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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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

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

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

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

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

Svante E. Cornell

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NAGORNO-KARABAKH: A DISASTER IN THE MAKING?

Stephen Blank

Turkey's normalization of relations with Armenia should normally be an occasion for rejoicing. However, due to inept Turkish and U.S. diplomacy, this reconciliation is not only incomplete; it could also easily fall apart, leading to a reversal of hopes for stabilization of the security situation in the Caucasus. A breakdown of this process could be devastating for the region. Ankara's and Washington's mistakes have already reversed Baku's ties with both governments and could cause further reorientation of its foreign policy from which only Moscow would benefit. As Azerbaijan is critical for both access to Central Asia and overflights to Afghanistan and is the linchpin for any possibility of the Nabucco pipeline's materialization, a reorientation towards Russia would have serious repercussions for Europe and the U.S..

BACKGROUND: The Armeno-Turkish normalization grew out of Turkey's alarm, if not panic, at the Russian war with Georgia in 2008 that threatened to marginalize Turkey as a player in the Caucasus. Accordingly, this process obtained strong U.S. backing to the degree that Secretary of State Clinton was the midwife of the final agreement. However, it remained incomplete and not part of a grand strategic bargain. Already in 2005, this author and other analysts observed that the stars were in alignment then for just such a grand bargain. This normalization would include an end to the Turkish embargo of Armenia and to Armenian efforts at obtaining recognition of the 1915 massacres of Armenians in Turkey as genocide, and would enable Armenia and Azerbaijan would resolve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and would help Turkey's attempt to join the EU.

None of this has happened, and the Armeno-Turkish reconciliation of 2008-09 occurred without any mention of Nagorno-Karabakh. This oversight, or omission, came about with clear U.S. support. Although Secretary of State Clinton claims the U.S. supports the Minsk

process for peace in Nagorno-Karabakh, she also insists that these issues are unrelated, a view that ensures that peace will not come any time soon. Needless to say, this omission quickly drew Azerbaijan's ire and is leading to the reversal of its formerly pro-American policies. Moreover, at home Ankara's "concessions" and silence over the occupation of Azerbaijani lands has drawn enormous opposition in Turkey's Parliament, which threatens to block ratification of the Turkish-Armenian protocols, leading to their collapse.

While Turkey's domestic political standoff is serious enough, it has no immediate strategic repercussions beyond Turkey and Armenia. But Azerbaijan's anger does. It has already indicated it will no longer give Turkey preferential pricing on oil and gas supplies, thus striking at Turkey's obsession with being an energy hub even though it produces little or no energy of its own. But beyond that strike at Turkey, Baku's anger has also forced Turkey to go back to Armenia and demand resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issues to retrieve its standing with Azerbaijan. Not surprisingly, Armenia has refused to do so and has

threatened to annul the accords if this pressure continues, leaving Turkey with nothing but mutual embitterment from both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Worse yet, Azerbaijan has also made clear its growing unhappiness with U.S. policy. For the first time, it has publicly protested U.S. aid to Nagorno-Karabakh. Beyond that, Azerbaijan has come out against the new U.S. policy in Afghanistan and will not send troops there, as have many other U.S. allies. More recently, Azerbaijan has signed oil or gas deals with Russia and Iran and is reportedly considering to sell energy to China. These moves clearly betoken a reorientation of Baku's foreign policies. In response, Iranian President Ahmadinejad has called for the resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh in the fastest possible way and Russia has made clear that it is willing to buy all of Azerbaijan's gas. If that deal is made, the Nabucco project is finished, and Europe will be at the mercy of Russia's gas network.

IMPLICATIONS: Another no less consequential danger is that those voices inside Azerbaijan who think they can launch a military operation, like Defense Minister Safar Abiyev, might grow in power because of Azerbaijan's frustration with the lack of progress on Nagorno-Karabakh. Such political forces might come to believe that there is no alternative save a military one and that somehow they could win or force a more favorable political outcome. However, the overwhelming majority of experts believe that a renewed outbreak of fighting would end in disaster for Azerbaijan. Such a war would also ignite a major political crisis.

As the 1993 fighting showed, there is nothing Turkey or the U.S. could do to stop Armenia from victory in such a conflict, especially as long as Moscow is on its side. While Russia almost certainly does not want such a war to occur, Armenia has recently made clear that it expects its treaty partners in the Collective



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Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to come to its aid, specifically meaning Russia. Failure to do so would undermine Russia's claim to leadership in the CIS. And if Azerbaijan were to be the attacker, Russia might be doubly impelled to come to Armenia's assistance, but it would do so in such a manner that reinforces its standing as the dominant force in the Caucasus, which would lead to the

ouster of the vacillating and ineffectual U.S. and EU influence there. Needless to say, either outcome, Azerbaijan's reorientation to Russia or a war, are anathema to U.S. and Western interests.

Yet despite these quite obvious facts, the U.S. persists in separating Nagorno-Karabakh from a resolution of Turkish-Armenia relations, a policy that makes no strategic sense and puts critical interests at risk. Why this should be the case is not clear, but U.S. actions clearly fit a pattern and could result in the loss of a key partner in the region for no offsetting gain. Whether or not it is the power of the U.S.' Armenian lobby, or a belief that the reset policy with Russia means not playing an active role in the Caucasus, or some other motive that drives the policy, it should be clear to objective analysts that such a policy undermines U.S. and Western interests and makes a new war more rather than less likely. In such a war, it is clear that the U.S. would have little or no leverage upon the combatants.

More broadly speaking, there does not seem to be a coherent U.S. policy for Central Asia other than to strengthen the Northern Distribution Network through those states to Afghanistan. Could it be that a kind of strategic myopia connected to the war in Afghanistan has crowded out other considerations of foreign policy and strategic interests in the Caucasus and Central Asia? One hopes that this is not the case and that the U.S. and Turkey will quickly come to see that neither of them can play a significant role in the Caucasus if they are not prepared to address the outstanding issue of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

We have seen how in Georgia, the label frozen conflict quickly proved to be a misreading of reality and the same could happen in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh as well and equally quickly. Should Azerbaijan reorient its policy towards Moscow or attempt military action, there will be no shortage of analysts here and elsewhere that will castigate it for doing so. But that will mean the final erosion of the U.S. position and any leverage it might have in the Caucasus. Meanwhile, Azerbaijani analysts might say that given their sense of abandonment by both Ankara and Washington, they felt they had no choice but to do so.

CONCLUSIONS: A sound U.S. and Turkish policy needs to be reestablished quickly. Such a policy should be mindful of their common interests in the Caucasus; of their overriding interest in not letting Russia return to unchallenged dominance in the region, from where it can threaten both Turkey and Europe; of preserving Azerbaijan as a pro-Western state, while answering Armenia's need to end the embargo and gain a peaceful relationship with its neighbors. Otherwise, as we have seen in Georgia, the results of bad policy can only benefit powers like Russia and Iran who seek to exclude the West from the Caucasus while both the Georgian and Azerbaijani people want to be affiliated with it. Failure to act upon this understanding will sooner, rather than later, result in a disaster for both them and the U.S.

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PRESIDENT PATIL VISITS TAJIKISTAN – INDIA IN SEARCH OF A FORWARD POLICY?

Ben Welch

The recent official visit of Indian President Pratibha Patil to Tajikistan may be emblematic of a new focus in Indian foreign policy. India's establishment of military bases, upgrading of diplomatic relations and increase of financial activity in Tajikistan might be interpreted as a new 'forward' strategy. Geography reveals the rationale – Tajikistan borders Afghanistan and is separated from Pakistani administered Kashmir by a strip of Afghan territory. Moreover, the former Soviet republic shares borders with China, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. This raises a pertinent question - is India is developing a regional strategy derived from Lord Curzon and the British 'forward' school?

