

REGIONAL POLITICS

THE INTERNATIONAL COUNTER-TERRORIST CAMPAIGN AND THE POLITICAL PROCESSES IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS

Dina MALYSHEVA

*D.Sc. (Political Science),
chief researcher at the Institute of World Economy and
International Relations, RAS
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

The U.S.-led worldwide counter-terrorist campaign of the post-9/11 period placed some of the Central Asian and Caucasian countries in the political limelight. They have become sort of an outpost in the struggle against the terrorist networks

woven by al-Qa'eda and other similar structures. The changing geopolitical situation will undoubtedly affect post-Soviet Eurasia. A clear idea of political processes and trends is impossible without a clear understanding of what international terrorism is.

Terrorism as a Globalization Phenomenon

The blanket term "international terrorism" is grossly overused by the political community. Its numerous interpretations used for purely political purposes baffle the public. The tag "international terrorist organization" is stuck indiscriminately on any Muslim organization a government might see as dangerous.

Political deliberations about purposeful and coordinated global terrorist activities are frequently tuned to the positions of the only superpower, which is unilaterally waging the "war against terror" on a global scale. Viewed at a closer range, this is a war against the "axis of evil" and the war Israel is waging against "Islamic terrorism." Not infrequently, those who organize the terrorist acts and those

who sympathize with them (European and American anti-globalists among others) describe them in geopolitical and geo-economic terms. They are seen as the response of the destitute South to the rich North (the notorious “golden billion”). There is another opinion, according to which there is no such thing as international terrorism. The term was invented to screen the great powers’ “real politics” and interests. Those in opposition to the American Administration insist that it was evoked to justify the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, to bring pressure on Iran and other countries. The same people say that the U.S. used the counter-terrorist operation to achieve world domination: America is trying to exploit slackened international cooperation and the diminished role of international organizations to consolidate its leading role.

In Russia, international terrorism has become closely associated with the Northern Caucasus or, rather, with the religious and political situation in Chechnia. Moscow has stated time and again that the armed resistance there is supported by the international terrorist network and, probably, by the West, which wants to weaken Russia and its foothold in the Caucasus. On the other hand, the opposition in Russia insists that North Caucasian terrorism was, first and foremost, a product of Moscow’s inadequate policies. It ascribes the rise of Wahhabism to the religious, ideological, and political soil that feeds terrorism (a grave economic crisis that forces young men deprived of social prospects to seek justice in radical Islam). This economically biased argument does not hold water: indeed, there are no terrorists and suicide bombers among those who live in the Russian European region and the Far East and who, by the way, are much worse off than people in the Northern Caucasus.

The Central Asian regimes have their share of trouble too. Certain European, American, and Russian politicians and human rights activists, as well as a small group of those who share their views in the Central Asian countries themselves, go out of their way to prove that the antiterrorist struggle is being used to mete out punishment to the regimes’ political opponents.

This is partly true. At the same time, terrorism is obviously a very real global threat. It is becoming much harder to follow all the changes of the al-Qa’eda network since its base in Afghanistan and the Taliban have been destroyed. This and similar organizations are very flexible—not infrequently they use respectable charity funds and corporations as their fronts. The enemy is hard to detect—therefore it is highly dangerous. In this context, we tend to accept the thesis about the “global networks of terror.” Even if those holding forth about them are politically biased, the terrorist threat, which seems to have adjusted itself to the 21st century, remains very real. This enemy has no specific political goals; it has transformed the national-liberation and anti-dictatorial potential of its early “romantic” period, when terrorism was an instrument of political pressure, into a subversive transnational threat. (In the 1960s-1970s Arafat, Begin, Mandela, and many of the Latin American revolutionaries were described as terrorists.)

