



Caucasus and Central Asia Newsletter

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Notes from the Executive Director

Sanjyot Mehendale

What Central Asianists have long been aware of has now been highlighted by September 11 and its aftermath: that is, the need in American universities for Central Asia specialists and the inclusion of Central Asia and Caucasus curricula. Although September 11 brought a flurry of attention to the region, a strange kind of event fatigue seemed to set in within six months. It became clear that focusing solely on the dramatic events and their immediate military and strategic impact was too narrow a frame from which to generate a lasting academic focus on the region. Instead, it is necessary to offer a broader structural enhancement of the curriculum which includes courses/lectures on the ancient and modern cultures and social organizations of Central Asia and the Caucasus above and beyond those that pertain to immediate military, political, and economic interests in the region.

The Caucasus and Central Asia Program has initiated and will continue to provide resources for graduate students who are considering study and research on the region. Over the next three years, funding from the program will not only provide for courses, language training, travel fellowships, and dissertation support, but will also play a part in further institutionalizing Central Asia and Caucasus studies at UC Berkeley. In this regard, we are pleased to announce the arrival of a number of new graduate students who are focusing on the region. In addition, we have had a number of visiting scholars this semester who have conducted extensive research on the region. Among them is Professor Natalya Khan, Professor of Oriental Studies at the National University of Uzbekistan and a specialist on Afghanistan. Professor Khan lectured on Afghanistan several times at Berkeley and contributed a paper to this issue of our newsletter.

Spring 2002 proved to be an extremely active semester at Berkeley for events pertaining to Central Asia and the Caucasus. Under the auspices of International and Area Studies, in cooperation with CCASP and other academic units, a course was developed entitled "Afghanistan and Its Neighbors" which brought together a series of national and international scholars who lectured on a variety of topics relating to Afghanistan and its neighboring regions. The many vectors of the course served to highlight some of the complexities of contemporary Central Asia.

In addition, CCAsP itself organized three major events this spring which illustrate the nature of its commitment to a multidisciplinary and cross-cultural approach to the region. A grant from the Ford Foundation (through the Institute of International Studies) under its "Crossing Borders" program funded an international conference titled "Currents, Cross-Currents and Conflict: Transnationalism and Diaspora in the Caucasus and Central Asia". The conference sought to address the roles diaspora communities in and outside the Caucasus and Central Asia play in shaping politics and policies concerning the region. The conference was characterized by a stellar cast of international scholars from a number of disciplines. Papers included theoretical approaches to the notions of transnationalism and diaspora, examinations of the role of modern information and other technologies, and several case studies including Armenian, Uyghur, and Afghan diaspora communities. CCAsP plans to publish the conference proceedings. More information on this publication will be available in future newsletters or from CCAsP directly.

In April, CCAsP also sponsored a symposium entitled "From 1991 to 9-11: A Decade of Independence in the Caucasus" organized by Professor Stephan Astourian (History Department). The symposium panel assessed the situation in the Caucasus after the fall of the Soviet Union and identified some of the changes that have taken place in the region since September 11. Two of the excellent papers presented at this symposium are published in this issue of our newsletter.

Finally, and on a very different note, CCAsP, together with other academic units on campus, worked with Cal Performances in organizing residency activities around the cellist Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Project. In late April, Yo-Yo Ma and his Silk Road ensemble were on the UC Berkeley campus performing a series of concerts. In conjunction, CCAsP organized a two-day conference titled "Sound Travels: A Musical Journey Along the Silk Road." The conference was unique in that it brought together academics, musicians, and composers to create a forum on cultural exchanges along the ancient and modern Silk Roads. The conference included papers on the Silk Roads and the spread of Buddhism and Islam along the trade routes, as well as papers and presentations on the art and archaeology of music along the Silk Roads. Ethnomusicologists discussed the transmission of music and, in one of the highlights of the conference, Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble musicians gave a lecture demonstration of various Silk Road musical instruments and musical forms. The conference was widely attended, including some 700 people during Yo-Yo Ma's lec-

ture demonstration.

In addition to the events devised and organized by CCAsP, this spring we also hosted a Social Science Research Council dissertation workshop entitled "Globalizing the Caucasus and Central Asia," which brought together doctoral students and faculty from various institutions in the US. We are grateful to SSRC for choosing UC Berkeley as this year's site for their annual dissertation workshop, and we hope that we will be able to host more of these productive workshops in the future.

Even with this unprecedented amount of activity on Central Asia at UC Berkeley, it is premature to conclude that the region has emerged from the academic shadows. Momentum to include Central Asia in the purview of existing area studies departments is sporadic rather than concerted, and there are no fully active proposals to create a dedicated departmental unit. Scholars with an interest in the region are not always in a position to fully focus on Central Asia curriculum because of their other commitments in non-Central Asia departments. And with few Central Asia positions at Berkeley or other American academic institutions, Central Asianist faculty find themselves in the difficult position of being unable to encourage young scholars to focus on the region for fear of leading them up an academic dark alley.

In public perception, too, there is a risk that Central Asia will once again fall into a "black hole" of inattention. Ten months after September 11, Afghanistan and other regions of Central Asia are no longer front-page news. Sporadic accounts of casualties are often the only events from the region reported on the evening news. Despite this fleeting attention, the Caucasus and Central Asia Program at UC Berkeley is determined to keep Central Asia and the Caucasus on the academic and public maps and to continue highlighting the important elements, both ancient and modern, that shape Central Asia today.

The Afghanistan Campaign (Operation Enduring Freedom): Implications for Uzbekistan

Natalya Khan

Only the lazy have not said that the world changed after the 9-11 attacks on New York and Washington. These events, followed by the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan (started on October 7, 2001) almost overnight increased the significance of Central Asia as a zone of vital interest for the Western nations, in particular the US.

Uzbekistan, which is now turning into the key US regional ally, is one of the five Central Asian nations. Uzbekistan is favorably situated in the center of Central Asia and shares borders with every Central Asian state, including Afghanistan.

What is today's Uzbekistan? What were its main concerns and challenges over the last decade? And last, but not least, what implications, both economic and political, is the Afghanistan campaign going to have for Uzbekistan? These are the questions I would like to address in this article.



Uzbek soldiers stand at attention during the playing of the American national anthem.

Population

Uzbekistan, with its population of 25 million people, is the most populous country in Central Asia. In terms of territory, it is the third largest (after Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan).

Table 1. Central Asian states and percentage of Uzbek population

| Country | Surface area | Population (1,000 sq. km) | Uzbek population | | Rank (population) | Rank (area) |
|--------------------|--------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|----------------|
| | | | % | Mil | | |
| Kazakhstan | 2,717 | 14.8 | 2.3 | 0.34 (5) | 2 | 1 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 199 | 5 | 13 | 0.65 (3) | 5 | 4 |
| Tajikistan | 143 | 6.3 | 25 | 1.6 (2) | 3 | 5 |
| Turkmenistan | 488 | 5.5 | 9.2 | 0.51 (4) | 4 | 2 |
| Uzbekistan | 447 | 25 | 71 | 17.75 (1) | 1 | 3 |
| Grand total | 3,994 | 56.6 | 20.85 (37% of CA population) | | | |

As can be seen from Table 1, apart from their homeland, Uzbeks also constitute a substantial minority in other Central Asian countries. Additionally, two million Uzbeks live in Afghanistan and around 25 thousand in China's Xinjiang Province.

The huge number of Uzbeks residing in the area was one of the reasons why Uzbekistan has been so persistent in claiming regional supremacy over the last decade. Other reasons include its geographical location in the center of the region and some historical facts such as existence of three Uzbek principalities in Central Asia (Bukhara emirate, Kokand Khanate, and Khiva Khanate).

What is also worth noting that the Uzbek population in Kazakhstan is the smallest among the Central Asia states, even though Uzbekistan shares its longest border with Kazakhstan (2,203 km). This can be explained by the fact that after the Uzbek tribes settled in the Mavurannahr (Transoxiana) in the early 16th century, they never migrated northwards. To the contrary, they spread to the south, west and east, where they established the three Uzbek principalities and where a substantial number of Uzbeks live today.

*Natalya Khan is a professor of Oriental Studies at the National University of Uzbekistan.
This talk was presented on February 27, 2002.*

Uzbekistan gained its independence from the Soviet Union on August 31, 1991, following the failure of the coup in Moscow.

Political system

In terms of a political system, according to the Constitution adopted in December 1992, Uzbekistan is a presidential republic with a 250-seat unicameral parliament (the Oliy Majlis) elected once in four years. The referendum on January 27, 2002, approved the introduction of a bicameral parliament in 2004.

There are also four political parties in Uzbekistan, namely:

- Fidokorlar (Self-sacrifice Patriots) National Democratic Party: 54 deputies at the Oliy Majlis of the last convocation;
- Halk Demokratik Partiyasi (People's Democratic Party) : 49 deputies;
- Adolat (Justice) Social and Democratic Party: 11 deputies;
- Milliy Tiklanish (National Renaissance): 10 deputies.

A deputy block of representative organs consists of 107 deputies; and a block of voters' initiative group comprises another 16 deputies.

Nevertheless, neither the parliament, which meets twice a year for its brief fall and spring sessions, nor the political parties play an important role in the policy-making process in Uzbekistan.

According to the Constitution of Uzbekistan (Article 89, Chapter 19), the President is "the head of state and executive authority in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan simultaneously serves as Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers."

To sum up the President's authority, it should be noted that according to the Constitution, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan has the right to appoint and dismiss (in some cases with the approval of the Oliy Majlis) the following officials:

- The prime minister
- His first deputy
- The deputy prime ministers
- The members of the Cabinet of ministers
- The procurator-general and his deputies
- The Chairman and members of the Constitutional Court
- The Supreme Court
- The Higher Economic Court
- The Chairman of the Board of the Central Bank
- Judges of regional, district, city and arbitration courts
- Khokims (heads of administrations) of viloyats (regions) and cities.

The President also has the right to dissolve the Oliy Majlis with the sanction of the Constitutional Court (appointed by himself). All together, these make the President a central figure in Uzbekistan's political system, who *de facto* is the head of all branches of authority.

The incumbent president Islam A. Karimov came to power in 1989, when he was elected the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan. In March 1990, following the example of Mikhail Gorbachev, the Supreme Council of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan elected him executive president of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan.

