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TRANSCRIPT

"PROMOTING RESILIENCE OR REPRESSION? SUPPORT FOR CENTRAL ASIAN SECURITY FORCES"

A Conversation With Dmitry Gorenburg and Scott Horton

Moderator: Michael Hall

ANNOUNCER:

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MICHAEL HALL:

Ladies and gentlemen-- first of all-- welcome to all of you to the Open Society Foundations. And welcome to what is for this year-- the inaugural-- event of this kind. The Open Society Foundations is-- together with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute supporting a series of-- publications-- working papers relating to issues of security-- in Central Eurasia.

And today's-- event-- marks the-- the launch of the first paper this year in-- in this series. And we're very fortunate-- to have with us today the author-- of this paper on external support for central Asian military and security forces-- Mr. Dmitry Gorenburg-- who-- among other things-- is a senior research scientist at the CNA-- which is-- a non-for-profit research and-- analysis organization-- editor of the *Journal of Problems of Post-Communism* and of-- *Russian Politics and Law*.

An associate at the Harvard University Davis Center for Russian Eurasian Studies, a writer, a blogger-- an expert-- one of the-- the foremost experts-- on Russian-- and former Soviet military affairs. And he's written-- a truly excellent-- paper, which you can find online at the-- the-- the website of-- of SIPRI.

I think one of the-- the-- the first paper that I've seen that really brings together-- a

huge amount of extremely useful information-- relating to foreign-- military and security systems to Central Asia, and I think it will be-- a very valuable resource to-- anyone working on this issue. But also a paper that-- that raises a number of very important-- policy issues, which-- Dmitry will-- will be discussing today.

Also joining us is a familiar face to many of you here at the Open Society Foundations-- Scott Horton-- who also-- was-- works in a variety of capacities. He is a contributing editor for legal and national security affairs at *Harper's Magazine*. He's an attorney at-- DLA Piper. He's a lecturer at Columbia University.

He's-- also-- for many, many years was the chair of the board of the Central Eurasia Project here at Open Society Foundations. Somebody with a very-- also deep knowledge of security and human rights affairs-- in the former Soviet Union and in many other parts of the world as well. So we are-- extremely fortunate to have him with us today.

I think that's-- I won't say much in terms of-- of preparatory marks beyond that. Just a couple of-- of points. First of all, this event, as you may notice-- is being recorded. Secondly is, as I'm sure you can hear, we're dealing with some construction issues across the street, so-- just be aware of that. This-- this will probably be going on through most of the-- most of the event, unfortunately.

SCOTT HORTON:

Think of it as a murmuring brook. (LAUGH)

MICHAEL HALL:

That's right, after a while it gets kind of soothing. Trust me-- we've been dealing with this for a couple of months now. But anyway-- I think-- without-- saying too much more, then, I'd like to hand things-- over-- to Dmitry. I've asked Dmitry to ask for around maybe 20-25 minutes or so. Scott will respond with some-- with some comments and-- and-- some ideas for further discussion, at which point-- I think we'll open things up for-- for a question and answer and-- and discussion. So-- Dmitry.

DMITRY GORENBURG:

Thank you, thank you. So-- as a drawdown of-- foreign forces from Afghanistan has accel-- accelerated in the run up to withdrawal by the end of 2014-- attention has really come to focus on the extent to which-- military equipment will be left behind for the use of Central Asian states.

And at the same time over the-- deals have been made in recent years to extend Russian military basing agreements in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. And these have

highlighted the extent to which Russia is providing military equipment and other forms of security assistance to-- states in the region.

So these-- two situations together raise some questions about-- the actual extent of-- external support-- for military and s-- and security forces in Central Asia, and the potential impact that augmentation of these forces-- could have on regional security. And-- and the issue has become I think especially salient-- in-- in recent years as all these states have started to increase their spending on military and security forces, which has in turn led to a gradual-- increase in capabilities-- still just at-- you know, at-- to a different extent in different countries, but the trajectory's been more towards reviving forces than-- than it was in the previous, let's say, 20 years.

So the report, which I urge you all to look at if you haven't, gets into a lotta details on capabilities, on specifics of what-- what kind of equipment what-- has been provided, what kind of training, cooperation goes on. I'm not gonna get into the details too much here. I'm gonna focus more on kinda the general trends and some-- and some pol-- especially some policy-- recommendations that flow from that.

But the-- the report does cover not just Russia and the U.S., but also E.U. states, China, and some other countries as well, so it's-- it's a fairly broad-- attempt to cover everybody who's tryin' to do-- tryin' to do something in Central Asia to the extent I c-- I can. So let me just start by talking about Russia-- first.

And Russia remains-- the main source of military and security assistance for most of the Central Asian states. Russia's primary goal in the region is to keep-- Central Asia in Russia's sphere of influence. And-- at the same time making sure that U.S. and NATO forces leave the region after the completion of the-- Afghanistan operation.

So there's-- there's sort of two sets of countries. There's the sort of the weaker Central Asia states-- Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan where Russia provides-- military assistance. And this can I think best be described as kind of a quid pro quo-- arrangement, where Russia is providing political and military support for the ruling regimes in these countries in exchange for basing rights and a certain level of acquiescence-- with Russian foreign policy priorities-- in the region.

