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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASS ANALYST

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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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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.

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RUSSIA PRESSES AHEAD WITH ANNEXATION OF ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA

Valeriy Dzutsev

On November 24, the Russian government signed an agreement with Abkhazia that will further diminish the already limited sovereignty of this territory in exchange for Russian investments and social benefits for the population. The South Ossetian government has signaled that Russia is preparing a similar agreement with this Georgian breakaway territory. Some South Ossetians, however, have unexpectedly spoken out in favor of retaining the republic's sovereignty. As Russia lays the groundwork for the annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it encounters surprising opposition from the tiny republics that have become accustomed to a certain degree of independence from Moscow. Tighter control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia will increase the security risks for Georgia.

BACKGROUND: After the prepared agreement for Abkhazia's integration with Russia was leaked to the public on October 13, the resulting outcry in Abkhaz society forced the governments of Abkhazia and Russia to renegotiate their positions. Abkhazia's government derived its own version of the agreement and submitted it to Moscow for further discussion. On November 19, Abkhazia's government approved the new iteration of the bilateral agreement and recommended the president of Abkhazia, Raul Khajimba, to sign it. The Russian government quickly proceeded to endorsing it on November 21 and on November 24, the leaders of Russia and Abkhazia, Vladimir Putin and Khajimba, signed the agreement. The new version replaces the word "integration" with "cooperation", envisages rotating military command of Russian-Abkhaz joint forces, instead of Russia's sole command of the joint military. The requirement to relax the

rules for acquiring Abkhaz citizenship by Russian citizens was also dropped from the agreement. This reflected Abkhaz sensitivities about Russian purchases of real estate in the republic. Khajimba reassured his compatriots that the country would not lose its independence and that there was no question of holding a referendum in Abkhazia on accession to the Russian Federation. However, Khajimba's opponents challenged the signing of the new agreement through public protests, while his supporters geared up to rally in support of the agreement. On November 24, an estimated 500 members of the opposition party Amtsakhara protested against the signing of the agreement. At the same time, an estimated 2,000 supporters staged their own public demonstration.

On November 20, Boris Chochiev, head of South Ossetia's presidential administration, stated that South Ossetian and Russian experts were working on an integration agreement

between South Ossetia and Russia. Chochiev said the new agreement would primarily address military issues, but given the model agreement between Russia and Abkhazia, it is likely that the new agreement will also strive to strip South Ossetia of its limited independence from Russia. South Ossetian analyst Dina Alborova commented on the new agreement for Ekho Kavkaza radio, saying that the widely accepted opinion among experts that South Ossetia was more lenient on issues of its sovereignty than Abkhazia, given the existence of its twin Republic of North Ossetia within the Russian Federation, was wrong. "South Ossetia is not indifferent to the issues of sovereignty. Of course, hot debates took place at the time of the [parliamentary] election campaign, but they subsided after the elections." Alborova asserted that South Ossetia and North Ossetia were already quite integrated with each other and there was no need for rejecting the republican sovereignty.

Another South Ossetian analyst, Alan Jussoev, told Ekho Kavkaza that militarily South Ossetia already felt quite protected by Russia, making even greater integration with its northern neighbor redundant. According to Jussoev, the only thing that he would like to see changed in the relations between South Ossetia and Russia was the removal of border controls between them. South Ossetia's former president Eduard Kokoity spoke in favor of strengthening South Ossetia's independence at the Ossetian conference in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia, on October 31. On November

7, Kokoity further reiterated his view that South Ossetia should stay independent and that Russia "supported its independence" at a special press conference.



(Source: Abkhaziagov.org)

IMPLICATIONS: It appears that not only Abkhazia but also South Ossetia seeks a certain degree of independence from Russia, a tendency that Moscow may want to curb as quickly as possible. Though both regions, but especially South Ossetia, depend heavily on Russia for their security and financial stability, the prospect of becoming just another region of Russia with no regional rights does not seem attractive to elites in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This is not surprising since they receive almost the same benefits that Russian regions enjoy, while in contrast to these Russian subjects enjoying a large degree of domestic political autonomy from Moscow.

Moscow's motivations for speedy incorporation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia into Russia are less clear. The same expedient signing of an agreement is probably expected in South Ossetia, which is seen in Moscow as easy prey. However,

sensing Moscow's sensitivity about fast-tracking the agreements, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia have hardened their positions to the extent possible, given their inherently weak negotiating positions vis-à-vis Russia. Abkhazia received significant concessions from Moscow; most prominently Abkhazia retained some control over the military and prevented a massive Russian procurement of Abkhaz real estate.

Russia's haste may be informed by its geopolitical calculation that its projected future capabilities will be reduced, hence the government in Moscow appears to press ahead to close the issue of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as soon as possible in preparation for the impact of Western economic sanctions and protracted animosity with the Western camp. At present, while Russia still has plenty of reserves and is an attractive alternative for impoverished Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Moscow wants to complete its territorial expansion. When Russia's economic capacities will later decline and with them its attractiveness to the poor territories, it will be harder to annex Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Also, the Russian government appears intent on annexing both territories in parallel. If Russia were to annex South Ossetia first as an easier object, this would have underscored Abkhazia's special, higher status, which would have made it even harder for Russia to annex the region. Therefore, Russian policymakers apparently decided to ramp up the annexation process of the Georgian breakaway territories in order

to entrench in anticipation of a long period of cold war with the West.

The small and *de facto* independent territories on Russia's southern rim resemble the North Caucasian republics that may decide to leave Russian Federation if Moscow's capacities become severely undermined as a result of economic collapse. In order to avoid such a development, Moscow prefers to formally annex Abkhazia and South Ossetia and entrench itself in the South Caucasus against Western allies, most prominently Georgia. Tighter control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia will also allow Moscow to interfere in Georgian domestic affairs more efficiently and attempt to tip the political balance in the country to its advantage.