The first presidential elections were held on December 29, 1991, when Islam Karimov stood against Mohammad Solih, a leader of the now banned Erk (Unity) Party. (Today Mohammad Solih lives in Norway; in 2000 he was sentenced in absentia to 15.5 years in prison for masterminding the bombings in Tashkent in February 1999.) As a result of the first elections, Karimov received 85.9 percent, and Solih received 12.6 percent (though he claims he got over 30%).

At a plebiscite in March 1995, the President's term was extended until 2000. The last presidential elections were held in Uzbekistan in January 2000.

In the 2000 elections, the incumbent president and the leader of the People's Democratic Party, Abdulhafiz Jalalov, were on the ballots. During his election campaign, Jalalov made an amusing statement that he himself would be voting for Islam Karimov. He further explained that he decided to run in the elections in order to prove Uzbekistan's devotion to democracy but not to challenge President Karimov. As a result, Jalalov received 4.1%, and President Karimov won overwhelmingly by 91.9% and is supposed to hold office until 2005.

The January 27th referendum in Uzbekistan extended the president's term in office to seven years by 91% out of 13 million legitimate voters. No statements have been made so far to make it clear whether the referendum's results will be applied to the current presidential term, which ends in 2005.

Economic issues

Uzbekistan is basically an agrarian country, which faces the daunting job of curing its dependency on the cotton market and returning its rich soil to food production. During the 1980s, the republic alone provided two-thirds of all cotton produced in the former USSR (plus a startling 60 percent of its fruit and vegetable production).

Even today cotton still remains Uzbekistan's main export commodity. This year the cotton crop was 3.7 million tons; and the cotton fiber output was 1.015 million tons

– 0.2% more compared to the year 2000. Uzbekistan is the world's fifth largest cotton fiber producer (after China, US, India, and Pakistan).

Uzbekistan is also the world's 7th largest producer of gold, extracting over 70 metric tons annually, most of it at the Muruntau mine in the Kyzylkum desert (southwestern region of Navoi), said to be the biggest open-cast gold-mine. Muruntau is developed by the Denver-based Newmont Mining Corporation. Another 80 US companies have their permanent offices in Uzbekistan.

The World Bank, the IMF, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the EBRD included Uzbekistan in the group of low income countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), along with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, and Tajikistan (CIS-7). In terms of U.S. dollars, the countries are among the poorest in the world, with annual per capita incomes in 2000 ranging from \$158 in Tajikistan to \$652 in Azerbaijan. A meeting on low-income countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States was held in London, February 21-22, 2002. The meeting resulted in

Table 2. Gross National Income (GNI) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in CA*

| Country | GNI 1999 | | Value of debt 1999 | | FDI | | | | FDI Per capita (\$) 1999 |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| | Total (\$mil) | Per capita (\$) | Total (\$mil) | Per capita (\$) | 1998 \$mil | 1998 % of total FDI | 1999 \$mil | 1999 % of total FDI | |
| Kazakhstan | 18,732 (1) | 1,250 (1) | 6,264 (1) | 417.6 (1) | 1,151 (1) | 71 | 1,587(1) | 86.3 | 105.8 (1) |
| Kyrgyzstan | 1,465 (5) | 300 (4) | 1,227 (4) | 245.4 (3) | 109 (4) | 6.7 | 36 (4) | 2 | 7.2 (3) |
| Tajikistan | 1,749 (4) | 280 (5) | 684 (5) | 114 (5) | 30 (5) | 1.9 | 24 (5) | 1.3 | 4 (5) |
| Turkmenistan | 3,205 (3) | 670 (3) | 1,730 (3) | 346 (2) | 130 (3) | 8.1 | 80 (3) | 4.3 | 16 (2) |
| Uzbekistan | 17,613 (2) | 720 (2) | 4,161**(2) | 170.5 (4) | 200 (2) | 12.3 | 113 (2) | 6.1 | 4.6 (4) |
| Grand Total | 42,764 | | 14,066 | | 1,620 | | 1,840 | | |

* Source: World Bank's *The Little Data Book*, April 2001.

**The value of Uzbekistan's foreign debt (as per the end of 2001) is estimated at 4.5-4.7 billion dollars.

Table 2a depicts Uzbekistan's economic indices for the years 1990-91 and 2000-2001. This table indicates the tendencies of Uzbekistan's economic development, more specifically right before the independence and a decade later.

Table 2a. Some Economic Indices for Uzbekistan (1990-91 and 2000-01)*

| | 1990 | 1991 | 2000 | 2001 |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| GNP per capita (\$) | 980 | 970 | 620 | ** |
| Annual average consumer price inflation (%) | 3.1 | 82.2 | 25 | 27 |

*Source: World Bank's "World Tables" publication for 1994 and 2001.

** Figures not yet available

The present condition of the struggling Uzbek economy was analyzed in the latest European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Transition Report (2001). The report, named "Energy in Transition," states that Uzbekistan has had little progress in currency convertibility, large-scale privatization, reform of agricultural and banking sectors, and social protection.

an agreement to launch a joint strategy by international financial institutions to more profoundly address the issues of poverty, structural reforms, and debt service in the CIS-7 Group.

In 2001, Uzbekistan had the highest national currency depreciation rate among the ex-Soviet countries. The official rate of the US dollar rose by 101 percent (from 385 to 688 sums), while the real rate was even higher. The slow pace of Uzbekistan's reforms towards the convertibility of its currency was the reason why the IMF recalled its resident representative from Uzbekistan in April 2001. Yet at the beginning of this year, certain steps forward were taken by the IMF and Uzbekistan. Both sides signed the Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies and the Technical Memorandum of Understanding, in which Uzbekistan pledged convertibility by July 2002.

Political issues in the region

On the regional level, Uzbekistan has faced two main challenges over the last several years:

1. The rise of militant Islam, against which severe actions have been undertaken by the government (bringing the issue of human rights abuses into the agenda);
2. Russia's growing influence vis-à-vis Uzbekistan's striving for regional supremacy.

Before September 2001, the rise of militant Islam in the region was the most serious security threat associated with neighboring Afghanistan where the Taliban harbored Al-Qaeda-like terrorist organizations. Within Uzbekistan proper, the threat emanated from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). In September 2000, the IMU was designated by the US Department of State "as a foreign terrorist organization under US law." US President George W. Bush cited the IMU as a terrorist organization of particular concern in his national address on September 20, 2001.

The IMU's leaders, Juma Namongoniy (born Jumaboy Khojiev) and Tohir Yuldosh (Tohir Yuldashev) were sentenced to death in Uzbekistan *in absentia* for masterminding bombings in Tashkent in February 1999.

The IMU gained its combat experience during the Tajik civil war in 1992-97 and focused on toppling the secular government of President Karimov with the subsequent establishment of an Islamic caliphate centered in the Fergana valley. Today the valley is divided between Uzbekistan (Andijan, Namangan, Fergana), Kyrgyzstan (Osh), and Tajikistan (Sughd – formerly Leninabad – province).

The valley is the most densely populated area in Central Asia with zigzag borders and has the highest rate of unemployment (up to 80 percent of the overall population, according to international aid agencies).¹ This indeed provided favorable soil for anti-government sentiments and was effectively used by the IMU during its two high-profile military campaigns in Central Asia in the fall of 1999 and 2000.

Despite being relatively small in size (1,000-1,500 troops), those IMU invasions did seriously damage Central Asian security by exposing its vulnerability to outer threats, and also had certain after effects for regional politics.

1. First of all, they seriously damaged Uzbekistan's image as Central Asia's stronghold of stability.
2. Secondly, the failure to prevent the IMU's continuous incursions forced Tashkent to soften its attitude toward the Russian presence in Central Asia.
3. Thirdly, the IMU military activities on the territories of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan resulted in a rise in distrust and strained relations between the three countries.

Though Uzbekistan withdrew from the CIS Collective Security Treaty in 1999, it nevertheless chose to sign a series of bilateral military agreements with Russia in December 1999 and May 2000, in order to be better prepared for further IMU incursions.

The IMU contingent was heavily involved in fighting around Mazar-e-Sharif and Kunduz last November in the course of the military campaign in Afghanistan. Apparently, Juma Namongoniy was wounded and died as a result of a US combat operation in Mazar-e-Sharif. The IMU infrastructure as a whole was unlikely to survive the US-led operations, though there is still a very strong probability that a number of IMU members managed to cross the Afghan border and penetrated into Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Recent steps by the Uzbek authorities to close the border checkpoint Jartepa, linking Tajikistan's northern Panjakent district with Uzbekistan's Samarkand viloyat, may serve as indirect confirmation of such a probability.

Uzbekistan's striving for regional supremacy

Some steps to boost the process of Central Asia's regional integration were taken even before the breakup of the Soviet Union. Five Central Asian leaders first met to negotiate coordinated policies in Kazakhstan's capital Almaty in June 1990.

The year of 1994 saw an acceleration of tri-lateral integration between Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan – countries possessing the lion's share in the region's labor force and water and power resources. Why only tri-lateral? It is because by that time, Turkmenistan had already abstained from participation in Central Asian summits on the grounds of its "betarapi" (neutrality) policy, and Tajikistan was engaged in a civil war. Russia, preoccupied with its own problems, had little interest in Central Asia. For Uzbekistan it was a golden chance to claim leadership in the region as the most populous nation, playing a special role in regional history and politics. In those days, the goal seemed so close.

In July 1994, Presidents Akaev, Nazarbaev, and Karimov signed an agreement in Almaty on the establishment of the Central Asian Union (CAU), aimed at creating a common political, economic and cultural space through regional integration supervised by intergovernmental institutions.

Russian observers evaluated those developments as a direct consequence of Russia's alienating policy in Central Asia and came to the conclusion that the three Central Asian states were about to create a united federal state.²

But this never materialized. With the support of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and in spite of Uzbekistan's objection, Russia was admitted to the CAU as an observer in August 1996, potentially deflating whatever hopes had been pinned on the organization by Tashkent.

During the same time, President Nazarbaev came up with the idea to create the Eurasian Union, which would replace the CIS, to better coordinate economies, foreign policies, defense issues and legislation. Considering the five

million Russians residing in northern Kazakhstan, Nazarbaev advocated a closer union with Russia, which in turn served to counterbalance Uzbekistan's ambitious regional policy. Uzbekistan reacted to Nazarbaev's proposal in a strictly negative way. The Uzbekistani mass media widely criticized Kazakhstan as a state that had failed the test on independence and therefore became nostalgic for the old Soviet times.

