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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.

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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

RUSSIA, GEORGIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA: NOTES ON A WAR

Stephen Blank

By August 20, Russia has deployed approximately 20,000 land, sea and air forces to recapture South Ossetia, occupy Abkhazia and invade Georgia, while also bombing civilian and military targets, and instituting a naval blockade. Russia's goals are clear: to annex South Ossetia and Abkhazia, destroy Georgia's defense capacity and economy, and in all likelihood continue to occupy Georgia until Saakashvili's government is deposed. In other words, Moscow seeks to reduce Georgia to a satellite renouncing its Euro-Atlantic integration. This in turn is intended to prevent any other CIS member of joining NATO, although its actions demonstrate precisely why NATO and the EU cannot leave the CIS to Russia's tender mercies.

BACKGROUND: Despite numerous Russian statements that Georgia was actively preparing for war and that it was a reckless and provocative player, in this particular drama Georgia was the bull, not the matador. Although Georgia clearly engaged in provocative statements and behavior despite much Western counseling to refrain from replying to Russian provocations, Russia's claims of reacting to ethnic

cleansing and attempted genocide are mendacious and tendentious.

The best evidence suggests that Georgia's invasion and Russia's counterattack were carefully planned provocations by the Siloviki in Moscow and their confederates in South Ossetia. The latter evidently feared that they might be forced by other elements in Moscow to engage at long last and despite all previous

Russian blocking of such talks, in direct negotiations with Tbilisi. The FSB agents who run South Ossetia and its pervasive smuggling rackets appear to have believed that this pressure signaled their being sold out by other elements in the Russian government. So instead, they launched a series of escalating provocations in an environment already burdened down by political and military



tensions as well as numerous previous provocations.

The South Ossetian attacks in July and early August clearly aimed to lead Georgia to invade, knowing full well that Moscow, who clearly was mobilized, would reply in overwhelming force. The extent, sequence and scope of the South Ossetian provocations as well as the size, readiness, and speed of the Russian counterattack suggests all the hallmark of a classic KGB provocation, and evokes earlier Soviet armed invasions of other countries in its planning. Russia's doctrine of invading to protect Russian citizens (who were actually not Russian citizens but citizens of Georgia to whom Russia had granted passports to undermine Georgia's sovereignty) also evokes Hitler's practice and rhetoric, particularly the Sudetenland episode of 1938.



This episode also shows that President Medvedev remains subordinate to Putin regarding Russian national security policy. There is good reason to argue that this entire operation was planned by these Siloviki elements together with their subordinates in

Tskhinvali to assert their control over Russian policy and to accomplish the aforementioned objectives. They also intend to demonstrate to the West that Russia can and will use force to assert its exclusive control over the CIS and to demonstrate Moscow's contempt for the West's feeble efforts to do anything for Georgia. Presumably, this will show all other CIS regimes that the West is powerless to help them in a crisis; demonstrate to the West its own feebleness, irresolution, and the futility of opposing Moscow; threaten the BTC pipeline if not destroy it; and establish the primacy of a tough and belligerent anti-Western line led by the Siloviki in Russian domestic, defense, and foreign policy.

IMPLICATIONS: As a result of this invasion, it is possible to conclude not only that the rule of force has reemerged in Europe, but that the CFE treaty is dead. Russia will continue to strongly militarize the Caucasus as a whole, and disregard Western efforts to bring it back to the treaty regime. Moscow is already building airbases in South Ossetia and near its borders with Ukraine, from which to threaten that state, and has apparently decided to place missiles in South Ossetia, Belarus and possibly Kaliningrad with which to threaten forthcoming missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic.

This invasion also shows why NATO and the EU cannot let Russia be the sole *Ordnungsmacht* (force of order) in Eurasia because its regime rests on force, official violence, criminality, and despotism. Second, it highlights the irresolution and weakness of European security organizations. Their demonstrated irresolution, impotence and penchant for blaming the victim are habits of behavior suggesting a guilty conscience concerning their own inaction. But beyond that, this episode is the harvest of over a decade of relative neglect by European security organizations of a situation that everyone recognized could easily explode with serious repercussions throughout Eurasia. This neglect emboldened Russia to believe, with apparent justification, that in the crunch the West would fall prey to divided counsels and do nothing to help Georgia.

Thus, one lesson of this affair is the need for a much stronger, coordinated, and concerted Western effort,

including both the EU and NATO, to establish an unshakable position regarding conflicts in its “common neighborhood” with Russia and to support pro-Western governments there. Indeed, Ukraine already faces Russian threats. Vladimir Putin has already stated that Ukraine is “not a state” and that if it seeks to join NATO, “we will dismember it”. Russian politicians are using every resource at their disposal to meddle in Ukraine’s politics, extend the Black Sea Fleet’s presence there beyond 2017, and now in addition attack Ukraine for its alleged arming of Georgia to the teeth and what Moscow disingenuously terms “support for genocide”.

Finally, this operation also confirms that the structure of Putin’s regime represents a permanent standing invitation to military adventurism. (See author’s analysis published by the Joint Center http://www.isdp.eu/files/publications/pp/o8/sbo8put_Insucession.pdf) The absence of democratic controls over all the instruments of force – regular military, paramilitary, internal troops, and intelligence forces – renders Russia permanently vulnerable to domestic and external coups as in 1994, 1999, and now in 2008. Just as the Chechen war of 1999 was in many respects a provocation and coup d’état against more democratic elections and accountability, so too today’s operation partakes of elements of the Siloviki’s unremitting desire to seize and hold power even at the risk of foreign war.

COCNCLUSIONS: This war possesses immense implications, going far beyond the normal scope of this paper. Every other CIS state is now potentially at risk. Russia already is claiming that the Baku-Tbilisi Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline is as a bad investment risk. If this pipeline and the parallel Baku-Erzurum gas pipeline fail or are endangered, EU hopes for a Nabucco pipeline to transport greater quantities of gas from Azerbaijan and other Caspian states will wither with them. Russia will then be the exclusive gas supplier from the CIS to Europe; moreover, it is likely to establish a direct connection to Iran’s energy reserves by linking its energy networks with the Iran-Armenia pipeline, which Gazprom bought into, and bypass the BTC pipeline. It can then monopolize

Caspian energy flows to Europe and use that power and those revenues to corrupt and subvert European political institutions peacefully, a process that it has already begun notably in the Council of Europe.

Similarly, we should expect pressure against Armenia and Azerbaijan and other CIS governments to subordinate themselves to Moscow’s dictates, abandon democratizing reforms, cease their flirtations with the West, and let Russia gradually take over their energy and other key economic sectors.

If unchecked, this Russian aggression against a small state invariably generates greater tension and insecurity, especially if Europe and America remain disunited. The need for concerted and expanded European resistance to Russian intimidation is clearer than ever and must be followed by the effort to bring about a united and coordinated Western position in the states of the former Soviet Union that will expand Western influence, prevent aspiring democracies from losing their independence and territorial integrity, and forestall the return of bipolarity in Europe.

Russia has conclusively demonstrated that its system of government – and the imperial appetites that derive from the inherent nature of that system – remains the greatest threat to security in Eurasia. Given the asymmetry of power between Russia and its former colonies, concerted Western action in the CIS is necessary to prevent the creation of a closed authoritarian bloc with an inherent inclination towards the unrestricted use of force at home and abroad. That kind of system must be checked, because the temptation of military adventurism can only breed ever-larger crises and threaten the entire post-Cold War international order.

That is the real message to come out of this crisis. The question is, who is prepared to listen, and who is prepared to lead the resistance to these threatening developments?

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

RUSSIA'S DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN OVER SOUTH OSSETIA

Robert M. Cutler

With Georgian government websites shut down by cyber-attacks in the days immediately preceding hostilities, the Russian story of its army coming to the defense of South Ossetia in the face of Georgian assault gained currency. This script is still often invoked as a preface to any commentary or reportage on current developments. However, as facts begin to surface, it is increasingly revealed as a propaganda strategy planned in advance and contradicted by evidence on the ground, by the testimony of neutral observers, and by the increasingly transparent cynicism of its purveyors.

BACKGROUND: From the very beginning of military clashes on the night of 7-8 August, there has been a concerted Russian effort to vilify President Mikheil Saakashvili as a war criminal. In the first days of the conflict, Russian media repeatedly cited a figure of 2,000 civilian casualties in Tskhinvali city and up to 40,000 refugees (out of a maximum 70,000 total population in South Ossetia of all ethnicities). It was on this basis that not only Russian media but also the highest Russian leaders repeatedly condemned Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili as a war criminal guilty of ethnic cleansing, and promised prosecution in international courts. These claims have faded in recent days, because they have been shown to be false by systematic investigations by Human Rights Watch as well as by the aggregated testimony of foreign reporters who have entered the region since the Russian occupation. In a twist, Georgia has filed a brief before the International Court of Justice charging Russia with conducting and abetting ethnic cleansing of Georgians from South Ossetia and Abkhazia from 1990 to the present.

There is a general view that Georgia assaulted South Ossetia before Russian troops invaded. A detailed timeline provided by Georgia's Prime Minister Lado Gurgenidze during an international telephone press conference disputes that assertion,

however. This view is corroborated in most part by several independent sources, and an independent *Washington Post* reconstruction of events concludes that the Georgian assault on Tskhinvali and the Russian tank column's emergence from the Georgian end of the cross-border Roki Tunnel could only have been minutes apart at most. Roughly 150 Russian vehicles including armored personnel carriers got through before Georgian forces were able to mount an only partially successful attack on the crucial bridge at Kurta linking the Roki Tunnel with Tskhinvali.

It seems inescapable that Russian tanks must have been on the road from Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia, for some time in order to cross the 100 miles of mountain roads to reach South Ossetia when they did. *Novaya gazeta's* respected military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer is only one of several writers who have documented how the Russian invasion is only the culmination of a months-long series of provocations as well as strategic and tactical on-the-ground preparations, for example the construction and equipment of a base near the city of Java, northwest of Tskhinvali, as a refueling depot for Russian armor moving southwards. This should be added to the better-known "railroad repair" troops sent to Abkhazia in recent weeks, who are reliably reported to have constructed tank-launching facilities. The

ceremony completing the railway repair was held as late as July 30.

IMPLICATIONS: Reports of fighting on 8 August, for which Russian media were the chief origin, asserted that Georgian forces entered Tskhinvali city early in the day, were then driven back by Russian troops who were said to retake the city, and finally returned to seize parts of the city's southern outskirts before being repelled for good. However, according to subsequent reports by civilians in

Tunnel. Both sides as well as local observers agree that there was massive aerial bombardment during the day of the eighth. Moreover, American military training provided to the Georgian army over the last few years appears to have concentrated on counterinsurgency tactics, in view of Tbilisi's contribution of troops to the Iraq conflict.

Given Russian air superiority in the region, it is difficult to suppose that the heavy aerial bombardment of Tskhinvali city came from the

Georgian side. Russian sources blame the destruction exclusively on the Georgian artillery assault on the night of 7-8 August, but surviving city dwellers seem to indicate that the Georgian assault was concentrated on the administrative quarters of the Russian-backed South Ossetian separatists, as well as communications links and the like. By contrast, if observers' reports are to be believed, the degree of devastation visited upon the city by nightfall on 8 August (after Russian bombardment had driven the Georgians from the city) is paralleled in recent history only by the



Tskhinvali, the Russians never occupied the city; rather, it was combined artillery and aerial bombing that drove the Georgians out of the city. According to Georgian sources, this bombardment was extremely intense and lasted for all the time Georgian forces were in Tskhinvali from dawn on 8 August until just before noon, and continued even afterwards, intensifying again when Georgian forces attempted to re-enter the city later in the day.

Among the weapons systems used by the Russian forces were Uragan and Grad artillery. The latter is the same system that Georgian military affirmed using against Russian military posts outlying Tskhinvali late on the night of 7 August, after Russian armor entered Georgia through the Roki

leveling of Grozny in the Second Chechen War of the 1990s.