Then-- then there are the-- the sorta what I call the-- the buying countries. Primarily Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan also to-- to some extent. And these countries, because their militaries are in large part equipped-- they're-- well, they're-- they're Soviet legacy forces. So they're-- they're-- they have Soviet equipment. They're still largely following-- Soviet military doctrine.

So for them, the Russ-- Russian weapons are the most familiar, the easiest to acquire-- their personnel are familiar with-- Russian training methods. So and-- so it's eas-- so that's kind of the-- the first-- direction of-- of buying weapons is-- is-- is Russia. It also helps that because most of the countries are members of the CSTO-- these countries pay lower-- the Russian price essentially for-- military equipment so they kinda can get it at a discount-- compared to-- what they would have to pay-- elsewhere.

So the-- the report goes into, you know, as I said, a lotta detail on what exactly is

provided. And the finding is that the-- this assistance, while significant for-- for the region is rel-- actually relatively limited in scale-- in the overall-- sense. But given the low starting capabilities of Central Asia's military and security forces, even relatively limited assistance can have a sizeable impact on security and stability in the region.

Now-- going forward, I think the impact's likely to be-- to be somewhat mixed in terms of-- of-- of-- of how-- how this plays out in-- in security relations. On the one hand-- efforts to improve counterterrorism and counterinsurgency capabilities of these states are likely to help local armed forces protect their countries from the threat of infiltration by radical Islamist groups, for example.

But on the other hand-- the extent of the danger to Central Asian security-- from these kinds of-- and this kind of infiltration has repeatedly been overstated, both by local leaders and by the Russian partners-- in or-- in large part in order to justify assistance requests and-- and subsequent security cooperation. I would argue that most local leaders actually face greater threat from internal instability-- and perhaps in some cases even regime collapse, as we've seen a couple times now in Kyrgyzstan-- than from outside infiltration.

And-- I think the events of the Arab Spring and the 2011-2012 electoral protests in-- Russia highlighted this for-- for the Central Asian leadership. So regime stability is-- is really their highest security priority. And since Russia provides equipment and training to security services without much regard for how such assistance might be used-- it's quite likely that it's-- any enhancements in capabilities could-- could then be proved to be useful for helping local leaders protect themselves from popular protests that may happen down the-- down the road-- and by repressing-- internal opposition movements.

So-- so that's kind of the big picture on-- on Russia. Let me turn to the U.S. a little bit next. The-- and sh-- so for the U.S.-- ensuring continued access-- for s-- supplies and personnel to Afghanistan has been the highest priority-- in Central Asia-- for much of the past decade. There have been other goals, to counter terrorism, counter narcotics-- democracy promotion-- preventing WMD proliferation.

And these have been pursued-- over time as well, but only rarely have they been allowed to infringe on the priority of the Afghanistan-- mission for the U.S. Now, in terms of providing equipment to Central Asia, the U.S. track record is actually kind of-- kind of poor. There hasn't been that much provided, but what there has been-- provided, a lot of the-- the equipment-- was-- was largely wasted because of-- inadequate maintenance-- or lack of training in their use on-- on the part of the local-- militaries.

So-- so that's-- there-- there are a lot of-- kind of rusting-- ships and just unused helicopters in-- various countries in-- in Central Asia. And-- the other-- the other point that I wanna make on this is that given the-- that we're in a period of reduced budgets and limited resources, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan is going to rel-- result in a decreased emphasis on all forms of-- assistance to Central Asia.

The region's going to once again, as it was in the '90s, become a relatively low priority

for the-- U.S. Department of Defense. You know, security assistance budgets for the-- for Central Asia have already been cut in recent years, and are most likely going to be cut further in the years to come.

Now, we may, given recent events, we may be entering a new period of confrontation with Russia. But I would argue that that's not likely to change this equation very much. Because the primary focus for the U.S. in this-- potential confrontation is going to be on Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. So-- so Central Asia may get some residual effects, but-- but lar-- but actually I think the larger-- trends in-- in-- in-- potential trend in increasing assistance will be to Ukraine, to Georgia-- perhaps down-- Moldova down the road. So-- so I think that's-- that's kinda where-- where things are headed.

Now, and Central Asian leaders sense that-- this withdrawal period kinda presents for th-- presents for them a final opportunity to receive significant amounts of military assistance from the U.S. The countries that are most interested in such equipment are Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. By contrast-- Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have the financial wherewithal to buy the-- new equipment-- on their own, and have not-- appeared very interested in donations of-- of used arm-- armaments from-- from the U.S. or from-- from elsewhere.

Now, the-- about-- in last year there was a lot of public discussion about the extent of potential-- U.S. assistance-- as part of the withdrawal from Afghanistan. And a lot of this-- the media coverage was really overstated-- both the amount and the significance of the equipment that's likely to be provided. And-- and also the potential impact of such assistance on-- on regional security.

So-- the research for this report was completed-- last fall, and at that time, at least in-- you know, in open source materials that I could have access to-- the U.S. government had not agreed to transfer any excess defense-- equipment from the Afghanistan operations to-- to Central Asian states.

Now, it's possible that some equipment will be transferred-- through the-- through the EDA program at-- at some point. But even if it is, it's not going to include-- major weapons systems or probably even small arms. So it's gonna be more like trucks and kinda logistics-- equipment, that sorta thing. So the security consequences of these donations is likely to be-- to be relatively limited.