Today, international terrorism, which imposes its strategy of social changes, has developed into the “shadow” of globalization and the most disgusting of its components. The very fact that globalization is drawing domestic and international spheres closer makes terrorism even more dangerous. Indeed, individual lives and society as a whole cannot be reliably protected against numerous risks, terrorism being one of them. It has declared a total war on Western civilization and on all “rotten regimes,” structures, alliances, and individuals outside it which (the Islamic fanatics argue) have succumbed to the West and America and are cooperating with them. The large secular states with numerous Muslim communities (Russia being one such state) are exposed to destabilizing subversion and terrorist acts. This is the first-ever global attempt to implement (with the use of force) a political-religious project of a totalitarian nature which combines the ideas of armed jihad and a highly conservative interpretation of Islam close to Saudi Wahhabism. Jean Louis Brugier, a French judge and expert in the problems of terrorism, has discussed the other side of this phenomenon. He is convinced that today the world community has to deal with new “nihilists,” whose aim is total destruction and physical annihilation of all those who side with this civilization.¹

¹ See: E. Shestakov, “Ispoved terrorista,” *Izvestia*, 6 June, 2003.

All those covered by the blanket term “international terrorists” and who, at closer range, turn out to include varied strata and segments of (predominantly Muslim) society are putting up fierce resistance to all attempts at building up a statehood in Chechnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These wars are closely connected with the mounting wave of international drug trafficking and spread of Islamic extremism, which (judging by what we have seen in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Chechnia) is developing into terrorism.

Today, the terrorists’ international system and the patterns of their actions have become much more sophisticated. Political Islamists, their terrorist structures, cells, groups, and societies (jamaats) are scattered all over the world. Some of them fall apart to be shortly replaced by others; they change leaders and become even harder to detect. These “networks of shadow globalization” are skillfully juggling with motives ranging from mystical to extremely tangible (such as offices and “charities” extending material support to the families of suicide bombers). This globalization of sorts of international terrorism betrays itself in slogans, rhetoric, clothes, and adverts filmed directly before an act of terror. They have developed into a ritual performed all over the world (be it Israel, Iraq, Indonesia, or Russia).

Money comes from all sides: petrodollars from the Arab countries, donations from charity and religious organizations, informal support centers, etc. The flow is not always steady, though, so terrorist organizations are actively involved in drug trafficking together with the international criminal community. These two forces—political radicals posing as religious forces and international criminals—obviously need continued confrontation and armed conflicts across the world. It is much easier to fish in the troubled waters of the Arab-Israeli, Chechen, Afghan, or Iraqi conflicts. Not necessarily involved in them as one of the sides, transnational terrorism will continue profiting at their expense. The so-called political elite that poses as the “defender of Islam” and that, in fact, is operating a conveyor belt producing suicide bombers will continue channeling the uncontrolled money flows with great advantage to itself.

The Zone of Political Risk

It is commonly believed that Western Europe, the United States, and Russia are the most vulnerable zone. Being more vulnerable than the U.S., Russia is at an even greater risk of becoming a target for terrorists in 2004.

Until recently, the Central Asian and South Caucasian countries were described as a zone of low or insignificant risk. Recent events have shown that these states too run the risk of becoming a potential (or real, as was the case with Uzbekistan) target of terrorist attacks.

Uzbekistan was the first among the post-Soviet states to be confronted in February 1999 with Islamist terrorism. On 28-31 March, 2004, there was a series of suicide bomber attacks in Tashkent; on 1 April this happened in Bukhara. The Uzbek authorities put the blame on Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (the Islamic Liberation Party—HTI) and certain other religious groups in opposition to the officially recognized form of Islam. There were alternative opinions: the blasts were ascribed to the authorities and law enforcement bodies (the militia in the first place). They were described as repressions against religious leaders or the result of popular discontent stirred up by the economic and social situation, etc. One thing is clear: Uzbekistan is the scene of higher level terrorist risks due to its key geopolitical location and influential forces of Islamist extremism still based in the Ferghana Valley. There are other factors as well: the country’s consistent and merciless struggle against all manifestations of Islamic extremism and terrorism and Tashkent’s cooperation with the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) acting in Afghanistan.