As a matter of fact, the Uzbek-Kazakh hardships of that period, and specifically their conflicting attitudes towards Russia, together with the disintegrated and dysfunctional economies in Central Asia generally, caused the actual inefficiency of further regional integration.

After Kabul fell to the Taliban in September 1996, the situation in Afghanistan and later the IMU's invasions were always high in the agenda at the Central Asian summits, as a rule with Russia's supervising participation. The latter actually benefited most from the situation, using it as a pretext to return to Central Asia and as a means to pressure Uzbekistan to soften, if not totally revise, its Russian policy.

With Putin in power, Russia visibly revived its interests in the region and was inclined to follow a combined military-economic approach with the emphasis on the military vector. Moscow advocated the creation of a Central Asian coalition force under its leadership within the framework of the CIS Security Treaty.³ Currently there are six signatories to this Treaty, including Central Asia's Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Over the years 2000-2001 the fact that Russia was regaining its influence in Central Asia became obvious. By September 2001,

Uzbekistan seemed to be at peace with the increased Russian military presence in the region as a last resort to prevent IMU attacks.

Human rights

As mentioned before, counter-actions by the government caused by the rise of militant Islam made observance of human rights in Uzbekistan an acute issue. The Tashkent bombing in February 1999, for which the IMU was declared responsible, gave start to the most severe crackdown on so-called "independent" Muslims (those who prayed at home or attended mosques whose imams refused to collaborate with the authorities). Those Muslims who were suspected to be members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Party of Islamic Liberation) or other political groups using Islamic rhetoric in their propaganda were also targeted. In Uzbekistan today, according to Human Rights Watch estimations, 7,000 "independent" Muslims and 4,000 people affiliated with or accused of being affiliated with Hizb-ut-Tahrir are behind bars.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir, established in the Middle East in the 1950s, calls for the peaceful overthrow of governments across the region and the establishment of an Islamic caliphate throughout the Muslim world. Before September 2001, Hizb-ut-Tahrir widely used anti-Karimov, anti-Russian, and anti-Semitic rhetoric. After the start of the Afghanistan campaign, the party's leaflets have become anti-Western and anti-American. Given the recent defeat of the IMU in Afghanistan and the growing number of Hizb-ut-Tahrir members, clearly in the thousands in Central Asia, the organiza-

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Georgia's Pankisi Gorge: An Ethnographic Survey *Shorena Kurtzikidze and Vakhtang Chikovani*

Available in Summer 2002. For more information, contact BPS at bsp@socrates.berkeley.edu or 510-643-6737.

tion now poses the number one threat to secular governments in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Regional geopolitics changed radically after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington. The day after those attacks, the Uzbek President sent a letter of condolence to George W. Bush, and along with condolences he offered to combine efforts to fight terrorism. The

Table 3. US presence in Central Asia (February 2002)

| Country | Level of US presence |
|--------------|---|
| Uzbekistan | 1500 US troops at the Khanabad airbase, Karshi; military and humanitarian operations |
| Kyrgyzstan | 300 US troops at the civilian airport of Manas, Bishkek; extensive buildup is underway |
| Tajikistan | 60 US forces at the capital airport Dushanbe; engaged in refueling |
| Turkmenistan | Mainly involved in humanitarian mission by land; concerned to keep it on the humanitarian level as much as possible |
| Kazakhstan | No presence; 10-12 overflights a day |

offer was greatly appreciated by the US, which according to Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, highly valued Uzbekistan's cooperation and support in Operation Enduring Freedom.

As stated by Mira Ricardel, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, "This cooperation has been instrumental to the success of the operation." Indeed, selection of Uzbekistan as the principal regional ally of the US was far from accidental. First of all, an immediate and obvious advantage was Uzbekistan's proximity to Afghanistan. Uzbekistan has a 129 kilometer (80-mile) border with Afghanistan. In the broader perspective, the country's strategic location in Central Asia, close to Iran and China, could also be useful.

As mentioned above, Uzbekistan is not a signatory to the Russia-dominated CIS Security Treaty. Uzbekistan is also the least dependent on Russia in terms of economy. It is my strong belief that Uzbekistan's relative freedom from Russian influence was one of the decisive factors contributing to Washington's decision to choose Uzbekistan as its main regional ally. The fact that the country has been a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace Program since 1994 was also an asset. From 1997 through 2000, the US troops and "CentrazBat" (the Central Asia Battalion composed of troops from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan under the auspices of the UN) participated in joint military exercises in Cen-

tral Asia. Uzbekistan inherited well-developed military networks from the Soviet Union, including major airbases and qualified manpower.

At present, 1,500 American special troops of the 10th Mountain Division are stationed at the strategically located major Karshi-Khanabad airbase. The airbase is located in the region of Qashqadarya, 300 km south of Tashkent and 200 km north of the Uzbek-Afghan border. The Karshi-Khanabad airbase was designated to be a forward CENTCOM area for the US operations in Afghanistan under the October 5, 2001 agreement between Secretary Rumsfeld and President Karimov. According to President Karimov, the deadline for the airbase's lease remains open-ended. This flexibility notwithstanding, according to Elizabeth Jones, Uzbekistan made it clear that it was not seeking a permanent US base on its territory.

Apart from the Karshi-Khanabad airbase, Tashkent also facilitated the establishment of the land corridor between Termez-Khairaton and Mazar-e-Sharf through the Friendship Bridge across the Amu-darya. The bridge was cleared of mines and re-opened at the end of last year.

Elaborating on the issue of the US presence in the region, Tommy Franks, Commander-in-Chief of the US Central Command, said that the US had not made any long term arrangements in Uzbekistan. Elizabeth Jones, at a briefing at the State Department on February 11, also confirmed this, but at the same time she emphasized that "we want access to the bases we are having access now [in Central Asia] for as long as we need them" and this, as she further commented, "would be determined by what's going on in Afghanistan." Through this statement, the US sent an unequivocal signal of its long-term engagement in Central Asia.

The past four months have seen an explosion of diplomatic activity in the region and in Uzbekistan in particular. Contacts between American and Uzbek officials have intensified enormously. Among the high ranking officials who visited Uzbekistan over the last months were Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense (twice), U.S Secretary of State Colin Powell, and Tommy Franks (three times). All together, there were 15 US delegations visiting Tashkent from October 2001 through January 2002. (To compare – in previous years, the number of visits by US officials to Uzbekistan did not exceed 6-7 a year).

US incentives to develop its relations with Uzbekistan are of strategic importance. Whatever the physical cost to implement those new relations, the US will be doomed to address first the issues of democratization and human rights in Uzbekistan, since stability, declared crucial for the US, depends heavily on these issues.

With regard to democracy, the January 27 referen-

dum in Uzbekistan showed that it still has a long way to go on this point. To what extent the US will be able (and politically motivated) to influence the situation in Uzbekistan is difficult to predict at this point. Nevertheless, some experts believe that the prospects are not very encouraging, and it's quite possible that US policy in Central Asia will be similar to that in the Middle East, where Washington has lent strong support to undemocratic regimes in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Nevertheless, what can be said for sure, as of today, is that some positive steps to improve the situation with human rights have already been made this year by the Uzbek government as a result of pressure by the US. What were those steps?

1. On January 30, at the first ever trial of that kind, four police officers were sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment for torturing to death a detainee.
2. By February 4, over 2,800 political prisoners had been released from penitentiaries as a result of two amnesties following negotiations in Tashkent with Senators Lieberman and Daschle and with Elizabeth Jones.
3. On February 10, well-known human rights activist Mikhail Ardzinov, chairman of the Independent Organization for Human Rights in Uzbekistan, was offered official apologies by representatives of law-enforcement agencies for the damage inflicted on him during the previous years.
4. On February 17, the Ezgulik (Good Deed) Human Rights Society was established in Tashkent. The constituent meeting of the society elected Vasilya Inoyat, a well-known member of the banned Uzbek opposition party Birlik, chairman of the society. The meeting was attended by 23 delegates from 10 Uzbek regions, the representatives of over 10 international organizations and embassies, including Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the US Embassy. This event is a confirmation of the word given by Elizabeth Jones that human rights societies will be set up and registered in Uzbekistan.
5. Elizabeth Jones also claims she was able to reach an agreement with President Karimov on granting International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access for the pre-detention centers.

No doubt, it would be too early to qualify these steps as proof of radical, irreversible changes in Uzbekistan's attitude towards human rights issues. But what these steps do signify is that the US is indeed capable of influencing Tashkent's approach to the matter.

As for Uzbekistan, it has its own considerations and expectations from the US campaign in neighboring Afghanistan. These include, but are not limited to: (i) combatting radical Islamic groups (especially the IMU); (ii) provi-

sion of economic aid and political support; (iii) lessening of Russian influence; and (iv) assistance in military buildup. These points are elaborated below.

i. The IMU structure was substantially damaged as a result of the US-led military campaign, and it is no longer the dangerous organization that it was before. For Uzbekistan, the defeat of the IMU was one of the earliest and maybe the most pleasant consequences of the campaign. Yet some observers believe that it is too early to write off the IMU as a threat to regional security in the region while the conditions that helped give rise to and sustain the IMU remain intact.⁴

ii. Regarding economic aid, a package of important US-Uzbek agreements addressing economic issues is currently under consideration.

iii. Regarding the lessening of Russian influence, it has been already accomplished. Objectively, Russian influence in the region has been reduced dramatically. And even though General Franks would have said a thousand times that "Russia is there," Russia is not there – it is out the of game now. At the same time, it is unclear how much longer President Putin will be able to hold his present position of noninterference, given the pressure imposed by the Russian establishment. On the other hand, one may also assume that the high-profile calls to stop US military buildup in Central Asia made by Russia's Defense Minister Igor Ivanov and Speaker Seleznirov, were a purposeful demonstration of pressure being imposed upon President Putin, who, in turn, might be able to cite this pressure as a pretext to get more from the US for Russia's current policy in Central Asia. At any rate, whether it was premeditated or spontaneous, one thing was obvious – today's Russia failed to achieve its goals in Central Asia at the end of last century. It failed to address new security challenges in Central Asia, such as the rise of Islamic extremism, drug trafficking or other problems. Therefore Russia had no other options but to step away in the face of US determination to play an active role in Central Asia. Moreover, Central Asian leaders warmly embraced this new US approach.