Now, what I argue in the report is that the greater threat to regional security-- is posed not by the pot-- a potential provision of military equipment from NATO forces leaving Afghanistan, but by some of the longstanding U.S. training programs for the region's special forces-- which are conducted as part of an effort to increase-- counterterrorism preparedness. Now, the U.S. has a wide range of training programs-- for-- Central Asia, and some of them are quite useful.

There's-- there-- are areas such as language training and-- reform of-- how-- how the-- how the military is structured that-- that-- that are quite helpful. But the-- so-- so-- but I'm here specifically talking about the special forces. So in recent years, special forces troops trained by the U.S. military have engaged-- in combat against local

insurgents on several occasions. And-- and on oth-- and-- also have fired on unarmed protestors and other civilians-- in Tajikistan and-- and in Uzbekistan and possibly in Kazakhstan as well.

So-- and what's more, these training programs are generally much less costly to donors than equipment donations, so they're much more likely to be maintained-- as part of general U.S. military assistance programming-- after NATO leaves a region, even though the resources are gonna-- the overall resources are gonna be a lot lower. It's just easier to maintain those kinda programs. So that's-- that's kind of the-- the-- the problem with the U.S., and I'll come back to those a little bit in the conclusions.

Let me-- let me talk just briefly about the European Union. While-- so the-- the E.U.-- and it's member states have been particularly active-- in efforts to-- improve-- local capacity in counternarcotics and in border control, and it's been primarily carried out through the OSCE.

Second, the eur-- European defense industry has-- has become the preferred alternative for Central Asian states that are seeking to diversify their sources of military equipment, particularly Kazakhstan-- as a country with the sort of the-- the-- the most resources and the most desire to kind of become-- develop-- m-- kind of a more modern military. Kazakhstan has set up numerous j-- joint ventures with various European defense firms-- especially in areas such as aircraft and helicopters-- that they're-- they're-- they're building-- in Kazakhstan under license from-- Eurocoptor and else-- other-- other companies.

Now, eur-- what the eu-- European union states have not done very much is provided direct military assistance. So there've been-- training programs, there-- in those border control, counternarcotics areas, there have been-- some sales-- but-- but not providing equipment as aid very much.

I also wanna cover China briefly. China's-- China's role's been very interesting because it's-- it's very limited, but it's-- k-- China's very significant from kind of a strategic point of view. So China generally lets Russia take the lead on security and military engagement-- in Central Asia. And Russia's willingness to bear the burden of maintaining regional security has really allowed China to free ride on Russian investments in Central Asian security.

China's been involved to a very limited extent, and when it is it's very careful to go through the SCO rather than doing anything bilaterally with individual countries on the security s-- again, this is the security side. The EC-- economic side is obviously very different. And-- local rulers are also worried about China's raid entry into the region and don't trust China's long-term intentions. And this has contributed to-- Chinese calculations to set-- stay out of Central Asian security for now.

However-- what-- so-- so-- so I would argue that China's-- set to allow Russia to continue to play the dominant role in Central Asian security while China focuses on-- on-- developing economic ties and securing needed energy resources for itself. But this may change if the security situation in Central Asia deteriorates. Especially if Chinese leaders-- come to feel that Russia is not up to maintaining security in the

region. In that case I think that China would step up security assistance programs to ensure that its investments-- in the economic and energy spheres are-- are protected. So-- but for now they're happy to let Russia do the-- do that work. And-- just-- invest in the economic sphere.

A few-- there are a few other states that are involved. Turkey is r-- remains one of the primary providers of military equipment and training for several countries. They're providing aid primarily to kyrgis-- to Kyrgyzstan, while Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are-- targets of efforts to develop commercial ties-- by the Turkish defense industry-- in a number of areas, the Turkmenistan Navy, armored vehicles in Kazakhstan, night vision equipment, so fairly broad range kinds-- kinds of equipment.

India's also involved. It's tried to-- make an effort to hedge against-- China p-- and Pakistan, its traditional rivals in the region-- by seeking to establish a military pr-- presence in Tajikistan. Although when that effort-- ended up having very little success, they refurbished an air base that then they were not allowed to actually-- use.

And since-- and that was a few years ago. And since then, India hasn't done very much. In part because they kind of felt the sting of this rejection, and in part because they wanna avoid antagonizing Russia. So-- and finally Israel, which has played a surprisingly large role in-- providing security assistance to the region.

And this is consistent with Israel's long-term effort to build security partnerships-- with those Muslim states that are willing to work-- work with it. And Central Asia's particularly important for Israel-- because-- of its proximity to-- to Iran. So-- so it's-- it's quite happy to develop partnerships there. And the existence of a community of immigrants from the r-- region living in Israel has helped to establish contacts and-- and to-- and to some extent to build trust.

It's also helped to, you know, in some cases its led to some fairly corrupt-- activities that have turned into big scandals. But-- but-- nonetheless, that's sort of how the connections have been made. So l-- so-- so that's kind of a very quick overview of a 90 page report of-- lots of details about different countries who they're-- what they're buying and what they're getting and so forth.

Let me turn to come conclusions and recommendations, then we can-- go on to-- to discussion. So overall the external military assistance to Central Asian states is-- I argue is unlikely to have a serious negative impact on regional stability and security in Central Asia. With the end of NATO operations in Afghanistan, the region's decade-long position of prominence on the international arena-- is likely to fade. In its place-- Central Asian states are likely to be increasingly left to their own devices-- with internal instability as the most serious threat that they face.