To lower the terrorist risk in the republic, it is obviously not enough to follow the reasonable suggestions which influential Western organizations, analysts, and human rights activists address to President Karimov. They advised him to stem terrorism by putting an end to persecutions of the so-called peaceful Islamists (some people go as far as describing them as “builders of civil society in Uzbekistan”²), enter into a political dialog with those of them who do not use violence to establish Islamic order, and start genuine, not demonstrative, economic reforms. These calls obviously come from those who refuse to bow down to Oriental mentality. In the West, political culture is rooted in the idea of a consensus of civil society, while in the East, concessions are taken for weakness, which invites more pressure. There is another trap: a retreat in the face of the Islamists may replace the present “enlightened authoritarianism,” a totally predictable secular regime, with an Islamist dictatorship. The critics of Karimov’s “repressive regime” close to the Western human rights communities may find this replacement unpalatable.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are also exposed to the risk of destabilization, albeit to a much lesser degree than Uzbekistan. The supporters of political Islamists and its striking force—Islamist terrorists—have entrenched themselves in some regions. The situation in Tajikistan has not yet been settled—the echo of the civil war can still be heard. The republic is exposed to the vile influence of political Islamism coming from Afghanistan, where it blended with the international drug mafia. After materializing as the neo-Taliban movement in the Pashtoon provinces of northern Afghanistan, they are waving the banner of Muslim unity in the face of the Christian civilization. They have made Afghanistan and the adjoining territories a zone of risk.

Today, in Central Asia waves of activity of various organizations of the al-Qa’eda type have become everyday occurrences; religious extremism is undermining secular power and the declared freedom of conscience. Different forces are promoting this destructive political trend.

These forces are: the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which in the 1990s intended to topple the secular regime and introduce the Shari’a. Driven by the repressions in March–April 1993, its leaders and some of the members fled to Tajikistan, where they fought in the Tajik conflict together with the opposition. Later they moved to Afghanistan and joined the “government in exile” headed by the leaders of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). In the 1990s, the IMU established contacts with its supporters in the Ferghana Valley and started supplying them with money and drugs to pay for weapons and secret Islamist structures. The IMU leaders have good contacts with the foreign centers of political Islamism and international terrorism (the Taliban and al-Qa’eda), from which they received money.³ The Central Asian countries profited from the defeat of the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban: the regime that had been threatening them was wiped out. This weakened the IMU, which acted from the Afghan territory.

HTI is another Islamist structure that the Central Asian governments accuse of subversive activities. It betrayed itself in the suicide terrorist acts in Uzbekistan. The party was founded in 1953 by the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood with the aim of “rescuing the Muslim ummah from its present cruel decline and liberating it from the ideas, systems, and laws of qufr, from the domination and influence of the qufr states, and of restoring the Islamic Caliphate.”⁴ Its emissaries reached Tashkent and the south of Kyrgyzstan back in 1995; its first secret cells appeared in Kyrgyzstan (in Osh and the Dzhalaal-Abad Region); they were involved in the Batken events in 1999 and 2000. The anti-Taliban operation in Afghanistan, described by HTI ideologists as the U.S. war against Islam, made the Islamist rhetoric even more bellicose. The leaflets the “party” distributed in Uzbekistan extolled the Palestinian suicide terrorists, demanded that the U.S.-led coalition remove its units from Central Asia, and called on all Muslims to fight for their faith.

Dosym Satpaev believes that the region is acquiring a terrorist infrastructure of its own.⁵ Together with the well-known IMU and HTI, he enumerated several other local and foreign extremist

² This is what Nicholas Gvozdev wrote (see: *The Washington Times*, 2 February, 2004) [<http://www.centrasia.ru/news/>].

³ For more details, see: A. Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, London, 2000; R. Gu-naratna, *Inside Al Qaeda, Global Network of Terror*, New York, 2002.

⁴ Hizb ut-Tahrir official site. URL [<http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org/english/definition/messages.htm>].

