intra-militant dispute has played out through the release of video statements and high profile attacks against civilian and government targets.

As Umarov and Gakayev battle for control of the Caucasus Emirate, it is necessary to assess Russia's recent attempts to quell violence across the North Caucasus. In 2007, then-President Vladimir Putin appointed Ramzan Kadyrov as President of Chechnya. Kadyrov, himself a former militant and son of the assassinated former President, has used brutal tactics to suppress violence in Chechnya. In response, Russian federal authorities have awarded

Kadyrov with huge amounts of financial support that allowed him to largely rebuild the war-torn capital and embark on prestige projects, such as the construction of Europe's largest mosque.

Despite the Kremlin's official announcement in April 2009 that it ended 'counter-terrorist operations' in Chechnya, violence continues to occur throughout the North Caucasus. Widespread unemployment and distrust of Russian rule have made the region a fertile ground for recruiting insurgents, particularly in the regions of Ingushetia, Dagestan and Karbardino-Balkariya, where violence has increased rapidly over the past two years. More recently, the Kremlin has tried a new, region-wide approach intended to attack a root cause of the insurgency by addressing the lack of economic development that has left the unemployment rates in some regions extremely high – over 50 percent in Ingushetia, and over 35 percent in Chechnya.

The new approach included the creation of the North Caucasian Federal District, which was carved out of the Southern Federal District in January 2010. The new political entity allowed



(Musa Sadulayev/AP)

federal officials to implement a region-wide policy for addressing endemic socio-economic problems. Toward this goal, Medvedev appointed Aleksandr Khloponin as the region's first Presidential Envoy, thus giving him the task of turning around the dismal economic situation and thereby undercutting the militant movement. Khloponin is not a strongman in the Kadyrov mold, but rather a politician and businessman from Krasnoyarsk Krai. Khloponin, however, has failed to produce tangible results, as the region's economy continues to struggle and the rate of violence remains high. In July, Khloponin released a detailed long-term plan for the socio-economic development of the region through 2025, but the Kremlin seems to lack the necessary patience for the region to reap any of the potential long-term benefits. Officials are well aware that with the upcoming 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, a highly visible insurgency in the region would be an embarrassment for Russia on the global stage. In November, Medvedev used a public meeting with Khloponin to express his displeasure and threaten changes to the region's leadership.

IMPLICATIONS: The divide within the Caucasus Emirate began after a bizarre episode

in which Umarov released and then quickly retracted an internet video announcing his retirement. Subsequently, several of his highest-ranking lieutenants, including Khusein Gakayev, have renounced their allegiance to Umarov. The string of recent high-profile attacks indicates that Gakayev and Umarov are competing to show off their capabilities, inspire potential recruits and acquire funding. On August 29, militants stormed Kadyrov's birthplace and stronghold in the village of Tsenteroy, an audacious attack that killed as many as 15 members of Kadyrov's private security force and for which Gakayev took credit. Less than two weeks later, a suicide bomber attacked a busy market in central Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Ossetia-Alania, killing 19 civilians and wounding over 200. An Ingush militant leader under Umarov's command claimed responsibility for the attack. Most recently, the October 19 attack on the Chechen Parliament – one of the most heavily secured sites in the entire region – was attributed by security services to Gakayev, suggesting that he has one-upped Umarov.

Moreover, the split between Umarov and Gakayev is not only a contest for personal power; it also represents a struggle over the ideological foundation of the insurgency in the North Caucasus. During his time as the leader of the Caucasus Emirate, Umarov has aligned the militancy with the global jihad movement and has sought to establish a regional Emirate governed by Islamic law. His tactics for achieving his political goals involve attacks against civilians as evidenced by the September market bombing in Vladikavkaz. Gakayev, on the other hand, seems to be following a more

nationalist path that mirrors the goals of his most prominent supporter, Akhmad Zakayev, the exiled leader of Chechnya's separatist government. It is also important to note that the attacks attributed to Gakayev have not targeted civilians, but symbols of Kadyrov's strength in Chechnya (Tsenteroy and Chechnya's Parliament). Recent events show that the Caucasus Emirate is split in terms of leadership, ideology and tactics, but the schism is certainly not a source of weakness.

It is also apparent that the Russian government has few options available for quelling the violence. The Kadyrov model, which stresses heavy handed, often violent, local control, cannot be easily exported to neighboring provinces because it requires a strong personality with a pre-established base of support. In addition, the recent attacks in Tsenteroy and against Chechnya's Parliament building have shown that the Kadyrov approach cannot effectively neutralize threats and could in fact be creating more militants. The Khloponin model, which focuses on socio-economic development throughout the region, has the potential to establish long-term stability in the region. However, it does not appear that the Kremlin has the political will to patiently pursue this type of approach, especially with the Olympics quickly approaching.

Daily low scale attacks punctuated by occasional high profile assault will likely remain the status quo throughout the North Caucasus. Russia will likely continue to launch counter-terrorism operations as it has for years, but there is a dearth of new policy options. However, one possible strategy for the Russian government is, in fact, an old approach. Recently, Russian officials at the federal and provincial level have been quick to blame Gakayev and his nationalist faction for attacks

and to note that Umarov is shrinking in terms of capabilities and influence. During the Second Chechen War, Russian officials successfully co-opted former nationalist militants, Ramzan Kadyrov and his father, to govern Chechnya. The current fight amongst nationalist and religious extremists could provide Russian officials with a narrow opportunity to elevate and eventually co-opt nationalists. A related tactic may be implemented across the North Caucasus in the near future. In October, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* noted that the Russian army is considering the deployment of mono-ethnic divisions across the North Caucasus. The effort echoes the creation of all-Chechen 'Vostok' and 'Zapad' divisions during the Second Chechen War. However, it is uncertain whether Russia will launch a large scale effort to nationalize the fight against militants in the North Caucasus, but it could be one of the few options left at its disposal.