First was a declaration signed by Elizabeth Jones in Tashkent last month, which laid the base for future comprehensive cooperation between the US and Uzbek governments. The document goes into every aspect of the relationship the US is building with Uzbekistan, including the economy. This agreement is likely to be signed during President Karimov's official visit to Washington due in the middle of March 2002.

This year the US will be tripling its assistance to Uzbekistan to more than \$160 million. As stated, it is not a grant, nor a loan. These funds authorized by the Congress

will pay for joint projects in the fields of border security, health, water management, local infrastructure development, education, and law enforcement. The US special strategy for these funds envisages their disbursement through specific “democracy programs” to be implemented in conjunction with US agencies such as USAID.

US aid to Uzbekistan will comprise more than 40% of the total US aid to Central Asia for 2002 (Table 4).

Table 4. US Aid to Central Asian States

| Country | US aid in 2001 | | US aid in 2002 | | Surplus (\$ mil) |
|--------------------|----------------|------|----------------|------|------------------|
| | \$ mil | % | \$ mil | % | |
| Kazakhstan | 71.5 | 30.2 | 81.6 | 20.7 | +10.1 (3) |
| Kyrgyzstan | 40.6 | 17.2 | 49.0 | 12.4 | +8.4 (4) |
| Tajikistan | 56.4 | 23.8 | 85.3 | 21.6 | +28.9 (2) |
| Turkmenistan | 12.2 | 5.2 | 16.4 | 4.2 | +4.2 (5) |
| Uzbekistan | 55.9 | 23.6 | 161.8 | 41.1 | +105.9 (1) |
| Grand Total | 236.6 | | 394.1 | | 157.5 |

iv. Regarding the military aspect of Uzbekistan’s expectations from the United States, an agreement was concluded between the United States Central Command and the Ministry of Defense of Uzbekistan in Tashkent in January, 2002. It provides for broad military-to-military exchanges, education, and security assistance.

Uzbekistan will also receive substantial military aid from the US in the amount of \$8.75 million in 2003, up from \$207,000, which constitutes a 40-fold (!) increase.

Conclusion

Going back to the questions asked in the beginning of this paper, let me try to sum up the implications of the US-led Afghanistan campaign for Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan is the most populous nation in the core of Central Asia with an authoritarian regime and a struggling economy. It is a nation whose main external challenges before September-October 2001 were militant Islam and the increasing Russian dominance in Central Asia. As a matter of fact, the government itself contributed immensely to the rise of Islamicist and Islamic movements mainly by pushing an economic policy from which very few benefited. The growing importance of Russia for Uzbekistan – or Russia’s return to Uzbekistan, if you will – in the late 90s was not a good will gesture by Uzbekistan, but a step caused by the vital necessity to combat the IMU incursions.

After the 9-11 terrorist attacks and the start of Operation Enduring Freedom by the US, Uzbekistan has gained political weight in the region as the main US ally. This is

likely to be the Afghanistan campaign’s main political implication for Uzbekistan, one that will give (and is already giving) a new impetus to Uzbekistan’s almost abandoned drive for supremacy in Central Asia. Such a shift in Uzbekistan’s role in regional politics, if not counterbalanced, may result in a series of very negative implications for the region as a whole, given the present state of Uzbek-Kazakh, Uzbek-Tajik and Uzbek-Kyrgyz relations and the existence of numerous problems in the region, such as border disputes and water distribution issues. At the same time, I would not write off Russia completely. Future hardships between the US and Russia, and perhaps Iran and China may also have negative implications for Tashkent. If this does take place, Uzbekistan will be faced with a daunting task of positioning itself among those superpowers’ interests, which will be, in turn, another major challenge, one very difficult to address.

The second implication is the liberalization of Uzbekistan’s economy, with the introduction of convertibility of the national currency and the implementation of other measures, such as privatization, de-monopolization of major industries and railways, the creation of a favorable climate for investments, etc. All of these have more chances to be successful now as a result of the multi-million economic aid package from the US and the activation of international financial institutions like the IMF. A more distant implication might be a diversification of routes for delivering Uzbek gas to international market via peaceful Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The third implication is a strengthening of national armed forces with the US’s help. Inter alia, this also will be conducive to boosting Uzbekistan’s regional ambitions, as discussed above.

The fourth implication is that a certain level of liberalization and democratization of the society is likely to be achieved under US supervision, but it is worth mentioning here that one may hardly expect a real breakthrough in this field. It is quite unlikely, though, that liberalization and democratization in Uzbekistan will go beyond the vital interests of the ruling elite. Nevertheless, in the not so distant future we shall be able to evaluate the rate of concurrence of US and Uzbek interests in this field.

¹ “Central Asia: IMU Gradually Developing into Pan-Central Asian Movement,” *Times of Central Asia*, 4 April 2001, <http://www.times.kg>

² Novoprudsky, S., “Novyi Turkestan kak zashsita protiv moskovskogo diktata,” *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 6 January 1994.

³ The CIS Security Treaty was signed in May 1992 and came into effect on April 1994.

⁴ ICG Central Asia Briefing, “The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign,” 30 January 2002, p. 3.

Tomorrow, Tomorrow and Tomorrow ... Georgia's Endless Transition

Stephen F. Jones

Recently, a student described to me why her performance in class was so erratic. She suffered, she told me, from hypoglycemia, a condition of low blood sugar. And what are the symptoms, I asked? Mood swings, heart palpitations, nervousness, fatigue. And what is the cure? Better diet, including complex carbohydrates and fiber.

The symptoms of hypoglycemia sounded uncannily like my experience in Georgia from August to December 2001. Georgian society closely resembled the symptoms she described. Maybe it was not a hypoglycemic society – but certainly a society where rules and self-regulation of the body politic were ineffective, and where the cure, or the diet that could regulate Georgian political and social life – such as economic sustenance, political security, cooperation, and trust in the doctor – were absent. Georgia has had a long list of doctors and proposed cures – independence, privatization, democratization, civil society, TRACECA, greater integration with Europe.

The doctors (some would call them heartless surgeons) have included the IMF; World Bank; Leszek Balcerowicz, the executor of shock therapy in Poland; and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The cures have been expensive: in 2000, USAID alone spent \$52,600,000 in Georgia restructuring its energy system, implementing business and democratic reforms, and funding social and humanitarian programs. That same year, the US government spent \$35,000,000 on border defense and on the Georgian armed forces, \$7,000,000 on conflict resolution, and \$14,000,000 on programs like judicial reform, rehabilitation of the health system and privatization. In 2000, the US spent a total of \$108,400,000 in direct aid to Georgia. Over the five years between 1995-2000, the figure amounts to \$700,000,000 (not including aid from IMF, World Bank and European donors).

Yet in the autumn of 2001, there was no indication the patient was any better. There were blockades on the streets of Tbilisi erected by irate citizens angered at endless blackouts, an occupation of Rustavi 2 (the most popular independent TV channel) by security ministry officials in September, the fall of the government in November after prolonged protests outside parliament, bombing of Georgian villages by Russian SU25s that same month, an incursion of Chechen fighters into the Kodori valley, and the election of a new South Ossetian President in December more antagonistic to Georgia than his predecessor. Conflict resolution with secessionist Abkhazia and South Ossetia is at a dead end. The judicial reform greeted with such fanfare in 1998 has petered out. Corruption and the obscure process of privatization of middle and large companies continue to undermine the faith of ordinary citizens in economic and political reform.

In 1991-1994, Georgia went through rapid stages of radical populism under Gamsakhurdia and warlordism under Kitovani and Ioseliani. Private armies, economic collapse, and territorial fragmentation characterized this period. The state practically ceased to function. Since 1994, Shevardnadze has de-radicalized this nationalist revolution, replaced the local Montagnards with moderate Girondins – in many case former Soviet officials (a recent survey shows 41% of current ministers occupied important administrative/nomenklatura positions in the



Vakhtang Gorgasali, founder of Tbilisi.

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Soviet period), and found a powerful and sympathetic ally and supporter in the United States. There is progress, but Georgia's success – in which Western governments and international organizations have invested so much – is built upon the thinnest of ice. The “old fox,” as Shevardnadze is known, has been in power in Georgia since 1972, with a seven-year break from 1985-1992. Once the darling of the West, he has run out of ideas and has lost power, direction and influence. He is presiding over an era which, with the completion of his constitutional term as President, will formally end in 2005. In reality, we are already in a post-Shevardnadze era, a transition period that will determine a number of possible future scenarios after he is gone. The question is: will it be closer union with Russia or further integration with Europe? Incremental authoritarianism or democratic reform? Economic decline or economic growth? Pervasive corruption or legalization of the black economy? State fragmentation or territorial consolidation? In short, is Georgia to be more like Belarus or more like Lithuania?

For Georgia, stable democratic statehood – the stated goal of its transition – is like the USSR's communist horizon, continually receding into the distance. To be more precise, in 2002 Georgia lacks at least three things that it needs if it wants to be more like Lithuania and less like Belarus. Unfortunately, the world's club of democracies is giving it poor advice on how to get there.

Minimal living standards

Impoverished democracies exist, but many studies suggest, like that of Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, and others (“What Makes Democracies Endure?” *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 7, No. 1, 1996, pp. 39-55), that on the whole, moderate growth, a higher per capita income and declining inequality are the best means for sustaining democratic institutions. Even with estimates taking into account popular participation in the shadow economy, 40% of the Georgian population has a combined monetary and non-monetary income below the subsistence level. (UN country assessment suggests over 65%.) Over the last 4 years, despite economic growth (GDP growth was down to 1.2% in 2001), the share of people falling below subsistence level has increased. Thirty percent of the population have no access whatever to the health system. In 2001 the official unemployment rate was 16.8%, but when only employment with monetary remuneration is counted, it rises to 25.6%. If we were to include the largest labor sector in Georgia – the self-employed, 78% of whom work in agriculture – the figure would be higher still. All those in rural areas who own more than a hectare of land are considered employed. The picture is uneven: some economic sectors

are growing (particularly the informal economy), some regions are better off than others, and some social categories are economically more successful, but overall the economic situation is getting grimmer. Between 1995-1999, 46.1% of families perceived that their economic situation had worsened.