⁵ See: D. Satpaev, “Tsentrāl’noaziatskiy terrarium,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 13 September, 2004.

and terrorist organizations: the Muslim Brotherhood, Tabligi Jamaat, Adolat uushmasi, the East Turkestan Islamic Party, the Islamic Development Center, the Islamic Movement of Turkestan (an IMU offshoot), Tovba, etc. All of them found a favorable social and political milieu in Central Asia (destitution of the active population, unemployment, spiraling corruption and crime, and obvious social inequality).

There is information that religious extremists of the Wahhabi bent are stepping up their activity in Azerbaijan.

Most of the Central Asian and Caucasian elites prefer a secular state—to survive they have to fight religious extremism and terrorism. The foreign factor—the ability of the world community, its Russian and American parts included, to become resolved to fighting the global threat of international terrorism—is equally important. There are still many obstacles in this sphere.

Internationalization of Peacekeeping and the Anti-Terrorist Struggle

While underpinning its claims to global leadership and its right to regulate international relations unilaterally with the need to fight international terrorism, the United States has reduced national sovereignty to an anachronism and a hindrance. Indeed, no effective counter-terrorist struggle can be limited by state borders; this is supported by another American invention: “conditional sovereignty” and “selective legitimacy.” There is another novelty in world politics: extended “multinational” interference in internal affairs of states, arbitrarily or subjectively announced to be either victims or connivers of terrorism, or even “failed states.” The latter is directly related to Russia’s policies in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

There is the widespread opinion in the United States and Europe that Russia, which has claimed the CIS and the Caucasus as its priority zone, cannot cope with the local conflicts and oppose terrorism. According to many influential politicians, the Beslan events of 1-3 September, 2004 sealed this verdict. It is believed in the West that the Russian authorities are using international terrorism as a pretext to go on fighting in Chechnia, to squash democracy in Russia, to make Georgia’s dismemberment irrevocable, and to restore its influence (the empire) in the Caucasus and across the post-Soviet states. (The professional fighters against “Russian imperialism” are busy using an apt expression coined by Anatoly Chubays—“Russia is a liberal empire”—outside its 2003-election campaign context.) They are also fond of saying that “the Russian president has capitalized on the Beslan tragedy to undermine democracy in his country.” This was what Western politicians and intellectuals said in the petition they sent to the leaders of the NATO and EU countries.⁶

Since Caucasian terrorism is potentially dangerous for the civilized world (read “Europe and the United States”), Moscow’s opponents believe that the peacekeeping and political process in the south of the CIS should be “internationalized.” The plan is simple: since the Caucasus is the hottest spot in the CIS, one of the republics should invite “multinational forces” there. Translated from the parlance of political correctness into the language of political reality, “internationalization of the conflict” and “a multisided counter-terrorist operation” mean NATO and American troops.

Speaking at the seminar “The Southern Caucasus: Making the Best Use of Outside Assistance for Building Stability and for Cooperation with NATO” held on 21-23 September, 2003 in Vilnius, Ms. Zeyno Baran, Director of International Security and Energy Programs at the Nixon Center, pointed out: Since a dialog with Putin can be positive, we (the United States.—*D.M.*) should take into account the coming

⁶ See: *Izvestia*, 30 September, 2004.

presidential elections in Russia. The Russian military-industrial complex is not overjoyed with Putin's "concessions" to the United States and has already started strengthening the Caucasian positions. Until the elections (the presidential elections in Russia.—*D.M.*), we should not drop Russia. After the elections, U.S. direct involvement will play an important role in creating a "security umbrella" for the Southern Caucasus before its countries join NATO.⁷

It is no coincidence that after Beslan official Tbilisi and certain unofficial figures, who part of the Western political establishment and their supporters in Russia regard as the epitome of the Chechens' cherished hopes, warmly supported the idea of internationalization for the sake of stability (or for protection against Russian imperialism) in the Caucasus. Those who want to extend the counter-terrorist operation to the Caucasus or other CIS regions (the Trans-Dniester region) seems to be ignorant of the fact that similar military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq triggered another bout of civil wars, intensified religious extremism and fanaticism, terrorist activity, and drug trafficking. Both countries lost their sovereignty; they are attracting soldiers of fortune from all corners of the globe, as well as terrorists posing as faithful "warriors of jihad."