CONCLUSIONS: While the Russian government has always struggled with political challenges and violence in the North Caucasus, the recent split within the Caucasus Emirate presents a set of problems without a clear path forward. Khloponin's economic program stalled from the start and the Kremlin is expressing doubts and a lack of patience. In addition, Kadyrov's heavy-handed approach to governance has failed to establish a haven of stability and security. As the Russian government searches for strategies to bring security to the region in advance of the 2014 Olympics, it appears that the only policy options are old ones that have already produced meager results.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Gregory Zalasky is a Senior Analyst and Dylan Myles-Primakoff is a Subject Matter Expert on the Emerging Threats Project at Georgetown University.

FIELD REPORTS

TAJIK AUTHORITIES RESTRAIN LOCAL MEDIA

Tavus Rejepova

The authorities of Tajikistan have embarked on using different tactics to quell domestic media by accusing private media outlets of ‘inaccurate’ reporting on the recent clashes between suspected militants and government forces in September. On October 4, Defense Minister Sherali Khairulloev released a public statement, which was published by the state-run news agency Khovar. The Minister’s statement termed the media reporting on the government’s response to the earlier militant attack in Khujand, as well as the military operation in Rasht Valley, as “disloyal” and contributing to instability in Tajikistan. The U.S. State Department’s press release from November 4 noted that in mid-October, the Deputy Minister of Transport and Communications sent a letter to several internet service providers, ordering them to block four of these websites in order to “protect the nation’s information security”.

Frustrated over the increasing pressure from the authorities, media representatives claim that instead of addressing their incapability to prevent violence, the authorities are trying to silence the media and accusing it of “supporting terrorism”.

“This is an attempt upon the professional rights of journalists and a violation of the constitutional right of citizens on access to information” the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) cited the joint statement of 17 media organizations, including the National Association of Independent Mass-Media in Tajikistan, released on September 27. This statement was made in response to the Defense Minister’s direct accusations against private media outlets. Reports from different local sources indicated that certain media outlets such as the

independent Avesta news agency as well as the websites ferghana.ru, avesta.tj and centrasia.ru have experienced systematic blockage and access problems.

Although intimidation of the media is not a new phenomenon in Tajikistan, the level of pressure on private media outlets and limitations in people’s access to information have been mounting this year. It is important to note that in February this year, two judges of Tajikistan’s Supreme Court sued the three main newspapers “Asia Plus”, “Farazh” and “Ozodagon” on charges of defaming the dignity of the judges and causing moral damage by publishing the content of a press conference held on a very controversial Supreme Court ruling. One month prior to this incident, the government put a new law into effect, which allows state bodies to charge fees for providing access to government information to the media and ordinary citizens. The fees were set as high as 35 somoni (US\$ 7.97) per page of information requested. Depending on the urgency and relevance of information, the decree also gave the respective information holders or state officials the discretionary power to determine the price.

In early September, the Tajik authorities have also decided to revise the existing legislation on the press and other mass media and commissioned an ad hoc committee for deliberations before the revised version goes to voting in Parliament. Representatives of the media and civil society claim that certain provisions of the legislature are still very broad and that the deliberation process needs to consider public opinion.

The Reporters Without Borders 2010 Press Freedom Index, released on October 22, 2010, ranked

Tajikistan as number 115, dropping from 106 two years ago. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) strongly criticized the Tajik authorities' mistreatment of independent newspapers and the general state of deteriorating media freedom and access to information in the country. "The practices of blocking web sites, preventing newspapers from printing and launching tax or prosecutorial inspections ... are serious non-compliance with Tajikistan's OSCE media freedom commitments", the senior OSCE official on Freedom of Media, Dunja Mijatovic, was quoted as saying in an official letter of concern to Tajik Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi. On November 4, the U.S. Department of State also released an official statement raising a "serious concern" over

the recent developments in Tajikistan, which appear to limit media access and media freedom. Local journalists claim that the press freedom in Tajikistan has worsened especially over the past few months.

It appears that the country's Ministry of Defense is now fighting two battles at the same time, one trying to prevent new outbreaks of violence after the three recent incidents, and one seeking to control conflict reporting in the media. In spite of the authorities' use of different tactics of intimidation, private media outlets and news agencies refuse to give up the struggle and have promised to litigate the stand-off in the country's Supreme Court.

BAKIEV AND ALLIES TRIED FOR MURDER IN BISHKEK

Joldosh Osmonov

The trial against former President Bakiev and his allies, who are charged with the murder of 77 people during the April unrest, has begun. While everyone agrees on bringing the guilty accountable to court, many disagree with the government's attempts to turn it into a show trial.

On November 17, the long-awaited trial for the murder of dozens of protesters during the April events finally started. 28 people are accused of killing 77 protesters in front of the White House in Bishkek during the civil disturbances that led to the collapse of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev's regime. Six of them, including former President Bakiev and former Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov, are being tried in absentia. Others include former Defense Minister Bakyt Kalyev, former General Prosecutor Nurlan Tursunkulov, former head of the Presidential Administration Kanybek Joroev, former head of the Presidential Secretariat Oksana Malevannaya, and commanders and soldiers of two Special Forces units, "Alfa" and "Arstan", under the country's National Security Service and the State Guard Service respectively.

The most celebrated criminal case in Kyrgyzstan's history comprises 18 defending lawyers, 7 state prosecutors, 306 victims, 78 legal representatives of those who died, and 129 witnesses. The court hearings are open to the public and are being held in the Palace of Sports, the country's largest sports complex, which can seat thousands of people. The authorities deployed 300 policemen to maintain order at the court and around the venue.

The first day of the court proceedings was highly emotional and resulted in incidents that questioned the appropriateness of conducting the trial in such circumstances. During the hearing, the relatives of the murdered protesters attempted to attack the accused and their lawyers. The whole process was attended by constant threats and insults against the defendants by the victims. The judge, Jakypbek Bektemirov, instead of bringing order to the court house, was unable to resist the emotionally-charged crowd.

Right after "Day One" of the judicial hearings, 15 of the defenders made a public statement refusing to

participate in the court sessions until the court could guarantee their rights and security. Thereby, the session scheduled for the next day was postponed due to the absence of the defenders. In response, judge Bektemirov and the General Prosecutor's office made a joint address to the Ministry of Justice, demanding measures against the lawyers, going so far as to threatening their disbarment.