J. K. Galbraith remarked that “nothing... sets a stronger limit on the liberty of the citizen than a total absence of money,” and the August 2001 United Nations Country Assessment on Georgia commented: “The poor are de facto deprived of the right to development which makes poverty reduction not only a development challenge, but also a human rights challenge.” In Georgia, the emphasis on democracy building has overlooked its basic building blocs, and until mass poverty and physical insecurity are mediated, democratization in Georgia will have little chance of success. USAID's extensive civil society assessment in June 2001 made no mention of the economic context as a determining factor in democratic reform. This is part of what Thomas Carothers calls the “transition paradigm,” or the belief that democracy needs no preconditions – whether it's a certain set of values, institutional legacies, or certain economic capacities (*Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 5-21).

State capacity

Alexander Motyl, in his book *Revolution, Nations, Empires* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), has pointed out that political elites embarking on revolutionary change should be especially well endowed with resources. What economic, institutional, and intellectual resources does Georgia have to institute reform?

Economic

Georgia has no or very little economic resources. Between 1991-1995, Georgia's GDP declined 70 to 75 percent. Despite 10 to 11 percent growth in 1996-97, Georgia's current economy in 1998 had shrunk approximately 67 percent compared to 1989. Industry is working at 20 percent of its capacity, and in 1999, Georgia's budget received GEL 484.6 million – that is, 68.1 percent of the planned amount. With 50 to 70 percent of economy being illegal and taxes are 7.7 percent of GDP (in 1999), Georgia is one of least successful states in gathering taxes in the world. Georgia has a trade deficit with 70 trade partner countries and a trade surplus with 18. Salaries and social transfers account for 40 percent of Georgia's total public expenditure. In addition, the state's budget cannot cover the salaries of its employees, pensions, nor other expenditures for state activities in areas such as education, health care, and defense. Between 1997-2000, expenditure on defense de-

creased from \$51.9 to \$13.6 million; education from \$35.6 to \$13.9 million; agriculture, forestry, and fishing from \$13.4 to \$7.2 million. In 1999, health spending was 0.6 percent of the GDP, and social security and welfare was 3 percent. The state's inability to fund its social insurance and employment funds, maintain its army, education and transport systems in rural areas, or stimulate agriculture and industry, has led to the majority of the population's declining view of the state as irrelevant, unrepresentative, and corrupt. Its functionaries are despised; its structures, including the police and the army, unworthy of trust or support. In this situation, the state has neither the capacity nor the support to introduce effective economic reform, a citizen based democracy and civil society, or even physical security, particularly in the regions. The transition to democracy, if it is to occur at all, must start with the premise of a coherent and functioning state.

Institutional

Georgia's economic catastrophe means it has almost no institutional capacity – essential for poverty reduction, sustainable economic growth (in regions as well as in the capital), and democratization. I agree with Stephen Holmes who argues that, in post-communist societies, “destatization is not the solution; it is the problem” (“What Russia Teaches Us Now: How Weak States Threaten Freedom,” *The American Prospect*, July-August 1997, No .33, pp. 30-39). In Georgia, the state's rapid withdrawal from major sectors of economic life like education, health and other social services, has undermined the capacity of the majority of the population to participate in policy making (in Akhalkalaki and Marneuli, for example, non-Georgian speaking Armenians and Azeris demand Georgian teachers in vain), permitted vastly unequal access to political power, increased the scope for corruption and the growth of powerful unaccountable private interests, widened the gap between state and society, and reinforced popular cynicism. A weak or insolvent state, as Holmes points out, is more likely to produce the elements that undermine liberal ideals – elements such as economic decline, gross inequalities, and public distrust for state bodies. A weak state is unable to promote good government and cannot control bad government. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report “Georgia 2000” warned that in Georgia, “the erosion of the government capacity to perform its inescapable duties” undermines “its legitimacy.”

The Georgian government has legislated the formal framework for civil society and democracy, but is unwilling, or unable to implement its laws or monitor them, especially in the regions. Elections are a good example. The 2000 presidential elections were illegally managed by the regional elites

loyal to Shevardnadze. The government, even if it wanted to, is unable to activate institutional resources against powerful business interests and groups because it cannot compete with their resources. Illegal business has infiltrated all levels of government and is inseparable from the state. The state has become privatized by clientalistic networks; it, along with the legislature, has become a means for realizing private interests. Both the weakness of the Georgian state and its vulnerability to private infiltration was exemplified by Russian financier Badri Patarkatsishvili's offer in December 2001 to the Tbilisi municipal authorities of a one-million dollar, five-percent interest, three-year credit to pay off the city's debts for electricity. Patarkatsishvili also undertook to pay for all electricity used in the Georgian capital for the next three years.

The government has not the resources to tackle other prerequisites for civil society— prerequisites such as a decent economic environment, a decentralized power structure with effective and accountable local government, and the promotion of honest officials accessible to ordinary citizens. According to Alexander Rondeli, DHL's, or decent, honest and law-abiding citizens, simply cannot survive in the Georgian environment today.

Public support

Along with economic and institutional resources, a democratizing government needs reform-minded political elites and public support. There are scattered reformers in the Georgian government – they are even ministers – but they are powerless and do not have the support of the President. A new triad of interlocking elites has emerged – business, central government, and regional/district governors. All three are largely conservative and profit from the status quo. They will not lead the charge for reform, and although they compete and conflict, they have created a perverted form of what Italians call “garantismo,” or an agreement by the major stakeholders of the regime to stick to the rules of self-preservation. This partly explains why the long list of anti-corruption measures from the legislature and executive, culminating in the reformist dominated anti-corruption commission, have failed. It also explains, again in part – I am not mentioning here the role of the Soviet legacy and Georgia's traditional culture of mutual gift giving – why innovative laws on preventing monopolies, on controlling lobbying, on conflicts of interests in the legislature and government, and on corruption in the civil service have bitten the dust. But the power of Georgia's corrupt and conservative elites to undermine law and democratic development is a symptom of Georgia's weak institutional and economic environment, not its cause. This was the conclusion of report of the Anti-Corruption Commission to President Shevardnadze: there is

nothing specifically corruption prone in the Georgian culture. Close the opportunities for corruption and create incentives for legal activity, and it will diminish. Reduce corruption, and business incentives to defend legality will increase.

The other source of successful economic and political reform is the availability and support of human capital. Statistically, Georgia has world-class levels of education at all levels, but given the Georgian government's minimal expenditure on education (\$50 per child per annum), the disincentives of unemployment and corruption, impoverished and poorly trained teachers, decrepit and unheated schools, and irrelevant or unimaginative curricula, the system has broken down completely. Financing is primarily from parents and local authorities. If, as Jeremy Sachs and the World Bank Annual Report in fall 2000 suggest, education, new training, and information technology are the sources of growth, Georgia's prospects are appalling. Enrollment in schools (81% in 1998) has significantly declined at the secondary level, especially in the tenth to twelfth grades where fees are required. It is estimated 20 percent of 14 year-olds drop out. The higher educational system is equally chaotic with 230 unregulated private institutions. Patronage and bribery ensure only those with connections matriculate in the better departments and universities. The quality of teaching, student attendance, and the curriculum are extremely bad and have not adapted to the changing economy.

In these conditions, it is not surprising that Georgia's population is fleeing the state physically and abandoning it mentally. The preliminary figures from the January 2002 census revealed that 4.4 million live in Georgia today, a decline of about one million since 1989 (5.4 million in 1989). Those who have left Georgia over the past decade in search of employment are primarily people in the 17-38 age group, with men significantly outnumbering women. The ensuing imbalance of the sexes has perhaps contributed to the fact that one in three Georgian women in the 15-44 age group have never married. The UN has provided some basic data on the nationality of emigrants, according to which 56 percent are Georgians, 9.8 percent of each Armenians and Russians, and 6.8 percent Azerbaijanis. One suspects that the best educated are disproportionately represented among émigrés. Emigration in Georgia is economically beneficial, but if the educated do not return, it undermines the capacity to build a future Georgian middle class – important to increasing and sustaining legality.

Methodologically sound opinion poll research suggests that, even if state elites wished to reform, they would find it very difficult to convince a profoundly alienated population that they were genuine. Data suggests that 56.8% of

the population do not trust the courts, 64% do not trust parliament, 79.4% do not trust the tax administration, and 65.6% do not trust the President. Such degrees of alienation will kill most attempts at reform before they begin. Misha Saakashvili, Georgia's youthful reformer and former Justice Minister, has decided the only way to mobilize support for democratic reform is to start a new grass roots based national movement outside Georgia's representative institutions – and he is probably right.

This brings us to something more profound about the relationship between the state, nation, and civil society in Georgia over the last ten years that makes democracy such a difficult prospect. I have argued elsewhere that political nationalism is much weaker in Georgia than most suggest. Since the 19th century, cultural nationalism, not political nationalism, has been the rule in Georgia. Gamsakhurdia was the exception in Georgian history, not the rule, although between 1989-1992, his radical nationalism was widely supported for specific reasons. Political nationalism in Georgia has always been weak, and Georgians are still struggling with the formation of a modern political nation, by which I mean a nation united behind a state representing common legal, economic, and political interests and values – something that goes beyond just being an “imagined” community. In Georgia, people still do not accept common legal rules, are not tied together by a common market, and have little faith in the national political system. Privatization, corruption, and poverty have shattered the Georgian state. In a sense, this situation requires more nationalism, not less, in order to create a coherent community where democracy can work. This is not a call for what Ghia Nodia calls the “inward bound nationalism” focused on minorities, but a form of nationalism based on Georgians' own self-perceived traditions of multiethnic statehood and inclusiveness. This might be hard for Georgia's Greeks, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis to take seriously, but Georgians' multiethnic tradition, their disillusion with radicalism, and their desire to be more like the West could create the basis for a nationalism conducive to democratic reform. Currently in Georgia we have what Giovanni Sartori has termed “polarized pluralism,” an elite-dominated free-for-all where there is no alternative to the dominant group, no connection between the population and politics, and no “national container” for political debate.