In Afghanistan, the anti-terrorist operations of the International Security Assisting Forces set up by the U.N. Security Council in accordance with the Bonn Agreement,⁸ which in the spring of 2003 were transferred to NATO (even though the ISAF peacekeeping contingent is not formally regarded as a NATO operation), failed to achieve a turn for the better. It controls the capital and its environs. Drug manufacture is one the gravest and underestimated threats: while under the Taliban, the country accounted for 12 percent of the world's total drug production, its share today is up to 70 percent. Significantly, as soon as the military phase was completed, the Russian special services tried to establish working contacts with their American colleagues in Afghanistan and the country's U.S.-controlled administration without much success. Normally, the United States ignored information coming from Russia for the simple fact that the Americans cherish their good relationships with the influential clans who are the main drug producers.

In Iraq, several thousand *mujaheddin* (mainly from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Sudan, and Syria) are fighting against the coalition forces. Every day they kill civilians and American military and their allies and take hostages. It seems that not only al-Qa'eda but also former officers and generals, as well as Baathists are behind the terrorist acts in this country. The interim Iraqi administration survives while the American and allied troops remain in the country—without them the country will degenerate into another Afghanistan. Under the Taliban and al-Qa'eda, it was a place where terrorist acts were planned.

It seems that those who want to persecute the violators of world order, irrespective of the consequences and the states' sovereign rights, are not disheartened by the example of Afghanistan and Iraq. This is amply testified by the growing attention of the U.S., NATO, and the EU to the frozen Caucasian conflicts. The West is convinced that they are destabilizing the situation along the new NATO and EU borders, which have come right up against Russia. There is every reason to believe that the West intends to keep Russia away from the peacekeeping process in the Caucasus and complete it on its own terms. It relies on its local partners (primarily Georgia, which is getting ready to join NATO in 2005), its own financial resources, and military might. What is called "active actions" (the use of forces or another variation of the "roses revolution") against self-identified Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and the Republic of Nagorny Karabakh may produce insurmountable difficulties: ethnic cleansing, great losses among civilians, refugees, and humanitarian catastrophes. They are the inevitable consequences of all armed conflicts, irrespective of the banners (struggle against terrorism, crime, separatism, etc.) under which they unfold.

This can be described as the result of the "process of democratization and political stabilization." This happened in former Yugoslavia. We cannot be absolutely sure that the world public will accept the new wars as just. The people living in the unrecognized republics may find support for their desire to realize their right to self-identification (recognized by the U.N. and the world community and registered in many international documents). It is precisely for this reason that the West is doing its best to discredit the "self-proclaimed" republics. They are described as criminal zones, through which drugs, weapons,

⁷ [<http://www.nixoncenter.org/21/09/2004>].

⁸ See: U.N. Security Council Resolution 1386, 20 December, 2001.

and girls are shipped to the West. Baku and Tbilisi are only too willing to regularly raise the issue of “international terrorists sheltered in the criminal separatist enclaves.”

Russia, which is being squeezed out of the peacekeeping process in the Caucasus, pays in kind: it is hurling accusations of inaction at Georgia that, it says, shelters fighters in the Pankisi Gorge bordering on Russia. While defining these people as terrorists, Moscow and Washington have different ideas of how they should be dealt with. So far, it seems that the RF time and again falls into the same self-prepared trap. While demonstrating its inability to overcome fighters in Chechnia, to say nothing of Pankisi, it is, wittingly or unwittingly, contributing to the internationalization of the peacekeeping process in the Caucasus. In 2002, the United States promptly responded to the Russian statements about bin Laden’s people reaching Pankisi by introducing, on 27 February, its airborne assault force into a region Georgia could not control. This was the U.S.’s third counter-terrorist operation (after Afghanistan and the Philippines, where Washington tried to destroy Abu Sayaf, who had direct contacts with al-Qa’eda). This began America’s fast military penetration into the Caucasus. It will never leave it, just as it remained in Central Asia, even though it promised to withdraw its units two years after the war on the Taliban.