BACKGROUND: Lord Curzon once stated “It is obvious, indeed, that the master of India must, under modern conditions, be the greatest power in the Asiatic Continent”. The symbolic trappings of President Patil’s trip, as she became the first Indian President to visit Tajikistan and the only foreign leader to attend the celebrations of Tajikistan’s Independence Day, were clear. Patil’s visit to the shrine of the Sufi saint Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani, credited with assisting the spread of Islam in the Kashmir valley, made the point plainly – India is overtly courting Tajikistan. Patil’s explicit discussion of the November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack, in which she stated that New Delhi is waiting for Pakistan to act against the perpetrators, seemed to clarify New Delhi’s intentions. This could easily be dismissed as another move in the unremitting Indo-Pakistani security dilemma. However, the contents of the rest of the meeting suggest otherwise.

During official discussions in Dushanbe, the presidents discussed the potential for greater cooperation in the energy sector and for an increase in bilateral trade. President Rahmon made clear his wish to see an enhanced level of Indian ‘capacity building’ – in military training and in the development of Tajikistan’s

pharmaceutical, IT and food processing industries. Interestingly, President Patil pointed out Tajikistan’s geographical proximity to India, observing that Dushanbe is closer to New Delhi than the Indian capital is to some of India’s own cities. Most revealingly, discussions were held on the work Indian companies are doing to upgrade the Varzob-I hydroelectric plant and the contentious redevelopment of Ayni airbase. It is the combination of these two concerns that seems to encompass the twin prongs of Indian forward policy in Central Asia. In this new iteration, the strategic issues at the heart of Curzon’s view have become synonymous with modern India’s need for energy.

Of course, it would be tempting to dismiss India’s move northwards as another facet of New Delhi’s troubled relationship with Islamabad. This view, however, fails to take into account the potential opportunities for Indian companies in Tajikistan. Underinvestment in hydroelectricity capacity means the country is currently only able to produce a fraction of its assumed annual potential of between 40,000 and 80,000 million kilowatts. Discussion of the hydroelectric issue at the recent meeting was a continuation of a



policy first announced by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during President Rahmon's 2006 visit to New Delhi. Its recurrence indicates a commitment to the development of the moribund Tajik energy sector, which in the understated language of Indian diplomacy has been described as being 'mutually beneficial'. At a Tajik-Indian business conference held in Dushanbe on September 8th (attended by President Patil), President Rahmon made his desire for increased Indian involvement clear, noting that Tajikistan currently uses only 5 percent of its water energy resources, and that only 20 percent of the cotton fibre produced in the country is currently processed. He not only encouraged investment in these sectors but also suggested Indian businesses consider the Tajik tourism,

hotel management, mineral prospecting, and agricultural goods processing sectors.

IMPLICATIONS: Aside from these discussions, Indian engineers are currently engaged in building a 118-km transmission line within Tajikistan, running from the Sangtuda-1 hydroelectric power station in the south of the country to the Afghan town of Pol-e Khomri in Baghlan Province. From India's perspective, the potential for this power line is impressive. It will allow surplus energy produced at the Sangtuda-1 and Sangtuda-2 hydroelectric power stations to be exported to South Asia. If India is able to build and control the export capacity for this electricity, its role as a player in regional politics could expand considerably. On top of this, Tajikistan's plentiful deposits of uranium, gold and tungsten could well provide future

supplies for India's raw material requirements. It therefore becomes clear this meeting may unmask a shift in New Delhi's long-term regional strategy.

When assessing the implications of these developments for Indo-Tajik relations, the question of India's military footprint comes into view. Unsurprisingly, given its contentious nature, the issue was largely avoided by President Patil. Nevertheless, the presence of Indian forces at both Ayni and Farkhor stand as possible evidence of a new military policy towards Central Asia. Indeed, since Pakistan does not allow India overland access to Afghanistan, New Delhi has had to channel its economic and relief assistance to Afghanistan through Farkhor. The 2007 statement of Farkhor's operational readiness announced India's first official foreign military base, and ensured that India became one of only four external powers with bases in Central Asia. The presence of Indian forces in Tajikistan, just two kilometres from the Tajik-Afghan border, discloses New Delhi's desire to project its power and influence into Afghanistan and beyond. If Kabul has long served as a proxy theatre for the simmering Indo-Pakistan conflict to play out, Tajikistan now features as an extension of that domain.

The successful development of the second site, Ayni, is decisive to any assessment of Indian strategy. Should Ayni become an operational base, it would enable India to project power beyond Pakistan and Afghanistan and into the heart of Central Asia. Work on the base, which is only 10km from Dushanbe, is thought to have been completed earlier this year. The upgrading of relations between the Indian and Tajik defense forces over the last decade makes this plausible. It should be borne in mind that

Indian Air Force technicians helped Tajikistan to retrofit their Soviet and Russian fighters, and civilian and military personnel are currently teaching English to Tajik defense staff. Perhaps most significantly, India conducted its first Central Asian military exercise with Tajikistan in 2003.

CONCLUSIONS: India's moves in Tajikistan, underscored by the prudent diplomacy shown in President Patil's visit, have generated unease in Islamabad, Moscow and Beijing. For its own security, Tajikistan will not be content to maintain a passive role. In a July 2009 news conference with President Zardari of Pakistan, President Rahmon stated that "as a friendly and peaceful country [we] are urging the two great powers of South Asia, India and Pakistan ... to take every necessary step to find political ways of settling this disputed issue". Veiled in this plea was the restatement of an enduring truth for the countries of Central Asia whose relative weakness has made them poorly equipped to shape their own futures. If India is truly performing the opening act of a forward policy, the success of the venture will rest less on President Rahmon's actions than on the diplomatic élan of a relatively inexperienced foreign policy community in New Delhi. Yet the early signs might reassure Mr. Rahmon. The moderation and poise exhibited by President Patil indicates that New Delhi may well understand the predicament, and is therefore calibrating its policy towards Tajikistan with an understanding of the regional dynamic and the country's own prerogatives.

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KYRGYZSTAN'S LOST DECADE

Erica Marat

This year, Kyrgyzstan's Freedom House democracy index will likely change from being "partly free" into "not free", placing the country in the same category as its Central Asian neighbors. From being the most democratic state in the region a decade ago, Kyrgyzstan has turned into the regional state where dynastic leadership is most likely. This month alone Kyrgyzstan saw four violent attacks against journalists and political activists. The situation is unlikely to change in the coming years.

BACKGROUND: Ten years ago, Kyrgyzstan's vibrant civil society and intrepid journalists tried to convince former president Askar Akayev to abstain from running for president for a third period. The pressure continued to mount in the early 2000s, forcing Akayev to flee Kyrgyzstan in 2005. At that time, most observers in Kyrgyzstan believed the newly-elected Kurmanbek Bakiyev would need time to clear the government from the corrupt heritage of the previous regime. As Bakiyev began to rapidly consolidate his power, many experts still hoped that since Kyrgyzstan had at least modest experience in political pluralism, the regime would not be able to fully suppress democratic debate. However, despite Kyrgyzstan's experience with strong civil society and independent media, the country succumbed to the level of authoritarianism of neighboring Central Asian countries within a relatively short period. In effect, the political capital that Kyrgyzstan earned in the 1990s was squandered in the 2000s.

During his leadership, Bakiyev strengthened his personal control over the security and military structures. He sought early elections this July and further centralized the government. Presently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministries of Interior and Defense, and the National Security Service are directly subordinate to the President. Importantly,

however, by appointing his son Maksim to lead the Central Agency on Development, Investment, and Innovation, Bakiyev made Kyrgyzstan's political life predictable. Kyrgyzstan is today the Central Asian country with the greatest likelihood of a dynastic power transfer. The Agency run by the president's son is to control all foreign financial inflows, including aid and credits; it is also responsible for controlling major national hydroelectric and gold companies. In his new post, Maksim Bakiyev is granted strong leverage over the national economy and political life. It remains to be seen whether he will decide to implement sensible business projects such as the construction of Kambarata hydropower stations.