Meanwhile, a number of local human rights organizations asked the interim government to stop taking vengeance on their political opponents and stated that the legal proceedings were no better than a "show trial". Human rights organizations are claiming that the first day of the trial provided ample evidence that a fair and impartial trial is impossible. The Committee of Civil Control, a well respected human rights organization, said in its statement that "Human rights defenders are outraged by the trial and we call on to the country's leadership to change the trial location in order to avoid violence and conflict".

Despite widespread appeals, the interim government seems determined to carry it out in this fashion. The same day as the first hearing was held, Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbaeva awarded special "medals of distinction" to the most active protesters of the April events and called the trial's critics "enemies of the Kyrgyz people."

Such initiatives and statements by the president have caused a wide range of reactions. While most people agree that the guilty should be brought to trial, many feel that an unethical show trial is not an acceptable response. Some see the president's statement as an attempt to influence the court's rulings. Cholpon Jakupova, head of the "Adilet" legal center, considers it a "President's directive" to sentence the defendants.

The anxiety of human rights defenders is shared by a number of international organizations and diplomatic missions. The U.S. Embassy in Bishkek has issued a statement expressing its concern regarding the conditions under which the trial is held. The statement puts into question the necessity of choosing the public site as the place for judicial proceedings and called upon the Kyrgyz government to take all necessary measures to provide secure and fair trials.

In addition, the defending side contends that the investigation was one-sided due to the political nature of the case and constant pressure from the relatives who have been continually organizing protests and demonstrations throughout the period of the investigation. However, according to local political analyst Marat Kazakpaev, the trial risks not coming to a close. "Due to the fact that the case is clearly politicized, the trial might drag on for a long time, or even might not finish at all," he concluded.

UZBEKISTAN'S PRESIDENT PROPOSES DEMOCRATIC REFORMS

Erkin Akhmadov

On November 12, during a joint meeting with the lower and upper chambers of Parliament, Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov introduced a concept for further strengthening of democratic reforms and civil society. As part of the concept, the president proposed several legislative initiatives in different socio-political and economic spheres. While only a few of the proposed changes have as

yet been adopted by the Parliament, the initiative per se is viewed as a positive democratic development in Uzbekistan.

The proposed initiative is directed at developing and strengthening the branches of state authority, resolving vital state issues, increasing the role of political parties, improving the legal system and

electoral legislation, developing civil society institutions and mass media, and further conducting democratic market reforms and economic liberalization.

The president proposed several amendments to the Constitution to strengthen the branches of state authority. Specifically, he proposed to expand the powers of the Parliament and introduce a new order for the nomination and approval of the prime minister. This was previously done by the president, while the new initiative will grant that right to the party gaining a majority in Parliament. In addition, the president proposed to grant the Parliament a vote of no-confidence in the prime minister. The amendment would also abolish the right of the president to decide on issues which are within the competence of the Cabinet of Ministers. Another proposed amendment stipulates granting temporary presidential responsibility and authority to the Senate chairman in case the president is unable to perform his duties, with subsequent conduct of presidential elections within three months.

As a part of reforming the judicial system, Karimov proposed to adopt a new version of the Administrative Code, which would “reflect tendencies on decriminalization of the criminal legislation and conversion of certain offenses from criminal into administrative jurisdiction”. In addition, in the criminal-procedural code he proposed to abolish the authority of the court to institute criminal cases; to renew the law “On normative legal acts” and adopt a law “On investigation and search operations”; to develop legal mechanisms to enable legal bodies to control and supervise state bodies and law enforcement structures.

Underlining the importance of free mass media and their role in enabling freedom in the information sphere, Karimov stated that it is necessary to have “the right arrangement of priorities in relations between mass media and state authorities, including resolution of such issues as elimination of economic mechanisms of control over mass media, closure of information sources, and pressure that many mass

media editorial boards suffer from state authorities and administrative structures”. Thus, he proposed to adopt several laws and amend the existing ones to regulate public information procedures, to enable promotion of mass media activities, and to expand the use of modern information technologies.

Further, the president highlighted the importance of civil society institutions in democratization. For developing and strengthening of their role, he proposed to adopt a law “On social partnership”, which would provide mechanisms for cooperation between civil society and state structures in implementing programs of socio-economic development, humanitarian problems, protection of rights, freedoms and interests of different population strata, and other spheres.

As for the issues of market reforms and economic liberalization, the president emphasized the importance of protecting private property. To support small businesses and entrepreneurship, he proposed to introduce a law that would eliminate excessive bureaucratic barriers in acquiring different types of business permissions, and to legally establish new forms of business that fully corresponds with the national traditions of engaging in family business. The president also suggested regulations of monopolistic activities, to expand the non-state sector, and to attract private investors to the leading economic sectors of the country.

On November 15, amendments to article 98 of the Constitution were adopted concerning the proposition of the president to expand the powers of the Parliament. Thus, the prime minister is from now on nominated by the party that gained a majority in the legislative chamber. After consideration by the president, the candidacy is directed to the Parliament. The candidacy should be approved by more than half the deputies from both the lower and upper chambers. The amendment also stipulates the spheres of competence of the Cabinet of Ministers and the right of the Parliament to vote non-confidence in the prime-minister.

One can only hope that the rest of the proposed measures for democratic reform in Uzbekistan will

be adopted in the nearest future. For instance, Duane Butcher, the chargé d'affaires ad interim of the U.S. in Uzbekistan, stated that the U.S. will support Uzbekistan in all its initiatives of strengthening democratic governance, rule of law,

and increasing the role of civil society. He also mentioned the possibility of involving U.S. experts for contributing to the process of developing changes to the legislature, or providing trainings on the role of civil society and mass media.

U.S. AND KAZAKHSTAN SIGN NEW AIR TRANSIT AGREEMENT

Georgiy Voloshin

At a time when U.S. armed forces are struggling to curb violence in Afghanistan, one of the five Central Asian Republics, Kazakhstan, which is now chairing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, has reached out a helping hand by sticking to the promises given by President Nazarbayev at the April 2010 Washington Nuclear Summit.