CONCLUSIONS: The Russian government's plan for a quick implementation of integration agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia mirror the geopolitical calculations in Moscow. Russian policymakers apparently predict that their country's appeal to its neighbors will decrease as a result of the standoff with the West. Russia's capacity to use hard power will also suffer. To capitalize on past gains and forestall losses, the Russian government is proposing to legalize Russia's territorial acquisitions in the South Caucasus as soon as possible. In the meantime, the Abkhaz and South Ossetian governments prefer political autonomy from Russia, while simultaneously receiving significant financial benefits. There is a certain clash of interests between Moscow and its satellite

statelets in the South Caucasus, implying that Russia will have to provide large incentives when forcing its tiny allies in the region to sign the proposed agreements. If Moscow would have taken a more gradual approach, it would likely have encountered far less resistance from Abkhaz and South Ossetians and it could have offered them much less. But the Russian government's hurry has alerted its South Caucasian allies and Moscow will find it harder to convince the disgruntled forces in these territories to sign up for Russia's proposals.

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WASHINGTON AND KABUL RENEW THEIR SECURITY COMMITMENTS

Richard Weitz

The Afghan parliament has authorized the continued deployment of thousands of U.S. and NATO forces in their country next year. Due to the opportunity offered by a more friendly Afghan government and the challenge presented by a declining regional security situation, the U.S. military will continue to provide some combat support for the Afghan Army. Meanwhile, China, which is experiencing an upsurge in Islamist terrorism, has been raising its economic and diplomatic profile in the country.

BACKGROUND: On November 23, the lower house of the Afghan parliament approved by an overwhelming 152-5 vote the two status-of-forces agreements that will permit some 12,000 U.S. and NATO troops to remain in Afghanistan beyond the end of this year, when the current agreements expire. Newly elected President Ashraf Ghani, who signed the documents as soon as he assumed office on September 30, welcomed the vote and called on the upper house to rapidly follow suit, which would bring the agreements into force.



(Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

The vote proved uncontroversial despite the media leaks a few days earlier by the Obama administration that the President had authorized more flexible rules-of-engagement for U.S. forces remaining in Afghanistan in 2015 than had originally been expected. In addition to training and equipping the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and fighting al-Qaeda-affected terrorists in Afghanistan, the White House has acceded to Pentagon requests to allow the U.S. forces that will serve in the new Operation Resolute Support (replacing the now ending Operation Enduring Freedom) to provide air support and other combat assistance to Afghan forces under serious threat from the Taliban.

In background briefings, White House officials struggled to explain that they were not giving the Pentagon a blank check, that the U.S. military would not engage in routine patrols or regularly provide air support for Afghan forces, that only senior U.S. officers could

authorize attacks on Taliban forces threatening Afghan but not U.S. forces, and that U.S. forces in Afghanistan next year would conduct combat “operations” but not combat “missions.” The Pentagon is currently writing the specific orders defining the new rules of engagement.

Several factors apparently drove the U.S. decision. First, President Ghani and other Afghan officials, as well as U.S. field commanders, had requested the expanded support. Whereas former President Hamid Karzai had soured on the U.S. military presence and sought to constrain its activities, Ghani has expressed a desire for greater U.S. military support and has removed Karzai’s prohibition against Afghan commanders calling in U.S. air strikes, which Karzai blamed for killing many civilians. Karzai’s former presidential rival and now government partner, newly appointed Afghan Chief Executive Officer Abdullah has also generally supported a greater U.S. role in Afghanistan than desired by Karzai.

Second, the collapse of the incompletely U.S.-trained Iraqi army in the face of the offensive of the Islamic State (IS) terrorist movement has reminded many observers of the dangers of reducing support for the ANSF prematurely. Unlike their Afghan counterparts, Iraqi politicians could not come to an agreement about permitting the planned large U.S. training mission to remain in their country, which may have contributed to their poor performance against the IS, which is gaining some support among the Taliban and other Islamist

militants. Thousands of U.S. force have now returned to Iraq to resume that training and advising mission. Large-scale air strikes by U.S. drones and fighter bombers might have helped prevent the Taliban offensives in September against Sangin in Helmand and Ajrestan in Ghazni province.

IMPLICATIONS: Assessing the performance of the ANSF this year has been difficult since the declining U.S. military presence in Afghanistan has resulted in less Pentagon data being published. In public, U.S. and NATO officials have expressed confidence in the ANSF, and the most recent U.S. Defense Department “Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan,” published in October 2014, offers a favorable evaluation of the ANSF’s recent performance.

Yet, the Taliban has pressed the ANSF hard in 2014, the first year that Afghan forces operated largely independently of U.S. forces. Thus far, more than 4,600 government troops have died in combat this year, a higher level than for all of 2013, which the second highest U.S. commander in Afghanistan termed “unsustainable.” The number of civilians killed by the Taliban is also higher. Both Afghan and U.S. officials cited concerns about these losses when justifying renewed use of U.S. air strikes this and next year.

Despite the enhanced rules of engagement, the administration did not follow the advice of some military commanders to stretch out the planned NATO troop drawdown. President Obama still seems determined to remove all U.S. forces from

Afghanistan by the time he leaves office in early 2017. The current timetable, which Obama announced this May, will see the number of U.S. soldiers fall to 9,800 by the end of this year (1,800 will focus on fighting terrorists such as al-Qaeda and the Haqqani network, while the remainder will concentrate on training and equipping the ANSF). About 5,000 U.S. troops are scheduled to remain in Afghanistan by the end of 2015, and after 2016 there will be only approximately 1,000 U.S. military personnel assigned to a security assistance mission operating out of the U.S. Embassy.