The Bakiyev regime's interest in maximizing profits affects the foreign policy domain as well. By first deciding to expel the U.S. military base from the Manas airport in February and then changing his decision in June, President Bakiyev was able to secure higher fees from the U.S. government for the Manas base. How the increased fees are spent by the Kyrgyz government remains undisclosed to the public, hinting that individuals in power are the main benefactors of the payments. Although it is difficult to estimate how much of the payments associated with the U.S. base fuels the regime's strength, one can assume that

the base represents a substantial source of financial empowerment.

IMPLICATIONS: Kyrgyz politicians, including MPs and the president, often mimic Russia's and Kazakhstan's policy choices. The most recent examples include limiting freedom of speech on the internet in a way similar to Kazakhstan, and toying with the idea of legalizing capital punishment as in Russia. Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship will foster even greater imitations of the large neighbor's decisions in Kyrgyzstan. Today, as in Kazakhstan, far fewer NGOs in Kyrgyzstan are willing to participate in public life, while local mass media often refuse to publish statements made by civil society activists. Compared to the early 2000s, the peak of Kyrgyz civil society's expansion, the visibility of local NGOs has decreased. According to the NGO activists themselves, most achievements of civil society have been written off by the ruling regime since March 2005.

This year alone, journalists Syrgak Abdyldayev, Amaz Tashiyev, Aleksander Evgrafov and Genady Pavluk were attacked. After being severely beaten in March, Abdyldayev spent several weeks in hospital and sought political asylum abroad, while Tashiyev died shortly after the attack. On December 9, Akayev's former aide Bolot Januzakov was severely beaten. On the same day Aleksander Knyazev, a professor at the Kyrgyz-Slavic University who often criticizes the current regime for usurping power, was also assaulted. Evgrafov, a Russian journalist, was attacked on December 15 by policemen and warned not to criticize Kyrgyzstan in his work. Pavluk, who was about to launch a newspaper together with opposition leader Omurbek Tekebayev, was pushed from the fifth floor during a trip to

Almaty on December 16. Pavluk died a few days later.

On March 13 Bakiyev's former aide Medet Sadyrkulov died in an accident that was allegedly orchestrated by his opponents. Sadyrkulov is alleged to have assisted the president in constructing financial schemes and had a significant influence over cadre politics. But after opposing some of Bakiyev political decisions in January, Sadyrkulov could potentially join the opposition. Sadyrkulov's death showed that even Bakiyev's closest allies are not immune to persecution.

This year, Kyrgyzstan prevented a number of human rights activists from entering the country. In the most recent case, Tajik human rights activist Nigina Bakhriyeva was not allowed into Kyrgyzstan upon her arrival from Dushanbe. Just weeks earlier, two activists from the Russian Memorial human rights group were similarly denied entry. Local NGO leaders saw a direct link between the refusal to allow Bakhriyeva into the country and her September training of Kyrgyz lawyers. Bakhriyeva's work with Kyrgyz lawyers followed the Kyrgyz authorities' harsh suppression of residents in the southern city of Nookat in October 2008.

In the past five years numerous opposition leaders, NGO activists, and journalists have fled Kyrgyzstan in fear of violence and unjust trials. The political role of the security services has increased tremendously, making any attempt to return to the country dangerous. The police and various law-enforcement agencies, such as the fiscal police and the prosecutor, are intervening in the lives of civilians more frequently. The budget of the National Security Service doubled after the president's brother Zhanysh Bakiyev was appointed as its head,



Kazakhstan and, to a lesser degree in Europe, United States and South Korea. Bakiyev does not face urgent demands to create new jobs or to provide social services. Opposition forces, in the meantime, have also been unable to prove strong enough to challenge Bakiyev beyond accusing him of corruption and authoritarianism. In this environment,

while the salaries of state security employees also increased.

As this year ends, Kyrgyzstan's human rights and democracy situation is turning increasingly similar those in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. However, unlike its neighbors, where killings or beatings of human rights activists, journalists, and opposition leaders peaked several years ago and where authoritarian leaders are now unchallenged by opponents, Kyrgyzstan is still discovering the brutalities of the Bakiyev regime. Local activists, who had learnt to speak out openly before Bakiyev came to power, are now bound to find a way of co-existing with the authoritarian regime. The sense of helplessness against the possibility of an attack devised by the regime is shared by many in Kyrgyzstan as unexpected and wry acts of violence have become Bakiyev's language of choice with his opponents.

Luckily for the president, the bulk of the country's population depends on migrant remittances from workers in Russia,

Kyrgyzstan's future is bleak. Bakiyev is likely to continue ruling the country, while Kyrgyzstan explores new heights of authoritarianism.

CONCLUSIONS: Following a short-lived political and economic openness in the 1990s, Kyrgyzstan has largely squandered its achievements in the 2000s. Moreover, there is a strong possibility of a dynastic succession of power in the country. While the incumbent Bakiyev has effectively centralized his government and established a loyal parliament, violence is used to solidify his rule over the broader society. Local civil society activists and journalist are vulnerable to being beaten or killed. The downgrading of Kyrgyzstan into a "not free" state should therefore come as no surprise.

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SINO-PAKISTAN RELATIONS REACH NEW HEIGHTS

Ghulam Ali

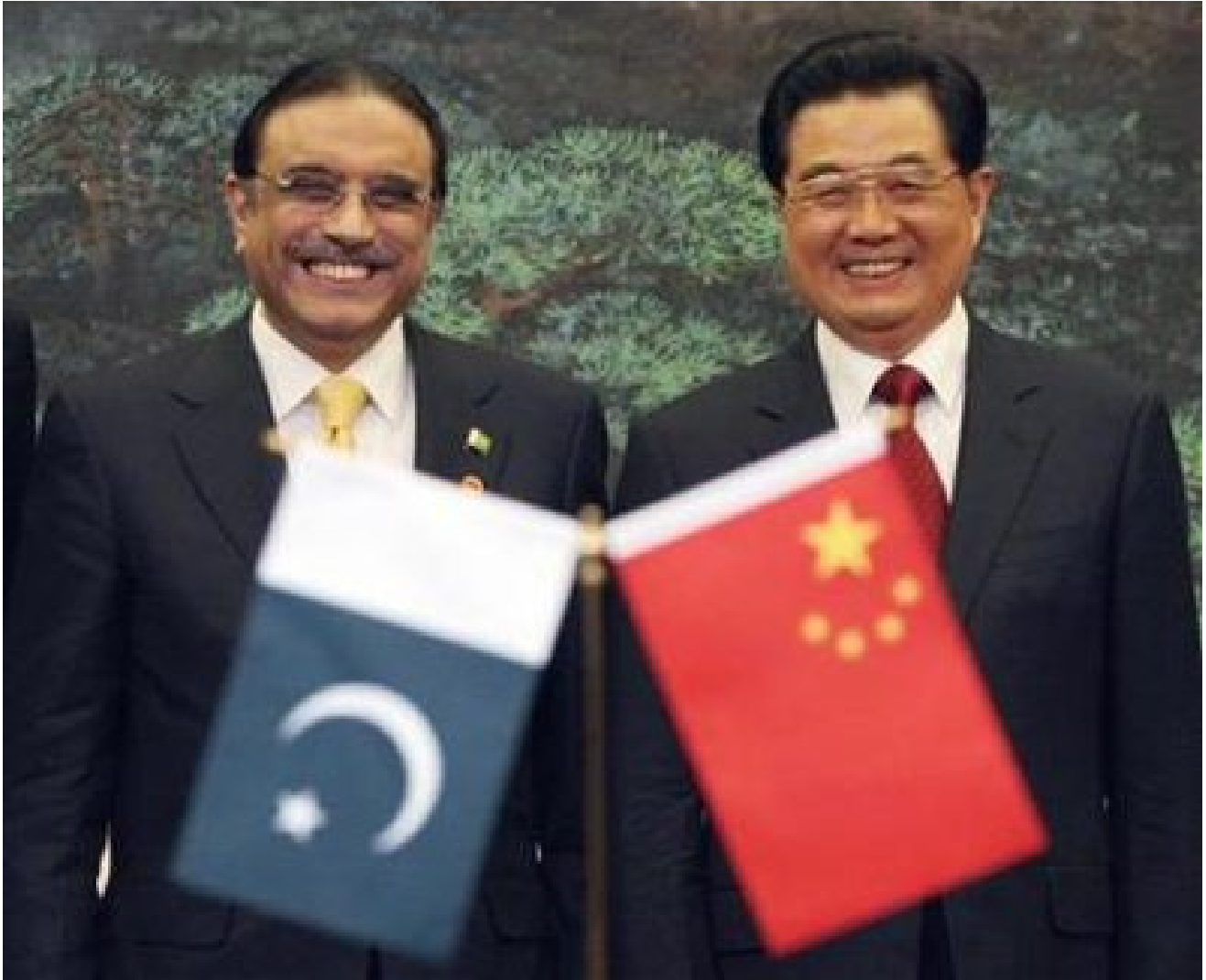
No other country celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the People's Republic of China with such an alacrity as did Pakistan. For over a week, activities such as exhibitions, banquets, meetings and seminars were held, both in capital Islamabad and in provincial and military headquarters in which top ranking members of the political and military leadership participated. Although the Saudi Embassy in Islamabad also celebrated its seventy-ninth anniversary shortly afterwards — Saudi Arabia being a country with which Pakistan enjoys deep religious affinity — the attention paid to the Chinese anniversary was incomparable. This aptly demonstrates the significance Pakistan attaches to its relations with China.