While external military assistance to Central Asia is likely to decline in the near future, it's not going to disappear. And in this context it's important to ensure that the assistance that is provided is not wasted-- one, and two, helps to improve the security situation in the region.

In particular, steps-- steps will have to be taken to ensure that any such assistance-- does not enhance the ability of internal security forces to harm civilians. And the recommendations-- that I have in the report flow from this-- understanding. So number one, training needs to be emphasized-- over the provision of-- military equipment. Now, this is a lesson that the U.S. government has already learned to some extent-- as it has-- in recent years shifted-- away from equipment donations towards providing training in areas ranging all the way from language instruction on one hand to combat operations-- on the other.

Shifting towards training-- will also help to avoid situations where the equipment that's provided is then used against-- unarmed civilians by local forces-- resulting in embarrassment or worse for the country providing the assistance. And we have-- I think the most prominent example of this that I can recall in recent years was the-- the tear gas canisters in Egypt that had, you know, "Made in the U.S.A." that-- got a lot of attention a couple years ago.

Now, shifting to training is not going to entirely solve the issue of complicity in-- potential complicity in-- in-- in-- repressive activities, since the force, as-- as I mentioned earlier, the forces that are trained through these assistance programs have already been implicated in some cases in human rights violations in Central Asia.

So one way that human security could be improved is by shifting the focus of training programs from the special forces units that have-- that have been the primary focus to policing work. Especially teaching internal security forces how to handle large groups of protestors-- without resorting to excessive violence.

And again, this-- this depends on the country involved-- this-- I-- I'm thinking of Kyrgyzstan as a place where this could it's par-- especially valuable. Uzbekistan, they probably-- don't care so much-- overall on whether-- whether they are-- unintended casualties. Or perhaps they are intended. So, but-- but anyway, that's-- that's kind of-- and I-- and I recognize that that-- you know, as far as the U.S. government is concerned, that is complicated because if the funding is c-- if the assistance funding is coming from the Department of Defense, they're not allowed to-- to-- aid police forces, or have to come through the authorities of the State Department.

But nonetheless, if we're looking at the bigger picture and we're looking come, you know, we're not-- we don't have to be constrained by what-- how the U.S. government operates. We should make recommendations on how the U.S. government should-- should operate. And so that's, I think, along the lines of-- where there might be-- might be-- some-- some benefit.

Second part-- is-- as part of the effort to reduce the smuggling of people, narcotics, and weapons, both the-- U.S. and European security assistance has emphasized border security-- initiatives. And these efforts are-- are very laudable, but they've often focused on technical assistance such as donating scanners or other kinds of detection equipment to secure-- b-- border crossings-- also refurbishing border-- border guard posts and that sort of thing.

Now, such equipment-- may not be so useful when the bulk of the cross border

smuggling in the region is sanctioned-- either by local intermediaries with government ties or by the government officials themselves. So the-- you know, a scanner isn't going to do much good if, you know, everyone knows that it's gonna be turned off whenever the right people are paid off.

So, now training can help to amel-- ameliorate this problem to some extent, but in the end it's not really gonna be solved without breaking the link between smuggling and high level corruption. And that's a problem that goes far beyond, you know, training border guards or-- and the-- and it's really, you know, how to-- how to-- eliminate corruption, as I think that, in some ways the insoluble problem of not onl-- not just this region but many regions.

But assistance providers have to recognize that-- given the local incentive structures-- a lot of-- a lot of the corruption-- reduction initiatives that are in place are not gonna eliminate corruption. And given the nature of local smuggling networks-- providing technical assistance for border security in the present conditions can, in some cases, be a waste of money. And so that just has to be kept in mind when-- when these programs are being-- being-- contemplated.

Now-- a second set of-- of recommendations in the report was-- that coordination among the assistance providing states is necessary if-- if the goal is to improve human security in Central Asia. So the effectiveness of a lot of security assistance is undermined by the perception among donors that other power are providing assistance as part of-- an effort to increase their influence in the region.

So this kinda zero sum nature of competition, which is then encouraged by local leaders-- who play off outside powers against each other in an effort to pre-- preserve their own freedom of action-- and-- in ways that-- Alex Cooley has-- set out in his book and-- and others have as well.

So in the report I suggest starting-- with cooperation in areas of mutual interest, such as information sharing and-- multinational training in counternarcotics, which is a real area where everybody kinda had similar interests. And then that could be expanded as trust increases. Now, given the recent crisis-- in relations between Russia and the U.S., who are the main-- the two main donors-- and-- and-- well, and-- the E.U. countries as well who are in this as well, this type of cooperation is likely to be off the table, unfortunately, for-- for the foreseeable future.

But it still, you know, I think worth keeping in mind-- as something to-- to aspire to-- down the road when-- you know, if-- if and when-- relations are restored and the cooperation can resume. Now-- these-- these recommendations are deliberately quite limited in their-- in their scope.

Security assistance efforts by outside powers are unlikely to lead to major improvements in regional security given the perceptions both within and outside the region that these powers are engaged in this geopolitical competition for influence, rather than a sincere effort to improve-- local conditions.