The smaller number of NATO forces, perhaps half as many as U.S. forces, are expected to follow a comparable drawdown. For now, Italy will lead the international forces in western Afghanistan, Germany those in the north, and Turkey will serve as the lead nation for the foreign forces based in Kabul. U.S. commanders will remain in charge of the advising and training mission in the eastern and southern regions, where the Taliban insurgency has traditionally been strongest. On November 7, Jens Stoltenberg, who became NATO's new Secretary General on October 1, visited Afghan and NATO forces in Afghanistan and met with the country's new government leaders. He pledged further support for Afghanistan, but NATO's attention has been moving back to Europe, where Russia's new assertiveness is challenging core NATO principles.

The other elements of the administration's Afghan strategy – promoting regional economic integration, countering narcotics trafficking, and promoting political and civil rights—remain in place but with reduced U.S. funding and presidential attention. In some cases, it looks like China and Russia, either individually or through the SCO, may assume a greater role in supporting these non-combat missions.

Whereas the U.S. and its NATO allies are decreasing their military and other presence in Afghanistan and neighboring Central Asia, China and Russia have been increasing their regional activities. Russia continues to expand its economic presence in Afghanistan, renew ties with various Afghan leaders, and strengthen the capacity of the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization. Although the U.S. will no longer purchase Russian helicopters for the Afghan Air Force, India has agreed to pay Russia even more money to send weapons to the ANSF. Russia has even begun to develop military ties with Pakistan, perhaps the most important foreign actor in Afghanistan.

China has launched an unprecedented diplomatic campaign regarding Afghanistan, including appointing a Special Envoy to that country, hosting the fourth ministerial meeting of the Istanbul Conference in Beijing, and pledging more economic and diplomatic support. For example, Chinese officials have been trying to reduce tensions between the new governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan. For his part,

President Ghani made his first state visit to Beijing and is eager to deepen economic ties with China.

CONCLUSIONS: The Asia Foundation's latest comprehensive annual survey of Afghan public opinion offered both positive and negative results. A majority of Afghans believe their country is heading in the right direction and hold more favorable opinions of the ANSF even as they continue to complain about corruption, insecurity, unemployment, and political infighting among Afghan politicians. They welcome the foreign assistance they have received but fear that the U.S. and other countries will again abandon them. Of course, polling data in these other foreign countries show a much more negative assessment of the results of the decade-long international intervention in Afghanistan, with a general Western military desire to avoid any future military adventures in Eurasia in the future. Securing additional U.S. and NATO military support for Afghanistan beyond the modest levels now authorized will prove challenging but probably essential.

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INDIA TO INVEST IN IRAN'S CHABAHAR PORT

Sudha Ramachandran

The Indian government's decision in late October to participate in the development of Iran's Chabahar port will jump-start this long-delayed project. The port's expansion will boost its emergence as a major transshipment hub and its strategic location is expected to transform the region's geopolitics. But will this ambitious project realize its full potential given unrest in the Sistan-Balochistan province, where it is located, and the prospects of a civil war looming large in Afghanistan?

BACKGROUND: After over a decade in cold storage, Iran's Chabahar port project is set to gather momentum with India deciding after much dithering to participate in its development. India proposes to invest US\$ 85 million over a year to convert two berths it will lease for a ten-year-period into a container terminal and a multi-purpose cargo terminal. Its development and use of the port's capacity will boost the prospects of Chabahar port emerging as a trade and transshipment hub.

It was during his visit to India in 2003 that Iran's then president Mohammed Khatami mooted the idea of developing Chabahar port into a trade and transshipment hub. However, the project floundered with India coming under U.S. pressure for co-operating with Iran. Doubts also existed over the project's economic viability given Iran's international isolation and the looming threat of sanctions. It was only in 2012 that India's interest in Chabahar revived. In March, it defied U.S. objections to transport 100,000 metric

tons of wheat to Afghanistan via Chabahar port – the first time it was using this gateway to Afghanistan. Improving U.S.-Iran relations over the past year cleared the way for Delhi's decision to participate in the Chabahar project. India and Iran are expected to sign an agreement soon.



(Source: [Baluchistan](#), Flickr)

When Chabahar's development as a trade and transshipment hub was first discussed a decade ago, three countries – Iran, India and Afghanistan – were involved in the plan. With the port's immense potential expanding and unfolding in the years since, at least a dozen countries have clambered on board the project. Among them is China, which financed, built and now

runs Chabahar port's main competitor, the Gwadar port, which is located just 72 kilometers east of Chabahar in Pakistan.

IMPLICATIONS: Iran plans to expand Chabahar port's capacity from the current 2.5 million tons per annum to 12.5 million tons. It has invested around US\$ 340 million in the project, declared the area around the port as a Free Trade Industrial Zone and constructed a petro-chemical complex to receive gas from Iranshahr. The Chabahar port's development could change the face of Iran's shipping industry. It is Iran's first deep-sea port, the absence of which has hitherto severely hobbled Iranian shipping. Bandar Abbas, for instance, which handles 85 percent of Iran's shipping, cannot receive ships exceeding 100,000 tons. Such ships bound for Iran first dock in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where the cargo is then loaded on to smaller ships to suit the shallower waters of Bandar Abbas port. A deep-sea port at Chabahar will free Iran of this problem, saving it millions of dollars in fees to the UAE and reducing its dependence on that country.