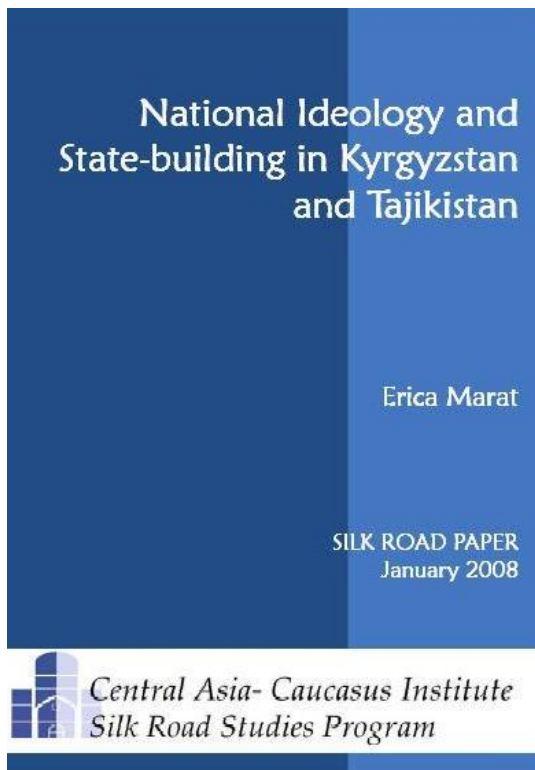
The Russian side's signature of consecutive ceasefire agreements without any visible attempt to implement them may also be charitably described as disinformation. This pattern of behavior was first clearly revealed several days ago when, after the Russian and Georgian presidents had both signed French president Nicolas Sarkozy's six-point ceasefire document, the Russian military began to withdraw from Gori and then, as soon as international media began to report this, literally reversed gear and moved back. As Western video journalists reported live, Russian troops then

continued to attack nonmilitary establishments (the nearest military target is a base eight miles outside Gori) while appearing to coordinate with Ossetian and other North Caucasus irregulars who looted property and even abducted civilians.

CONCLUSIONS: What is remarkable about the Russian information policy on the war against Georgia is its failure to adapt to the twenty-first century information environment. Even Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vitalii Churkin has lost the charisma that he radiated twenty years ago when, during the heyday of glasnost and perestroika, he became the first Soviet ambassador to Washington to testify to a Congressional committee. Russia's political leaders hold no spontaneous interviews even with representatives of Russian media. By contrast, Saakashvili's presence on CNN and other western stations, and his and the Georgian leadership's command of foreign languages, have enabled them to get their message across effectively.

Late on the night of 18 August, Tbilisi time, the Georgian Ministry of Defense posted a statement (hosted on blogspot.com because of continuing infrastructure and cyberattacks against official Tbilisi websites), saying simply: "It is absolutely obvious to the international community that the Russian Federation chose destruction of economy with the use of military force and ethnic cleansing as an instrument for implementing its foreign policy." The credibility of the Georgian message is enhanced not only by reports from foreign journalists on the ground but also by an entirely new element in the information environment: the aggregate of amateur eyewitness reports on youtube.com, ireport.com, and other vlog (video-logging) dedicated websites.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Robert M. Cutler is Senior Research Fellow, Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Carleton University, Canada.



New Silk Road Paper:

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This 99-page Paper discusses the policies adopted, and the challenges confronted, by the weak and multi-ethnic states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to build national ideologies catering both to the titular nationality and to the inclusion of ethnic minorities.

The Paper can be downloaded free at www.silkroadstudies.org. Hardcopy requests should be addressed to Alec Forss at aforss@silkroadstudies.org.

RUSSIA'S INVASION OF GEORGIA: BLEAK PROSPECTS FOR THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Blanka Hancilova and Magdalena Frichova

Russia's invasion of Georgia has gone far beyond the worst expectations of possible developments in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts. Moscow wants to dominate regions it perceives to be its sphere of influence. Its actions have sent a shock-wave throughout the CIS, and will strongly impact on developments in the South Caucasus and beyond. In different ways, the invasion, and the lack of a strong western response, is likely to consolidate Moscow's influence on both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

BACKGROUND: As Moscow's military intervention has moved far beyond the breakaway South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Georgian-Russian relations have hit a catastrophic low. Russia is attempting to restore its superpower status, send an unequivocal message to the U.S. and EU that it cannot be ignored in foreign policy agenda-setting and decision-making, and that it will not allow a further NATO enlargement to its sensitive southern flank, or accept Kosovo's Western-orchestrated independence without repercussions. In other words, that Russia has a say in what choices its neighbors make. Before resorting to disproportionate military force in Georgia, Russia had pursued the same strategic goals by diplomatic, economic and political pressures, be it in Georgia, Ukraine or the Baltics. In Georgia, it had also meddled with the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts.

After the 2003 Rose Revolution, as Tbilisi prioritized the restoration of its territorial integrity and pro-Western choices, its pro-peace rhetoric was accompanied by assertive and sometimes militant demarches for reunification, and to counter Russia's meddling in the regions. Georgia struggled to change the political and peacekeeping arrangements dominated by Russia and the realities on the ground. A miscalculated operation launched by Tbilisi resulted in hostilities in South Ossetia in 2004. Since 2006, Tbilisi promoted the role of 'alternative' Ossetian and Abkhaz authorities, both

based in territories controlled by Tbilisi and staffed by loyal Ossetians, or ethnic Georgians, in the latter conflict those displaced from Abkhazia.

Besides irritating Moscow, these measures also led to plummeting confidence across the conflict divides. Security in both conflict zones deteriorated over the past two to three years, and negotiations further stalled. Abkhazia and South Ossetia grew further isolated from Georgia proper than they had been in the decade following the wars of early 1990s. Realizing that diplomacy alone was not going to help to quickly reunite their country's integrity, hawks in the Georgian government had been drafting plans to re-take at least parts of the conflict zones by force, despite strong warnings of Georgia's Western allies.

Russia had been badly meddling in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but Tbilisi's longer terms policies toward the conflict regions also contributed to setting the context for the current standoff. Takes on how the recent violent confrontation was sparked off differ. While Tbilisi may well have used disproportionate force against Ossetians, Russia's aggression against Georgia appears well prepared and pre-meditated. It is a coercive statement which reaches far beyond Georgia's conflict zones.

IMPLICATIONS: The Russian strategy in Georgia is to ensure Moscow's continued strong influence in the country's internal affairs. Russian actions outside of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are

emboldened by the weak reaction of the West which had limited its intervention (at least so far) to declarations of support for Georgia's territorial integrity, humanitarian aid, and plans for an observation mission to monitor the withdrawal of the Russian military and the ceasefire. Moscow has signed a six-point ceasefire plan but has so far interpreted it in the loosest possible manner, if not violated it. As the Russian army has dug in positions along key roads and taken under control many strategic locations in Georgia, the U.S. and EU risk having to simply agree to Moscow's game-plan.

This is likely to prevent Georgia's integration into NATO. It will, at least in the short-to-mid term, prevent Georgia from re-incorporating Abkhazia



and South Ossetia, and may undermine the consolidation of Georgia proper. Foreign investment risks plummeting, and trade will suffer from instability and the destruction of infrastructure. And while the people presently appear united around the leadership, internal tensions may follow after economic problems hit, casualty tolls are fully reported and the extent of the humanitarian disaster sinks in.

The shock-waves the Russian intervention is sending through the entire CIS aside, these developments will have a profound impact on the South Caucasus as a region. Both Armenia and

Azerbaijan may suffer economically due to the ensuing instability and the damage to Georgia's infrastructure.

The developments in Georgia present a complex economic and security dilemma for Baku. Azerbaijan's impressive economic growth rests on export of Caspian gas and oil, and its exports depend on the Baku-Ceyhan-Tbilisi pipeline, which crosses Georgian territory, as the overwhelming export route. Long-term instability in Georgia that would hamper oil and gas export would directly impact Azerbaijan's economic growth. Russia's military presence in Georgia, and its resulting leverage over the country's stability, can impact on exports of Caspian oil and gas through the BTC pipeline, which was reportedly interrupted on August 12.

Azerbaijan's maneuvering space has hence shrunk significantly. Disappointed by the weak American reaction to the Russian aggression, Azerbaijan is likely to revisit its top foreign policy priority, namely NATO integration, and become more cooperative with Russia in an attempt to avoid further disruptions in oil export. Confronted with a forceful Russian reaction in Georgia, Azerbaijan is now less likely to resort to use of force to restore its territorial integrity in Nagorno Karabakh. The speedy resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh dispute is even less likely as Russia will continue to use it as a lever to meddle into the internal developments of both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The Armenian regime of President Sarkisyan is relatively weak internally. Sarkisyan, who assumed power following deadly clashes with demonstrators who protested the rigged February 2008 presidential elections, has not managed to bridge the deep rift in the Armenian society and secure broad legitimacy. With weak democratic and human rights credentials, the regime is pressed to deliver in terms of economic performance (Armenia has since 2001 enjoyed double digit growth rates).

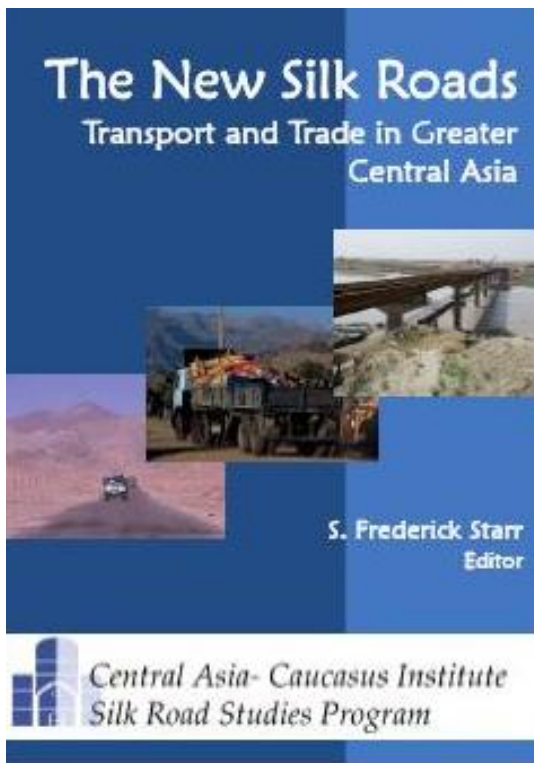
The events in Georgia will impact Armenia and its regime in two ways. Firstly, Armenia's economic prospects will worsen. Currently, the bulk of the land-locked Armenia's foreign trade is carried out through Georgia, via which Armenia also gets natural gas (though a new gas pipeline linking Armenia with Iran is near completion). Armenia is in a state of war with Azerbaijan, and it does not have diplomatic relations with Turkey, its neighbor to the west. Borders are closed, and direct trade has been suspended. Should land trade with Georgia be suspended or severely impeded, the only remaining land trading partner for Armenia would be Iran. Yet the infrastructure linking those two countries is limited.

In the absence of strong economic growth, it is possible that internal pressures on the regime will grow further. On the other hand, the relatively weak Western reaction to violence in Armenia in March 2008, and its preoccupation with any reaction to the Georgian situation increase the risk of a potential use of authoritarian means to solidify its power. The foreign policy course of Armenia will

remain essentially unchanged, i.e. closely coordinating with the Russian Federation, while formally maintaining, at least for a while longer, a "policy of complementarity".

CONCLUSIONS: There is a great risk of Georgia's longer-term destabilization. Its internal conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are unlikely to be resolved, and Russian meddling in the country is likely to undermine its stability, security and economy. Russia's intervention there will have a profound impact also on the South Caucasus and the entire CIS. It also signifies a broader geopolitical shift in which Russia is securing a stronger role in world affairs.