And furthermore, the likely decline in attention paid to the region by outside powers after the completion of NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan is going to reduce-- the

extent to which outside powers remain interested-- in the region. So other priorities will inevitably make it more difficult for-- to change assistance policies toward the region. So recognizing all of these limitations, the relatively small steps I've outlined I think would help to improve the impact of outside military assistance on-- on human security in Central Asia. So I'll stop there.

MICHAEL HALL:

Okay, excellent. Thank you very much, Dmitry. (APPLAUSE) Okay, Scott, over to you.

SCOTT HORTON:

Thank you. And-- thanks to Dmitry for this paper. I th-- I really think it's-- it's a superb-- product, well worth being read. Sorry we don't have copies out there, but that's-- that's the new policy right? Which is not to waste paper--

MICHAEL HALL:

Right, we're going green.

SCOTT HORTON:

--we want everyone to go out and read it on-- in-- in cyberspace instead. You should invest the time to do that. And I think it really covers all the bases. In fact, it makes my job a little bit more difficult because I was gonna-- I-- I instantly thought-- when Michael first emailed me, "Fine, we'll just go dashing in and address those two old staples of the Open Society Fund."

Which are-- first of all-- the question of leave behinds in-- from the Afghanistan conflict-- and concerns particularly that the Uzbeks are gonna get their hands on-- helicopters and all sorts of legal weaponry, which, we know, of course they-- they dearly wanted.

And-- and-- and secondarily, the-- the issue of training programs. Training programs focused especially on-- special forces units, but also-- police and-- and I'd say paramilitary-- police operations-- and the-- the-- the fact of those programs against the background that includes the events in Andijan, Zhanaozen, Osh and so forth, and the-- risk-- not just of embarrassment to the United States, but going beyond that.

But my problem is that Dmitry actually addressed all those issues. (LAUGHTER) And he addressed them very well. And his prescriptions also I think cover everything that's needed. So that creates my dilemma. So I-- I think I'm gonna resolve my

dilemma by saying okay, all fine and good, Dmitry.

But don't we have a sea change going on right now? And doesn't that really-- provide a reason for us to go back revisit a lotta the questions you raise and ask-- if it's not going to affect them? Now, I think you somewhat preemptively said-- no, not really--

DMITRY GORENBURG:

(UNINTEL) in my notes already. (LAUGHTER)

SCOTT HORTON:

No, not really. But-- but I-- I-- I think it-- it-- and I think that's probably correct, that in the area of security assistance, maybe not. But I think we should go back and we should look at all these things a little bit more consequently. What are the developments I'm talking about? Everybody knows what they are, I guess. No, we're not talking about the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines Flight 370.

No, instead it is-- I-- I think it's-- it's actually two separate sets of events-- that produce-- each of them their own set of concerns for governments in Central Asia. And the first is the events of Maidan, leading to the toppling of the government. Well, let's say-- an extra constitutional-- transfer of power to a new government. (COUGH)

I mean, and-- and a transfer of p-- pow-- power that no matter how friendly one wants to be to the people at Maidan, nevertheless raises pretty serious questions of legitimacy, certainly serious questions of legitimacy that will persist until elections are-- orchestrated-- that can actually-- provide democratic legitimacy for a government in Kiev.

So you have that set. And with-- most Central Asian governments being-- of-- of an autocratic-- nature, not being really democracies, not even trying very hard. I say, but the standout example of c-- exception of-- of Kyrgyzstan-- this presents obvious worries. I mean, worries I can imagine people reading about this in Astana and-- and Almaty thinking about Zhanaozen and what was going on there. And-- and-- as well as other events.

And then we have the second complex of problems, which is-- the Russian-- absorption of-- of Crimea, making it-- an actual part of the territory of the Russian Federation. It (UNINTEL) part a subject of the Federation. Which is, again-- if we look back to what happened in 2008, the summer of 2008, a far more aggressive posture than was taken with Georgia, where-- you had the-- the intervention. But even there, the posture was taken that-- Abkhazia was an independent state, right?

I think one of the things that's going on is that that gambit didn't work very well for Russia. I mean, I think not-- not followed by a lot of people, but followed by scholars of international law and diplomacy. The Russian effort, if you're gonna be an

independent state, you have to-- well, international law provides these definitions.

You have to have a territory. You have to have a government. You have to have a population (the reason why the Vatican really isn't a state, by the way). But you also have to be recognized by other nations. That's a requirement to be a state. And-- so Abkhazia is being created as a state, and Russian diplomats started scurrying around the world, trying to find governments that would recognize Abkhazia. You know, Vanuatu, Nauru.

I mean, and by the way, let's start with the fact that not a single government in Central Asia, not even Tajikistan, was prepared to say, "Yes, we recognize"-- not even Belarus, for that matter, "We recognize-- Abkhazia as an independent state," for obvious pragmatic reasons of their own.

So you had-- an assortment of tiny islands in the Pacific that did so after receiving considerable-- expressions of grace from the Kremlin. And I'd say it was a pretty embarrassing failure. And I think that experience helps us understand exactly why there was a move to a much more aggressive posture with-- with Crimea-- absorbing it directly in. But that also creates-- much more reason to be concerned-- on the part of-- of all the Central Asian governments. And I think we have to view the situation-- in-- in-- between-- Russia and Ukraine right now as a work in progress.