BACKGROUND: The messages sent by Pakistani leaders to their Chinese counterparts on China's anniversary further explained the nature of this relationship. President Asif Ali Zardari stated on the occasion that no "third element" could ever obstruct the evergreen Pakistan-China friendship — an implied reference to India and the U.S.. He termed the renaissance of China's civilization a defining theme of the twenty-first century and a factor of stability in the world. This statement demonstrated that Pakistan does not share the Western concerns over the rise or threat of China. Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani left no ambiguity in stating that China was, and would continue to be, a cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy. Chinese officials also eulogized relations with Pakistan and expressed their gratitude to Islamabad for its valuable support to Beijing on vital issues such as Xinjiang, Taiwan, Tibet, and human rights. They assured that China, as in the past, would stand by Pakistan.

As a contribution to the celebration of China's anniversary, Pakistan issued a postage stamp and a commemorative coin of 10 rupees with the inscribed flags of China and Pakistan.

While a symbolic gesture, it is unique that another country's flag is inscribed on Pakistan's national currency. Yet another development was the inauguration of a think tank, the Pakistan-China Institute, which will employ an equal number of scholars from both countries and devote its entire research to various aspects of China-Pakistan relations. In addition, the three branches of Pakistan's armed forces (the Army, Air Force, and Navy), which all enjoy robust ties with their Chinese counterparts, also arranged certain events to highlight the strategic dimension of this relationship. Strategic cooperation is and will continue to be the bedrock of overall Sino-Pakistan relations.

Interestingly, the burgeoning Sino-Pakistan relations run parallel to deteriorating Sino-Indian relations which have recently been rocked by a series of events. In July 2009, one month before the thirteenth round of Sino-Indian border talks, China opposed the Indian request for a US\$2.9 billion loan from the Asian Development Bank on the grounds that part of it would be utilized in the Indian-controlled Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims in its entirety. Subsequently, reports of a Chinese "incursion" into Indian territory, along with



the publication of an online article (which was later removed) by a Chinese scholar on the *iiss.cn* website proposing the dismemberment of India into 30 independent states, and the October 2009 issuing of visas by the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi to applicants from Jammu, Kashmir and Arunchal Pradesh on separate pages of their passports (showing that they hail from disputed territories), sparked anger in Indian media. The Indian government, under strong domestic pressure, increased its air and land forces along the Chinese and Pakistani borders in response. While some time has passed after these events, Sino-Indian relations are still tense. Such situations usually benefit

Pakistan and provide additional glue to the Sino-Pakistan entente.

IMPLICATIONS: The Sino-Pakistan entente has been significantly strengthened in recent years. The current government of the Pakistan People's Party, whose founder Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is considered to the architect of the Sino-Pakistan entente (first as a Foreign Minister during the 1960s, and later as Prime Minister during the 1970s), is strongly determined to push these relations forward. This was underlined by four visits by Zardari and three by Gilani to China since early 2008. During these visits, the two countries identified more than fifty new initiatives for joint

collaboration and signed over three dozen accords and memoranda of understanding. China recently agreed to assist Pakistan in building 14 dams and a satellite. Over 10,000 Chinese are currently working on 120 projects in Pakistan. The presence of such a huge number of Chinese, when other countries have reduced their presence in Pakistan in the face of terrorism, is yet another reminder of China's commitment to Pakistan. China's investments in constructing infrastructure in Pakistan such as the Gwadar port, nuclear power plants, dams, coal and zinc fields, highways, telecommunications and railways will play a significant role in Pakistan's economic development, bringing Pakistan further closer to China.

Another important aspect of these relations is that it is a two-way relationship, which is in fact one of the reasons for its durability. Pakistan, too, has supported China in many significant ways. In the past, Pakistan helped China to break its isolation especially during the 1960s and 1970s, as it functioned as a bridge between China and the Islamic world, facilitated the Sino-U.S. rapprochement (Henry Kissinger's first secret visit to China via Pakistan in July 1971 paved the way for Sino-U.S. normalization) and staunchly supported China's permanent seat in the UN Security Council, which Beijing finally secured in October 1971. Presently, Pakistan stands by China on human rights issues, democracy, Taiwan and Xingjian. All these issues occupy central positions in China's foreign policy. For

instance, during the recent ethnic riots in Xinjiang, Pakistan was the first country to issue a statement supporting Beijing's measures to quell them. Furthermore, Pakistan used its clout in the Islamic world to prevent certain countries from taking the issue of violence in Xinjiang to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. This, according to the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Lou Zhaohui, saved Beijing from embarrassment.

CONCLUSIONS: Islamabad's enthusiastic celebration of China's sixtieth anniversary in general and the recent developments in Sino-Pakistan relations in particular all indicate the continuation and consolidation of this "special relationship". Although many proverbs are attached to this relationship—"all-weather", "time-tested" and "a model relationship" — this is in essence a pragmatic and practical partnership based on geographical proximity, mutual needs and varying degrees of shared hostility towards India. The early and mutually agreed solution to their un-demarcated border in 1963, regular exchange of visits at highest level, mutual consultation and support for each other's policies at various forms and non-interference in each other's internal affairs further strengthened this relationship.

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FIELD REPORTS

TAJIK GOVERNMENT INTRODUCES FEES FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION ACCESS

Suhrob Majidov

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Tajik Government has seemingly been looking fervently for any sources of revenue lately. Some experts view this initiative as being in line with other unconventional decisions by the government to replenish the budget. The Parliament earlier approved a decree on levying fees for the use of roads, while the President recently launched a campaign for selling shares in ‘the dream’ Roghun hydropower station to the people of Tajikistan. In light of such initiatives, the decree on charging people and media representatives for obtaining information from state institutions is viewed by many as just another way to draw resources to the state budget. The story will most likely develop further. Regardless of the reasoning behind the state decrees, an average salary in Tajikistan is US\$80, and few will be able to afford the services offered.

KYRGYZ PRESIDENT OFFERS ALTERNATIVE LINE OF SUCCESSION

Joldosh Osmonov

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev has offered an alternative delegation of power in case of his death or incapacity to execute his duties. The initiative was put forward within the framework of recent reforms of state institutions. President Bakiyev’s unexpected proposal became the topic of heated discussions in the public and is generally considered a deliberate step towards a “father-to-son” power succession.