It is fashionable to blame Western policies for much of the troubles in the NIS. Georgians are primarily responsible for the mess in Georgia, and the West is limited in what it can do to promote democracy and reform. There are particular projects that have undoubtedly helped improve people's lives, and the NGO sector would be unsustainable without Western aid. But overall, Western governments and aid

agencies have helped make an appalling mess of the country, employed double standards, engendered corruption (the massive privatization policies were an inducement to corruption), imposed inappropriate Western models (such as the manner in which the judicial reform was introduced), been irresponsible and absent monitors who focused on macro-economics and a peculiarly narrow conception of civil society, and been generally hopeless leaders – all of which has contributed to Georgia’s inability to create a state capable of serving its population and mobilizing them around a national and reform oriented ideology. A poll in December 2001 conducted by the Georgian research firm SOCIOGEO suggested that Georgia’s cumulative problems and the US-backed ineffective reform program have decreased faith in the US among Georgian citizens. Forty-three percent of Georgians polled (24% in 1999) favored closer security ties with Russia and the CIS, rather than with the USA.

Impact of September 11th

Very briefly, for most Georgians in the short-term, September 11th has had no impact whatsoever. The US anti-terrorist policy in Georgia is a signal to Russia of US commitment to Georgian sovereignty but does not seem to have deterred Russian incursions. US troops are unlikely to achieve the US aim of eradicating terrorism in Georgia, especially in

the Pankisi gorge. It is unlikely that Georgian sovereignty will receive much of a boost from eight helicopters or military training, unless the Georgian army’s budget is increased from the current 0.5% of GDP and the health and conditions of the soldiery improved.

September 11th has focused US attention on Georgia as a source of drug business, international crime, and terrorist links. But beyond more focus and more money for the police, how are these problems going to be tackled? More jobs and paid salaries would be a start, but that will require some radical rethinking from the IMF.

The presence of US troops in Georgia could indicate a US security commitment to Baku-Ceyhan and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, but whether it will lead to greater US support for Georgia’s attempts to regain Abkhazia from the “terrorists” in Georgia’s own backyard is questionable. One aspect of September 11th is US-Russian rapprochement and cooperation. If that continues, it may lead to greater Georgian-Russian rapprochement. But much depends on how the Georgian-US relationship develops, and whether the US has decided that a more active presence in Georgia is desirable in the long run.



Transforming Space into Place: Environment and Human Cultures in the Caucasus and Central Asia

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Azerbaijan in the Morning after Independence: Less Oil, More Graft

Alec Rasizade

America’s honeymoon decade with Azerbaijan ended last year when the anticipated oil boom silently burst. Instead of the politically bloated appraisal of 200 billion barrels of Caspian oil valued at 4 trillion dollars, postulated for years by the State Department to entice American investors into the region and justify its own strategy there, today reserves are estimated at only 18 billion to 34 billion barrels, 75% of which are in the Kazakh section of the sea. Investors today shun even the geopolitically correct but economically infeasible \$4 billion pipeline, promoted by the Clinton brigade to move the “enormous” petroleum output from Baku to Turkey’s Mediterranean coast.

It is hard to think of an industry as phenomenally over-publicized as the potential Caspian energy industry. Austere insights that challenge industry claims are not encouraged, and interlopers who try to ferret out facts endanger their own safety. The dismal reality, however, is a far cry from the claims encountered in the non-specialist media.¹

The US government and corporate communities are pursuing a delusional policy that is preoccupied with the purported oil boom. They endorse unprincipled leaders who only 10 years ago were zealously anti-American communist bosses and ignore the condition of the nation, which is still seething from the loss of socialist welfare and wallowing in poverty despite its alleged energy wealth. We run the risk of dealing with a renegade Azerbaijan, should it opt for the oil industry nationalization remedies undertaken by Iran, Iraq, and other frustrated outcasts in the Third World. The destitute Azerbaijan cannot be an exception to this general rule.

Unfortunately, the US’s current oil-fixated approach to Azerbaijan remains naive. Our think-tankers and the intelligence establishment tend to overestimate the significance of some of Azerbaijan’s prospects and brush aside the more important factor of social discontent, which historically can lead to uncontrollable bouts of popular unrest and overturn the regional balance of power as they did in Iran in 1979.

The lesson to be learned from our arrogant behavior in Iran is that we should not gloss over the explosive impact that failure in Azerbaijan, in combination with ineffable social distress, could have. The few studies in the mid-1990s that predicted this foreshortening of Caspian oil reserves, the emergence of a personality cult, the institutionalization of corruption, and massive poverty could not gain currency in Washington. The ideas of more perceptive scholars were filtered out in the bureaucratic process, and it is the corporate view of the oil lobby that counts because that is what reaches the president and Congress.



Neftyanje oil fields near Baku.

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The mythology of Caspian oil boom

The subject of the oil rush is inescapable when talking about Azerbaijan. Our analysts and newsmen have developed a ubiquitous description of the country, the “energy-rich former Soviet republic on the Caspian Sea.” At the expense of other vital issues, they dwell on minor details of Caspian “energy” contracts and proposed routes for export pipelines, following every twist in negotiations and superficially linking the prosperity of entire nations in the Caucasus to petroleum output and even to a traversing pipeline. They love to tell us that a petroleum panacea is right around the corner. Let us look around that corner, to see what is behind the facade exhibited to the world.

The “Deal of the Century” ostentatiously signed in Baku in 1994 began to crumble last year, when the first three of the sixteen international contracts signed during the oil rush of 1994-1998 were terminated after their exploratory wells yielded no oil. Of the pledged \$50 billion, no more than \$2 billion have actually been invested in Azerbaijan in the past decade, compared to “energy-poor” Hungary’s \$20 billion in direct foreign investment during the same period. In the same time, the so-called “New Azeris” had managed to siphon off about \$800 million into private investments in Turkey alone, not to mention other countries, while pleading for foreign aid and investment into their homeland.² Of the remaining international consortia, only the Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC) currently produces some crude oil, not only far below Persian Gulf levels, but not even enough to justify the construction of the Baku-Ceyhan “pipeline to prosperity” so insistently promoted by the State Department and local governments.

Now questions are being asked about the true extent of the Caspian reserves. The first question is why the USSR government, after 100 years of intensive depletion, shifted its emphasis from the Caspian to the permafrost oil fields of Siberia? It is unlikely that Soviet engineers were unequal to the task of extracting oil from the Caspian deposits. In fact, they were pioneers in offshore extraction beginning with the 1947 Neft Dashlary oil rigs in the Caspian Sea. Long-term surveys conducted by Soviet petroleum research institutes examined the development of deep-water fields, but proposals were always rejected because of the poor potential returns and the high cost of extraction.³

There is no shortage of evidence to support their common sense. Caspian figures pale in comparison to the reserves of Saudi Arabia, which are thought to total around 260 billion barrels. Figures released by the AIOC predict that its peak production will reach 650,000 barrels per day within fifteen years from the current 100,000 bpd.⁴ For comparison, Kuwait is producing 2.14 million barrels a day, its

quota from OPEC, and has enough oil to pump about two million barrels daily for 132 years.

Moreover, extracting oil from under the Caspian Sea is an expensive business. Heavy soil, deep seas, special rig equipment, and the complicated geological nature of the deposits raise the price of extracting Caspian offshore oil to three times above the world average. The cost of moving crude oil from the landlocked Caspian Basin through a multinational pipeline system with transit tariffs is to be added as well.

All post-Soviet geological explorations have thus far failed to find large new deposits in the Caspian except for the Kashagan oil field in Kazakhstan. It is now clear that much of the talk of Caspian oil was a spectacular bluff. The litmus test is the reluctance of the AIOC and other consortia to build the main export pipeline. Even AIOC’s own projections come short of the minimum daily throughput of 1 million barrels needed for financial viability of the \$4-billion Mediterranean pipeline coveted at the Foggy Bottom.⁵

Rationale for the Caspian myth

If reserves are not so extensive, why is it so essential for the USA to be there? The first reason is political. In our “Silk Road Strategy,” the Caucasus represents an important geopolitical isthmus, linking the Black and Caspian Seas and providing a “Silk Route” to Central Asia. Furthermore, Washington is trying both to limit Russia’s influence in the region and to restrict the number of potential allies for Iran. American investment would extend financial backing to friendly local regimes and encourage them toward our strategic goals.

Second, the interest of international oil companies can be easily explained. All the ventures are joint-stock companies, and shareholders of these companies derive their main profit not from increasing dividends based on successful commercial activity, but from the rising price of their shares on the stock exchange and oil futures. As in the case of the collapsed Enron Corporation, share prices are dictated not by real economic indicators, but by their aura of promise. This is the very essence of Western business investment in Azerbaijan. By participating in high-profile Caspian projects and reporting great resources, companies improve their stock image, generating an instant profit without pumping a single barrel of oil. In fact, to begin extracting oil would be counterproductive, because the true extent of oil reserves would then be exposed.

Third, why do the Azeri authorities cheat on the contracts they are only too willing to sign, and how do they benefit from that? Aside gaining a sense of self-importance, their objective is entirely pragmatic: the more foreign investment, the easier to perpetuate autocratic rule and keep popu-

lar discontent at bay with tales of a “Second Kuwait” prosperity lying ahead. Western slush funds and kickbacks for the ruling elite (called “signing bonuses”) provide additional incentive.

The government of Azerbaijan needs Western patrons in its confrontation with Armenia and fortitude vis-à-vis the overpowering Iran and Russia, so why dissuade them by confessing that Azerbaijan’s only attraction is a deceit? In a retort to H. Aliev’s estimates of the size of Azerbaijan’s Caspian oil reserves, Armenian president Kocharian famously remarked at the World Economic Forum in Davos: “Is there any water in the Caspian, or is it only oil?”⁶

Finally, let me point out the articulate lobby that has cultivated the Caspian energy legend in collaboration with our sensationalist press. It comprises a rapacious welter of think-tanks, law firms, investment banks, trade associations, pipeline construction companies, big oil-controlled politicians, ambitious academics, aspiring diplomats, and hungry local officials, our agile expatriates there and unsettled Caucasian émigrés here – all united in the desire to benefit from contracts, assignments, and consulting fees.

Institutionalized corruption

Another compelling matter is the local peculiarity of endemic institutionalized corruption, which our national policy does not address.⁷ Neither the Russian nor the Western understanding of corruption apply to this pattern of kleptocracy. The institutionalization of corruption in Azerbaijan has evolved

into two intertwined systems: the distribution of bribes through the chain of superiors and the buying of lucrative positions through payments to top officials.