After the Beslan tragedy, Moscow made the same mistake by talking about fighters and international terrorists camping in the Pankisi Gorge. Chief of Russia’s General Staff Iury Baluevskiy even threatened (in the same way as other Russian generals had done before him and never carried out their threats) to launch preemptive attacks against the terrorist bases. Meanwhile, U.S. Ambassador to Georgia Richard Miles who, according to the press, was the force behind Mikhail Saakashvili’s “roses revolution” declared: “There are still many international terrorists in the Pankisi Gorge,” which invited Tbilisi’s mixed response. On the one hand, the Georgian leaders knew that this was a pretext for American interference in Caucasian affairs and, hence, Georgia could count on outside help when trying to restore its territorial integrity. On the other, official statements coming from Moscow and (worse still) from Washington reduced to naught Georgia’s bragging about restoring law and order and achieving peace and stability. The Tbilisi leaders have not abandoned their intention to return South Ossetia and later Abkhazia to the Georgian fold, even though the Georgian units were defeated in the summer of 2004 in an aborted attempt to penetrate the Tskhinvali Region (the name South Ossetia acquired under Gamsakhurdia); some of the units were later withdrawn. There is talk in the Tbilisi corridors of power that a full-scale war is still possible and that it might begin late in the winter of 2004/2005. South Ossetia expects a war as soon as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline is commissioned in the spring of 2005.

Meanwhile, the results of the campaign against separatists as the main enemies of Georgian and Azeri statehood may turn out to be highly dramatic. Hostilities may undermine the ruling regimes, or even contribute to their downfall, just as they will encourage extremists and terrorists. Ethnic peace and political balance in the Caucasus might be disrupted since internationalization of the conflict is unlikely to be limited to the introduction of American and NATO units. These wars will inevitably cause havoc in the Northern Caucasus and affect other neighbors (Turkey and Iran). The region will attract all sorts of mercenaries and soldiers of fortune from the Arab countries, who will flock there to swell the ranks of the local Islamist terrorists.

It should be said that far from bringing settlement of the frozen Caucasian conflicts closer, the very possibility of their internationalization has destabilized the situation. Today, as in the early 1990s, the sides have moved too close to fighting; in South Ossetia the fighting has already begun. This is very dangerous for the South of Russia. If the RF fails to protect its borders promptly and effectively, internationalization may prove fatal to its statehood.

Democratization as a Weapon against Terror?

Enforced democracy is one of the key components of the unfolding counter-terrorist campaign. A democratic system and pluralism are regarded as a mighty antiterrorist weapon. On 6 November, 2003,

⁹ BBC Official Site [www.bbc.com/russia/], 13 September, 2004.

President George W. Bush presented his project of moving democracy to the Greater Middle East, which declared, among other things, that democratic reforms and economic liberalization should be used "to fight terror-breeding poverty and backwardness."¹⁰

There is nothing new in the idea that greater democratic manageability of the Muslim world would promote American interests. Until recently, however, the Bush Administration refrained from putting it forward, so as not to drive away the key strategic partners with far from democratic regimes. Everything changed after 9/11 largely thanks to increased pressure from the neo-conservatives, liberal internationalists, and certain European politicians who criticized America's relationships with autocratic regimes. There is a firm conviction in the United States that the common citizens of the Islamic world will profit greatly from democratization, which will help them fight corruption, ineffective administration, poverty, and other social evils. Washington is using this idea to withdraw with dignity from the Iraqi mess and to compensate for the U.S. unpopular war with a constructive and attractive program for this key region.