Chabahar's location at the mouth of the Gulf of Oman on Iran's Makran coast endows it with immense strategic significance. Besides, it is situated 300 kilometers east of the Strait of Hormuz, giving Iran direct access to the Indian Ocean. Its location outside the Hormuz straits means that even if this strategic waterway were to be closed by Iran's enemies, Chabahar port would continue to function. It reduces

Iran's vulnerability to international pressure immeasurably.

For land-locked Afghanistan, Chabahar port promises a widening of options. Kabul currently depends on Pakistan for access to the sea, an uncertain option given the volatile relations between Islamabad and Kabul. Not only is the route to the Chabahar port safer and more cost-effective but will also significantly reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan.

Chabahar port offers India a gateway to enter Iran and to realize its economic and strategic ambitions in Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics. Pakistan has denied Indian goods overland access to Afghanistan, severely restricting trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia. Its trade with the CARs, for instance, was valued at just US\$ 738 million in 2012. Chabahar port could change that. With Indian goods getting preferential treatment and tariff reductions there, India's trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia could grow exponentially. An expanded role for India in Afghanistan's reconstruction will boost its influence there. India is also eyeing trade with Europe via Chabahar port and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) as this route is estimated to be 40 percent shorter and 30 percent less expensive than its current trade via the Red Sea-Suez Canal-Mediterranean Sea route.

Recognizing that Chabahar's full potential can be tapped only by improving its connectivity, India and Iran have built roads and railway lines. Iran has built a road running from

Chabahar through Iranshahr and Zahidan to Milak on its border with Afghanistan. Across the border on the Afghan side, India has built the Zaranj-Delaram highway, which links up with the Garland Highway that connects Afghanistan's main cities. Thus goods offloaded at Chabahar port can be sent via trucks across Afghanistan. Several railway lines are in the pipeline too, including one that runs northwards from Chabahar to Zahidan, where it will hook up with the Iranian rail network, and a 900-kilometer railway line between Chabahar and the Hajigak iron ore mines in Afghanistan.

To draw the Central Asian states into channeling their trade with South and West Asia through Chabahar, Iran has enhanced infrastructure co-operation with these countries to facilitate transport of goods to the port. Teheran's financing of the Kyrgyz stretch of the Iran-Afghanistan-Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan-China road project and the Anzob tunnel in Tajikistan, for instance, must be seen in this light.

With India unlikely to be able to provide the massive investment that the Chabahar project requires, China, which also has an interest in Chabahar, could step in. Gwadar port provides China's oil imports from the Gulf with a shorter overland route, one that bypasses the Malacca Straits and the South China Sea. Participation in Chabahar port will provide Beijing with another such overland option. China's likely participation in Chabahar has triggered unease in Delhi over being edged out of the project.

Indeed, it was such anxieties that prompted India to decide on participating in the port's development. However, Indian apprehensions over China's participation in Chabahar seem excessive. However large the Chinese investment in Chabahar, its role in the port will not be the same as in Gwadar as Iran is unlikely to hand over control of the port to China or any other country. In fact, China's investment in Chabahar's capacity could facilitate India's trade in the region.

CONCLUSIONS: Discussions on Chabahar port often trigger comparisons with Gwadar. Chabahar's development is at least a decade behind that of Gwadar as Iran's difficult relations with the U.S. inhibited the project's progress. That is expected to change now as Iran's international isolation is easing and India is stepping in. Importantly, which of the two ports will emerge as the preferred port option for Afghanistan and the Central Asian states? Will Chabahar attract more trade than Gwadar? Distances between Gwadar and Central Asian cities are shorter and a transit corridor being developed between Gwadar and Kashgar could spur Gwadar's attractiveness to the CARs. But extreme unrest in Pakistan's Balochistan province severely undermines Gwadar's appeal.

Although Chabahar's strategic location and its improving connectivity to Central Asia and beyond bodes well for its future, problems loom. Its success hinges on the security situation in the restive Sistan-Balochistan province where it is located and in Afghanistan

through which vital roads and railway lines run to Central Asia and beyond. Iran has managed to put a lid on the insurgency in Sistan-Balochistan to some extent but with the issues underlying the conflict unresolved, violence could erupt again, prompting investors to rethink plans. Iran can minimize this challenge by ensuring that locals benefit from the port project. The situation in Afghanistan is even more worrying and the deteriorating scenario there compromises the tapping of Chabahar's full potential. Should Afghanistan descend into civil war or Taliban influence there expand, completion of roads and rails linking Iran with Central Asia could be delayed, throwing into jeopardy Chabahar's emergence as a transshipment hub and snuffing out the grand ambitions of India and Iran.

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THE GEOPOLITICS OF TAJIKISTAN'S WATER

John C.K. Daly

At a seminar in Dushanbe on November 11, Uzbekistan's Environmental Protection State Committee specialist Muhammadzhon Hojayev proposed collaborating with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to conduct aerial survey studies of glacier melt in the Tien Shan and Pamir mountain ranges to assess the problem, as the last aerial surveys were done 14 years ago. The problem is accelerating; UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia Deputy Head Fedor Klimchuk told seminar participants, "The main reason of glaciers melting is climate warming and man-induced factors. Glaciologists say glaciers may disappear by the end of this century."

BACKGROUND: Before the implosion of the USSR in 1991, the Soviet centrally planned economy left Central Asian nations with a number of mega-projects, turning the region into the USSR's cotton plantation while a number of hydroelectric facilities were built in the upstream states of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan both to regulate water flow and generate electricity. Hydrocarbon poor Tajikistan wants to build more hydroelectric dams to allow it to generate electricity for export, a prospect that downstream neighbors Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan fear will disrupt regular water releases and damage their agriculture. Besides hydroelectric projects, global warming is altering Central Asia's alpine environment as glaciers recede.