On November 12, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, Andrew J. Shapiro, and Kazakhstan's Ambassador to the U.S., Erlan Idrissov, signed a new transit agreement enabling U.S. armed forces to overfly Kazakh territory on their way to Afghanistan. According to officials of the U.S. State Department and the Pentagon's military experts, such bilateral cooperation with Kazakhstan will permit considerable reduction of the flying time from the U.S. to battlefields in Afghanistan. Previously, the U.S. air force had to fly first to the Ramstein Air Base in Germany and then go south along the Arabian Gulf from where it could reach Afghanistan via Pakistan.

The opportunity provided by Kazakhstan is aimed at diminishing the United States' dependence on Pakistan, which is characterized by internal instability and even accused by some of complicity with the Taliban insurgency. The new route will enable the U.S. to transport lethal goods to Afghanistan in slightly over 12 hours by passing close to the North Pole and then overflying both

Russia and Kazakhstan. The landing site will now be located at the Bagram Air Base.

“Conflict and instability in Afghanistan are threats to the region and the world. Bilateral cooperation, as exemplified concretely by this Air Transit Agreement, helps to counter these negative trends by enabling progress on our common efforts regarding the security, stabilization, and reconstruction of Afghanistan”, said the Joint Statement on the U.S.-Kazakhstan Air Transit Agreement.

Earlier this year, Kazakhstan and the U.S. concluded another agreement on the overland transportation of non-lethal cargo to Afghanistan for the purpose of supporting NATO-led combat operations there. This agreement supplemented a set of similar arrangements agreed to by Russia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, all of which had previously consented to establishing a direct and less vulnerable transport route across the Eurasian landmass up to the Uzbek-Afghan border.

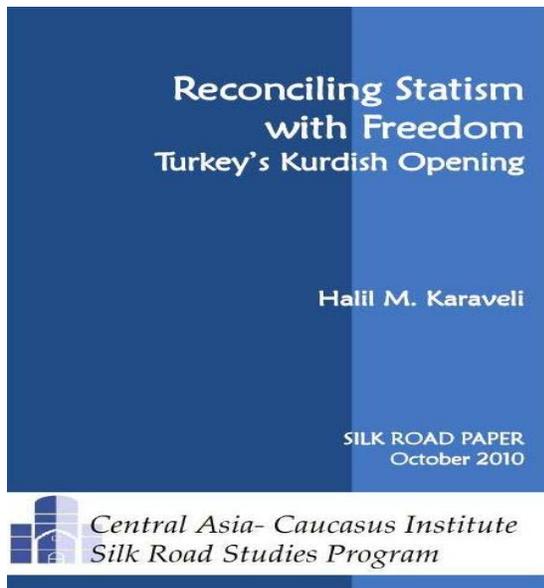
It should be noted that Kazakhstan, acting as the current OSCE chairman, made the stabilization of Afghanistan one of the major objectives of its multilateral diplomacy. In July 2010, Nazarbayev addressed the OSCE Informal Ministerial Meeting in Almaty where he outlined his country's commitment to help the Afghan government rebuild its failed economy and normalize the domestic situation.

Earlier, in November 2009, less than a month before the Kazakh Minister for foreign affairs Kanat Saudabayev took over the OSCE chairmanship from his Greek counterpart, Kazakhstan pledged to allocate US\$ 50 million to Afghanistan to train 1,000 Afghan students in such sectors as agriculture, medicine, school teaching and engineering. It also donated more than US\$ 4 million for the reconstruction of schools, hospitals, car roads and bridges.

Nazarbayev's recent decision to support the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan with a dozen Kazakh soldiers dispatched to work in the ISAF Headquarters demonstrates the willingness of the Kazakh leadership to become more actively engaged in regional affairs. It is expected that Afghanistan will be one of the top items on the agenda of the upcoming OSCE Summit of the heads of state and government in Astana scheduled for December 1-2 2010. Despite President Obama's unavailability for

this high-level meeting intended to open a new chapter in the OSCE's evolution as a tool of multilateral diplomacy and conflict prevention, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has promised to travel to Astana to present the U.S. position.

Kazakhstan has been a staunch supporter of Operation Enduring Freedom from the very start of combat activities in Afghanistan in 2001. Thanks to Kazakhstan's internal stability and robust economic growth and due to the balanced implementation of a multi-vector diplomacy with regard to major regional powers, it has managed to stay clear of great power quarrels and learned to accommodate Russia, China and the U.S. at the same time. The departure of U.S. troops from the Uzbek Karshi-Khanabad military base in 2005 and the continuing instability in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, which hosts the International Transit Center at Manas, make Kazakhstan an indispensable partner in the stabilization of Afghanistan.



New Silk Road Paper:

***Reconciling Statism with Freedom: Turkey's
Kurdish Opening***

By Halil M. Karaveli

The Silk Road Paper can be downloaded
free at www.silkroadstudies.org.
Hardcopy requests should be addressed to
Paulette Fung at caciz@jhu.edu.

NEWS DIGEST

STANDOFF SIMMERS IN SOUTH KYRGYZSTAN

9 November

At least 20 people were arrested near the southern Osh region of Kyrgyzstan for occupying land illegally, deputy officials in the region said. Around 500 Kyrgyz protesters from the region arrived in the ethnically diverse south during the weekend with plans to divide the area into plots. More protesters arrived Tuesday, saying they wouldn't vacate the area unless the land was distributed among ethnic Kyrgyz. Ethnic violence gripped the southern Kyrgyz cities of Jala-Abad and Osh following an April coup that forced deposed President Kurmanbek Bakiyev to flee the country. Hundreds of people were killed and thousands were displaced in conflicts between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz communities. Kushbek Tezekbaev, a deputy regional governor in Osh, told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that the action of the Kyrgyz group is illegal. "We are demanding that people obey the law," he added. Kyrgyzstan held elections in October. A party loyal to the deposed president was among the five leading groups tasked with forming a new government. Interim President Roza Otunbayeva said last week she thought a new parliament would have its first meeting Nov. 12, though authorities in Bishkek said the legal challenge was in part to blame for a decision to hold off until later this week. (UPI)