There is a similar program for post-Soviet Eurasia. When launching the Millennium Challenge Account program of aid to certain developing countries, U.S. Congress pointed out, in particular, that "By continuing to suppress human rights and to deny citizens peaceful, democratic means of expressing their convictions, the nations of Central Asia risk fueling popular support for violent and extremist movements, thus undermining the goals of the war on terrorism."¹¹ In 2003, the U.S. gave the Central Asian republics about \$3 billion-worth of aid. It was not limited to humanitarian purposes alone and was intended to help them build a civil society, carry out political and economic reforms, and fight proliferation of WMD, crime, and terrorism. In 2004, out of 16 CIS countries eligible for the Millennium Challenge Account aid, only Armenia and Georgia received money (\$300 and \$500 million, respectively). Though being no less pro-American than Georgia, Azerbaijan was excluded as a regime that "betrayed democracy" and was busy "building up an authoritarian and corrupt family dynasty."¹²

In recent years, "the red Tbilisi rose" has been regarded in Central Asia and the Caucasus not only as a symbol of the replacement of "manageable democracy" with simply democracy, but also as a method of dealing with their very painful problems. The example of the Georgian opposition inspired their colleagues in other countries to use some of the Georgian methods of democratization (the mechanism of removing old rulers and seizing power in a democratic way).¹³

The Central Asian and Caucasian countries which have not yet progressed far along the road of democracy have to accept the Western rules of the game. They hold elections, regarded as an important indicator of democratic development, and have accepted other outward features, such as the division of powers into the legislative, executive, and judicial; political parties, an opposition, NGOs, and relatively independent media. In all Eurasian countries where manageable democracy has proven its efficiency, manipulation of the constitution and election laws is very popular. For example, under the 1994 referendum Saparmurad Niyazov extended his presidential term for five years; today, he has become president of Turkmenistan for life. Under the 2003 referendum, Emomali Rakhmonov can remain president of Tajikistan until 2020. International observers failed to describe elections in these countries as free and fair. In Uzbekistan, the opposition parties are refused official registration. The situation in other Central Asian countries is similar: all opponents of Niyazov's are either in prison or in exile. All serious opponents of President of Kazakhstan Nazarbaev were efficiently removed from the political scene in anticipation of the parliamentary elections of 19 September, 2004 won by the party of power. In Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan some of the prominent opposition leaders were imprisoned.

¹⁰ President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East. Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html>].

¹¹ See: U.S. Congress Act, H.R. 1950, 108th Congress, 1st Session, 16 July, 2003 [<http://www.congress.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?c108:4:/temp/~c1084hWjjP::st>].

¹² R. Mirkadyrov, "Baku obnesli," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 28 May, 2004.

¹³ For more detail, see: D. Malysheva, "Demokratizatsia postsovetetskogo Vostoka: modeli i realii," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, No. 6, 2004, pp. 85-94.

A casual observer may describe the South Caucasian republics as more democratic and more devoted to human rights. A closer look, however, reveals that democracy is skin-deep, while the common people remain unprotected, if not against the abuses of the state, then against crime, ethnic conflicts, and corruption. The ruling groups, having pushed aside macroeconomic and social issues, are engrossed in property division. The omnipresent newly rich are seeking monopoly on all life-support systems. The opposition, meanwhile, is busy developing its party structures and sorting thing out among itself. The governments are exploiting the counter-terrorist campaign to restrict NGOs in their respective countries. They argue that since the campaign intends to liquidate the terrorists' financial and economic base, NGOs should be carefully checked. In Azerbaijan, for example, the authorities suggested that a careful investigation was needed to bring to light possible contacts between NGOs and international terrorist organizations. This was accompanied by a special Law on Grants (adopted in December 2002 to complement the Law on NGOs passed in October 2000). Under the new law, all NGOs have to inform the authorities about all grants they received before they start spending the money. On top of this, the NGOs will have to pay 27 percent of all grants to the Social Security and the Pension Funds.¹⁴

Similar attempts were made in Shevardnadze's Georgia. In 2001, the first law on grants and humanitarian aid was drafted to place international aid to NGOs under state control. In 2002, the Ministry of State Security of Georgia came up with its own draft law "On Suspending Activities, Liquidating and Banning Extremist Organizations and Organizations Controlled from Abroad." If adopted, it would have considerably limited the scope of activities of local NGOs which live on financial aid from abroad. The draft remained unapproved very much to Shevardnadze's ill fortune: unhindered by the state, the "philanthropists" supported the "democratic transfer" of Georgia, while looking after their own interests at the same time.