AUTHORS' BIO: Dr. Blanka Hancilova is analyst of international relations with a focus on the CIS and the co-founder of Apreco Consulting Group. Magdalena Frichova has worked on conflict issues in the South Caucasus since 1999, most recently as Project Director for the International Crisis Group.



New Book:

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GUAM AND THE GEORGIAN WAR

Richard Weitz

The members of GUAM had long sought to avoid further Russian military intervention on their territory, by seeking the resolution of the “frozen conflicts” in Georgia and other former countries of the former Soviet Union. Unfortunately, GUAM proved unable to make much of a contribution in resolving these conflicts, which constantly threatened to thaw, due to Russian opposition, West European indifference, and growing problems with wayward Moldova.

BACKGROUND: At the July 2008 GUAM summit in Batumi, the presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine all urged the organization to become more active in resolving the so-called “frozen conflicts” existing in three member countries (Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova) and adversely affecting Ukraine, the fourth GUAM member. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, whose term as rotating GUAM chair ended with the Batumi summit, underscored the need for GUAM and the rest of the international community to address the protracted conflicts in the former Soviet republics: “Issues of regional security cannot be ignored because our future development, economic and social progress will depend on regional security.” Aliyev also praised the solidarity shown by GUAM members in supporting one another’s efforts within the United Nations to deal with separatist issues. “Azerbaijan is very grateful to all the members of GUAM for strong support to our initiative in the United Nations General Assembly session on the resolution of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. All the members of GUAM voted in favor of this resolution,” he remarked at the post-summit joint press conference. “The same unity and solidarity we enjoyed when Georgia issued a resolution related to their territorial integrity.”

After thanking his guests for coming at the post-summit press conference, President Saakashvili warned that “there is an attempt to impose on Georgia a scenario similar to the one that was imposed on Europe and implemented in respect of Czechoslovakia through the Munich agreement, as

well as in respect of Poland and the Baltic states through the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.” Alluding to the unwillingness of some EU and NATO members to commit to Georgia’s defense against Russian predation, he expressed “hope that a new “Munich” and “Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact”—dividing Europe into spheres of influence, partitioning territories and revising borders, will not be implemented in today’s world.”

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko observed that the Batumi summit participants discussed “projects important not only for the region, but the whole of Europe.” After describing the members’ recent activities in the areas of transportation, energy, and other projects, Yushchenko singled out the importance of dealing with the frozen conflicts because they threaten general Eurasian stability and security. Noting the absence of an agreed settlement plan regarding some conflicts and the lack of even an active negotiating process in others, the Ukrainian president argued that “GUAM needs to strengthen its efforts” in promoting creative solutions regarding both settlement terms and negotiating formats.

As if on cue, Polish President Lech Kaczynski and Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, who both attended the summit, reaffirmed their support for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and Georgia. Kaczynski observed that, “No country can demonstrate tolerance to the presence of troops of other countries in its territory.” Adamkus added that, “Invasion of one country into the territory of another one and unresolved conflicts cannot be

acceptable.” Both presidents extended support for granting Georgia and Ukraine a NATO Membership Action Plan at the alliance’s Council of Foreign Ministers meeting scheduled for December 2008.

The five presidents present at Batumi signed a declaration entitled, “GUAM—Uniting Europe’s East.’ The document reaffirms their concerns about the threats caused by aggressive separatism, religious and ethnic extremism, and international terrorism. The Batumi declaration restates the members’ readiness to counter such dangers through collective measures in close cooperation with other countries and international institutions. They pledge “to stand jointly against common risks and threats” and to support “peaceful settlement of the conflicts in the GUAM region on the basis of respect for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

IMPLICATIONS: The appeal by the three GUAM heads of state represented yet another attempt to address within GUAM the protracted separatist conflicts that has bedeviled its members since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The crisis over Georgia’s two pro-Moscow separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia had long threatened to escalate, while those involving Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh remain explosively unstable. Ukraine is also acutely vulnerable to their negative consequences. Not only do the conflicts impede Ukrainian efforts to benefit from optimal east-west trade and transport routes connecting Europe with Asia through the South Caucasus, but some Russian officials are now threatening Ukraine with dismemberment should it enter NATO or decline to extend basing rights for the Russian Black Sea Fleet after 2017.

The GUAM governments have long lobbied to “internationalize” the frozen conflicts by encouraging other governments and international institutions to contribute to their resolution. Their intent is to break the current stalemate among the conflict parties. GUAM members have pursued several joint initiatives within the UN, OSCE, and other fora aimed at resolving the conflicts in

Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

For example, in December 2007, the GUAM submitted a draft resolution to the UN General Assembly calling on UN members to express support for the territorial integrity of states suffering from such frozen conflicts. They termed the conflicts in the GUAM area threats to peace, and called on all states and international organizations to help resolve them. GUAM members have also jointly worked within the OSCE to induce that organization into endorsing “international mediation efforts aimed at peaceful settlement of these conflicts on the basis of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of internationally recognized borders.”

Furthermore, GUAM representatives have discussed deploying peacekeeping forces from the UN and other organizations into the conflict regions as well as developing their own peacekeeping capabilities. A GUAM peacekeeping contingent might have deployed in the conflict zones along with, or in place of, the existing Russian and CIS peacekeeping forces. With regard to the latter alternative, GUAM members have discussed possibly sending civilian police forces from GUAM states into Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

It is possible that their presence might have averted the latest crisis, though representatives of the separatist authorities in the breakaway regions had expressed opposition to the entry of GUAM peacekeepers into the conflict zones. The Russian authorities shared this negative view. The organization’s official documents specify that GUAM is “not directed against anyone.” In addition, while the United States and some former Soviet bloc countries in Eastern Europe have supported the organization, most NATO and EU members have largely ignored it. Even so, observers in Russia and elsewhere have long seen the institution as an anti-Russian bloc. Although GUAM members all belong (until Georgia’s post-war withdrawal) to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), they generally have shown more interest than other CIS members in

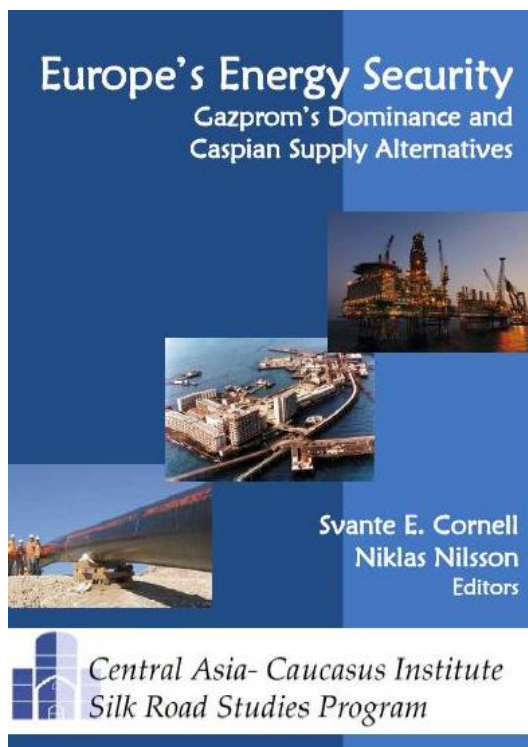
developing ties with Euro-Atlantic institutions such as NATO and the EU.

The proposal to establish a GUAM peacekeeping force has also divided the members, with Azerbaijani and Moldovan authorities evincing less support than their Georgian and Ukrainian colleagues. In June 2008, however, Ukrainian Defense Minister Yuriy Yekhanurov announced that Georgia and Ukraine would begin creating a joint peacekeeping unit by themselves, which would be open to other GUAM members. “We are now starting together with Georgia practical consultations on what configuration this unit should have and how specific tasks should be carried out,” he declared at a press conference in Tbilisi. How these plans will survive the recent Georgian War remains unclear.

CONCLUSIONS: The Russian invasion of Georgia will presumably derail GUAM’s peacekeeping capabilities for the time being. It is possible that the members will seek to strengthen

their collective defenses against further Russian predations, especially given recent Russian threats against Ukraine after that country’s leadership sided with fellow GUAM member Georgia in the recent war. Although the government of Azerbaijan failed to offer similar overt support for Tbilisi, the most vulnerable GUAM member appears to be Moldova. Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin skipped the annual GUAM leadership summit once again this year. Hints of Russian negotiating flexibility regarding Transdnistria combined with Moldova’s dependence on Russian energy imports might lead to the defection of yet another GUAM member. Some Russian strategists might hope to repeat the events of 2002-2005, when Islam Karimov gradually withdrew Uzbekistan from the organization to improve ties with Moscow by realigning his foreign policy away from its previous western orientation.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Richard Weitz is a Senior Fellow and Director for Project Management at the Hudson Institute.



New Book!

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FIELD REPORTS

EXPLOSION IN A BAKU MOSQUE: INTERESTED PARTIES AND POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS

Alman Mir Ismail

What was feared the most in Azerbaijan happened. On August 17, a grenade was thrown into the most controversial mosque in the capital city of Baku, the Abu Bekr mosque. As a result, two persons died and dozens more were wounded. President Ilham Aliyev immediately took the investigation under his personal control. Various law enforcement agencies, such as the National Security Ministry and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, are investigating the matter.



The explosion comes at a very sensitive time. The Russian-Georgian war has already created many security risks in the region. An explosion tearing up the BTC pipeline on Turkish territory directly affected Azerbaijan, as the country had to halt the export of its oil. Compared to that, however, the

explosion in the mosque could prove much more dangerous. Azerbaijan is facing Presidential elections on October 15, and Baku analysts see this as a deliberate action, seeking to create some sort of internal chaos, instability and uncertainty.

Azerbaijan in the past decade has witnessed a slow growth of radical Islam, especially among youth. This is partly the result of their dissatisfaction with domestic politics, but also a factor of the influence of missionaries from foreign, particularly Gulf countries.

Local analysts believe that the grenade was thrown as a result of internal fighting between religious groups. The Abu Bekr mosque is home to Sunni Muslims of a Salafi-leaning orientation. Its imam, Gamet Suleymanov, has been known for his sharp anti-Western and anti-government preaching. Many radical Islamists have come out of this mosque, and some have even gone on to fight in Chechnya and the Middle East. Gamet has later refuted his links with these radicals and claimed that he is loyal to the ruling regime. Yet, the mosque continued to be the subject of internal religious debates and discussions.

It is not excluded, of course, that Gamet himself and his religious community have become targets of attacks by either extremist Shi'a groups, or an even more radical Sunni community, known as

Havarish, which have accused Gamet of collaborating with the authorities. The Imam himself was wounded during the attack.

Azerbaijan, however, has never experienced sectarian violence, and the issue of Shi'a-Sunni identity is often very superficial in this largely secularized country. The prominent Shi'a cleric Haji Ilgar Ibrahimoglu has condemned the attack, and blamed the authorities in misleading religious education of the population.

Azerbaijani government officials and civil society representatives have condemned the attack. Elchin Askerov, deputy chairman of the state committee on work with religious institutions, says that "a Mosque is a holy place. If someone is interested to use it in less than peaceful means, they should be evicted from the mosque and punished." In several northern regions, special services have conducted law enforcement operations against Wahhabis. But this, in the opinion of local pundits, is not the solution. The more sustainable solution lies with the proper education of the young generation.

Some analysts point to Russia as a possible interested party in the explosion. Oktay Atakhan, chairman of a pro-Western political party, has said that "Today it is in the interest of Russia to escalate Iranian-American tensions and in this respect, a provocation similar to the one in the Abu Bekr mosque would fit the purpose." Certainly, creating internal instability in Azerbaijan would make

President Aliyev and his ruling party more dependent on regional powers to maintain his authority in the country. This, in turn, would mean a decreased intensity of Azerbaijan's integration towards NATO and the EU, and closer economic ties with Moscow. Iran is also not excluded as an interested party in this situation.