I mean, I would really love to think it's-- it's over now, and there are no more territorial aspirations, but certainly there are clear reasons to be concerned about them. And in fact the way that this has played out, I mean, especially focusing on-- media inside of Russia and how it's been sold to the Russian population (very effectively for the time being, I would say).

It is, I mean, I think-- we have a lot of-- a lot of commentators saying it's exactly like Germany in the 1930s and the Sudetenland-- and I suppose that's true. But-- actually, this is-- this points to a staple of techniques that's been used by imperial powers going back a long time. So, in fact, if you look at the way-- British India expanded, vis-à-vis the princely states in the period between about 1870 and 1890, it's exactly the same techniques over and over again.

Constantly stating that, "Oh, the interests of British citizens or subjects in the principality of what's-its-name-- are being threatened and the government there doesn't seem to be able to control the situation, and the government seems to have fallen into the hands of Hindu fundamentalists, or Muslim fundamentalists," or whatever.

The same sorts of concerns being expressed over and over again, they would always-- precede, by a period of a couple of months, the arrival of British forces into absorb that princely state into the Raj. So it's-- it's sort of a time-honored practice. And I-- I think we see that going on now, in raising obvious questions about the eastern and-- and southern Ukraine. So-- so what does all this mean for-- the Central Asian region?

And I think it means-- it probably means quite a bit more than the events of the summer of 2008 event. And I think there that-- that sent sort of a cold wave through the region, but didn't produce mass shift in orientation towards-- either the west-- or

Russia. But this is gonna be viewed as a far more serious threat. And I think if we look at the region we're gonna have to break the region up.

I mean, by the way, one-- one giveaway, whenever you hear someone running around talking about Central Asia, Central Asia, Central Asia, and characterizing the entire region, you know they don't know anything about the region. Because the instant you start studying it you realize it's impossible in one brushstroke to descr-- to describe this region in-- any way that really matters.

But I think one of the clear dividing lines at the-- at the start is going to be between Kazakhstan and the rest of Central Asia. I mean, I keep thinking back to the-- the phrasing that was used in the Soviet period where, in fact, it was always Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Central Asia was not Kazakhstan, Central Asia was something-- historically, culturally, much closer to Russia. You know, it was Southern Siberia. It was-- included cities where Dostoyevsky lived and wrote for instance, right? (COUGH) Very substantial Russian population, Russian cities. I'm trying to think, if you even go back and look at the his-- at the history of Kazakhstan's-- some of the capitals at some point were Russian cities.

DMITRY GORENBURG:

Bahrenberg (PH).

SCOTT HORTON:

Bahrenberg, exactly. So-- so there's-- there's clearly-- in this-- cultural, historical attitude which is blossoming in-- in Russia today, including in state media and independent media, there's a definitely different-- there's a different attitude towards Kazakhstan from-- from Central Asia. And-- and more of an attitude of it being an almost integral part of Russia, potentially, at least as integral as Crimea, potentially.

And so that's presents an issue. And you have the very substantial Russian populations and the virgin lands in Eastern Kazakhstan and the city of Almaty-- and other areas-- around the country, sort of discreet areas that are sort of ripe for breaking off or reabsorption. And I think this is gonna present a real challenge-- for Kazakhstan leaders.

Now, I think the same sort of concerns, we could even say maybe-- is it wrong? Maybe. I don't like to say positive things about the government in Ashgabat, but on the other hand, they-- they-- they seem to have saw very early on, in the 1990s even, that having a large Russian population on your territory might raise all sorts of problems. I think the Uzbeks, same issue, same problems, notwithstanding Karimov married to a Russian, certainly-- a Russian speaker, culturally quite Russian.

Nevertheless under his government, also, there are policies pursued that, sometimes subtly and sometimes not so subtly, disadvantaged Russians and certainly encouraged them, sometimes quite aggressively, to depart for their homeland. So the

result of-- of that-- those programs was that the Russian population in both of those nations was dramatically reduced. So that sort of vulnerability does-- does not exist.

But it also seems to me if we look at this from the perspective of Moscow, we come to a question of, you know, how would Russia want to assert its-- its interests in this region? And let's assume that we're even dealing with a Russia with imperial or neo imperial aspirations-- that that's the correct characterization-- of-- of Putin's Kremlin.

It seems to me still quite a stretch to think that they would want to aspire to actual control and reabsorption of Central Asia following the old Soviet distinction as opposed to potentially Kazakhstan. And I think the one clear sign of that is if we think back to the Osh events, I'm-- I'm blanking on the year now. When were the last Osh events--

DMITRY GORENBURG:

2010.

SCOTT HORTON:

2010, of course, right in the wake of the-- of the Second Revolution-- of 2010, where they were-- where there was even an appeal from Bishkek for support, for Russian troops, for Russian peacekeepers. The answer from Moscow was no. And I think that was quite a considered answer. I-- I think, you know, that there was a sense that this was not a desirable way for Moscow to exercise its control.

In fact, instead I would say probably the desirable model for control would be something like what we say in Dushanbe today-- which is an independent-- ostensibly independent state which, nevertheless, is effectively a protectorate-- of-- of Russia-- that subjects itself on many, many different areas but starting the list with security issues to-- to consultation-- and agreement with the Kremlin. I think that most likely is the model.