US, KAZAKHSTAN SIGN DEAL TO EASE FLIGHTS TO AFGHANISTAN

12 November

The United States and Kazakhstan signed an agreement Friday opening new air transit routes for US troops and supplies flying to Afghanistan, the State Department said. "The agreement enhances a United States-Kazakhstan arrangement, under which the United States began transit flights to Afghanistan across Kazakhstan's airspace in 2001," it said in a statement. "By providing access to new transit routes, Kazakhstan is providing valuable

support to the international effort to defeat the violent extremism in Afghanistan and to ensure Afghanistan's and the region's security," it said. The deal signed in Washington by Andrew Shapiro, assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs and Erlan Idrissov, Kazakhstan's ambassador to Washington, permits US polar routes to Kazakhstan, Shapiro's office said. The move saves time and fuel for the aircraft involved, it added in an e-mail exchange. The deal permits both US military flights and commercial contract flights, it added. (AFP)

KAZAKH GOVERNMENT WANTS SCIENTISTS ABROAD TO RETURN HOME

12 November

The Kazakh government plans to start repatriating Kazakh scientists and researchers who are working abroad, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Kazakh Education and Science Minister Bakhytzhan Zhumagulov said in the Senate on November 12 that there are currently 125 talented Kazakh scientists and researchers on the list of those whom the government wants to return to Kazakhstan. "We have drafted a document addressed to the government that proposes ways to bring home Kazakh scientists who left the country at various times and for various reasons," he said. Zhumagulov said that Russia and China both have similar programs to bring back their expatriates. Hundreds of thousands of Kazakh citizens left Kazakhstan in the 1990s as a result of the deep economic crisis caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union. (RFE/RL)

AFGHANISTAN TALIBS BURNED AN ESCORT OF 12 NATO GASOLINE TANK TRUCKS

15 November

Afghanistan Talibs burned an escort of 12 NATO gasoline tank trucks, the agency reports citing RIA RosBusinessConsulting (RBC). According to RBC, 12 large gasoline tank trucks have been burned. The

escort was attacked by a group of armed insurgents in the suburb of Dzhahal Abad in the Nangarhar Province in the east of the country. Two civilians are among victims. (Kazakhstan Today)

TURKMEN LEADER TOUTS CHINA, IRAN TIES BUT SILENT ON NABUCCO

17 November

The leader of Turkmenistan on Wednesday touted growing energy ties with Iran and China but stayed silent on Europe's proposed Nabucco pipeline aimed at breaking Russia's grip on gas exports. President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, in a written address at the opening of an annual conference in the capital Ashgabat, singled out ties with Tehran and Beijing while also praising a Turkmen-led pipeline project to India through neighbouring Afghanistan. Mention of cooperation with Europe, however, was notably absent from Berdymukhamedov's annual address to the Oil and Gas Turkmenistan conference -- closely watched as a bellweather for the opaque country's thinking. "Exporting natural gas to the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran, our country keeps pipeline modernisation activities at the centre of its attention," the statement said. "Furthermore, alongside conducting negotiations on the construction of a gas pipeline in second direction to China, Turkmenistan spares no effort to launch construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline." Turkmenistan, an isolated but resource-rich Central Asian state located on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, is thought to hold the world's fourth largest reserves of natural gas. Ashgabat has been working to diversify away from its reliance on Soviet-era pipelines through Russia since a pipeline explosion in 2009 ground exports of Turkmen gas to a halt and soured ties with the Kremlin. At the height of the row with Russia last year, Berdymukhamedov pleased the crowd of mostly Western energy executives by throwing his weight behind the Nabucco pipeline project, a trans-Caspian pipeline to Europe aimed at breaking Moscow's stranglehold on Central Asian energy exports. But since then Ashgabat has opened a 7,000-kilometre natural gas pipeline to energy-hungry China and boosted exports to neighbouring Iran while progress on Nabucco has remained mired in diplomatic wrangling. (AFP)

CLINTON TO LEAD US DELEGATION TO KAZAKHSTAN SUMMIT

18 November

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will attend the December 1-2 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit in Kazakhstan, a US diplomat said Wednesday. "Secretary Clinton plans to lead the US delegation to the OSCE summit," Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake said in prepared testimony to a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee. Blake noted that the gathering, to be held in Kazakhstan's capital Astana, would be the first ever in Central Asia. "We hope that this event will shine a light on positive developments in Central Asia, and the role that the OSCE has played, and can play in the future, in promoting its principles throughout the OSCE region," he added. Kazakhstan took over the leadership of the OSCE on January 1, the first former Soviet republic to chair the transatlantic security body, despite its poor record in human rights and democracy. But Blake said the country had done "a very credible job," notably in troubled neighbor Kyrgyzstan where the organization "has been at the forefront of efforts to promote peace, democracy and reconciliation." Kazakhstan's long-serving strongman President Nursultan Nazarbayev's current term in office expires in 2012, but in 2007 the parliament ruled that he should be able to stand for president as many times as he liked, as the country's first head of state. Kazakhstan ranked 142 out of 175 countries on media watchdog Reporters Without Borders' annual worldwide press freedom index last year. The last OSCE summit was held in Istanbul in 1999 and concluded with the adoption of a common declaration and a charter for European security. Meanwhile, Clinton said she would travel to the Gulf Arab state of Bahrain in early December. She announced the trip at the start of a meeting Wednesday with Bahrain's Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Mohamed bin Mubarak al-Khalifa, but gave no details. (AFP)

AZERBAIJAN FREES 'DONKEY' SATIRE BLOGGER ADNAN HAJIZADE

18 November

A court in Azerbaijan has freed an opposition blogger who posted a satirical video online of a pantomime donkey giving a press conference. Adnan Hajizade and another man, Emin Milli, were jailed for two years on hooliganism charges in

November 2009. The two men and their supporters claim the charges were fabricated to stifle their anti-government campaigns. A court ruled on Thursday that Mr Hajizade could serve the remainder of his sentence as a suspended term. Mr Hajizade and Mr Milli were arrested after a scuffle in a restaurant in Baku, the Azeri capital, in July 2009, soon after the video was posted. The film quickly became a symbol of perceived intolerance of freedom of expression in Azerbaijan. The campaign for their release was taken up by President Barack Obama in September this year when he urged the Azeri authorities to free the men. After he was freed on Thursday, Mr Hajizade appealed for the release of fellow blogger Emin Milli. A court is expected to hear an appeal against his sentence in the coming days. Human rights groups say oil-rich Azerbaijan has grown increasingly authoritarian in recent years. (BBC)