On December 14, the president introduced a draft bill on “Introducing changes to the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic” in the parliament. “The draft bill is directed to adjust the powers of president, parliament and government with consideration of the newly launched reforms in the system of public administration”, the presidential press service stated.

The whole point of the draft bill is to legalize the changes the president has already introduced. In

particular, Bakiyev suggests the elimination of the institutions of the State Secretary, the Presidential Administration and the Security Council, which were recently abolished *de facto*. At the same time, the president strives to create a Presidential Council and other consultative and coordinating bodies within his own administration.

Meanwhile, his opponents claim that dissolving the above-mentioned institutions, which are specified in the country’s main legal document, violates the Constitution. Opposition leader Omurbek Tekebaev stated to the *Svoboda* (Freedom) Radio Service that the opposition has indicated seven cases where the president has abused his authority, including his elimination of the constitutional institutions.

While the reforms have overall been contested, debates over one specific provision in the draft bill have become especially heated within political circles. The proposed statute provides for a new line

of succession in case of the president's death or incapacity to fulfill his duties. Whereas the elimination or establishment of institutions was previously announced by the president and more or less expected, the new norm for presidential power delegation was quite surprising to the public.

According to the legislative proposal, presidential powers will not be delegated to the Speaker of Parliament, as stated in the Constitution, but to "another person" chosen by the Presidential Council by a simple majority of votes. As a matter of fact, this provision of the draft bill will eradicate the notion of the Speaker as the "second person" in the country. It is notable that the Presidential Council is not formed yet, although it is assumed that the new body will be comprised of representatives of the President's Administration, parliament, government, and civil society.

The draft bill authors justify the initiative by stating that "the mission of the Parliamentary Speaker is to perform representative and administrative functions within the legislative body and the delegation of presidential powers to him might jeopardize the sustainable and stable functioning of the state system".

The proposal has already been approved by the parliamentary committee on constitutional legislation and the state system. After a brief discussion at the session, the bill was sent to the Constitutional Court for review. If it is found to comply with the constitution, the draft law will again be debated at the parliamentary session. In theory, the bill has a long way to go before

becoming a law. However, no one doubts that the draft bill will be adopted.

Many experts and opposition leaders believe that this line of succession scheme is the easiest way to bring a successor to the highest position in the state. Moreover, according to a poll by the *Vremya Novostey* news agency, many Kyrgyz politicians and experts believe the norm is designed to bring Maksim Bakiyev, the president's youngest son, to power. "These new changes will legalize the delegation of supreme power based on the family principle", stated Roza Otunbaeva, leader of the opposition faction in the Kyrgyz parliament.

Maksim Bakiyev is already considered to be the "second person" in the country in practice. Heading the newly-founded Central Agency on Development, Investments and Innovations (CADII), the body controlling the country's biggest economic projects and strategic state assets, he successfully continues to bring all state-owned businesses in the country under his agency. Recently, shares of the *KyrgyzAltyn* enterprise, the biggest gold-mining company in the country, were passed on to the CADII. According to the company, it produces 97 percent of all gold in Kyrgyzstan in partnership with foreign investors. The gold-mining industry makes up 10 percent of the country's GDP.

While the draft bill is still under consideration, the debates around it have not yet reached their climax. The outcomes of this issue will depend on how determined the president is in realizing his succession plans.

KREMLIN KEEPS LESS NATIONALISTIC BAGAPSH IN POWER

Maka Gurgenidze

Abkhazia's Central Election Commission declared the validity of the breakaway region's presidential elections held on December 12 with a voter turnout of 73 percent. Sergei Bagapsh, the incumbent and

long-standing Moscow protégé, won the elections in the first round with nearly 60 percent of the votes, thus defeating his main rival – former vice-president Raul Khajimba – who received slightly

more than 15 percent of the votes. The other three competitors, the head of the state-owned Abkhaz Shipping Company Zaur Ardzinba, the businessman Beslan Butba, and university professor Vitaly Bganba, garnered 10, 8 and 1 percent respectively.

All five candidates pledged their allegiance to Moscow's policy and did not voice any intention of confronting the status quo established after the 2008 Russian-Georgian war in the region. Moscow nevertheless from the very beginning of the election campaign opted for Bagapsh, an already tested Moscow-ally, in order to eschew even minor risks of instability.

The most prominent Western actors in the region, the EU and the U.S., termed the elections illegitimate. The EU issued a special declaration declaring that it does not recognize the "constitutional and legal framework within which these elections have taken place". Likewise, the U.S. recognized "neither the legality nor the results" of the elections.

Tbilisi termed the elections a "farce" of the "proxy regime", arguing that the Kremlin has revoked even weak autonomous features on part of the separatist regime, having placed the region under complete occupation since 2008.

However, certain analysts, such as Paul Goble and Sergey Markedonov, hailed the new "democratic" trends emerging in the wake of "fair" and "free" elections. Those analysts pointed to the low margins by which Bagapsh won the race and that, considering the much higher margins of victory usually enjoyed by Russian and Central Asian leaders, the Abkhazian elections can be viewed as an aspiration on Bagapsh's part to build a democratic regime, which would be difficult to challenge by Georgia and the West, while it could also create problems for Moscow.

In contestation of this view, one can compare the last election with that conducted in Abkhazia in 2004, when the race between the same top candidates was much closer than in the current case. According to the official results released on October

5, 2004, Bagapsh received 45.7 percent and Raul Khajimba 38.4 percent of votes.

Moreover, the International Crisis Group estimated on the basis of the January 2005 Abkhazian electoral roll that in 2006, 129,127 individuals reached the voting age out of a total population ranging from 157,000 to 190,000. Against this figure, the Abkhaz interior ministry's passport and visa service reported that 146,121 residents of breakaway Abkhazia (constituting 90 percent of the Abkhazian population) had obtained Abkhazian passports by December 7, 2009, just before the presidential elections. This would imply that the population of voting age in Abkhazia has increased by more than 16,000 individuals since 2005.

However, the incorrectness of these figures is not the only reason to question the fairness of the Abkhazian elections. Most importantly, the over 200,000 ethnic Georgians exiled from Abkhazia remain unable to participate in the elections. In addition, the exclusion of the 45,000 Georgians living in the Gali district of Abkhazia under severe conditions from the elections undermine the principle of free and fair elections in essence.

According to Georgian media, the human rights abuses against ethnic Georgians have increased in the Gali district lately. Russian troops reportedly detained ten minibuses and later opened fire on the population of the Nabakevi village on December 19th. The following day, eleven Georgian families were robbed in their homes in the village of Chuburkhinji, Gali district, according to Georgian sources.

Russian troops enjoy a ten-year agreement on joint border protection, granting Russia the right to patrol Abkhaz land and maritime borders and reducing the Abkhaz presence at the breakaway region's checkpoints.

This fact, which the Abkhaz parliament ratified earlier this year, reduced the position of the ethnic Abkhaz in the region and heightened nationalistic sentiments. Taking this situation into account, Moscow decided to continue its support for

Bagapsh, whose legitimacy seems to be based mainly on his pragmatism towards Moscow.

There is a clear risk that the increasingly chaotic actions of Russian military forces may increase the tension between them and local residents of

Abkhazia. This would not only reduce the prospects for democratic development, but could also imply a need on the part of the de facto government to apply stronger bureaucratic pressure on the civilians of the region.

ARMENIA TO PLACE RUSSIAN REACTOR AT ITS NEW POWER PLANT

Haroutiun Khachatrian

On December 3, the Armenian government decided to place a Russian-manufactured block in Armenia's planned new nuclear power plant (NPP). The government also decided to create a joint venture for constructing the block, with equal shares for the Armenian government and the Russian company Rosatomstroiekspport.

The future block will replace the current one, which was constructed in 1980 and, as the Armenian government has pledged, will be taken out of service in 2016. The new block will be constructed near the current NPP in the town of Metsamor, 38 kilometers west of Yerevan, and is expected to be ready by 2017. The construction cost of the new block will be US\$4-5 billion.