Tajikistan has an abundance of glacier-fed streams and rivers and more than 1,300 natural lakes. Tajikistan also contains many glaciers, of which the

270-square-mile Fedenko glacier is the largest in the world outside the Polar Regions.



(Source: kremlin.ru)

Hydrocarbon poor Tajikistan, facing rising natural gas prices from Uzbekistan, sees increasing its hydroelectric potential as a growth sector in the form of electricity exports to South Asia, with water discharges for power generation increasingly taking precedence over the agricultural concerns of their downstream neighbors, a policy that Uzbekistan in particular has opposed.

Tajikistan has few immediate options but to attempt to develop its

hydropower assets. Only 7 percent of Tajikistan's land is arable, and the U.S. government estimated that the country's 2013 oil production was a paltry 210 barrels per day and produced only 6.7 billion cubic feet (bcf) of natural gas, forcing it to import 44 bcf to meet demand.

According to Kyrgyz expert Valentina Kasymova, Tajikistan's hydropower potential is over 300 billion kilowatt-hours. But Tajikistan's reliance on the Nurek dam, led state-owned electricity holding company Barki Tojik on Oct. 1 to introduce partial restrictions for electricity supplies in rural areas in order to conserve water in Nurek's reservoir, cutting electricity throughout most of the country from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. until the spring. In 2013 similar restrictions were introduced on Oct. 26 and were lifted on April 15, 2014.

But even these figures are optimistic. On Oct. 15 the internet portal barknest.tj reported that many Tajik rural residents receive electricity nine hours a day on average, a figure that drops to seven and a half hours in some rural districts. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the country lacks gas and thermal supply systems, and residents have to use electricity to heat their homes and cook meals.

IMPLICATIONS: Adding to Tajikistan's problems, Central Asian countries are the world "leaders" in inefficient water use, being among the world's highest per capita users. Tajikistan's per capita consumption rate is the seventh highest in the world, and Tajikistan has the lowest rate in the world of water use per US\$1 of

GDP, using nearly 3.5 cubic meters of water per dollar of GDP, a rate more than 45 times higher than that of Spain.

Despite such shortfalls, the administration of Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon is pinning its hopes on becoming Central Asia's leading electricity exporter, which has required outside assistance from Russia and Iran. The US\$720 million Sangtuda-1 hydropower dam with four turbines generating 670 megawatts (MW) was completed in 2009 with Russian investment. The smaller Sangtuda-2 hydropower dam, begun during the Soviet era and completed with Iranian investment, began operating two years ago at a limited capacity, its two turbines generating a total of 220 MW. The Tajik government is tens of millions of dollars in arrears for both Sangtuda dams, and Sangtuda-2 has been closed for maintenance since January 2014.

The crown jewel of Tajikistan's hydroelectric dreams is completing the vast 3,600-megawatt Soviet-era Vakhsh River Rogun hydroelectric cascade, begun in 1976, which, if completed, would stand 1,150 feet tall. Building the dam is a major strategic priority, as every winter, the power crisis means most Tajiks are only able to have three hours of electricity every day. Brushing aside regional criticism, President Rakhmon has stated that Tajikistan will use its natural resources "for the benefit of its people" while adhering to international laws.

Building Rogun is beyond Dushanbe's capabilities; the government was forced to announce a tender for participation

in the project, because the cost of the work was appraised at US\$ 5-6 billion. In 2013 Tajikistan generated 17.09 billion kilowatt hours (kWh), exporting 1 billion kW, primarily to Afghanistan. Uzbekistan strongly supports the position that the Amu Darya is in fact a “trans boundary” river, which accordingly makes it a regional and international rather than bilateral issue. Seeking to allay regional concerns, the Tajik government in September established the Agency for Supervision of Safety of Hydrotechnical Facilities, whose manager, Bahodur Isupov, commented that the new agency will “supervise observance of norms and standards of construction and repair of dams, hydropower plant buildings, water discharge tunnels, and other hydrotechnical facilities.”

Despite the government’s preference for mega-hydroelectric projects, Barq-i Tojik is attempting to diversify, reporting on Oct. 22 that it will bring online 16 small hydroelectric power stations, with a combined capacity to generate 11 megawatts of electricity, in various regions by the start of the cold season, with 12 of them already operational. But Barq-i Tojik’s broader diversification efforts remain uneven as while it currently has 316 small hydroelectric power stations capable of generating 25 megawatts in total, only 60 are currently operational.

Tajikistan may soon be exporting water as well, as Iran is considering importing water from Tajikistan via a pipeline, where earlier this month Iranian officials discussed the possibility of

importing water during a trip to Dushanbe, according to Iranian Energy Minister Hamidreza Chitchian, updating a proposal first broached a decade ago. Iran stressed its readiness to invest \$3 billion in the project to supply Tajik water to Iran’s Khorasan province via a 373-mile water pipeline from Lake Sarez in the Gorno-Badakhshan region in eastern Tajikistan to Khorasan. Iran has also suggested shipping water by rail, adding as an incentive that it could be an oil for water barter arrangement. The worsening drought in Iran on Oct. 5 led Ayatollah Mohammad-Ali Movahedi Kermani in Tehran during Id al-Adha prayers in Tehran to call for prayers for rain in every mosque in Iran.

CONCLUSIONS: There are alternatives to gigantic Soviet-legacy projects like Rogun, such as smaller, more numerous free-flowing hydroelectric facilities that would alleviate many of the downstream nations’ concerns, which have been advocated by Western specialists with such institutions as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank.