TURKMENISTAN PLEDGES GAS FOR NABUCCO

19 November

Turkmenistan's First Deputy Prime Minister Baymurad Khojamukhamedov has said his country is ready to provide some 40 billion cubic meters of natural gas to the European Union-backed Nabucco pipeline project. Speaking at the "Oil and Gas Turkmenistan-2010" forum, Khojamukhamedov told some 700 delegates from 36 countries there would be an agreement on constructing a trans-Caspian pipeline along the bottom of the sea to transport Turkmen gas across the Caspian where it would be fed into pipelines linking up with the Nabucco pipeline. Khojamukhamedov noted a key pipeline from gas fields in eastern Turkmenistan to the Caspian shore was already under construction. Turkmenistan has often spoken about Nabucco as part of the country's diversification scheme but Ashgabat has not yet signed any contracts committing itself to the project. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA ADMITS NO PROGRESS IN VOLATILE CAUCASUS

19 November

President Dmitry Medvedev said on Friday that Russia had failed to curb violence in the mainly Muslim North Caucasus, highlighting the Kremlin's struggle to contain a spreading Islamist insurgency. A decade after Moscow drove separatists out of power in the second of two wars in Chechnya, the North Caucasus is plagued by near daily violence, where poverty-stricken youths fueled by jihad (holy

war) want to carve out a separate, Islamic state."We must frankly admit that it (situation) has practically not improved," Medvedev told the Kremlin's envoy to the North Caucasus, Alexander Khloponin, as well as a slew of officers from the police and the Federal Security Service (FSB), the successor to the KGB. Medvedev named the region -- a patchwork of mostly Muslim republics along the country's southern fringe -- Russia's biggest domestic problem last year. "The killing of civilians, spiritual leaders and law enforcement officers, shootouts and bombs are not going down in number," he said in Yessentuki, which sits at the foot of the Caucasus mountains in the Christian-majority Stavropol region. Across the North Caucasus, 259 state agents and 112 civilians were killed in January-November of this year mostly from militant activity, according to terrorism experts at the U.S.-based Monterey Institute for International Studies in California. The institute says up to 351 Islamist fighters were killed in the same period. Russia's National Anti-Terror Committee, part of the FSB, said last month that attacks in Chechnya and Ingushetia were down by nearly a half. Medvedev blamed the police for twisting statistics on the number of attacks in the region, calling them "utter rubbish". Multi-ethnic Dagestan on the Caspian Sea, which has a population of 2.5 million, has overtaken neighbouring Chechnya as the epicentre of violence in the insurgency. Twin suicide bomb attacks on the Moscow metro in March, which killed 40 people, were blamed on two women from Dagestan and were considered to be the first suicide bombs carried out by non-Chechens in the Russian heartland. After a string of scandals involving corruption and violence within the police this year, Medvedev pledged to reform the force and cut the 1.4 million staff at the Interior Ministry, which provides for the police, by 20 percent nationwide. However critics say there has been little substantial change so far, and Medvedev admitted in July that his administration had made almost no progress in fighting corruption. (Reuters)

TWO HANDMADE BOMBS UNARMED IN DAGESTAN

19 November

Two 1-kilogram-TNT bombs were unarmed in Kaspiysk, Dagestan, on Friday, the information center of the National Counter Terrorism Committee told Itar-Tass. A tenant informed the police about a suspicious plastic bag with sticking out wires at 12, Alferov Street, at 1:50 p.m. Moscow

time. The area was blocked, and tenants were evacuated. "Employees of the Dagestani department of the Federal Security Service confirmed that the plastic bag contained two bombs made from champagne bottles filled with explosives. The bombs were unarmed with the use of a water gun at 5:15 p.m. Moscow time," he said. "The bombs were preliminary estimated at one kilogram of TNT each," the source said. No one was hurt, the source noted. Forensic experts keep working on the location, and a criminal case will be opened soon. The Committee thanked local residents for their vigilance and cooperation with the police. "The prevention of militant attacks in Dagestan has become a common cause of everyone interested in sociopolitical stability in the republic," the source said. A source at the Dagestani Interior Ministry told Itar-Tass that the bombs were found near a polytechnic college. (Itar-Tass)

BAKU SUMMIT OF HEADS OF NEAR-CASPIAN STATES STARTED ITS WORK 19 November

Third Summit of Heads of the Near-Caspian States started its work in the capital of Azerbaijan. It is taking place in the President's residence near the center of Baku, the agency reports citing ITAR-TASS. The Presidents of all five near-Caspian countries are participating in the summit: Russia - Dmitry Medvedev, Azerbaijan - Ilham Aliyev, Iran - Mahmud Ahmadinezhad, Kazakhstan - Nursultan Nazarbayev, and Turkmenistan - Gurbanguly Berdymuhammedov. The Presidents of the states of Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan arrived in the capital of Azerbaijan in the first half of the day and the President of Iran has been in Baku since Wednesday. Two documents are planned to be signed after a three-hour discussion: the agreement on safety in the Caspian Sea and the presidents' joint statement. The agreement in the field of safety in the Caspian Sea is aimed against the new challenges and threats in the region and assumes cooperation of the coastal countries in struggle against transnational criminality, terrorism, distribution of weapons of mass destruction, drug trafficking, and poaching. (Kazakhstan Today)

GEORGIA OFFERS 20 INSTRUCTORS FOR AFGHAN ARMY 21 November

Georgia, which has 950-strong combat unit in Afghanistan, has offered to send 20 instructors to help train the Afghan forces, the Georgian Ministry

of Defense said. It said that President Saakashvili voiced the proposal at a meeting of leaders from countries contributing to the Afghan operation on a sideline of NATO Lisbon summit on November 20. "The proposal made by Georgia today is very important," Bacho Akhalaia, the Georgian defense minister, said on November 20. "We offered to send Georgian military instructors who will provide training for the Afghan military in various professions; it might be infantry component, or aviation," Mr. Akhalaia stated (Civil Georgia)