The new ruling classes in the South Caucasian republics are putting pressure on NGOs for the simple reason that in the context of lawlessness, weak opposition, and a judicial branch which lacks independence, they are the watchdog that informs the public about all violations. The authorities find it hard to accept this. As a result, democratic development stalls, and civil society and its institutions remain immature, which opens the door to corruption. It has assumed hypertrophied forms and developed into kleptocracy. This undermined the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of the press and the open society principles, which encourages extremist trends.

It should be said that there is no genuine democracy in most of the Central Asian and Caucasian states, while power is usurped by ruling clans. Any opposition is described as a "religious extremist group," which allowed the local regime to expect Western support. Many of the Eurasian states do need genuine reforms, in many of them the ruling elites and bureaucratic structures should be replaced. They cannot reform themselves, they are using their power for personal enrichment, and therefore concentrate on staying in power as long as possible. The special services of the Central Asian and South Caucasian countries, irrespective of whether they are efficient or not, tend to brush the laws aside, thus interfering with the development of a civil society.

These societies should reform themselves—no reforms can be imposed on them. The process should be gradual so as to preserve security and stability; it should take the local specifics into account, since each country requires an individual approach. It is extremely important to prevent religious-political extremists and terrorist groups from profiting from the reforms and the "open door" policy.

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Here are several conclusions.

The struggle against political Islam and Islamist terrorism in Central Asia will continue for many years to come. In fact, terrorism may come to stay in the following cases:

- (a) If Afghanistan and Iraq fail to restore normality and spread violence to neighboring countries and regions;

¹⁴ See: C. Zullo, "NGOs—Unlikely Target of Azerbaijan's and Georgia's War on Terrorism," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 23 April, 2003.

- (b) If no serious effort is made to destroy the terrorist networks: so far they are winning the battle against high technologies and professional national security services armed with the latest technical and information tools;
- (c) If Central Asia and the Caucasus fail to carry out serious restructuring, sort things out in the social sphere, eliminate unemployment, etc. Today, unemployment and social problems breed crime, Islamist extremism, and Islamist terrorism;
- (d) If the ruling regimes fail to offer the broad masses floundering at the roadside of political and social development an alternative project or mobilization ideology to replace religious extremism and the philosophy of violence which are attracting more and more "warriors of jihad."

The relations among America, China, and Russia will greatly affect the political atmosphere in Central Asia. The local countries, as well as Russia, will have to accept the American presence, which to a certain extent protects them from the conflict-prone zone in Southern Asia and the negative processes now underway there (terrorism and drugs in particular). China, for its part, seems to tap the Shanghai Cooperation Organization for fighting domestic sources of terrorism (in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region) and for continuing its economic expansion in the post-Soviet territory.

In the Caucasus, a clash of Russian and American interests is possible if peacekeeping in Nagorny Karabakh, Abkhazia, or South Ossetia becomes international, or if similar methods are applied in Pankisi. It would be much wiser to concentrate international efforts within the counter-terrorist campaign on setting up a coalition similar to the anti-Hitler coalition to fight the Islamist terrorist international, rather than trying to squeeze Russia out of post-Soviet expanse, or to capitalize on the political and geopolitical situation. It is the Central Asian and Caucasian countries, the Eurasian periphery, which will be exposed to all the negative consequences. Their political systems are unable to withstand the destructive influence of terrorism, the plague of the 21st century.