Armenia's NPP is the only one in the region. Currently, its only block with a capacity of 407 megawatts provides up to 40 percent of the electricity produced in the country, and the government considers it a major element of Armenia's energy security. The government has repeatedly stated it will not close the NPP (as the EU has long demanded) unless an equivalent capacity is built. In May 2009, the government signed a consultancy agreement with the Australian company Worley Parsons which will also control the construction process.

The new block, with a capacity of 1060 megawatts, will be a Russian AEK-92 type water-water nuclear reactor. Its lifetime is 60 years and it has a European safety certificate. According to the official report,

the decision was made according to the recommendation of the consultancy company, but at the same time, Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan said it was a "political decision". This means that Russian technology will be given a governing role in the construction of the new NPP.

Several issues remain to be formally clarified at a later stage. In particular, the government's choice of a Russian nuclear reactor does not mean that the steam generator and the automatic regulator system of the block must also be of Russian origin, and the field is still open for other producers. In particular, France's AREVA and the U.S.' Westinghouse are also reportedly interested in this project. The investors in the project remain unknown, although the Russian government will evidently be a leading investor. The involvement of other investors is also possible, and a small part of the shares is expected to float at the stock exchange.

One thing that is certain is that Rosatomstroiekspport has obtained a lucrative contract. This is good news for the Russian company, especially given that a tender that a consortium under its leadership had won for the construction of the first NPP in Turkey was annulled by a Turkish court last month.

Armenia's power industry is dominated by Russia, as most of the Armenian power-generating enterprises are controlled by different companies with considerable control by the Russian government. The Metsamor NPP was an exception,

as it has been recognized as the exclusive property of the Armenian government. However, the new NPP block is not included in this limitation and the Russian government is likely to have a significant, if not dominant, share in it.

In addition, the construction of the new NPP block will enhance Armenia's role as a regional power exporter. Currently, Armenia is the only country in the region with excess power generating capacities and it exports electricity to Georgia and Iran. An initial agreement on exporting electricity to Turkey from 2009 was announced last fall, but it has not

been realized due to political reasons. Replacing the current NPP block of 407 megawatts with a new one of 1060 megawatts will enhance Armenia's export capacity. Also, new generating capacities are under construction at the thermal power stations in Yerevan and in Hrazdan. Since all Armenia's four neighbors suffer from electricity shortages, Turkey most of all, Armenia will have good chances to increase its electricity exports in the future. Russia will also benefit from this, due to its dominating position in Armenia's power sector.



New Book:

The Guns of August 2008

Edited By Svante E. Cornell and S.
Frederick Starr

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

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

NEWS DIGEST

DASHNAKS PLAN MORE PROTESTS AGAINST TURKISH-ARMENIAN PROTOCOLS

14 December

A leading member of the opposition Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) has said the party will launch street protests in early January aimed at scuttling implementation of the Turkish-Armenian protocols signed two months ago, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The Armenian Constitutional Court is scheduled to start assessing the accords on January 12. Vahan Hovannisian said today the party has received numerous calls to hold "serious actions of protest" on the eve of the announcement of the Constitutional Court decision. He said that "seeing that a popular wave [of protest] is again rising, we can state for certain that there will be no calm in Armenia during those days." Dashnaktsutyun quit the four-party coalition government in April to protest President Serzh Sarkisian's policy of rapprochement with Turkey. The party staged protests against the Turkish-Armenian protocols signed in Zurich on October 10, which it considers a sellout. The party is particularly unhappy with Yerevan's formal recognition of the existing Turkish-Armenian border and its acceptance of a Turkish proposal to set up a joint commission of historians that would research the mass killings of Armenians at the end of the Ottoman Empire. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIA REFUSES TO TAKE PART IN EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS

15 December

Georgia has refused to take part in a meeting dedicated to the exchange of prisoners with South Ossetia. The meeting with the participation of Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Charalampos Christopoulos was planned for December 17, South Ossetian Presidential Representative for the Post-Conflict Settlement Boris Chochiyev told Itar-Tass on Tuesday. "Representatives of the OSCE Secretariat told me by phone that Georgia would not take part in the meeting until the release of the Georgian citizens seized in South Ossetia on November 4," he said. (Itar-Tass)

USA REFUSES TO RECOGNIZE ABKHAZ PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION - DEPARTMENT OF STATE SPOKESMAN IAN KELLY

15 December

The United States does not recognize the presidential election in Abkhazia, Department of State spokesman Ian Kelly said in a brief statement posted on Monday. "The United States regrets the decision to hold "elections" in the Abkhazia region of Georgia on December 12 and recognizes neither the legality nor the results. The United States reiterates its support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders," the statement runs. (Itar-Tass)

MEDVEDEV CONGRATULATES NAZARBAYEV ON KAZAKH INDEPENDENCE DAY

16 December

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has forwarded greetings to his Kazakh counterpart Nursultan Nazarbayev whose country is marking Independence Day, the Kremlin press service said. "Over the years of its sovereign development, Kazakhstan has scored considerable successes in strengthening its statehood and economy. Under your leadership, the republic has established itself as a responsible and authoritative member of the international community. I am convinced that Kazakhstan's upcoming chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010 will make a solid contribution to efforts aimed at maintaining international stability and security," Medvedev said. "The Russian-Kazakh strategic partnership has been developing confidently. It is based on the cultural and spiritual commonness of our countries' people. What is important is that the traditions of friendship and good neighborliness have been both carefully preserved and consistently multiplied," the Russian president said. "Political dialogue at various levels has been playing a special role in Russian-Kazakh ties," he said. "I highly appreciate our trustful and constructive personal relations. I recall our meetings held this year with warmth. And I hope to continue our fruitful dialogue in a few days - during our upcoming meetings in

hospitable Almaty," Medvedev said. "Russia and Kazakhstan share a common vision on crucial global processes in the international arena, as well as their commitment to finding the most optimal solutions to key present-day problems. Our countries have been vigorously cooperating within a wide variety of important multilateral organizations and formats, including the CIS, the EurAsEC (Eurasian Economic Community), the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) and the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization)," he said. (Interfax)

U.S. AMBASSADOR SAYS IRANIANS STILL HELPING TALIBAN MILITANTS

17 December

Karl Eikenberry, the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, told RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan today that he continues to receive intelligence reports about "Iran or elements within Iran" providing weapons and training to Taliban militants who are fighting in Afghanistan. Eikenberry described the support as "low level" and "periodic cooperation." He also confirmed that General David Petraeus, the head of the U.S. military's Central Command, has reviewed the intelligence reports. "General Petraeus has said that the scope of that support is nothing on the level of the support that was given previously, at one time, by Iran to various terrorist elements in Iraq," Eikenberry said. "Still, the reports that continue to be received about this kind of low-level support and periodic cooperation between elements in Iran and militant extremist Taliban are disturbing and do not show good faith by [Afghanistan's] neighbor to the west." Eikenberry also said there will be "very significant increases" in U.S. developmental assistance to Afghanistan during the next two years as part of President Barack Obama's new strategy there. Eikenberry made the remarks from RFE/RL's bureau in Kabul during a live phone-in program that gave ordinary Afghans a chance to ask him questions. (RFE/RL)

U.S. SPENDS \$ 23 BILLION ON AFGHAN CONTRACTS

18 December

The United States has spent over \$23 billion on reconstruction and development contracts in Afghanistan since 2002, and auditors say about \$1 billion of this is waste, a U.S. senator says. The contract spending is expected to rise with President Barack Obama's planned surge of 30,000 U.S. forces into Afghanistan in the coming months, Senator Claire McCaskill said at a subcommittee hearing December 17. "Currently there is a great deal we do not know about contracting in Afghanistan. We do know, however, that the president's new strategy in