THREE DEFENDANTS SKIP KYRGYZ EX-PRESIDENT'S TRIAL

22 November

Three defendants on trial along with former Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev have failed to appear in court and the authorities do not know their whereabouts, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. The three -- former Prosecutor-General Nurlan Tursunkulov, Bakiev's former chief of staff Kanybek Joroev, and Oksana Malevannaya, the former head of Bakiev's presidential office -- are among 28 people on trial in connection with the deaths of antigovernment protesters in April. The trial in Bishkek's Sports Palace resumed today after it was adjourned last week following rowdy scenes in which some relatives of the victims threatened the defendants, their lawyers, and family members. Our correspondent said today's session was markedly more peaceful. But after the three failed to show up, prosecutors told the court they were also not at their homes, where they had been under house arrest. The judge said the three would be tried in absentia. Bakiev and five other defendants, including one of his brothers and his eldest son, are already being tried in absentia. The judge also turned down a request by 16 of the defendants to be transferred from jail to house arrest. (RFE/RL)

CHINA TO SET UP FACTORIES IN KAZAKHSTAN

22 November

China is planning to put its cheap labour force to work in a new 70,000-strong factory town across the border in Kazakhstan, in a move which will heighten fears of a land grab in the Central Asian country. The factories will be built on a 6,000 hectare Special Economic Zone (SEZ) which Kazakhstan plans to launch next year as part of its \$1.6bn land port and trade centre at Khorgos, a border town 220 miles north-east of Almaty, the Kazakh commercial capital. "A Chinese factory

from Urumqi will be able to build a factory on the Special Economic Zone," said Askhat Mukhamediev, director of the Khorgos centre. "Goods which come from China before will be brought into the SEZ in the form of raw materials. It will be produced in the SEZ, and exported under the brand 'Made in Kazakhstan'. The use of Chinese manpower will be permitted." Next month, Kazakhstan's parliament is expected to pass a new law on SEZs, which will detail the legal status of this foreign labour, making it easier to bring in workers. "These are strategically-planned steps for expansion from the Chinese side," said Murat Auezov, a former Kazakh ambassador to Beijing, who has long warned of Chinese designs on Kazakhstan's territories. "They will use the production of these goods as a narcotic, because Kazakhstan will want to continue production, and will increase it with the use of Chinese labour. The next step will be expansion of SEZ, and then Kazakhstan will need to provide additional territories." In January, Mr Auezov played a key role in protests against a Chinese proposal to lease 100 hectares of Kazakh land for farming, which forced the Kazakh government to back down. Mr Mukhamediev said the use of Chinese manufacturing expertise and labour would help fulfil Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev's plan to diversify his country's exports beyond raw materials. (Telegraph)

PRIME MINISTER OF KAZAKHSTAN CONFIRMED ARRANGEMENT ON JOINT ACCESSION TO WTO WITH RUSSIA

22 November

The Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Karim Masimov, confirmed the arrangement on introduction of Kazakhstan to the World Trade Organization (WTO) along with Russia and on identical conditions. Karim Masimov informed on Friday in an interview to ITAR-TASS after the session of the supreme body of the Customs Union at the level of heads of governments in St. Petersburg, the agency reports. "We have an arrangement that Kazakhstan and Russia will access WTO simultaneously and on identical conditions, which was confirmed today," K. Masimov said. "All parties confirmed these arrangements," he underlined. According to ITAR-TASS, the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, answering a question on disagreements at the negotiations at the joint press conference, following the results of the session, said: "There are no

disagreements. It is a difficult process of coordination of interests." He also underlined that all arrangements reached at the level of three countries are in line with the WTO requirements. (Kazakhstan Today)

TURKMEN PRESIDENT: CONSENT NEEDED FOR PIPELINE CONSTRUCTION UNDER CASPIAN SEABED

22 November

Turkmen President Gurbangulu Berdimuhammedov said Turkmenistan firmly believes that pipeline projects under the Caspian seabed should be implemented only with the consent of those countries, through which sections of these pipelines will pass, local media reported today. He added that the implementation of such projects is possible on the condition that they "will strictly comply with the highest international environmental norms and standards," the Neytralniy Turkmenistan newspaper reported. The Turkmen leader emphasized that the Caspian Sea is a unique natural body of water, whose fate should be of particular concern to all littoral countries. Focusing on the significance of the third Caspian summit in this context, Berdimuhammedov instructed the relevant high-ranking officials to study thoroughly all issues related to problems on the Caspian and the intensification of an effective partnership in the region. "The question of defining the legal status of the Caspian should be resolved solely on the basis of a consensus among the parties and the optimum balance of interests based on universally recognized norms of international law," the Vatan newspaper quoted the president as saying. Turkmenistan, along with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Iran, borders the Caspian, which is rich in hydrocarbons and bioresources. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was necessary to adopt a new agreement on the legal status of the reservoir. The EU believes that Turkmenistan - given its immense gas resources ranking the biggest in the world after Russia, Iran and Qatar - will be able to guarantee energy security through resource diversification. The Trans-Caspian Pipeline, which would link Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan and pass through Turkey to European markets, is regarded as a prospective project in this regard. The Nabucco gas pipeline project, whose assets have grown considerably since major oil and gas companies from the United States and the West arrived in Turkmenistan, is mostly linked with this direction, experts say. Recently, an announcement was made

that agreements on the mining and exploration of oil and gas resources on the Turkmen shelf may be concluded with Chevron and Total. Nabucco shareholder's the German RWE has contracts with the Turkmen government. Western observers note that the start of the construction of the East-West gas pipeline, which will connect the reserves of the field with the east Caspian coast, gave a recovery to this process. Recently, Ashgabat announced its readiness to supply 40 billion cubic meters of gas per year for Nabucco, including resources from Yoloten and the Turkmen section of the Caspian Sea where the Malaysian Petronas operates. According to recently released data from the Turkmengeologiya, the resources at Yoloten, which is among the top five biggest fields in the world, are roughly 21 trillion cubic meters of gas. (Trend)