As for regional squabbles over water rights, a diplomatic solution now exists – the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, whose Article 5 states, “Watercourse States shall in their respective territories utilize an international watercourse in an equitable and reasonable manner.” While Uzbekistan has ratified the

convention, it is the only Central Asian country to do so. In the absence of an international agreement, Uzbek president Islam Karimov continues to seek support for Uzbekistan's position on further Tajik and Kyrgyz hydroelectric construction, raising the issue during an October 25 meeting with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov in Ashgabat, with the Turkmen media reporting that Berdimuhammedov backed the rational use of water in Central Asia "based on respect for each other's interests."

Russia, China and the U.S. should press other Central Asian nations to adopt the constitution as well as assist in finding financing for smaller, free-flowing hydroelectric facilities, or water will continue to trouble Central Asian relations as the USSR's most environmentally destructive legacy. In the meantime, the Tajiks face another winter with dark, cold evenings.

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SOROS VISITS BISHKEK

Arslan Sabyrbekov

On November 17, the American business magnate and philanthropist George Soros paid two days visit to Kyrgyzstan. Soros is Chairman of the Open Society Foundation, a global network of institutes aiming to shape public policy to promote democratic governance, human rights, legal and economic reforms. In Bishkek, several dozens of pro-Russian activists held a peaceful rally near the U.S. Embassy, protesting Soros' visit.

The initiators of the rally are activists from the Union of Russian Compatriots *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) and members of Kyrgyzstan's Communist Party. Participants were mostly elderly people, holding posters in both Russian and Kyrgyz languages reading, "U.S. hands off from sovereign Kyrgyzstan;" "Kyrgyzstan+Russia = Customs Union;" "Soros, please let us live in peace" and many others.

In an interview to local journalists, Union of Russian Compatriots chairwoman Nadejda Ladojinskaya emphasized that Soros finances local non-governmental organizations aimed at destabilizing the socio-political situation in the country and is one of the main initiators of the so called "color revolutions" in the post-Soviet space. In her words, "America should listen and accept the choice Kyrgyzstan has made. We support the policy that our government has taken and its growing partnership with Moscow. We are against those who try to prevent

these positive developments and brainwash our people against Russia." The rally participants demanded Embassy representatives to come out and speak with them. However, there was no response and the small crowd dispersed within an hour.

The Kyrgyz public and local experts have taken varying positions on the demonstration by pro-Russian activists. According to Kyrgyzstan's former State Secretary Osmonakun Ibraimov, the rally should be regarded as a complete disgrace for the country and there is no evidence whatsoever pointing to sabotage activities by George Soros or his Institution.

The Soros Foundation has been active in Kyrgyzstan starting from the first days of the country's independence and continues to strongly advocate democratic governance reforms by launching and supporting initiatives in all spheres of public life. Moreover, Soros has stood at the forefront of creating the American University of Central Asia, which has become a renowned regional educational institution, training future leaders and offering a multi-disciplinary learning community in the American liberal arts tradition. As part of his visit to Bishkek, Soros also met with the president and student body of the American University and inspected the University's new campus, built by his donation.

It seems that Bishkek's growing partnership with Moscow contributes to a growing activism among pro-Russian forces in Kyrgyzstan. This is not the first rally conducted by the Union of Russian Compatriots. Recently, Union activists have also protested in front of the Ukrainian Embassy in Bishkek, urging Kiev to stop military actions. But unlike the dozens of young people who recently protested the government's decision to join the Russia-led Customs Union, the security forces did not take any actions against the Union members, describing the entire Ukrainian nation as "fascists." According to MP Omurbek Abdrakhmanov, this is indicative of the current power holders' tacit agreement with or even direct involvement in these processes.

However, the developments around Soros' visit to Bishkek did not prevent the country's President Atambayev to meet the man who over the course of Kyrgyzstan's independence invested around US\$ 80 million in various social and educational projects. According to the President's press service, they briefly discussed the activities of the Soros Foundation and of the American University of Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan's president expressed his gratitude to Soros for remaining Kyrgyzstan's good friend and a great supporter of democratic reforms.

In the end of October, the multi-billionaire investor published the article "Wake up, Europe" in the New York Review of Books, warning Europe's democracies against the threat that a resurgent Russia poses to the continent.

Soros wrote that "The Russian attack on Ukraine is indirectly an attack on the entire European union and its principles of governance," and called for more economic and military support for Ukraine, as well as for the abandonment of the Eurozone's current austerity programs.

The author writes in his personal capacity. The views expressed are his own and do not represent the views of the organization for which he works.

AZERBAIJANIS IN SYRIA

Mina Muradova

Azerbaijani media have reported that a national wrestling champion was killed while fighting for the Islamic State (IS) militant group. News about Azerbaijani citizens – mostly young men – traveling to Syria to join militant groups are increasing. Observers believe that this trend underscores an emerging security threat to the secular Azerbaijan.

The wrestler, Rashad Bakhshaliyev, from the Ismailli district in northern Azerbaijan, appeared to lead a successful life before his sudden departure for Syria in August, taking his wife and child with him. He won various wrestling competitions in Azerbaijan and before leaving for Syria worked as a freestyle wrestling coach in Ismailli's Olympic complex. In September, he called his mother, Mirvari Bakhshaliyeva, from Syria and told her that everything was fine, but one month later his wife announced his death in a telephone call from Syria.

Of Azerbaijan's population of over nine million, 93 percent identify as Muslims, the overwhelmingly majority of which is Shia (65-75 percent) while the remainder identify as Sunnis. No precise data exists for the number of Azerbaijanis who have been fighting in Syria. Local media claims the number of militants in Syria is between 200 and 400, with more than 100 killed in action.