And then what does this mean for-- U.S. posture-- U.S. cooperation? I mean, there I think Dmitry's absolutely right that we're s-- gonna see a shift in which-- the priority of security assistance drops precipitously. I don't see that these events are gonna cause a change in that. On the other hand, I think it probably is going to cause a ratcheting up of pressure-- on the Central Asian states and Kazakhstan to limit their dealings with-- the American-- security apparatus.

You know, most vehemently in opposition-- to having an installation of any sort. But I think also in other forms of cooperation, you know, listening posts and intelligence cooperation. All sorts of other things-- of that sort. I think Moscow's likely to be far more vigorous-- in the near future-- in opposing those things, and-- figuring out exactly-- what's going on. So I-- I think-- I think I s-- I expect them to be successful in that and-- to chill those relationships.

But I-- it's-- it seems to me, coming out of all that too, we've got another really very fundamental question. And that is-- the experiment of Central Asia as a set of independent states. And the-- the fundamental question that hangs over this region is, are these states viable? And in fact, you know, when I read Dmitry's paper, that was in the back of my mind. You know, is he demonstrating that, in terms of the way they deal with their own security, it's one of the most fundamental issues of any state, are they dealing in a way that really moves them to-- themselves towards political viability? Viability of states in the future?

And-- and what the answer I extract from that paper is, generally, no. I mean, maybe the exception is Kazakhstan, maybe. I mean, Kazakhstan really-- you have to give them credit. There are lots of problems with the Kazakh state, but the Kazakh state does seem to behave very smartly in terms of construction of the basic edifice of a state-- doing it in a sort of programmatic, policy-driven way, doing it with a reasonable allocation of money.

And-- and I think in that sense, the way they pursue defense policy is not much different from the way they pursued monetary policy. That is to say, it's much smarter than any of the other-- states of-- of the region. But, you know, one of the fundamental questions for the region is about the region.

That's something you actually don't talk about so much in your paper. It wasn't commissioned either, maybe it should've been. And-- and that is, can-- can the states of this region survive without working together with one another? And there, I mean, and the answer seems to be they don't really work together in any way.

I mean, not economically, but not even in the area of security when there's obvious-- every obvious reason for them to try to work together effectively. So I think that-- that, to me, is sort of the final question. You know, can these states survive? And it seems to me we've got one state that does respectably, and-- and then another group that is-- there are highly dysfunctional states. Although each dysfunctional in its own unique way. So-- but I think I'll-- I'll end it with that and turn it back to Dmitry and see what responses you have.

MICHAEL HALL:

Great. Yeah, thanks Scott. So yeah, Dmitry, just if-- if I can get-- maybe we can get a brief response from you on-- on a couple of points. First of all, you did allude to the Ukrainian events in your-- in your comments, and obviously your paper was written well in advance of-- of these latest events.

But what-- do you see the sort of re-- this-- this very fundamental realignment taking place? And what implications beyond-- increased-- difficulties for cooperation between U.S. and Russia, what implications do you see-- for-- for-- the engagement of Russia and the U.S. in-- in security in the region? And then-- secondly I guess the-- Scott also raised a very provocative question on the viability issue. I'm wondering, so maybe-- maybe just limit it to those two big points, and then-- 'cause I do wanna

open it up for-- for broader-- discussion.

DMITRY GORENBURG:

On the-- so on the first point, I think th-- you know, the $64,000 question for everybody is, what-- so-- so Putin clearly has some map of what his ideal Russia looks like. And what we don't know is what it is, right? So clearly-- you know, if you look-- if we look to the-- in-- in the western direction, clearly it includes more of Ukraine than just Crimea-- but probably not all of Ukraine.

So-- so that's-- you know-- we don't know. Does it include the Baltic states? It probably does in an ideal universe, but he recognizes the limitations. When we look at Central Asia, I-- I don't know. I don't-- I'm not sure it includes any of them, right? Even kaz-- even northern Kazakhstan. Second-- so-- the p-- Putin is much more of an opportunist than a strategic thinker I think. So unless Kazakhstan collapses in some unexpected way, at least to me unexpected way, I don't think he's really gonna have the opportunity to-- you know, do a Crimea scenario in northern Kazakhstan even if he wanted to.

That seems to me, you know, that's sort of how I interpret Crimea, is that it's-- he may have wanted to include Crimea one way or another for a long time, but it wasn't like he had a plan to do this. And-- but when events kinda spiraled out of control and Yanukovych was unexpectedly f-- overthrown, he sort of took advantage of the weakness of the-- of the new-- the weakness in-- of the new regime and the chaos in Ukraine to-- to-- to-- to go ahead and do this.

So what does this all mean-- for Central Asia? I think that in terms of, you know, I don't think there's a major threat at least for the-- in the foreseeable future of, you know, boundary changes coming, you know-- from-- from Russia-- in Central Asia. I agree with you on the-- you know, that they're likely to-- there's likely to be more pressure to-- exclude the U.S. from-- from the region.

Although I think there's gonna be sev-- at least some of the states in the region are going to resist that. I think both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are going to try to, even more than they have so far, try to keep their options open. Which will include trying to reach out the U.S., but will also probably include trying to reach out as much as they can to China as well. So-- well, maybe I'll stop there on that point.

And then the-- the other point was on-- on-- viability. I guess there's-- there's that question of what is-- what is survive-- what does state survival mean, right? What does viability mean? These-- these states have been more or less dysfunctional for, you know, over two decades now. There are lots of, in the world, there are lots of states that have been-- persevering despite being even more dysfunctional for even longer. Right?