AFGHANISTAN SHIFTS FROM RECONCILIATION AFTER TALIBAN IMPOSTOR REVEALED

23 November

After a man some officials believe to be simply a Pakistani shopkeeper duped NATO and members of the Afghan government into thinking he was one a top Taliban leader, the focus in Afghanistan is shifting from reconciliation and back to the mechanics of the war. Speaking to reporters on Tuesday morning, the day news of the Taliban impostor broke, Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai was less interested in talking about meetings with the Taliban and more focused on what the NATO summit in Lisbon meant for his country. Indeed, there remain serious questions about the legitimacy of talks with the Taliban following the revelation that NATO and Afghan officials had actually been dealing with a fake. NATO and Afghan leaders reportedly thought they were in talks with Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, the Taliban No. 2. Only after flying him from Pakistan to Afghanistan, reportedly providing him with large sums of money, and arranging meetings with key leaders did they realize he was just an ordinary Pakistani shopkeeper posing as the high-level Taliban leader. Some speculate, however, that he may have been a Pakistani spy or an undercover Taliban trying to see what was on the table by posing as a high-level Taliban leader. Taliban leadership have categorically denied any participation in talks since they began, and on Tuesday Karzai denied reports that he'd ever met with Mr. Mansour or anyone claiming to be him. NATO officials say this underscores the difficulty

of negotiating with the Taliban. The High Peace Council, appointed by Karzai in September to negotiate with the Taliban, has been widely criticized for lacking anyone with serious ties to the Taliban – a weakness that this latest incident underscores. (csmonitor.com)

AFGHAN LEADER DENIES MEETING 'TOP TALIBAN NEGOTIATOR'

23 November

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has denied meeting a man pretending to be a top Taliban leader, as reported by U.S. media. "The New York Times" has reported that a man claiming to be Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, one of the most senior commanders of the Taliban, was in fact an impostor. "The Washington Post" said the man was a shopkeeper from the Pakistani city of Quetta. NATO and Afghan officials told the "Times" that they met the fake Taliban leader three times, and that he was flown to Kabul on a NATO aircraft and ushered into the presidential palace to meet Karzai. A Western diplomat in Kabul told the "Times" the man -- who traveled from Pakistan -- was given "a lot of money" to take part in the talks. One Afghan official was quoted as saying the man could have been sent by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence spy agency. Karzai told reporters at a press conference today not to accept "propaganda" from the foreign media. (RFE/RL)

SAAKASHVILI, AT EU PARLIAMENT, CALLS FOR DIRECT DIALOGUE WITH KREMLIN

23 November

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, in a impassioned speech at the European Parliament on November 23, proposed direct talks with the Kremlin. "I am, ladies and gentlemen, ready for a deep, comprehensive dialogue with my Russian counterpart," Saakashvili asserted. "We will, of course, continue to participate in the Geneva talks, hoping that our pledge today will persuade the Russian Federation to stop blocking these discussions. But we need a political dialogue to start as well." Saakashvili said he recognized past mistakes and failures on the Georgian side, which he did not name, and gave reassurances that Georgia would not resort to force, except "in the case of new attacks and invasion of the 80 percent of Georgian territory that remains under the control of the Georgian government." Saakashvili did call on the EU parliament to qualify the Russian military presence in the breakaway Georgian regions of

South Ossetia and Abkhazia as "illegal." He underlined the fact that the two breakaway regions have received practically no international recognition, including none from any other CIS members, aside from Russia. He said the international community's stance indicates "to the great surprise and the fury of some that the old times are definitely over. It shows that the former captive nations of Soviet times have become strong -- [despite] all the hurdles and problems -- independent states that determine their own policies." The Georgian president was invited to Strasbourg by the speaker of the European parliament, the Polish conservative Jerzy Buzek, with the agreement of all political factions in the legislature. Parliamentary sources told RFE/RL that the presence of the Georgian leader in Strasbourg should be seen as a political gesture by the MEPs, some of whom feel Tbilisi was unfairly sidelined by European governments following the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. (RFE/RL)

SAAKASHVILI: NON-USE OF FORCE PLEDGE 'NOT A SIGN OF WEAKNESS'

23 November

Georgia's unilateral pledge on non-use of force is "not a sign of weakness", President Saakashvili said at a news conference after addressing the European Parliament in Strasbourg on November 23. "Such a gesture underlines our self-belief... The weak tends to respond by threats or menaces or instability; in our case the opposite holds," Saakashvili said speaking in French, adding that he was convinced that Georgia and Russia should go down the road of negotiations. "Russia has serious problems in the region and I think it is very much in the interests of Russia to move towards more open relationship," he said. (Civil Georgia)

MOSCOW RESPONDS TO SAAKASHVILI'S NON-USE OF FORCE PLEDGE

24 November

President Saakashvili's non-use of force pledge can be "perceived seriously" if only it "is put on paper"

and when "it becomes legally binding," the Russian Foreign Ministry said on November 24. "Russia still believes that the road towards ensuring peace and security in Trans Caucasus lies through legally binding commitment on non-use of force between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali, as well as between Tbilisi and Sokhumi," a statement issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry reads. In his address to the European Parliament on November 23, President Saakashvili said Georgia was ready for "unilateral initiative to declare that Georgia will never use force to roll back the Russian occupation and to restore its control over the occupied areas." The Russian Foreign Ministry said that impressions from Saakashvili's speech were mixed. "On the one hand, we would like to believe, that Saakashvili's remarks... reflect Tbilisi's realization of the fact which has been persistently suggested for many years already by Russia and other members of the international community - that use of force is inadmissible and a crime," the Russian Foreign Ministry said. "But the way in which this so called 'unilateral solemn pledge' is being delivered cannot but trigger our concern," it continued. "Saakashvili still tries to convince the international community in the existence of some kind of conflict between Russia and Georgia, instead of speaking about many years of conflict between Tbilisi and peoples of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which as a result of another Georgian forceful adventure in August 2008 ended up with eventual self-determination of these peoples," the Russian Foreign Ministry said. It also said that in the past Georgia had broken its commitments for number of times. "We all remember 'a peace-loving' televised address by Saakashvili on August 7, 2008, just couple of hours before barbarous overnight shelling of Tskhinvali," it said. Saakashvili's announcement at the European Parliament is more close to what Moscow was offering recently, in particular making "unilateral declarations" signed separately by Tbilisi, Sokhumi and Tskhinvali on non-use of force pledges. (Civil Georgia)