In light of more frequent press coverage of Azerbaijani citizens allegedly

participating in the Syrian conflict, security forces are now paying closer attention to this trend. On September 23, Azerbaijan's security forces arrested 26 residents for allegedly joining armed Islamic groups in Pakistan, Iraq and Syria and some were alleged members of Azeri Jamaaty, a jihad group in Syria made up of Azerbaijani nationals. In May, the leader of an Azerbaijani IS faction in Raqqa, Mohammad al-Azeri, gave a video address in which he stated that IS was on the "correct path of jihad" in Syria.

Azerbaijanis fighting in Syria primarily come from Baku, Sumqayit, and smaller towns in northern Azerbaijan. Specifically Sumqayit, just 35 kilometers north of Baku, is considered as the main source of fighters, following Salafism and advocating a return to Islam in its purest form. Salafism was catalyzed in Azerbaijan by missionaries from the North Caucasus in the 1990s, funded by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and mostly supported by Sunni Muslims.

Azerbaijan is considered attractive for recruiting due to the ease of travelling there by bus through Georgia and Turkey, and Azerbaijanis do not need visas to enter these countries. Some experts believe that the government's repressive attitude to religious communities, including the adoption of a law limiting religious freedoms and justifying police detentions and high

finances may lead to an increase in religious extremism in Azerbaijan.

Another threat is expected from neighboring Russia. Azerbaijanis constitute the second largest nationality in Moscow, at 14 percent of the city's population of about 11 million. Economic decline due to Western sanctions is causing a reduction of migrants' income and makes some more receptive to radical religious movements.

On November 2, IS released a video titled "A Message from Brother Abu Muhammad Ar-Rusi" via social media and jihadi forums. The appearance of an ethnic Russian in an IS propaganda and recruitment video is aimed at Russian-speaking Muslims. Moscow has expressed concern that Russian-speaking militants in Syria could return to the Russian Federation and commit terror attacks. With regard to the threat posed by IS, Russia has focused attention on militants from the North Caucasus and on labor migrants from former Soviet republics. Last week, Russian authorities carried out a wave of arrests in Moscow of Azerbaijani men with alleged links to IS.

The UN Security Council has adopted two resolutions this year, intended to coordinate international efforts to fight terrorism. The August resolution imposed sanctions on persons with alleged links to IS and the al-Qaeda-linked group Al-Nusra Front. The second resolution ratified in September required UN member states to deny entry to anyone suspected of supporting or engaging in terrorist-related activities, making it a criminal offence

to travel abroad to train for or fight for jihadist groups. A few days ago, Azerbaijan's government made corresponding amendments in its national legislation.

The EU counter-terrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove considered that between 20 and 30 percent of the over 3,000 Europeans who joined jihadist groups have now returned to their home countries. Some have resumed a normal life while some have become radicalized and dangerous, he warned. "The challenge is for each member state to assess each and every returnee, assess their dangerousness and provide the adequate response," de Kerchove said.

GEORGIA DECLARES CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

Eka Janashia

In mid-November, Georgia's PM Irakli Gharibashvili visited Brussels to discuss the country's progress on Euro-Atlantic integration, after former Defense Minister Irakli Alasania's publicly expressed doubts regarding the irreversibility of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic path. The EU praised Georgia's progress in implementing the Association Agreement (AA) but also aired warning signals about "political retribution, confrontation and polarization."

On November 17, the Georgian delegation led by PM Gharibashvili along with European colleagues, the EU's foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini and EU Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy Johannes Hahn, attended the first EU-Georgia Association Council (AC), the highest body in charge of supervising AA implementation.

The Council confirmed the European Commission's October 29 report, stating that Georgia had successfully dealt with the first-phase requirements of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan (VLAP) envisaging a set of benchmarks for the EU short-term visa free regime.

VLAP involves a wide range of issues such as anti-corruption and organized crime policies, protection of human and minority rights, border management,

document security, money-laundering, migration, mobility, asylum and anti-discrimination policies.

Since the European Commission's first progress report on VLAP, issued in November 2013, Georgia has approved a new law on status of aliens and stateless persons as well as an anti-discrimination law and made extensive legislative amendments including legislation on protection of personal data.

The first phase of VLAP has applied to the overall policy framework reflected in the adoption of relevant legislation and the next phase will focus on effective and sustainable enactment of defined measures and adopted laws.

The AC also reviewed the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), a substantial component of the AA. Hahn said the DCFTA preparations are going "smoothly" and "Georgia continues to be in the forefront of the Eastern Partnership."

To maintain the country's efforts, the EU will allocate EUR 410 million in the period 2014-2017, enabling Georgia to continue adapting to the AA demands. The foreign affairs committee of the European Parliament issued recommendations for the European Parliament to ratify the AA with Georgia in December.

Despite the successful completion of the first phase of VLAP application, paving the way for the second one, EU representatives noted their concerns regarding the firing of Defense Minister Alasania and the resignations of Georgia's Ministers of Foreign Affairs and European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. Mogherini talked about the need for an improved political climate and "space for opposition and cross party dialogue." She accentuated the necessity of continuing judiciary reform and avoid "any form of instrumentalization of the prosecution for political purposes."

PM Gharibashvili pledged to substantiate Georgia's further steps to meet all second phase criteria of the VLAP by the next Eastern Partnership summit in Riga 2015, where Tbilisi hopes to get the EU's approval for a visa-free regime with Georgia.

After the AC's inaugural session, Gharibashvili discussed with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg the implementation of the "substantive package" granted to Georgia at the Wales summit in September.