Azerbaijan is a country with long traditions of religious and ethnic tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Ordinary people as well as policy-makers are exceptionally proud of the secular and moderate nature of Islam in the country, and often point to the existence of the Jewish community in Baku and the northern city of Quba as a sign for religious tolerance. The leader of the Jewish community, Simon Kilo, stated that the explosion in the mosque was aimed at the destabilization of the situation prior to the presidential elections. Indeed, the explosion appears to have been aimed not only at pitting a radical religious sect against the secular authorities, but also at creating a rift between the Sunni and Shi'a communities. Moreover, the explosion could create hesitations in the minds of investors, businessmen and security analysts.

It is worth noting that prior to the Parliamentary elections of 2005, prominent journalist Elmer Hussein was killed- an act certainly not in the interest of the authorities. At that time, fingers pointed to Russia and Iran. The situation seems to be repeating itself.

WILL THE CONFLICT IN SOUTH OSSETIA PUSH KYRGYZSTAN INTO A PRO-RUSSIAN STANCE?

Nurshat Ababakirov

As Georgia announced its intention to leave the CIS, its current chair, Kyrgyzstan, might well find itself expected to deviate from its habitual practice of maneuvering between the interests of Russia and the U.S.. It may be pushed to bring about a relative

crystallization of its foreign policy. Harboring military air bases of both Russia and the U.S., only a short distance from each other near Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan will need a special shrewdness at the SCO summit in Dushanbe this August not to spoil

its relationship with either side; and contribute its part to the future of the CIS in a summit in September.

Yet, Russia's military victory in the conflict, vividly highlighted in the mostly pro-Russian media outlets in Kyrgyzstan, will likely push President Kurmanbek Bakiev's position a good deal closer to that of Moscow.

From the onset of the conflict in the Caucasus, Bakiev chose to be rather aloof and decided not to make hasty comments. Taking a short vacation on the peak of military conflict in Georgia, Bakiev unofficially met with Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of Kazakhstan, on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul. Apparently anxious of making untimely comments, they both shied away, equivocally stating that "such a conflict must be handled by international law and exclusively through diplomatic means."

After the meeting, Nazarbayev, who often positions Kazakhstan as a regional leader and advocates the creation of a Central Asia Union, described the CIS as "amorphous" and stressed its lack of leverages and mechanisms for intervention in conflicts such as that between Russia and Georgia. He also stated that all the CIS members are against separatism and that this sort of complicated international questions should be solved peacefully through negotiations. "There is no way for a military solution," he stressed.

Alikbek Djekshenkulov, a former Foreign Minister and head of a local Think Tank, predicted that the CIS summit in Bishkek will be fateful and decisive. In his view, Georgia's withdrawal from CIS membership will trigger at least a polarization within the CIS, as Russia's perspective will force its members to define their position on the CIS more clearly. At the same time, he argued that the best option for Kyrgyzstan is to support the CIS and participate in its institutional reforms, since Russia remains as a strategic partner despite the limited effectiveness of common economic projects.

Along with Russia's popular First Channel, local mass media outlets tend to be overly pro-Russian as

well. Channel Five, which fills a special space in local media outlets targeting mostly the Russian-speaking urban population, showed an interview with Valentin Vlasov, Russian Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, who talked about "Tbilisi's criminal activities in South Ossetia" and lamented the activities of some states and international organizations "apparently dictated from outside." Vlasov also implicitly warned that "careless conformation could endanger people of these [Central Asian] states to the extent the people of Georgia has become instruments of foreign politics."

The objectivity of Kyrgyz politicians sent to South Ossetia to provide field information is generally questionable, as their reports largely derived from Russian sources. For instance, Russia's RBK Daily has role-modeled Kyrgyz delegates for helping cement the principally critical position of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) towards Georgia. Invited to South Ossetia by the public fund For Russia for "independent monitoring," Murat Juraev, a parliamentarian from the Social Democratic Party, reasoned that the existence of disputed territories in Central Asia and about one million Kyrgyz workers in Russia makes Kyrgyzstan a supporter of Russian policies.

Amidst the intense flow of Russian news holding the U.S. responsible for staging a proxy war in Georgia, the confiscation of an arms cache by Kyrgyz forces in a private house rented by U.S. citizens obviously harmed the image of the U.S., and especially its military air base mission there. Notwithstanding the U.S. embassy's statement that they are to be used for an antiterrorist exercise, information confirmed belatedly by the National Security Service (NSS), local analysts were keen to interpret this as a warning for the Kyrgyz government, in case it jumps on the Kremlin's bandwagon (Reporter Bishkek newspaper). More than that, the circumstances under which the weapons were found have eagerly spawned assumptions of anti-American feelings. The blame could be placed on both the US, for allowing

weapons in a private house, and on the Kyrgyz security forces, which often lack coordination.

As a result, on August 8 the pro-government Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan (CPK) demanded that the government consider in September a withdrawal of the U.S. airbase from Manas Airport. The CPK argued that “cooperation with the U.S. most of all spoils the image of Kyrgyzstan in the eyes of our traditional allies like Russia, China, and other Islamic states.” As the CPK often cites, the rudimentary sources of anti-U.S. feelings usually stem from incidents involving the reckless behavior of military vehicles in Bishkek, the killing of a local truck driver, and the dumping of air petrol on farmlands, which are frequently seen as going unpunished, and usually receiving undue attention of media outlets.

A month ago, Bakiyev made an unofficial visit to Moscow. Against the background of the coming SCO and CIS summits, President Medvedev suggested Bakiyev to “sync watches,” and discussed unfinished Russian projects in Kyrgyzstan. Apparently, Moscow is making an effort to strengthen ties with Bishkek by boosting

cooperation in banking, mining industry, and weapons manufacturing. During his late spring visit to the Kyrgyz Dastan Corporation, located on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul and once part of the Soviet military industrial complex manufacturing naval weapons, Admiral Vladimir Vysotskiy boasted of the Russian Navy’s active return to the “world oceans.” However, military experts commented that this venture had political overtones, given Dastan’s limited capacity.

Nonetheless, in light of the Russian-Georgian war, Kyrgyzstan, once characterized as part of the revolutionary family, is likely to find itself thrown closer to Russia and forced to restate its arguments. Obviously, issuing an official statement and reaching a unanimous conclusion among members of the Russian-led CIS will be difficult. Kumar Bekbolotov, Central Asian program director of the London-based Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), argued that the CIS, as has long been claimed, has worn off, pointing at frequent failures of both negotiations and their implementations within the framework of the CIS.

PESHAWAR DISCUSSION ON PAK-U.S. RELATIONS AND REGIONAL MILITANCY

Zahid Anwar

A roundtable conference was organized by the Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, Pakistan on August 15, 2008, on “Pak-U.S. Relations and Regional Militancy” in Peshawar. Professor Stephen Cohen of the Brookings Institution, and a large number of University faculty, journalists, diplomats, research scholars, and bureaucrats participated. Dr. Azmat Hayat Khan, Vice-Chancellor University of Peshawar, introduced Prof. Stephen Cohen to the participants.

Dr. Cohen, an author of several books on Pakistan, delivered a brief speech, which was followed by a lengthy question and answer session. He said that Pakistan was the most frequently discussed country in the 2008 U.S. presidential debate and added that states are getting weaker, while nations and ethnic groups are getting stronger. Dr. Azmat asked him about U.S. foreign policy in the region, eliciting the response that U.S. policy in the frontier is murky. There is a deep concern in the U.S. about Pakistan’s control over its territory, particularly relating to

people crossing the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Professor Adnan Sarwar, Chairman of the University's International Relations Department, said that during the Cold War, U.S. policy was considered tilted towards Pakistan vis-a-vis India, yet at the end of Cold War it was said that U.S. policy will be even handed. Now it appears rather tilted towards India. Cohen explained U.S. South Asia policy and mentioned the BJP idea of

in Peshawar, said that the size of U.S. aid to Pakistan is \$1 billion per year. The U.S. has given aid to Pakistan since the 1950s. It has provided assistance in different fields; improvement of physical infrastructure, balance of payments, and education, Fulbright fellowships, teachers' training, sanitation, and health care excess. He particularly mentioned U.S. assistance in the development of the Agricultural University in Peshawar in the 1980s.



bifurcation. He said that Pakistan and India are neighbors and said that he doesn't understand the rhetoric of bifurcation. The Indian economy is booming, foreign investment is growing, and India is investing in the U.S. as well. It has huge markets and a potential to play the role of rival to emerging China but added that US diplomacy should be more flexible towards Pakistan.

Mr. Zubair, Law college lecturer, talked about Pakistan's search for identity. The American scholar answered that Pakistan's search for identity is still ongoing. Pakistan has failed to benefit from globalization; however no major country wants Pakistan to fail. Pakistan has also missed opportunities to attract foreign investment due to the poor security situation.

In an answer to a question on the amount and type of aid America is giving to Pakistan, Mr. Steve Lebens, Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. consulate

Dr. Cohen said that Pakistan is the most anti-American country in the world, and criticized the way U.S. aid is provided; little has reached the people of Pakistan. He compared it with what happened in Afghanistan. He underlined that while a huge amount of aid is given to Afghanistan, little has actually reached the country. Large contractors give it to subcontractors, then subcontractors give it to other subcontractors and in this way, out of \$100 only \$10 is actually reaching the people of Afghanistan. He said that conditionality attached to aid should be pro-Pakistani rather than anti-Pakistani. Transparent conditionality should be attached to the aid.

Regarding the situation in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the Brookings Institution expert said that both the U.S. and Pakistan military are wrong. This counterinsurgency is total nonsense, and the lessons of Iraq may be applied to Afghanistan. He said that

India has faced many insurgencies and lessons should be learnt from the Indian experience. He mentioned the U.S. experience in Vietnam and the British way of dealing with IRA, and elaborated that insurgency is a protracted and durable phenomenon which may be ongoing for more than a generation.

In response to a comment to the effect that there is a common perception among people in Pakistan that Pakistan is fighting a U.S. war on its territory,

Cohen responded that Pakistan is a moderate state and its women are educated, and explained that President George W. Bush has hugely exaggerated its actions against extremists; it should have been called a police action rather than global war. He referred to Barack Obama's concern for the genuine security interests of Pakistan and also pointed out that the U.S. is beginning to realize that Pakistan's strategic interests are different from those of the U.S.

ARMENIA FACES NEW SECURITY CHALLENGES AFTER THE AUGUST WAR IN GEORGIA

Haroutiun Khachatryan

The war between Russia and Georgia of August 8-13, 2008, has dramatically changed the geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus, and one of its consequences are new security challenges for the states of the region. Armenia, the smallest and potentially one of the most vulnerable countries of the region faces the following new threats.

First of all, a conflict started between two countries, which are both friendly to Armenia and are of vital importance for it, as Georgia provides Armenia the bulk of its land communications with the outer world, and Russia is Armenia's principal military and economic partner. Worsening of relations with either of them would endanger Armenia's security, even if the problem of getting vital supplies were the only consequence. Armenia already has had problems (so far brief and not significant) with supplies of grain and oil products through the territory of Georgia (the August 16 explosion of the railroad bridge between Tbilisi and Gori being only one of the reasons) and pumping of the Russian natural gas was also briefly reduced. Continuing instability at the Black Sea port of Poti, with is the main gate for exporting and importing Armenian goods looks currently as a serious danger for Armenia.

Second, the conflict may create difficulties for Armenia to follow its foreign policy doctrine, known as "complementarity," which envisages keeping good relations with both Russia and the West. So far Armenia has been successful in its efforts to keep military ties with NATO along with those with Russia, as well as in cooperating with EU (as a member of the European Neighborhood Policy) having Russia as the main trade partner and investor. Worsening Russia-NATO relations may force Armenia to choose between the two, and the choice will inevitably be in favor of Russia. Thus, Armenia may be forced to abandon its ties with NATO, which was not only a way to acquire modern technologies of military management, but also a channel for cooperation with members of NATO and its Partnership For Peace program, a process which provided an opportunity for improving the whole climate in the region. For example, Turkish troops might visit Armenia for military exercises.