In accordance with the first system, a customs officer ordinarily gives 75% of his illicit income to higher executives. His supervisor keeps 25% and passes the rest on to the next level, and so on.⁸ A shopkeeper pays regular cuts to local police for “protection” and payoffs to all inspecting officials, from fire marshals to tax collectors. Such a system leaves no room for Russian-style racketeering, as it is substituted by officials performing the same role. If the chief of customs paid \$3 million for his appointment in accordance with the second system (as it is unanimously rumored in Baku), he has done so with a purpose to double or triple the original “investment” via systemic graft and extortion in his office. Thus, the two types of corruption outlined here cannot be separated.

It is unclear how local graft relates to the behavior of corporate investors in the region. A recent study conducted by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development suggests a correlation. According to EBRD, 78% of companies surveyed in Azerbaijan reported systematic extortion and blackmailing and complained of incessant delays and illicit charges requested to expedite business matters. The EBRD study concluded that corruption exacts an unofficial tax of sorts on business ventures in the Caspian territories, averaging eight to ten percent of companies’ annual revenue.⁹

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Yet the Justice Department allows the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act to lay dormant in Azerbaijan as we learn more that investors were misled on the amount of Caspian oil reserves. Take the case of British Bank, the second largest bank in the country. When I was visiting Baku last winter, the British Bank officials held a press conference to declare that the bank had stopped its activity in Azerbaijan. The bank had deposits from local residents worth \$50 million and ranked first among foreign banks there. Why would the bank close while Azerbaijan is experiencing an oil boom? It became clear that British Bank stopped its activity in Azerbaijan because it went bankrupt. According to unofficial information, the British Bank closed in Azerbaijan because \$50 million belonging to various Azeri officials was withdrawn within two months, and the simultaneous outflow of capital made the bank bankrupt.

Social metamorphoses

Let us consider the omitted non-petroleum anxieties of downtrodden masses, generally disregarded in our foreign policy until an upheaval goads prominent pundits to ask, "Who lost Iran?" or "Who lost Russia?" A report published by the EBRD has estimated that the GDP of Azerbaijan in 2001 constituted 46% of the GDP of the Azerbaijan SSR in 1991.¹⁰ The economic disaster in Azerbaijan is greater than in the worst years of the Great Depression in the USA. The gravity of the situation can be seen in Azerbaijan's second largest city, Ganja, where only 18,000 inhabitants out of a population of 300,000 officially have a job.¹¹

Azerbaijan has suffered proportionally the largest decline in its population of all former Soviet republics, fairy tales of oil-boom prosperity notwithstanding. According to the 1999 census, Azerbaijan's population currently numbers eight million. Russian researcher A. Arsenyev has claimed that the official results were fabricated and that the country's current population could not exceed four million.¹² Indeed, the leadership of Azerbaijan has a vested interest in downplaying the extent of the outmigration and the social discontent it implies.

The census conducted in 1989 put the population of Azerbaijan at seven million. In the course of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict of 1988-1994, the entire Armenian population of Azerbaijan, about half a million people, was driven out. A similar number of Russians and Jews left in the early 1990s. Arsenyev concludes that Azerbaijan lost no less than 1.2 million people as a result of the flight of non-Azeris.

In addition, millions of native Azeris have also left their country since 1994, mainly to Russia and Turkey. According to Russian statistics, the number of Azeris resident in Russia has reached 2.5 million. Specifically, the Azeri popu-

lation in Moscow and its vicinity is now 1.2 million, compared with 21,000 in 1989. Arsenyev estimates total emigration of Azeris in recent years at no less than three million. He thus deduces that, allowing for modest natural population increase, Azerbaijan's population has shrunk by half during the decade of independence.

It is paradoxical to watch how, instead of moving away from their former colonial master after gaining national independence, millions of Caucasians are now moving into Russia, voting with their feet for economic reintegration with the power which their leaders still blame for all threats to their independence. Among them are thousands of pauperized and disillusioned intellectuals whom I saw ten years ago leading crowds and shouting anti-Russian slogans in the central squares of Baku and denouncing the very Russia where they today seek refuge and relief.

Both EBRD and World Bank statistics indicate an almost 90% poverty level among Azeri citizenry, marking one of the lowest standards of living in Europe, lower than in Bosnia, Albania, Armenia, and ahead only of Moldova. Although Azerbaijan has been relegated to the Third World, its people perceive their situation differently than other backward societies, raising many unforeseen obstructions for US political and economic strategy. The basic psychological problem in Azerbaijan in the years ahead is that, due to the socialist legacy, wide segments of the population are well educated and have seen much better days under a welfare state.

US policy in Azerbaijan before and after September 11

We all want to believe that Azerbaijan has reached a certain level of stability, democracy, and economic sufficiency. Just listen to exuberant experts upon returning from their regular "fact-finding" trips to Baku. After fretting a little about democracy and ignoring social welfare completely, they start touting the country's strategic value and oil-boom prospects, judging by the number of modern shops that have popped up in downtown Baku, unaffordable to ordinary Azeris save a few thousand people who work for foreign companies.¹³

The principal constraint for the US government concerning Azerbaijan was Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act passed by Congress in 1992, which excluded this nation from any assistance until it lifts its economic blockade of Armenia.¹⁴ Several Clinton administration attempts to waive this restriction for the sake of oil and national strategic interest failed. In 1996, the House passed the Porter amendment, which stipulated proportional humanitarian aid for the NKR if Azerbaijan were determined eligible, but it was rejected in the Senate. Meanwhile, Section 907 applied no

restraints on American oil companies operating in Azerbaijan. Their combined investments and “bonuses” to Azerbaijan and its leaders grossly outweighed the US assistance for Armenia.

The September 11 crisis and its aftermath were instrumental in lifting the Azerbaijan embargo. On January 25, 2002, President G. W. Bush finally signed the long-anticipated waiver of Section 907. The waiver acknowledged Azerbaijan’s support for the international antiterrorist coalition and enabled Azerbaijan to receive \$50 million in US aid in the year 2002.

In an effort to save American strategic achievements in the region before September 11, some foreign policy theorists proposed to create a link similar to the Northern Tier theory promoted by J. F. Dulles in the early 1950s. Designed as a bulwark against the Soviet expansion in the Middle East, it was implemented in 1955 in the form of Baghdad Pact (renamed CENTO in 1959). On the contemporary political map the new pro-Western bloc includes such beachheads of our strategy as Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, with the possible addition of Turkey and Romania. It would serve as a cordon sanitaire to contain Russian expansion from the north and to deter an Iranian or Taliban-like fundamentalist advancement from the south.

In Azerbaijan especially, our policy planners are on the well-forgotten trail of Baghdad Pact antecedents. The cordial receptions for President Aliiev at the White House demonstrated that both the Clinton and Bush administrations have opted for stability over democracy in Azerbaijan, overlooking the ethnic cleansing, muzzled press, human rights violations, electoral travesties, total corruption, international aid embezzlement, political oppression, autocratic rule, and personality cult. Congress would have never tolerated such a policy towards any European nation — for instance, to Belarus.

A historic reminder is necessary to point out that the two central powers of the Baghdad Pact fell and converted into anti-Americanism precisely as a result of their (and our) ignorance of internal social deficiencies in Iraq (1958-1968) and Iran in 1979. A similar collapse will occur in the central and weakest members of the GUUAM – Georgia and Azerbaijan – no matter how much oil they export or how loyal they are to Washington.

The Department of State has chosen to overlook that Azerbaijan did not live up to its expectations. It is consumed with the illusion of oil production as a panacea for all the maladies of Azerbaijan, misguided by our oil corporations, but my scholarly obligation is to observe that there is no stability without democracy and middle-class prosperity.

Azerbaijan lacks both, and we shall lose much more than just oil when the Aliiev era comes to a close with the natural finale of the 79-year-old leader.

¹ A fresh piece of media hype has been presented by *Newsweek*, which carried in its 8 April 2002 issue a report by O. Matthews, who wrote: “It is apparently beyond the limits of journalistic restraint to tell the story of Caspian oil as anything but a breathless spy thriller.” The journalist claimed that “the Caspian Basin, at a conservative estimate, contains about 70 billion barrels of oil.” Speaking on the same day of 8 April in Almaty at the Eurasian Economic Summit, G. M. Gros-Pietro, chairman of Italy’s ENI oil company, said that the Caspian contains 7.8 billion barrels of oil (*Financial Times*, 9 April 2002). ENI is the only Western company that has discovered a new oilfield in the Caspian after the demise of the USSR, the Kashagan in Kazakhstan, and I have more confidence in the estimate of its president, although it is tenfold lesser, than in a journalistic account.

² *Turkish Daily News*, 23 November 2001.

³ L. Agaev, I. Veliev. *Kontrakt veka i problemy nefte dobychi na Kaspii*. Baku, 1997, pp. 83-114.

⁴ *Oil and Gas Journal*, 22 November 2000, p.47.

⁵ Recent studies by two independent research groups in Washington have calculated that the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline would need \$200 million per year in subsidies from the US government to remain viable: Stanley Kober, *The Great Game, Round 2: Washington’s Misguided Support for the Baku-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline* (Cato Institute publication No. 63), Washington, 2000, p.14; *An Agenda for Renewal: US-Russian Relations* (Report by the Russian and Eurasian Program of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), Washington, 2000, p. 28.

⁶ *The Washington Times*, 6 February 2001.

⁷ The latest evidence has been provided by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, which suspended its activities in Azerbaijan in the wake of accusations by Chechen refugees that its local office staff in Baku demand bribes in return for the allocation of humanitarian aid and allowances. (See *RFE/RL Newslines*, 28 March 2002, at <http://www.rferl.org/newslines/2-tca.asp>).

⁸ There is, naturally, no documentary proof, but this is the practice verbally described by many a dismissed officer.

⁹ *Financial Times*, 22 November 2001.