Afghanistan will bring a massive increase in the number and value of contracts and contractors in Afghanistan," the Democratic senator said. The money has gone to projects ranging from road-building and power generation to agricultural and urban development and water sanitation, McCaskill's staff said in a memorandum prepared for the hearing of the Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight, which she chairs. The panel is part of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. The \$23 billion contract spending estimate was made by the Federal Procurement Data System, a central depository of information on U.S. government contracting, the subcommittee memorandum said. McCaskill said the waste identified by auditors amounted to nearly one in six dollars spent on Afghan contracts so far. She worried that the waste and fraud that had been seen in some contracting in Iraq would be repeated in Afghanistan. Jeffrey Parsons, director of the Army Contracting Command, testified before the subcommittee that the Army is training contracting officers being sent to Afghanistan so they can better identify bad business practices. Over 100,000 contractors are working for the U.S. government in Afghanistan, and that number could reach 160,000 next year, McCaskill said, citing estimates by the Congressional Research Service. Some two-thirds of the current contractors are Afghans, she said. The Congressional Research Service recently said the United States has spent nearly \$230 billion on the war in Afghanistan. That amount will jump to \$300 billion once Congress has approved a military spending bill for fiscal 2010. The House has approved it and the Senate is expected to act on the bill this week. (Reuters)

TAJIKISTAN OPENS BORDER SO THAT AFGHAN SHEPHERDS CAN GO HOME

18 December

A Tajik border official has said 25 Afghan shepherds and thousands of sheep stranded for nine days by a snowstorm crossed through the Vakhon Mountains to return to Afghanistan, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Border official Firdavs Davlatov told RFE/RL that the shepherds and some 3,500 sheep crossed into Afghanistan's Khargushi region on December 16 after being trapped in the Langhar region. Davlatov said the decision to open the border for the shepherds and their flocks was made following a request by the Afghan Consulate in Khorugh, the administrative center of Badakhshan Province. He said the shepherds had to travel some 80 kilometers on Tajik territory. Zabeullah Naseeri, the second secretary of the Afghan Consulate in Badakhshan, told RFE/RL that crossing through Tajikistan was the only safe path for

the shepherds and expressed his gratitude to Tajik officials for their understanding. Davlatov said the shepherds were provided with medical and veterinary assistance when they entered Tajikistan. Tajikistan shares a 1,400 kilometer border with Afghanistan. (RFE/RL)

ANKARA CONSIDERS NABUCCO PIPELINE

18 December

Financing for the \$11.3 billion Nabucco gas pipeline is a challenge, though ties with Azerbaijan could benefit the project, Turkish lawmakers said. Ankara hosted the signing of a milestone intergovernmental agreement by representatives of Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Turkey on the construction of the Nabucco natural gas pipeline in July. A report from the Turkish Foreign Affairs Committee passed its recommendations on Nabucco to lawmakers this week, warning of financial challenges for the project, Turkey's leading English-language daily Today's Zaman reports. The report warned about "uncertainties" in the financial support for the gas pipeline, which the committee felt posed "a serious risk." Taner Yildiz, the Turkish energy minister, expressed optimism about the prospects for Nabucco, however, pointing to gas deals with Azerbaijan as a sign of progress. Ties between Baku and Ankara are strained over regional disputes, though both sides have made progress on the diplomatic front. Nevertheless, the committee noted that for Nabucco, Baku could play a "key role." Europe aims to diversify its energy sector with Nabucco, bringing gas from Central Asia and the Middle East along a Turkish route. Ankara is slated to host a section of Russia's South Stream as well. (UPI)

RUSSIA BACKS LAUNCH OF TURKMENISTAN-UZBEKISTAN- KAZAKHSTAN-CHINA GAS PIPELINE - SHUVALOV

19 December

Russia approves and supports the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China gas pipeline launched earlier this week, Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov said. "A more diverse and better infrastructure in the Customs Union and the CIS means our greater contribution to global energy security," Shuvalov told journalists. "We support these projects," he said. "Russia is working on its own and together with other partners to expand the infrastructure for energy supplies," he said. (Interfax)

KAZAKHSTAN AVOWS INNOCENCE OF ARRESTED KAZAKH CREW MEMBERS IN THAILAND

21 December

Kazakhstan firmly declared that the Kazakh crew members of the IL-76 cargo plane arrested in Thailand are innocent, the spokesperson of Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry said on Monday during a briefing. "The aircraft crew are innocent and are not responsible for reliability of the cargo and its content, according to the relative regulation and usual practice of international freight transportation," spokesperson Yerzhan Ashikbayev said. "We have been cooperating with the authorities of Thailand to at least make the conditions of our citizens in prison easier, and try to release them on bail before the next trial," Ashikbayev said. Ashikbayev said so far, the crew members have already received legal assistance and gotten in touch with their families. The IL-76 cargo plane was detained on Dec. 12 by local police after it landed for refueling at Bangkok's Don Muang airport. It was carrying 40 tons of arms including rocket-propelled grenades and surface-to-air missile launchers. Five crew members were arrested, a captain from Belarus and four Kazakh nationals. The chairman of Kazakhstan's Civil Aviation committee said on Dec. 14 that the IL-76 had been registered in Kazakhstan, but was later sold to Air West Georgia. (Xinhua)

GEORGIA REPORTEDLY DETAINS RUSSIAN BORDER GUARD

21 December

The Russian border guard service's branch in South Ossetia said it was checking a report that a Russian border guard was arrested on Georgian territory early on Monday. "According to information from the Georgian side, Vitaly Viktorovich Khripun, a warrant officer of the Border Guard Department of the Russian Federal Security Service in the Republic of South Ossetia, was detained in the vicinity of the village of Perevi in the republic's Dzhava district," the department said. "The Georgian side was ready to hand over the detainee but then postponed the handover for an indefinite time," it said. The department confirmed that Khripun was "in the vicinity of the village of Perevi as a member of a border guard detail" early on Monday. It said Khripun, 25, had joined the department this month. (Interfax)

GEORGIAN OPPOSITION PROTESTS AGAINST DEMOLITION OF WAR MEMORIAL IN KUTAISI

21 December

The leaders and activists of several opposition Georgian parties held a peaceful protest in Kutaisi on Monday against the demolition of a war memorial in this city on December 19 that resulted in the death of two people. About 2,000 people and the leaders of

several parties attended the event, including Zurab Nogaideli (former prime minister and the head of the movement For a Just Georgia), Salome Zourabichvili (former foreign minister and the leader of the Georgia's Way party), Temur Shashiashvili (former Imereti governor, presidential ex-candidate and leader of the Tetrebi party), Gubaz Sanikidze (leader of the opposition National Forum), and others. They criticised the authorities for their policy and said "the fight against monuments is unacceptable and criminal". The speakers said they would insist on the dynamited war memorial be restored in the same place and an Orthodox church be built nearby in memory of those who died during the 1941-1945 Great Patriotic War and the woman and her eight-year-old daughter killed during the demolition last Saturday. Nogaideli said earlier that the government's policy with regard to monuments was "cynical". "The decision to dismantle the war memorial in Kutaisi was made by the authorities without taking into account the opinion of the public and without any need," he said. He blamed authorities for the death of two people who were killed during the blasting work at the construction site. Georgia's Main Prosecutor's Office confirmed the death of two people during the demolition of the war memorial. Chief prosecutor Murtas Zodelava told journalists, "Two persons died during the dismantling of a part of the memorial that was carried out by a private company under a contract with the Kutaisi municipal authorities." "According to preliminary information, the tragedy occurred because occupational safety rules were not fully complied with during the operation," he said. "All persons responsible for incident will be brought to justice," the prosecutor said. Chunks of concrete killed a woman and her eight-year-old daughter who were standing several dozen metres from the war memorial. The site is fenced off, but obviously too close to the place of the work. Another two local residents received injuries and were hospitalised, local mass media and law enforcement reported. The investigation of the incident is underway. President Mikhail Saakashvili has cut short his visit to Copenhagen, where he attended the U.N. Climate Change Summit, and flew back home. In the evening, Saakashvili held "an urgent meeting with law enforcement leaders, members of the government and the heads of regional administrations and received a comprehensive report on the tragedy", presidential spokeswoman Manana Mandzhgaladze said. "The president of Georgia hopes that the investigation started by the Main Prosecutor's Office will determine the details of the tragedy and those responsible," she said a press briefing. "The president has been shocked by the tragedy and expressed condolences to the families of those killed. According to Saakashvili's

decision, the state will provide financial aid and moral support to the families of those killed and injured," the spokeswoman said. (Itar-Tass)