The freezing of ties between Russia and the European Union may appear unlikely, but Armenia still may be forced to restrict its cooperation with the EU due to political reasons. A separate aspect of these difficulties may be the necessity for Armenia to choose between Russia and the U.S., also an

important partner in the country's development programs. The United States provides Armenia with aid not only in the economy (with the Millennium Challenge Account as its largest component), but in many other spheres, including military assistance.

Third, Georgia's August 8 incursion into South Ossetia was the first case of an attempt to solve by force one of the three "frozen conflicts" in the South Caucasus since May 1994 (the establishment of the ceasefire in the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh). The conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia used to be the least "hostile" among these three, as people were mostly free to travel between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali, whereas no such freedom existed in Abkhazia and Nagorno Karabakh, the other two conflict areas of the South Caucasus. Hence, the August armed clash greatly endangered the perspectives for peaceful settlement and reconciliation of the conflicts of the region. Although this Georgian attempt failed due to the Russian intervention (and many politicians, including the French president Nicolas Sarkozy reiterated that they cannot be solved by force), concerns are high in Armenia that Azerbaijan may follow the example of Georgia and try to seize quickly the Nagorno Karabakh region.

There are unconfirmed data that Armenian troops are at a state of high alert, both along the Armenian-Azerbaijani borders and on the line separating the unrecognized Nagorno Karabakh Republic and Azerbaijan. The parties involved in the Nagorno Karabakh issue have made statements in favor of continuing efforts to find a peaceful settlement, but Yerevan is concerned that the possibility of a hostile solution for the conflict was never excluded by official Baku. So the negotiation process over Karabakh, not very successful so far, can encounter additional difficulties.

Fourth, an unexpected aspect of the new geopolitical situation in the Caucasus region is the Turkish

initiative to create a regional security forum ("platform") to help decrease tension in the region. The Turkish leaders have said that Armenia's participation in the putative body would be desirable, and they have also supported undertaking urgent measures to help reach a peaceful settlement to the frozen conflicts. Moreover, the Turkish position concerning the establishment of relations with Armenia has become more tolerant, as some officials in Ankara may be inclined to exclude a Karabakh settlement from the list of preconditions for normalization of ties with Yerevan.

Of course, this is in line with Armenia's goals, while another positive aspect is that the Turkish plan received initial support from Russia. However, the Turkish initiative - which is aimed at increasing Ankara's influence in the region - can in fact generate jealousy not only in Russia but also in the United States, and Armenia may get into additional trouble. In addition, Armenia has been suspicious over the Turkish initiatives, as Turkey has always had a pro-Azerbaijani stance on the Karabakh issue.

Given all of the above-mentioned, Armenia has been very cautious during and after the Russian-Georgian war. Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan extended his condolences and pledged to send humanitarian aid to the Presidents of both Russia and Georgia. Extensive diplomatic contacts are being held with Russia, and there are reports that Armenia may seek to act as a mediator among the two conflicting parties. Finally, the August events apparently increased the possibility of an unofficial Armenian-Turkish summit, as Turkish president Abdullah Gul is reportedly inclined to accept Serzh Sargsyan's invitation to attend the Armenia-Turkey soccer game on September 6 in Yerevan. The final pattern of regional security is still far from complete.

PRESIDENT ILHAM ALIYEV ATTENDS GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY OF TURKISH STRETCH OF BTK RAILWAY

24 July

Presidents Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, Abdullah Gul of Turkey and Mikhail Saakashvili of Georgia as well as officials from the European Union, USA and other countries attended Thursday the groundbreaking ceremony of the Turkish section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway in Kars. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, also called Iron Silk Road, will link China with Europe. The ceremony started with opening remarks of Turkish Transport Minister Binali Yildirim who called the 76-km railroad a landmark event. According to him, this project will make Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia even closer. Construction of the railway began on November 21 at the Marabda station in Georgia and is set to be completed in 2011.

Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili described BTK railway as the one of the major projects of the century. He pointed out BTK railway would allow boosting export potential of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia. Saakashvili noted this project could have never been realized without President Ilham Aliyev's persistence. President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev characterized the groundbreaking ceremony of the BTK railway as the landmark in the cooperation among the three countries. He described the BTK railway project as the example of effective cooperation. Thanks to the political will of the three countries, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum projects are being implemented, and BTK project is another success of this cooperation. Turkish President Gul described BTK railway project as the revival of the Silk Road. According to him, this project will link not only Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia but also Europe and Asia.

By early estimation, this railway will be carrying 1.5 million passengers and 6 million tons of cargo in 2010 and 3.5 million people and 16.5 million tons in 2034. Kazakhstan signed the protocol to link up to the line. (Azertag)

SCO FOREIGN MINISTERIAL MEETING KICKS OFF IN TAJIKISTAN

25 July

Foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states gathered for a meeting at a Tajik government countryside residence on Friday, a RIA Novosti correspondent reported. The ministers are to focus on a joint declaration to reflect the bloc's role in the world, and in particular Central Asia. The meeting will also adopt a joint statement to assess the SCO's performance in 2007 and to establish new tasks for expanding cooperation. International problems as well as efforts to enhance security and stability in the region will also be discussed. The SCO, comprising Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, has maintained a moratorium on new members for two years now. Iran and Pakistan, observer states at the SCO since 2005, have sought full membership in the regional bloc, widely seen as a counterweight to NATO's influence in Eurasia. Today's meeting will also decide on whether to admit new members or set up mechanisms for a partnership dialogue for other countries to join. The group primarily addresses security issues, but has recently moved to embrace various economic and energy projects. Russia and China have been cautious over admitting Iran, embroiled in a long-running dispute with the West and Israel over its nuclear program and alleged support for radical groups in Lebanon and other countries. However, both China and Russia have major commercial interests in Iran. China wants Iranian oil and gas, and to sell weapons and other goods to the country, while Moscow hopes to sell more weapons and nuclear energy technology to Tehran. (RIA Novosti)

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH SAYS UZBEKS BAR REPRESENTATIVE

25 July

Uzbekistan has barred a representative of Human Rights Watch from the country despite an EU condition for the lifting of sanctions on the Central Asian state, the rights group said on Friday. Human Rights Watch said its Tashkent representative Igor Vorontsov had been denied work accreditation and then told by the Uzbek authorities while he was abroad that he would not be allowed to return to the

country. It said this was despite the fact that the European Union had made accreditation of a Human Rights Watch representative one of the criteria for a formal ending of sanctions against Uzbekistan. "The Uzbek government is mocking the EU, and Brussels should respond forcefully to make clear it won't accept this kind of behaviour," Veronika Szente Goldston, Europe and Central Asia advocate at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement. "This is a real test of the Uzbek government's commitment to human rights and of the EU's resolve to insist on real reform." The rights group called on EU ambassadors due to meet the Uzbek authorities on July 28-29 to discuss rights abuses and to insist that EU rights criteria are met. "Tashkent has not only failed to make meaningful progress toward meeting the EU's calls for rights improvements, it has actually backtracked in a number of respects," it said, highlighting the arrest of a journalist and a rights activist in recent weeks. The statement said Uzbek authorities had said they would consider an alternative candidate for the Human Rights Watch post, but that this candidate should not be Russian. It called this discriminatory and inappropriate interference. The rights group said Uzbekistan continued to detain at least 11 other rights activists and journalists for politically motivated reasons.

It had also failed to address impunity for torture or to provide justice for the May 2005 massacre in the town of Andijan, where witnesses said troops killed hundreds of people, including women and children, when firing on unarmed protesters. Rights groups have been upset by a gradual easing of EU sanctions on Uzbekistan despite a lack of progress on rights. The EU imposed visa bans on senior Uzbek officials in response to Andijan, but these have since been suspended and are due to expire in October, largely due to pressure by Germany, which is keen to protect its interests in Uzbekistan. These include a military base used to supply its troops stationed in Afghanistan as part of a NATO mission there. (Reuters)

GAZPROM SAYS AGREES PRICE MODEL WITH TURKMENISTAN

26 July

Russian gas export monopoly Gazprom said on Friday it has reached an agreement with Turkmenistan on key pricing principles for the company's gas imports from the Central Asian country, but gave no figure. Gazprom, the world's largest gas producer, which supplies a quarter of

Europe's gas needs, imports gas from Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to meet growing demand at home and abroad. Gazprom said earlier this month that its import bill for purchases from Central Asia may more than double next year and that it could raise its export price to Ukraine to more than \$400 per 1,000 cubic metres from \$179.5 now. Europe is carefully watching pricing talks between Ukraine and Russia after a previous dispute led to supply disruptions to Europe, which imports much of its gas via Ukraine.

Turkmenistan has raised its price for gas supplies to Gazprom to \$130 per tcm in the first half of this year and \$150 in the second half, up from \$100 last year. (Reuters)

TAJIKISTAN PRESIDENT SUGGESTS FOUNDING REGIONAL SCO ANTINARCOTICS CENTER IN DUSHANBE **28 July**

The President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, suggests founding SCO regional antinarcotic center in Dushanbe. The President informed during the meeting with Foreign Ministers of SCO member states on Friday, the agency reports referring to news agency Asia Plus. "E. Rahmon suggested creating in Dushanbe SCO regional center on struggle against manufacture and illegal circulation of drugs. In his opinion, to strengthen regional security we need to involve Afghanistan in cooperation and to render it target address help," the press service of the President of Tajikistan informs.

According to the press service, during the meeting the questions of preparation for the next summit of SCO member states and the agenda of the summit, which will take place in August in Dushanbe, have been considered. Much attention has been given to cooperation in the field of security and various areas of economy. E. Rahmon named "very important prompt creation of Development Fund and SCO energy club along with the interbank community and Council of businessmen." "The parties exchanged opinions on expansion of regional transport cooperation and effective use of hydro-energy resources of Central Asia, activization of cultural cooperation and communications with other international organizations, the press service of Tajikistan President informed. (Kazakhstan Today)

U.S. CRITICIZES KYRGYZSTAN IN HOTEL FENCE ROW

30 July

The United States criticized Kyrgyzstan on Wednesday for destroying part of a fence surrounding a Western luxury hotel, saying its actions undermined investor confidence in the Central Asian state. U.S.-Kyrgyz ties have been sour since 2006 when a U.S. airman shot dead a Kyrgyz man at a U.S. military base in Kyrgyzstan used by Washington for operations in Afghanistan. Tensions rose last year when Washington criticized Kyrgyzstan for failing to meet international standards during an October referendum that strengthened President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's hold on power.

Last week officials tore down part of the fence around the glass-and-steel Hyatt hotel in Bishkek to allow public access to the statue of a Kyrgyz ballerina located on its premises. The U.S. embassy in Bishkek reacted angrily, sending a formal note of complaint to the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry. "Two fundamental principles govern foreign investment: rule of law and contract sanctity," Lee Litzenberger, the embassy's charge d'affaires, told Reuters. "The actions of the Mayor's Office are inconsistent with both these principles, and will undermine investor confidence in Kyrgyzstan."