Stoltenberg stated that the establishment of a NATO-Georgia Training Center and the deployment of trainers to strengthen the country's defense capabilities are the essential components of the package. Their implementation should start at the NATO defense ministerial meeting in February, 2015. Stoltenberg also said he has "no reason to doubt" Georgia's NATO integration commitment.

PM Gharibashvili's visit to Brussels also aimed to disperse the allegations

voiced by former Defense Minister Alasania that Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration is under threat. Many officials and analysts in Brussels and Washington assessed the PM's decision to sack Alasania as an attack on Georgia's strategic direction.

Gharibashvili thus had to convince Georgia's foreign partners that the incumbent government remains firmly on its chosen course. He presented the newly appointed Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili, State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Davit Bakradze, Defense Minister Mindia Janelidze to European colleagues and expressed their readiness to make Georgia a "success story in the region" by galvanizing the process of European integration.

Gharibashvili also made tough statements about Russia's destructive policy. He condemned Moscow's "attempt to annex" Abkhazia and South Ossetia and expressed hopes that "Georgia's occupied territories will remain on the radar screen of the Alliance." Moreover, Gharibashvili dubbed the Kremlin's steps in Ukraine as a continuation of the Russia-Georgia war in August 2008. Such hardline language is new for the PM who has otherwise subscribed to the soft and cautious policy towards Moscow endorsed by his predecessor Bidzina Ivanishvili.

Alasania's dismissal from government compelled Gharibashvili to reassure counterparts in the EU and NATO that there is no drift in Georgia's strategic direction. To restore the confidence among Georgia's Western partners, he

is also portraying the criminal cases against former Ministry of Defense officials as exclusively based on corruption charges, in an effort to disperse perceptions of political retribution.

TAJIKISTAN'S PARLIAMENT IMPOSES RESTRICTIONS ON DEMONSTRATORS

Oleg Salimov

Tajikistan's Parliament passed a newly revised law on rallies and demonstrations on November 13. The law regulates all public and street meetings and gatherings. Although the ruling and opposition parties unanimously declared that the new law improves the application of principles of democracy in Tajikistan, the political conditions that surrounded the passage of this law point in the opposite direction.

First, law was passed in the aftermath of events in Ukraine and, most recently, the stand-off between protesters and police in Hong Kong. Second, the law is the next step in a set of measures taken in Tajikistan after the calls for protests launched by the opposition *Group 24* on October 10. Soon after the protest appeal was announced, the Tajik government blocked internet in the country, put the police and military on high alert, and designated *Group 24* an extremist organization.

The new law substituted a similar law from 1998. In essence, the new and harsher version of the law aims to control and prevent mass protests and demonstrations. The law regulates the presence and legal status of journalists and reporters during rallies, demonstrations, and meetings. In other words, the newly added provision imposes government censorship on all

information about meetings and demonstrations. The law successfully monopolizes the government's control over the flow of information and interpretation of events during public rallies and demonstrations.

Also, the new statute grants additional power to police during meetings and demonstrations. Police is allowed to stop and disperse a public gathering if its organizers violate the government approved agenda or order of a meeting. Thus, the determining factor of a meeting's longevity will be the police's vision of the order of a meeting.

The new law also prohibits "coercion" of the public to participate in rallies and demonstrations. The coercion provision is seemingly inspired by the recent protest movements in Ukraine and Hong Kong, which demonstrated the potential for internet and informational technologies as protesters were widely informed and got involved through the spread of text messages and on-line social networking. In the conditions of authoritarian rule, the simple mobilization of supporters for a protest rally through text messages or on-line social networks can easily be interpreted as coercion.

Rakhmon understands that the "immunization to protests" which Tajiks obtained through the Civil War might have started to wear out. Generations of young Tajiks not

familiar with the bloodshed during the Civil War and unfamiliar with any other leadership than that of Rakhmon, are now adult. Having previously targeted nonconforming individuals, Rakhmon is currently refocusing on the masses. Political instability in Badakhshan Autonomous Region, where the last public unrest took place as recently as May 2014, is a clear signal for Rakhmon to reassess the probability of mass protests in Tajikistan. Regardless of its failure, the attempt last month by *Group 24* to organize an opposition meeting in Dushanbe became a turning point for Rakhmon to adopt more serious measures to subdue undesirable public actions.

The Tajik Islamic Renaissance Party's leader Mukhiddin Kabiri pointed out that Tajikistan has not had violent protests in the last twenty years. Over the same period, neighboring Kyrgyzstan, which demonstrates as low economic development and high corruption indicators as Tajikistan, had experienced two waves of upheaval in 2005 and 2010, resulting in the overthrow of two governments. By passing the new statute on rallies and demonstrations, Rakhmon reveals his regime's increased perceived vulnerability to political opposition, which can produce an outcome similar to Kyrgyzstan.

Another important factor in the new law on rallies and demonstrations is the Tajik opposition's unanimous endorsement of Rakhmon's latest legislative initiative. The leaders of the largest opposition parties represented in Tajikistan's parliament, the Islamic

Renaissance Party and the Communist Party, collectively supported the law significantly restraining opposition. When justifying support of the law, Kabiri and Shabdolov emphasized their commitment to peaceful resolution of all disagreements with the current regime. This commitment is now secured in the newly passed law on rallies and demonstrations.

From the legal standpoint, the new statute is intended to protect the general public from potential outbursts of violence, unruly crowds, and street mobs during meetings and demonstrations. However, in Tajikistan, justice as the foremost principle of the legal system is often substituted by political considerations and objectives of the regime. In the context of a weak separation between the executive, judicial, and legislative powers, the law can easily be manipulated for the regime's benefit. While the law can meet the criteria of justice, its interpretation and application can deviate significantly from its initial intent.