NATO SAYS NO DEADLINE FOR AFGHAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL

22 December

The head of NATO has said there will be no deadline for the exit of allied troops from Afghanistan, as fears grow among Afghans that foreign forces will leave before their own troops are able to guarantee security. NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen was visiting Afghanistan for the first time since U.S. President Barack Obama announced plans this month to send 30,000 extra troops to Afghanistan to try and tame mounting violence. NATO allies have also promised to send around 7,000 more. But Washington's plan also calls for U.S. troop levels to be scaled down from 2011 as Afghan security forces gradually take over responsibility, sparking concerns among Afghan civilians. Unrest has reached its worst levels in the eight-year war, and many fear that bombings and attacks may rise if their police and troops have not been well-enough prepared for their new responsibilities. There are currently around 110,000 international troops in Afghanistan, including 68,000 Americans. "My first message is to the Afghan people: I know that some are wondering how long international forces will stay, more specifically, they are worried we will leave too soon," Rasmussen told reporters alongside the Afghan president in Kabul. "Let there be no doubt, the international community will stand with you, will protect you, and help rebuild your country until you are ready to stand on your own," he said. Rasmussen said there would be a "new momentum" in 2010 as NATO ramped up its mission in Afghanistan but that its main focus would be to protect the population and train more Afghan forces. Afghan police and soldiers would begin to take over security from foreign forces next year, he said, but stressed the change would only come when the Afghans were ready. "They will start to take the lead when and where they are ready. This transition will be conditions based, not calendar driven. We will stay the course," he said.

He added that NATO was now in a "phase of increasing, not decreasing." But despite the headline figure of 7,000 extra forces, figures from NATO sources showed pledges for only 5,500 troops, with 1,500 more to be confirmed later. Of the 5,500, at least 1,500 are already in the country and will not now be withdrawn as planned, NATO sources have said. The additional numbers also do not account for some 4,900 Dutch and Canadian troops due to leave Afghanistan in 2010 and 2011. (Reuters)

RSF URGES KAZAKHSTAN TO INVESTIGATE KILLING OF KYRGYZ OPPOSITION JOURNALIST

22 December

The international press freedom organization Reporters Without Borders (RWB) has expressed its outrage over the killing of opposition Kyrgyz journalist Gennady Pavlyuk in Almaty, Kazakhstan. "Ten days ahead of taking over the presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Kazakh authorities cannot allow a murder like this to go unpunished and the Kyrgyz side must cooperate in resolving this case," the organization said in a statement. "The attack, this time in a neighboring country, is the third in a week launched against Kyrgyzstan journalists of Russian origin," RWB said. "Political analyst Alexander Knyazev was attacked in the capital Bishkek on 9 December and the correspondent for Russian news agency BaltInfo, Alexander Evgrafov, was struck and threatened by uniformed police on 15 December," it said. "It is impossible at the moment to establish a direct link between this murder attempt against Gennady Pavlyuk and the two previous assaults, even if a vocal minority has wanted to give the impression that it was a concerted plan. But in any event, the exploitation of these attacks in the interests of a strategy of nationalist and political tension is unacceptable," it said. "Journalists cannot go on being taken hostage by the extreme polarization of Kyrgyzstan political life," it said. Unidentified individuals apparently threw Pavlyuk out of a window in a multistory building in Almaty on December 16. He died in the hospital without regaining consciousness on Tuesday. (Interfax)

TURKMENISTAN TO SUPPLY UP TO 30 BCM OF GAS TO RUSSIA PER YEAR

22 December

Russia and Turkmenistan have agreed that Turkmen gas supply totaling up to 30 billion cubic meters per year will resume in the period January 1-10. An amendment to the gas trade agreement of April 10, 2003 was signed in the presence of the Russian and Turkmen presidents. Gazprom (RTS: GAZP) Deputy Chief Executive Alexander Medvedev told reporters that the documents "set down all the terms for resuming supplies, their volume and prices and status." "For the first time in Russian-Turkmen gas relations, gas supplies will be based on a formula that corresponds fully to the terms of the European gas market," Medvedev said. (Interfax)

AFGHAN LAWMAKER DIES IN POLICE AMBUSH

23 December

Afghan officials say a member of parliament was killed when his vehicle drove through a police ambush set for Taliban militants. The Interior Ministry said Mohammad Yunos Shirnagha, a member of Afghanistan's upper house of parliament, failed to stop at a police checkpoint set up as part of the planned ambush. The ministry said Shirnagha and his driver were killed when police opened fire. The incident took place in northern Baghlan province. (RFE/RL)

LG LAUNCHES \$9.8 MLN REFRIGERATOR PRODUCTION IN UZBEKISTAN

23 December

LG Electronics of South Korea has begun producing refrigerators in Uzbekistan at a plant into which it has put \$9.8 million, the association Uzeltekhprom told Interfax. Production was organized at OJSC Sino (Samarkand), an Uzbek monopoly producer of refrigerator and freezer equipment, under a mid-2009 deal signed by Uzeltekhprom and LG, the Uzeltekhprom administration source said. The first phase of the project, running until the end of next year, will be production of 50,000 LG brand refrigerators built on modern assembly lines LG has set up at the Samarkand plant. The second phase, in 2011, envisions upgrading the plant's production capacity to where it can produce up to 100,000 new kinds of refrigerators and freezers per year. Total investment in the project will be roughly \$15 million. Sino, with production capacity of 250,000 units per year, was launched in 1973. It was declared bankrupt in 2003 and plant management was turned over to a consortium of Uzbek companies. Its equipped capacity is currently only 15%. Uzeltekhprom, which comprises Uzbek electro-technical sector companies, plans in 2009-2013 to direct \$93 million to modernizing and developing production at the plant, including \$48.7 million for the production of household appliances. Over a five-year period, plans call for upgrading existing and building new production facilities for making up to 200,000 televisions, 350,000 refrigerators, 90,000 washing machines, 75,000 air conditioners, 35,000 compact disc players, and 50,000 regular telephones. Appliances will carry the LG and Samsung brand names (South Korea), Candy (Italy), Haier (China), and also the local brand Roison. (Interfax)

ARMENIAN ACTIVIST SAYS OFFICIALS PROVOKED DEADLY CLASHES

23 December

An Armenian opposition leader and newspaper editor on trial over postelection unrest says officials provoked deadly unrest in Yerevan last year by rigging the presidential election and persecuting opposition

supporters, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports. Nikol Pashinian presented detailed allegations on December 21 during his trial on charges of provoking clashes between security forces and supporters of opposition candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian following the February 2008 presidential election. Ten people died and more than 200 others were injured in the violence. Pashinian described what he said were officials' plans to provoke and disperse thousands of opposition protesters who barricaded themselves in central Yerevan on March 1, 2008. "If the authorities really wanted to prevent clashes between police and people, they should not have attacked [the people] in the first place," he said during nearly three hours of testimony. Pashinian, 34, was a leader of the antigovernment protests sparked by the disputed

election, and he went into hiding after authorities declared a state of emergency and began mass arrests of opposition members. The editor of the newspaper "Haykakan Zhamanak," Pashinian also defended opposition activists who clashed with riot police during an October 2007 incident. The confrontation took place in Yerevan between police and a small crowd promoting Ter-Petrosian's first rally in the capital since his return to politics.

Pashinian and several other opposition figures were detained during the incident. Pashinian alleged that from that day until the February 2008 election Armenian police regularly intimidated and arrested Ter-Petrosian supporters on the orders of high-ranking government officials. (RFE/RL)