The eight-storey Hyatt Regency -- the only five-star hotel in Kyrgyzstan -- is seen as a symbol of Western-style wealth in the impoverished nation of 5 million where the monthly average wage is \$137. Room rates start at about \$250, according to its Web site. Last Thursday, the mayor's office sent bulldozers to flatten part of its fence and open a public passage to the monument of Bubusara Beishenaliyeva, a ballerina revered in Kyrgyzstan. The hotel, part of the U.S. Global Hyatt Corporation's network, said they were in talks with the city authorities. "Our company has had two meetings with the mayor himself and we will have more meetings in the next few days," Puneet Tandon, the general manager of Hyatt Regency Bishkek, told Reuters. "We are hopeful that there will be a mutually acceptable solution to this current issue." The Mayor's Office has defended its actions, saying in a statement on Tuesday the hotel had ignored state orders to provide free access to the monument. Washington established its military air base in Kyrgyzstan in 2001 to support operations in Afghanistan. The former Soviet republic also hosts a Russian military air base. Activists have held a number of anti-U.S. rallies in Bishkek calling on Washington to withdraw troops. So far the government has rejected opposition calls to evict U.S. troops. (Reuters)

GEORGIA DOES NOT PLAN TO LEAVE KODORI GORGE - MINISTER

30 July

Georgia is not going to withdraw its police forces from the Kodori Gorge, Georgian State Minister for Reintegration Affairs Temur Iakobashvili told journalists on Wednesday. He was commenting on the statement by Russia's envoy to the United Nations Vitaly Churkin, who said after the UN Security Council meeting on the Abkhaz issue that talks between Sukhumi and Tbilisi cannot resume unless Georgia withdraws its forces from the Kodori Gorge and signs a non-aggression agreement. "The issue as to whether Georgian police forces should enter or withdraw from the Kodori Gorge is not within Churkin's remit. This issue is up to Georgia, and Georgia is not planning to leave," Iakobashvili said. (Interfax)

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN BEGAN IN AZERBAIJAN

31 July

Presidential elections campaign began in Azerbaijan on Wednesday, the agency reports. The planned schedule of Central Electoral Committee of Azerbaijan of the main activities and measures on preparation and elections of the president of the country was published in official press on July 29. October 15, 2008 has been declared the day of presidential elections. According to the procedure, the documents for registration of the candidates will be received from August 11 till September 5. Within 10 days from the date of submission to the Central Electoral Committee of the necessary documents and subscription lists the Central Electoral Commission should inform applicants of the status of their registration or refusal in registration of candidates for the president. The final list of candidates will be published till September 20, 2008, and election campaign will begin on September 17 and will be finished by the end of October 14. On October 15, the day of elections, polling districts will open at 8.00 and will be closed at 19.00. (Kazakhstan Today)

IRAN-UZBEKISTAN HOLD JOINT ECONOMIC COMMISSION

31 July

Iran and Uzbekistan 9th joint economic, commercial commission was held in Tashkent on Wednesday. Iran's Commerce Minister Masoud Mir-Kazemi, who headed Iran's delegation, said,

"Considering historical, cultural and religious commonalities we ask for expansion of ties in all fields with our brotherly country Uzbekistan." Existing potentials in different fields of oil and gas industry, agriculture, mine, petrochemicals and other industrial sectors can promote commercial and economic cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan, Mir-Kazemi added. He continued, "We are both trying to increase commercial exchange level to one billion dollars, annually." Nasiruddin Najimev, deputy minister of foreign economic and commercial relations, said " According to the existing statistics, commercial exchange level has increased five fold from year 2000 to 2007. Commercial exchange between the two countries reached to 385 million dollars in the first six months of the year 2008, while it was 565 million dollars for the whole last year. He continued, "Currently some 117 Iranian investing companies are active in Uzbekistan." The two sides are to consider and discuss the latest situation of bilateral cooperation in the fields of transportation, commerce, banking, energy, tourism and standard and ways to promote and develop them. It was said that documents on expansion of economic and commercial cooperation are to be signed at the end of the meeting. (IRNA)

SIX GEORGIAN POLICEMEN WOUNDED IN TSKHINVALI DISTRICT

1 August

Six Georgian policemen were wounded in a terrorist attack in the Georgian-South-Ossetian conflict zone in the early hours of Friday, a police source in the Shida Kartli region told Interfax. According to Georgian police, two remote-control bombs were exploded under a car carrying Georgian policemen on a by-pass road near Tskhinvali. The Georgian policemen, five of who are in serious condition, were admitted to hospital in Gori, the source said. However, mixed Peacekeeping Forces in the conflict zone spokesman Capt. Vladimir Ivanov said that two policemen were wounded in the mine blast. "A group of military observers of the Mixed Peacekeeping Forces from the three parties and representative of the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] mission are working at the scene," he said. An engineer unit of peacekeepers is checking the territory adjacent to the scene of the blast, he added. (Interfax)

KAZAKHSTAN, CHINA SIGN ACCORD ON GAS PIPELINE CONSTRUCTION

1 August

The Kazakh gas company KazMunayGas and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) have signed an agreement on the basic principles of the construction and use of the Kazakhstan-China gas pipeline, the press office of KazMunayGas said today. The document, which was signed in Astana on Wednesday, stipulates the principles guiding the project's funding, the setting of tariffs, ship-or-pay provisions, and includes the issue of the project's profitability.

The China-Kazakhstan oil pipeline is part of the Turkmenistan-China backbone pipeline. The pipeline's capacity is expected to reach 10bn cubic meters of gas per year in 2009 and 30bn cubic meters in 2012. (RBC)

AZERBAIJAN PRESIDENT TO SEEK SECOND TERM

2 August

Azerbaijan's ruling party on Saturday nominated President Ilham Aliyev to stand for a second term at October elections in this strategic oil-rich state, the party said. The elections were immediately denounced as fraudulent by the opposition, which vowed to boycott the vote. The Yeni Azerbaijan (New Azerbaijan) party unanimously approved the nomination of Aliyev, who exerts a tight grip in this Western-backed, mainly Muslim country. "In case of my election I will defend Azerbaijan's national interests and work to strengthen the state," Aliyev told the party congress, quoted in a statement by the party. Aliyev, 46, has ruled this Caspian Sea state since October 2003, when he took the place of his deceased father Heydar in a vote marred by police breaking up mass protests and arresting hundreds. Azerbaijan is central to Western efforts to develop new sources of oil and gas in the Caspian region independent of its Soviet-era master Moscow. The country hosts strategic East-West oil and gas pipelines. Two leading opposition parties, Musavat and the Democratic Party, announced Saturday they would boycott the October 15 election, leaving few challengers to Aliyev. The Azadlig bloc, another opposition group, had already announced its own boycott. Musavat leader Isa Gambar told a party gathering Saturday that restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly made it impossible for the opposition to contest the vote fairly. "The majority of the party supports boycotting the elections and I support it as well," Gambar said.

He told AFP earlier he had no doubt the election would be falsified. "Unfortunately, we have no basis to believe that the upcoming election will be free

and fair, according to international standards," he said. "We have not seen any election since 1993 that was democratic. They have always been falsified. This year I think the situation will be even worse." Critics have accused Azerbaijani authorities of persecuting the opposition and cracking down on independent media. Media-rights groups have frequently criticised authorities for harassing and jailing journalists critical of the government. Reporters were barred from covering the party congress and Aliyev's acceptance speech. Western groups, including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, have called on Azerbaijan to ensure a free and fair vote after giving negative assessments of previous elections. (AFP)

SOUTH OSSETIA EVACUATES CHILDREN 2 August

The breakaway Georgian province of South Ossetia says it is evacuating children to neighbouring Russia, amid renewed violence. The authorities said they had started to put children on buses to take them out of the conflict zone, but it is not clear how many children have left. Georgia said the decision was worrying, as it could be a sign the separatists were preparing for more violence. Six people died on Friday when South Ossetia's capital came under fire. The Russian-backed separatists and the Georgian authorities blamed each other for starting the fighting. Tensions have risen in South Ossetia and Georgia's other breakaway region, Abkhazia, after Russia announced it would establish official links with the separatists. Georgia's government says Russia is supporting and inciting the separatists to create instability as part of its attempts to stop Georgia joining Nato, says the BBC's Matthew Collin in Tbilisi. It also accuses Russia of acting to maintain the Kremlin's influence in this former Soviet region, our correspondent says. 'Full-scale war' The separatists said three of their militiamen were killed by Georgian sniper fire and three civilians died when the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali was shelled on Friday night. South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity accused Georgia of "attempting to spark a full-scale war", and said he was ready to mobilise volunteer fighters if the situation deteriorated further. The Georgian interior ministry told the BBC that the separatists had provoked the violence by opening fire first, and troops had responded. It said snipers were not involved and that populated areas were not shelled. Interior Ministry spokesman Shota Utiashvili also

said that South Ossetian forces had blown up a Georgian police car with a mine earlier on Friday, injuring six policemen. Friday's overnight fighting was the worst violence in South Ossetia for several years. Skirmishes have erupted frequently along the border, with the two sides accusing each other of starting them. South Ossetia fought a war to break away from Georgia during the collapse of the USSR at the beginning of the 1990s.

It has remained de facto independent, backed by Russia which has about 1,000 peacekeeping troops stationed there. Georgia has been seeking to restore its control over both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. (BBC)

GEORGIA, SOUTH OSSETIA TALK WAR AFTER 6 DIE IN CLASH

3 August

Stoking fears of war in the volatile Caucasus, separatist president Eduard Kokoity said he was ready to mobilize his region's men and take volunteers from the Russian republic of North Ossetia and other Caucasus republics to fight Georgia. South Ossetia said on its website, cominf.org, that the death toll had risen overnight from three to six people and armed clashes continued through the night on the outskirts of the separatist capital, Tskhinvali. The commander of Georgia's peacekeeping force in the region, Mamuka Kurashvili, was quoted by Interfax news agency as saying South Ossetian peacekeepers shot at a Georgian village and suspected Russian peacekeepers of taking part. Georgian peacekeepers and police officers returned fire and repelled the attack, he said. Georgia's Interior Ministry said nine civilians in the Georgian villages in South Ossetia were injured, while Tskhinvali said up to 15 were injured on its side, up from seven reported on Friday. Kokoity put the number of injured at 13. "This is another attempt by the separatist side to involve Georgia in a military conflict," Georgia's state minister in charge of re-integration, Temur Iakobashvili, told reporters in Tbilisi before leaving to visit the shootout area. (Reuters)

KYRGYZ MEDICS JAILED IN HIV CASES

4 August

A court in Kyrgyzstan has convicted nine medical workers for infecting 24 children with HIV - the virus that causes Aids - local media have said. The doctors and nurses, all from one hospital, were sentenced to between three and five years for causing the infections through negligence. They

have also been ordered to pay compensation to the victims' families. The medics said poor hygiene and equipment at the hospital were to blame for the infections. Another four medical workers were found not guilty and charges against another were dropped. More than 70 children have been infected with HIV in the region since last year, with four deaths reported. The outbreak has shocked the Central Asian republic and deepened public concern over conditions in hospitals and the quality of health workers. The former Soviet republic has struggled to fund its healthcare system since the break-up of the USSR. There have been similar cases in neighbouring countries. Last year, 21 medical workers in Kazakhstan were sentenced to prison terms for infecting 150 children with HIV. (BBC)

GAS FLOW DISCOVERED AT GUTLYAYAK SECTION IN THE KARAKUM DESERT

4 August

A production gas and gas condensate flow with a potential daily yield of over 200,000 cubic meters has been discovered with test exploration at well N1 at the Southern Gutlyayak section in the Central Karakum desert, the Turkmen State Information Agency said. The agency said that the deposits productive horizon is at depth of 4040-4060 meters. The Gutlyayak section is the leading gas condensate field in the Prikopetdag lowlands according to geophysical research conducted by Turkmengeologiya in the oil and gas producing Kyrk-Gozli region. Research is continuing in the region, which will allow for a more exact geological survey of the field's reserves, which, in turn, will determine the course of future exploration. It was earlier reported that over 150 fields have been discovered in Turkmenistan. However, production has commenced at only 50 of these fields. (Interfax)

PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN WILL IMPORT 1,300 MEGAWATTS ELECTRICITY FROM TWO CENTRAL ASIAN STATES KYRGYZSTAN AND TAJIKISTAN UNDER AN AGREEMENT SIGNED IN ISLAMABAD ON MONDAY

4 August

Under the Central Asia-South Asia (CASA-1000) agreement Pakistan will import 1,000 MW and Afghanistan 300 MW.