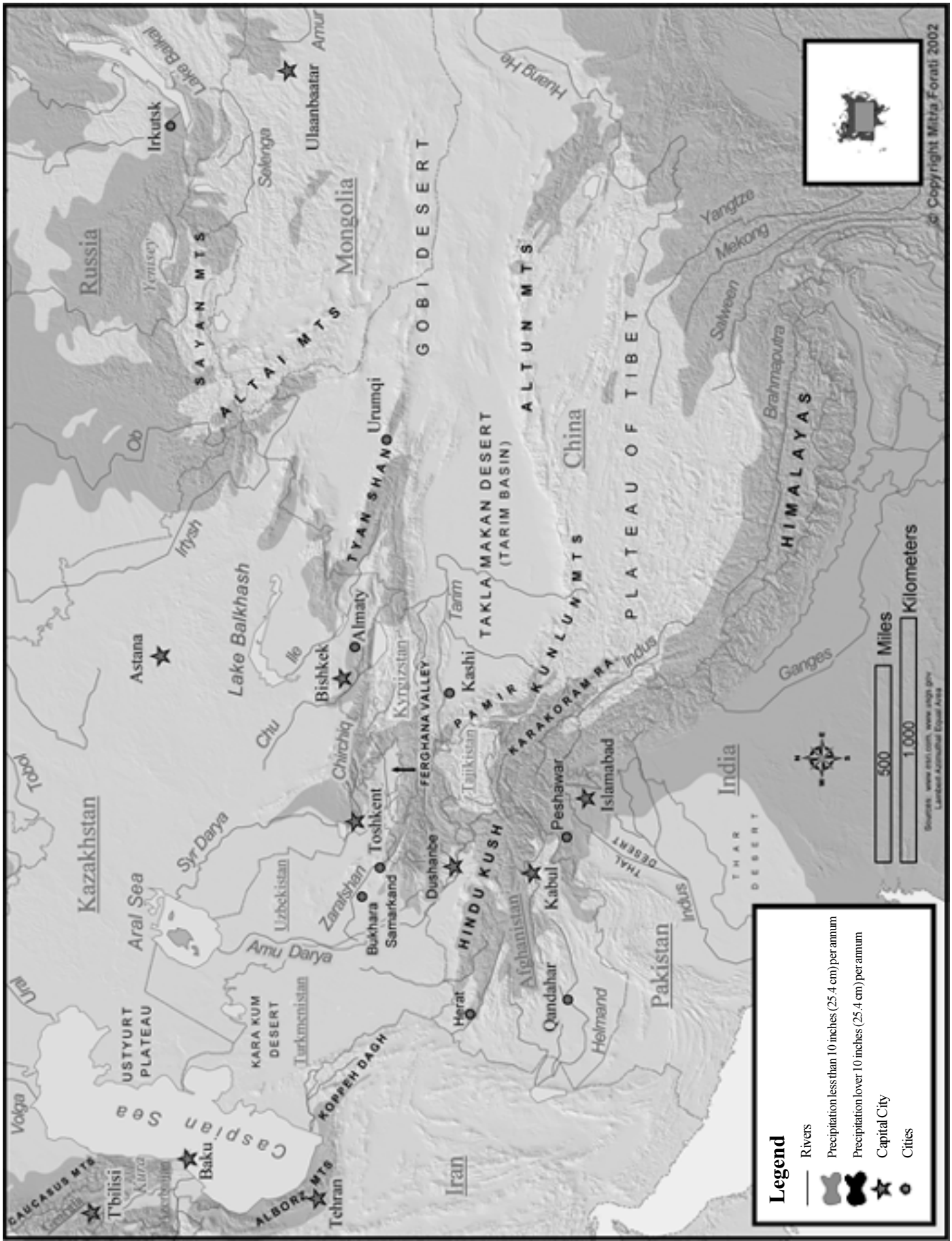
¹⁰ *The Transition Report: November 2001*. EBRD, London, 2001, p. 36.

¹¹ *Yeni Musavat* (Baku), 11 January 2002.

¹² *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (Moscow), 1 December 1999.

¹³ Read, for instance, a “Letter from Baku” by Thomas Goltz in *The National Interest*, Summer 1997, pp. 37-45.

¹⁴ The clause reads: “United States assistance under this or any other act... may not be provided to the government of Azerbaijan until the President determines and so reports to Congress, that the government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh.”



Inner Asia



Inner Asia: A Geographical Perspective

David Hooson

Between more recognizable places like China, India, Russia and the Middle East, there is an area as large as the United States, which can be lumped together as Central Asia. Before September 11th, this was probably the blackest of black holes in the global knowledge for even educated Americans. Even now, while a crash course has performed put Afghanistan on the map, the surrounding territories and the wider context generally have remained vague, and America, the “indispensable” superpower, is groping its piecemeal way towards a fundamental understanding of the world it is being called upon to lead.

Even for most “area specialists” in Russia/Soviet Union, China, India, or the Middle East, Central Asia is marginal at best. In my own experience as a Soviet specialist with an interest in Central Asia, I generally treated the region in relation to metropolitan Russia and was never able to approach the borders of Afghanistan or Iran – let alone cross them. Of course, since the end of the Soviet Union, limited contacts have developed between them and the newly independent Central Asian states, but the suspicion and secrecy are hard to kill, and the connection with Chinese Turkestan remains tenuous and often tense.

Inner Asia as a coherent physical realm

Perhaps “Inner Asia” has more of a ring to it than Central, or Middle Asia, but whatever name eventually sticks, it could hardly be less descriptive and logical than the widely adopted “Middle East.” The fact is that, from the Caucasus-Caspian to Mongolia, Sinkiang and most of Tibet, and from Southern Siberia to Afghanistan, there are recognizable common denominators in the physical environment. The most important is general aridity – almost all of the region receives less than ten inches of precipitation a year (often much less) so that sandy or rocky deserts prevail, along with seasonal grasses which have given meager support to generations of nomads and their camels, sheep, and goats.

The second is that some of the highest mountain ranges on earth, such as the Tian Shan, Hindu Kush and Caucasus, are able to capture and store snow and ice and release water in the summer, like our Sierra Nevada, for irrigation in the valleys below. This has enabled hydraulic civilizations to develop over thousands of years and to produce the only pockets and strips of dense population in this otherwise desert realm.

The third common feature of the whole region is that it is a closed inland drainage area, where no water drains out to the world oceans. In fact, this is the most telling common denominator, which can actually be used to delimit Inner Asia as a unit and which is redolent with meaning. This situation makes the region and its people increasingly vulnerable and fragile, because of a combination of physical and human factors. The glaciers and snowfields have been shrinking, perhaps due to global warming, but much more disastrous have been the wasteful irrigation practices and cotton monoculture forced on the people of Soviet Middle Asia, resulting in the catastrophic shrinking of the Aral Sea to half its 1960 size, with attendant pollution, desertification, poverty, and disease. The basins of the Amu Darya River in Uzbekistan, the Kura in Azerbaijan, and the Helmand in Afghanistan – the latter exacerbated by constant warfare – are disaster areas, along with comparable parts of Sinkiang, Tibet, and Mongolia. A collective, suffocating physical claustrophobia is descending upon Inner Asia.

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The "Pivot of History"

A century ago (1904), the British geographer Halford Mackinder delivered a startling lecture, titled "The Geographical Pivot of History." He asserted that the "Columbian epoch," the age of sea power, the basis of Britain's position as a world power, was coming to an end. He argued that the closed "heartland" of Eurasia was a pivotal region that lay beyond the reach of sea power – not only the inland drainage area described above but also the great Siberian rivers flowing to the frozen sea. At the time, this pivot region was not developed, although the Trans-Siberian railway was just being completed through Manchuria. After recounting the phases in history during which powers from this heartland conquered much of Europe and Asia (Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, etc.), Mackinder warned that if this heartland were fully developed with railways, industries, mineral resources, and population, it would be possible for it to dominate the "World Island" more firmly than the nomads ever could and eventually – immune to sea power – dominate the world.

Though this theory may now seem "far out," it resonated in political circles throughout the 20th century. Without Stalin's breakneck industrial development of Siberia, the Soviet Union might well have lost the Second World War, giving Hitler control of the "heartland." Then the Cold War, accompanied by massive new finds of oil and gas in the USSR and an aggressive military posture, resurrected Mackinder's theory once again. I well remember how, in 1957, the year of Sputnik, fresh from the Geography Department at Oxford, which Mackinder founded, I was put to lecture on the Soviet Union at the Pentagon. I was amazed to find that many generals and admirals in my class were sold on Mackinder's theory and the "containment" policy that it indicated as necessary. It took two world wars and the Cold War, culminating in the collapse of the Soviet Empire to finally (?) put Mackinder's scary theory to rest.

Great games

The old Silk Road connected East and West for centuries and put Inner Asia on the beaten track of the ancient world. But then the discovery of the Great Sea Routes around Africa sent the region into obscurity and depression. However, by the 18th and 19th centuries, it had become the object of empire-building from Russia, China, and British India, and the "Great Game" of rivalry between these empires descended intermittently upon the peoples of this long-suffering inland drainage area. By the

end of the 19th century, the Russian bear and the British (Indian) lion had come within snarling range in Central Asia, leading to the formation of Afghanistan as a "buffer state," and Russia and China were jousting for control in Eastern Turkestan and Mongolia.

Now the new Great Game seems to be in full swing again in Inner Asia. Though "independent" for a decade, the successor states of Soviet Central Asia are still suffering from the devastating fall-out from Russian colonialism – repressive regimes, Stalin's shamelessly gerrymandered boundaries, dividing and ruling across real communities, and perhaps worst of all, the consequences of the rape of their environments and distortion of their cultures and economies. Mongolia is independent of the Soviet Union after 70 years, but it is wracked with serious problems, primarily with harsh environmental catastrophes leading to decimation of the animals on which they depend. Chinese colonialism continues to hold sway in Sinkiang and Tibet and outrage at environmental violations, coupled with excessive Han immigration, is widespread. Afghanistan, as everyone now knows, has been utterly devastated by decades of war and invasion.

Tasks and dangers ahead

Into this disrupted, devastated and depressed realm, a new Great Game element has been injected, revolving around oil and gas and particularly the problem of getting the presumed riches to the Western market through pipelines. The landlocked nature of these Central Asian hydrocarbon-rich nations, coupled with the rugged environment and often dangerous human impediments – land mines, warlords, etc. – will severely hamstring exploitation of these undoubted resources. The specter of rich but devastated "petro-states" like Venezuela or Nigeria, or even Saudi Arabia, stands before these Inner Asian communities and states.

With all of this, the problem of terrorism now looms large but should be seen in context with the oppression and neglect of these regions by the outside world. For the long-term self interest and security of the United States, as well as the stability and well-being of the desperate inhabitants of Central Asia, a truly munificent investment in the rehabilitation of both the environments and peoples of this benighted region would be not only much more humane and charitable, but also basically more successful and effective than more lavish military spending and the chimera of "homeland security."

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