The transmission line will be 477 km long from Kyrgyz Republic to Tajikistan and 750 km between Tajikistan and Pakistan via Kabul. The agreement

was signed on conclusion of two-day Inter-Governmental Council (IGC) meeting of Central Asia/South Asia Regional Electricity Market (CASAREM). The agreement was signed by energy ministers from the four countries in the presence of representatives of the international financial institutions including the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Islamic Development Bank. Pakistan's Minister for Water and Power Raja Pervez Ashraf told a news conference that CASA 1000 Project is expected to be commissioned by year 2013. "The project would go a long way in overcoming power shortages in Pakistan, as well Afghanistan". The IGC Secretariat will be set up at Kabul and would become operational with immediate effect. Qazi Naeemuddin of Pakistan has been appointed first Executive Director of IGC Secretariat. "The project is a landmark as it fosters regional electricity market and brings together countries of Central and South Asia and also opens new vistas of trade and energy among energy rich and energy deficit countries," Ashraf said. Minister of Energy and Water of Afghanistan Alhaj Mohammad Ismail Khan said that the agreement will play a vital role in the strengthening of relations between members' states. He added it will certainly be a great milestone for the economic development of the members' states. (IRNA)

FOUR POLICEMEN KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

4 August

Taliban militants stormed a police post in central Afghanistan overnight, killing a police commander and three of his officers, a government spokesman said Monday. Some of the dozens of Taliban who conducted the raid in the central province of Ghazni were also killed in an ensuing battle that lasted about an hour, provincial government spokesman Ismail Jahangir told AFP. The Zana Khan district police chief was one of the policemen who died, he said. "A big number of Taliban have also been killed but we don't know exactly how many," the spokesman said. A spokesman for the insurgency Taliban movement, Zabihullah Mujahed, confirmed that fighters with his group had carried out the attack but claimed they had not suffered casualties. Police are among the main targets of extremist insurgents linked to the Taliban, who are trying to take back power after being driven from government in a US-led invasion in late 2001. Also in Ghazni, four people were killed in an air strike by international military forces but it was not

confirmed if they were Taliban or civilians, Jahangir said. "Four people, all men, were killed when coalition forces bombed a house in Waghaz district. An investigation has been launched to find out whether they were Taliban or civilians," he told AFP.

It was not possible to independently confirm the reports due to the remoteness of the area. In more fighting, the US military said "several" militants were killed Sunday in the northern province of Baghlan in an operation to capture a militant leader responsible for bomb attacks on troops, the force said. The militant was captured, it said in a statement.

Unrest linked to the insurgency has increased every year since the Taliban were forced out. This year about 800 Afghan security force personnel and around 150 international troops have lost their lives in insurgency-linked unrest as have hundreds of civilians, according to various official estimates. There are no official figures for the number of rebels killed (AFP)

PRESIDENT OF KAZAKHSTAN TO VISIT CHINA ON AUGUST 7-10

4 August

The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, will visit the Chinese National Republic on August 7-10. The official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Yerzhan Ashikbayev, informed at today's briefing, the agency reports. "During the visit the leader of the state will take part in the opening ceremony of XXIX Olympic Games and will visit a number of sports competitions with participation of Kazakhstan Olympians," Y. Ashikbayev said. N. Nazarbayev will meet the chairman of the Peoples Republic of China Hu Jintao (Kazakhstan Today)

NATO "NOT AWARE" OF ANY GEORGIA BUILDUP, URGES CALM

5 August

NATO said on Tuesday it was not aware of any troop buildup by its ally Georgia in or near the country's breakaway South Ossetia region and called on all parties to reduce tensions. Russia said on Tuesday it would not remain indifferent if violence escalated in South Ossetia, given the presence of Russian citizens there, Interfax news agency reported, quoting a Russian diplomat. NATO spokeswoman Carmen Romero said the alliance was closely following the situation. "NATO has seen the reports of the violent

confrontations in the Georgian region of South Ossetia in the last few days, which caused a significant number of casualties," she said. "We call on all parties to de-escalate the tensions." Russia has accused Georgia of using excessive force in South Ossetia, but Romero said NATO was "not aware of any troop concentrations by Georgia in or near South Ossetia". The breakaway region is at the centre of a row between Russia and Georgia, which NATO says will one day join the alliance. The West fears tensions could trigger conflict. Moscow's accusations followed a weekend of clashes in South Ossetia, a mountainous region bordering Russia that broke away from Georgia after a war in the early 1990s. Interfax quoted Russian special ambassador Yuri Popov as saying that, if events continued to develop according to a "worst-case violence scenario", Russia would not remain indifferent, given that Russian citizens lived in South Ossetia, especially in the conflict zone. (Reuters)

MARINES ORDERED TO STAY LONGER IN AFGHANISTAN

5 August

The Pentagon has ordered roughly 1,250 Marines serving as trainers for the Afghan security forces to stay on the warfront almost a month longer to continue a mission that military leaders say is a top priority, according to a senior military official. In addition, Defense Secretary Robert Gates has authorized the deployment of up to 200 other troops to Afghanistan to support the Marines. That includes eight helicopter crews that could be shifted from Iraq if commanders decide. The senior military official spoke to The Associated Press on Monday on condition of anonymity because the formal announcement has not yet been made. The decision to extend the tour of the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment in Afghanistan comes just a month after defense officials told the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit that it would stay an extra month in Afghanistan. According to the official, the decision to hold the battalion there longer is part of an effort to capitalize on the gains the Marines have made in the training mission. The extension means that the battalion would return home in late November. Asked about Gates' decision, Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell said the secretary was responding to a request from the commanders. Gates "is always pained to have to extend tours. He understands the effect that has on the families of our forces, but he also appreciates our commanders' need to make additional progress while the weather

is still good in Afghanistan," Morrell said. Gates' decision to send the other support forces comes after weeks of discussions by top military leaders who scrambled to find needed troops. He authorized Army Lt. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, who is temporarily in charge of U.S. Central Command, to shift up to eight helicopters and their crews from Iraq to Afghanistan — four Cobra attack aircraft and four MH-53 heavy lift helicopters. The remainder of the support forces being deployed are smaller units, including engineers, route clearance troops and explosive ordnance disposal teams. It was not clear Monday whether those support forces also would return home in late November, or if they would stay longer in Afghanistan. The Pentagon announced in January that the Marine Expeditionary Unit, which is based at Camp Lejeune, N.C., was being ordered to Afghanistan, largely because efforts to press other NATO nations to increase their troop levels at the time had failed. The MEU has been fighting Taliban militants in the volatile south.

At the same time, the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, which is based at Twentynine Palms, Calif., was ordered to deploy also. Gates has said he would not replace the Marines with other U.S. troops when they left later this year. But commanders have said they need three more combat brigades — or as many as 10,000 troops — to bolster the fight in Afghanistan. And U.S. officials have indicated they would like to send extra brigades there next year. Military leaders, however, have made it clear they need to free units from Iraq deployments in order to send more troops to Afghanistan. As security in Iraq continues to improve, officials have suggested that units initially headed for Iraq late this year or early next year could be sent to Afghanistan instead. (AP)

GEORGIAN SEPARATISTS "DESTROY GOVT VEHICLES": REPORT

6 August

Georgian separatists in the breakaway region of South Ossetia have destroyed two government vehicles during a clash on Wednesday, Russia's Interfax news agency reported, quoting a separatist official. "At present, a fight is ongoing near the village of Nul, where South Ossetian forces are trying to push out Georgian special forces," Irina Gagloyeva, official representative of the South Ossetian authorities, told Interfax. "We have information that two Georgian military vehicles

have been blown up," she was quoted as saying. (Reuters)

GEORGIAN REBEL REGION REJECTS DIRECT TALKS

6 August

The leader of Georgia's rebel region of South Ossetia on Wednesday rejected plans for direct talks with Tbilisi this week as violence continued to flare in the mountain province. "There will be no bilateral meeting on Thursday," South Ossetia's de facto president, Eduard Kokoity, told Russia's Interfax news agency. "We are ready to carry on negotiations in (the rebel capital) Tskhinvali, but only in the four-party format," he said. Georgian and Russian officials previously announced that the first bilateral talks in a decade would take place in Tskhinvali on Thursday. Georgian officials continued to insist that the meeting would take place, despite denials from South Ossetia. "The meeting will be held," Marina Salukvadze, a spokeswoman for Georgian Reintegration Minister Temur Yakobashvili, told AFP on Wednesday. Tbilisi has rejected talks under the established four-party format, which consists of negotiators from Georgia, Russia, South Ossetia and Russia's North Ossetia region. Georgia says the format is biased in favour of the rebels. Both sides, meanwhile, accused the other of opening fire on local villages with automatic rifles and heavy weapons. The rebel government said in statements on its website that four Ossetian villages had come under heavy fire throughout the day. It also reported that Georgian special forces had attempted to seize high ground over a strategic road, but been repulsed by rebel militia. It said it had destroyed a Georgian armoured personnel carrier during the battle, but Tbilisi denied the claim. Georgian Interior Ministry Spokesman Shota Utiashvili told AFP that Georgian forces had only returned fire after Ossetian positions began shelling Georgian-controlled villages. (AFP)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT OFFERS SOUTH OSSETIA CEASEFIRE

7 August

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said on Thursday he was offering South Ossetian separatists an immediate ceasefire following days of heavy fighting. He said he had ordered Georgian forces not to return fire. "I offer you an immediate ceasefire and the immediate beginning of talks," Saakashvili said in a televised address. He repeated

an offer of "full autonomy" for the breakaway region. (Reuters)

EU AND U.S. BACK GEORGIA'S CALL FOR TRUCE

10 AUGUST

Russia accused Georgia on Saturday of seeking bloody adventures by trying to retake its breakaway region of South Ossetia and defended its own military campaign to stop it. Pro-western Georgia earlier called for a ceasefire after Moscow's bombers widened an offensive to force Tbilisi's troops back out of the region in the Caucasus mountains. "Russia's actions in South Ossetia are totally legitimate," Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said, visiting an adjacent region of Russia to which thousands of refugees have fled. U.S. President George W. Bush urged Moscow to stop bombing immediately, saying it marked a dangerous escalation. Russia said it had seized the rebel capital Tskhinvali but Georgia denied this. The Moscow-backed rebels contradicted each other, one leader saying Georgians had been beaten back, but another that "The city has been lost. We have been betrayed." Current European Union president France urged Russia to accept Georgia's truce offer. (Reuters)

RUSSIAN SHIPS SANK GEORGIAN MISSILE BOAT ATTEMPTING TO ATTACK – DEFENSE MINISTRY

10 August

Georgian missile boats made two attempts to attack Russian war ships on Sunday, a Russian Defense Ministry spokesman has told Interfax. "Russian Navy ships opened reply fire and as a result one of the attacking Georgian vessels sank," the spokesman said. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJAN EASES TRANSIT FOR FOREIGNERS LEAVING GEORGIA

11 August

Azerbaijan has facilitated transit formalities for foreign citizens leaving Georgia, the Azeri Foreign Ministry's official spokesman Hazar Ibragim told a briefing on Monday. "The case in point is several hundred people wishing to leave Georgia. The time needed to examine the corresponding permission has been reduced from five days to one or two days," the spokesman said. The Azeri embassy in Georgia is working in its full-day schedule, he said. "The embassy is closely watching the developments in Georgia. We cannot remain indifferent to the

destiny of our citizens. We provide help to all our citizens who want to leave Georgia," the diplomat said. He added that some Azeris had already left Georgia but did not specify how many. (Interfax)

BTC OIL PIPELINE FIRE EXTINGUISHED

11 August

A fire on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline in Turkey was extinguished on Monday, a senior source at BP, a major shareholder in the pipeline, told Reuters. The pipeline carrying Azeri crude, which passes through Georgia, was hit by an explosion on Turkish territory in the week before conflict began over the South Ossetia region. Repairs may not be finished for one to two weeks or longer, according to sources at Turkey's state-owned pipeline company Botas. World oil prices rose last week after the announcement of the blaze, and estimates that it could take up to two weeks to get the pipeline on stream again. "Today we put the fire out, and immediately after that we started trying to cool down the pipeline. As soon as the cooling process ends, we will begin assessing the damage and start repairs," he said. The pipeline normally carries Azeri oil which is high quality and commands a premium. The \$4 billion BTC pipeline can pump up to a million barrels per day, the equivalent of more than 1 percent of world supply, from fields in the Azeri sector of the Caspian Sea to Ceyhan on the Turkish Mediterranean coast. The biggest hindrance to firefighting efforts was oil that settled in the pipeline since the flow was stopped last Tuesday. Technical teams sent to the site of the fire will assess the damage and the BTC consortium will decide how to proceed. One repair method put forth by the teams could take two weeks or longer, pushing back original estimates for a date to get the pipeline back on line. Kurdish separatists claimed responsibility for the explosion and said they would carry out more attacks on economic targets inside Turkey. Military and local official sources said the fire was due to a technical error and was not due to sabotage. (Reuters)

RUSSIA WON'T LEAVE S. OSSETIA RESIDENTS UNAIDED AFTER FIGHTING ENDS -PUTIN

11 August

Russia is prepared to provide all necessary resources to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in South Ossetia, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said on Monday. "Decisions will be made today to provide funding to assist the victims of the humanitarian disaster - 500 million rubles," Putin said. Russia will not leave South Ossetia's residents unaided after the fighting ends, he added. "We will help restore the housing, schools, hospitals and infrastructure. I

have said already that we are prepared to consider applications as they arrive, and provide a sizeable sum - about 10 billion rubles," the Russian prime minister said. Twenty-one electric power plants, 23 water purification systems and two mobile hospitals have now been taken to South Ossetia. An additional 2,700 beds have been made available at hospitals in southern Russia, which are ready to receive injured people, he said. Some 136 tonnes of food, 90.5 tonnes of drinking water and 39 tonnes of medicines and medical equipment have been brought to the region to assist the refugees, Putin said. (Interfax)

GEORGIA CLASHES WON'T STOP BTC OIL FLOW

12 August

Fighting in Georgia will not stop oil flow on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline and exports will resume when the pipeline is repaired, a source at Turkish state pipeline company Botas said on Tuesday. The pipeline carrying Azeri crude, which passes through Georgia, was hit by an explosion claimed by Kurdish separatist guerrillas on Turkish territory two days before conflict began over the South Ossetia region between Russia and Georgia. "We are not linking the fighting between Russia and Georgia with the oil pipeline at the moment. We are focused on repairing the pipeline," the source, who declined to be named, said. "Oil exports will begin when the pipeline is repaired, the fighting is not an obstacle for exports," the source said. Another Botas source said on Monday repairs may not be finished for one to two weeks or longer. No oil is currently flowing through the pipeline. World oil prices rose last week after the announcement of the blaze, and estimates that it could take up to two weeks to get the pipeline on stream again. The pipeline normally carries Azeri oil which is high quality and commands a premium. The \$4 billion BTC pipeline can pump up to a million barrels per day, the equivalent of more than 1 percent of world supply, from fields in the Azeri sector of the Caspian Sea to Ceyhan on the Turkish Mediterranean coast. Britain's BP Plc owns 30.1 percent of BTC, while Azeri state oil company Socar holds 25 percent. Other shareholders include U.S. companies Chevron and ConocoPhillips, Norway's StatoilHydro, Italy's ENI and France's Total. Kurdish separatists claimed responsibility for the explosion and said they would carry out more attacks on economic targets inside Turkey. (Reuters)

RUSSIA TRYING TO CRUSH DEMOCRACY, GEORGIA LEADER SAYS

11 August

Russia is attacking Georgia to achieve "regime change" and crush Georgia's pro-Western democracy, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said Monday. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili says Russia wants to extend its control over former Soviet republics. "We are in the process of invasion, occupation, and annihilation of an independent, democratic country," Saakashvili said at a news conference Monday. "The goal of this operation is regime change in Georgia." Saakashvili then abruptly ended his conference call with reporters, saying, "We have to go to the shelter because there are Russian planes flying over the presidential palace here, sorry." Video footage showed a chaotic scene outside the palace, with the president being rushed away under heavy security. Russia said it has no interest in interfering with Georgia's affairs but wants to protect its peacekeepers and the residents of South Ossetia, an autonomous region of Georgia. Over several years, Russia has given passports to many of those residents and declared them Russian citizens. Also Monday, Saakashvili had to run for cover during a visit to the town of Gori, where scores of people were killed in a Russian attack Saturday. The Associated Press reported that a member of his security team shouted, "Cover him!" as the Georgian president spoke to reporters next to his sport utility vehicle. (CNN)

58TH ARMY WILL LEAVE S. OSSETIA AFTER SIGNING OF TRUCE - RUSSIAN GENERAL STAFF

12 August

The units of the 58th Army will leave South Ossetia after the sides have reached a truce, Colonel-General Anatoly Nogovitsyn, deputy head of the Russian General Staff, told a press conference in Moscow on Tuesday. The units of the 58th Army were brought to South Ossetia to support the peacekeepers in the region. At the time the conflict began, there were only 588 Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia, said Nogovitsyn. "Serious protocol measures are needed" for the withdrawal of the units, "which need to be followed in certain succession," he said. The first of them is a ceasefire," he said. (Interfax)

ABKHAZIA WILL NOT INVADE FOREIGN TERRITORIES –BAGAPSH

12 August

Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh believes the operation to free the upper part of the Kodori Gorge can be completed on Wednesday. "The majority of the gorge has been freed, including the village where the pro-Georgian government of the autonomous Abkhazia in exile was located," Bagapsh told reporters on Tuesday. The Abkhaz forces have yet to free another two mountainous areas, Omarishara and Saken, from the Georgian troops, he said. "The troops will reach the Abkhaz-Georgian border but will go no further," he said. "We have no intention of invading foreign territories," Bagapsh said. Bagapsh confirmed that he intends to visit the upper part of the gorge once the operation is completed. (Interfax)

RUSSIAN PEACEKEEPERS WON'T LEAVE ABKHAZIA - RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY

13 August

Russia intends to continue its peacekeeping mission in Abkhazia despite Georgia's decision to declare the Russian troops in the region occupants and denounce the agreement on their presence. "Being guided by our international obligations and a sense of responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in the region, the Russian federation will continue fulfilling its peacekeeping mission in Abkhazia and South Ossetia," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement issued on Wednesday. According to earlier reports, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili has made a decision to "denounce the agreement on the presence of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Abkhazia and declare the Russian troops in the Abkhaz region occupation forces." The Russian Foreign Ministry admits that the peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia can be stopped at the request of one of the parties to the conflict, but stresses that Saakashvili's statement looks like "an attempt to prepare for a new military attack." (Interfax)

GEORGIA AGREES TO MODIFIED RUSSIA PEACE PLAN

13 August

French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Georgian leader Mikheil Saakashvili said on Wednesday they had agreed to a modified version of a peace plan with Russia over the breakaway region of South Ossetia. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev ordered a halt to military operations in Georgia on

Tuesday in support of the plan proposed by Sarkozy, who flew to Georgia after meeting Medvedev in Moscow. "It is a political document. It is an agreement of principles ... and I think we have full coincidence of principles," Saakashvili told a joint news conference with the French president. Sarkozy said the text would be presented to a meeting of European Union foreign ministers on Wednesday so they could throw their weight behind it. It would then provide the basis for a U.N. Security Council resolution. The changes made had been approved by Medvedev and included removing a reference to talks on the future status of South Ossetia, the two leaders said. Sarkozy said the text now provided for the opening of international talks on ways of restoring security and stability in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia instead. He assured the Georgian president extra Russian security measures mentioned in the agreement would apply only to areas bordering South Ossetia, not broader parts of Georgia. Sarkozy, whose country holds the six-month presidency of the European Union, said he believed Georgia's territorial integrity was "guaranteed by the spirit of this text". Saakashvili said he hoped the agreement was a prelude to international peacekeepers moving into South Ossetia, replacing Russian forces. "These are temporary arrangements now, but later it should be replaced by international process," he said. (Reuters)

GRENADE KILLS 2 AT AZERBAIJAN MOSQUE

17 August

A grenade exploded during evening prayers at a packed mosque in Azerbaijan's capital Sunday, killing two people and injuring up to eight others, police said. An unidentified attacker threw the grenade into a prayer area in the Abu-Bekr mosque, one of the largest in Baku, Interior Ministry spokesman Ehsan Zahidov said. He said the attacker may have had accomplices. Media reports said there were hundreds of people in the mosque when the blast occurred. Zahidov said seven or eight were injured and hospitalized. Azerbaijan is a mostly Muslim former Soviet republic whose secular government is deeply wary of any Muslims whose views and practices go beyond the bounds of the approved. The Abu-Bekr mosque is seen by authorities in the oil-rich Caspian Sea country as a gathering place for extremists. (AP)

GEORGIAN BRIDGE BLAST HITS OIL TRANSIT

17 August

Azerbaijan suspended oil exports through ports in western Georgia on Sunday after an explosion damaged a key rail bridge there. Georgia accused Russian troops of blowing up a railway bridge west of the capital Tbilisi on Saturday, saying its main east-west train link had been severed. Russia denied any involvement. Georgian Railways said Sunday that the railway would reopen within 10 days. "The construction or repair works are expected to be completed within 10 days maximum," said Irma Stepnadze, a spokeswoman for Georgian Railways. She said engineers and workers from Armenia and Azerbaijan were expected to arrive in Georgia on Sunday to help with reconstruction. They were also bringing specialist equipment. In a statement earlier Sunday, Azerbaijan's state railway company cited the bridge explosion as the reason for the suspension. A shipment of 72 oil tanks had been due to be sent to Armenia before the link was cut off, the Azeri company said. The railway line runs from Tbilisi, through the Russian-occupied town of Gori, before splitting in three and running to the Black Sea ports of Poti and Batumi and southwest to just short of the Turkish border. Earlier this month Azerbaijan suspended crude shipments via the BP-operated Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which carries 1 million barrels per day, to Turkey after a fire damaged it. BP last week closed the pipeline taking crude from Azerbaijan's Caspian port of Baku to the Georgian port of Supsa on the Black Sea, citing fighting between Georgian and Russian troops. A pipeline running from the Caspian Sea to Russia's Black Sea port of Novorossiisk is currently Azerbaijan's only oil export outlet. (Reuters)

NO RESTRICTIONS ON AZERI-RUSSIAN BORDER, AZERBAIJAN SAYS

19 August

Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry has denied information on the introduction of restrictions for the passage of foreigners through Azeri-Russian border. The border between Azerbaijan and Russia

is operating as usual, and there are no restrictions, Spokesman for the republic's Foreign Ministry Khazar Ibragim was reported as saying by Trend news agency. However, the ministry did not specify if any restrictions had been introduced during the military conflict in South Ossetia.

(RosBusinessConsulting)

RUSSIAN GOVT RESTRICTS FLOW OF FOREIGNERS ACROSS BORDER WITH AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA

19 August

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has ordered restrictions to be imposed on the inflow of foreign citizens across the Russian border with Azerbaijan and Georgia. Resolution 592, published by the Rossiiskaya Gazeta newspaper on Tuesday, says that the Russian border with Azerbaijan and Georgia, except the Abkhaz stretch, has been temporarily closed for foreigners, except citizens of countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States

(CIS). "The Federal Security Service in conjunction with the transport and interior ministries, and the Federal Customs Service, shall temporarily clear into Russia only citizens and means of transportation from countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States across the Russian state border with Azerbaijan and Georgia, except the Abkhaz border stretch, as well as trains arriving from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia," the resolution says. The new resolution amends Resolution 1223 of November 5 1999, listing "measures to prevent the arrival of members of foreign terror organizations and the importation of weapons and means of subversive operations through listed border checkpoints on the Russian border, within the North Caucasus region." (Interfax)