There are actually fairly few examples over the l-- in the-- in the, say, you know, the post-colonial period, of complete state failure. You know, s-- Somalia-- Zaire, Congo to-- to a greater or lesser extent-- Afghanistan at various points, now possibly Syria.

But-- probably some others I'm forgetting, but-- but not a lot, given the number of states and the number of really weak and dysfunctional states.

So I think that they can muddle along (LAUGH) for quite a while. The-- the risk of, you know, conflicts among the states remains still, you know, I-- the whole, you know, and the here, I mean, maybe we're ranging kind of far beyond our topic here. But-- but the whole water-- conflict, you know, the-- the-- you know, the weak states provide the water to the slightly stronger. Uzbekistan, right? And that creates tension that I think has been simmering for a long time and could at some point, depending on how things develop, lead to a conflict.

So I think that that, you know, the-- we've-- we've been wrong already at least on one occasion where I think a lotta people thought that any-- regime transition in Turkmenistan would lead to-- chaos and instability, and that didn't happen. So-- which l-- makes me cautious about predicting similar-- chaos and instability in the eventual-- regime transition to come in Uzbekistan.

But at the same time it could happen, right? There could be elite, you know, elite fight-- and it may be that a lot depends on how Karimov dies, right? If it's sudden then maybe somebody can jump in, and whereas if he's sort of weak and incapacitated for a while there's more opportunities for infighting. I don't know. But that's-- that's the kinds of things that I would be more concerned about than-- than sort of-- than the-- the viability as-- as such. So I'll-- I'll stop there and maybe we can have some questions.

MICHAEL HALL:

Okay, great. We have-- just-- just over half an-- just under half an hour remaining. So I-- I will-- take questions. I would encourage people, when you're asking a question, please-- do identify yourself. So I-- I see one, two-- I'll take this in groups of three. So one in the back-- two right here in the front, and three right over there.

SANJAY PATEL:

Hi, my name is Sanjay Patel. I work with the public health program here at OSF. Scott, I like the way you sort of identified the fact that Central Asia as a region doesn't necessarily mean much, particularly given how diverse the countries are. So my question is specifically focused on Kyrgyzstan, but I'm sure it could apply elsewhere.

But we'll focus on Kyrgyzstan because it's a country I know better than the others in the region. So on this point of viability versus legitimacy-- I wanted to pick up on a point, Dmitry, that you mentioned in terms of corruption being, like, one of the key elements in-- in the legitimacy of this state. So basically my question links to Georgia.

In 2004 with the Rose Revolution, because the police were so identified as a criminal enterprise, essentially, one of the major-- sort of platforms for reform was police

reform. And they essentially fired-- most of their police and then rehired them with better pay. That has proven to have resulted in diminished corruption amongst the police within Georgia.

I'm curious, with a small, relatively smaller state like Kyrgyzstan, whether something like that would be feasible. And if so, what would have to happen for that particular entity, which really does speak to both the viability of the state and the legitimacy of the state, if the police-- and the political apparatus are so corrupt that no one really respects them as an institution-- cleansing it would require a significant change-- in the way business is done. So I'm just curious if you could-- comment on that.

MICHAEL HALL:

Okay. So I'll take the questions first then-- then get, you know--

QUESTION:

I wanted to talk about the Eurasian-- Union, Putin's concept of the Eurasian Union. He had-- Belarus and Ukraine and Kazakhstan in that union. Now, how far east is that union going to go in his mind? I guess my question is-- will it include the Central-- Asian-- republics? Or-- and as far as-- Ukraine is concerned, will-- can Ukraine actually belong-- to have an eastern partnership with the E.U. and also belong to this eur-- Eurasian-- Union that Putin wants to set up?

MICHAEL HALL:

And sir?

NICHOLAS ZARINA:

Nicholas Zarina (PH). I'm a lawyer and-- Scott Horton and I were part of a team that went to-- Central Asia years ago. Turkey was mentioned--

(SCOTT HORTON: UNINTEL)

NICHOLAS ZARINA:

--Turkey has certain advantages because of the linguistic ties with-- the-- different Stans. And-- Turkey has also been the traditional enemy of Russia. What do you suppose-- lies-- in the future with-- with regard to any competition between Russia and Turkey in Central Asia?

MICHAEL HALL:

Okay. Okay, so I guess-- Dmitry, I'll give-- I'll give you the first-- first go at the three questions. And so-- just to-- to summarize, the question about police reform, is a Georgian approach applicable in Kyrgyzstan? What-- what-- what fate for the Eurasian Union now and-- and also Ukraine's place in that? And then Turkey/Russia-- relations when it comes to the region?

DMITRY GORENBURG:

Well-- on the police forces, I think this is probably too far outside of my area of expertise, since I-- both in term-- I-- I, you know, I'm more focused on the region from looking at flows coming into the region rather than what's going on in the region, and more on the military than-- than the police.

So-- so I-- I'm not sure I know-- I-- I have a good answer for what exactly would be involved or why, you know, some countries can do this effectively and not others. So I think I'll-- I'll-- I'll refrain from-- I don't know if Scott has-- has an answer. On the-- on the Eurasian Union, well-- I think Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have both-- have both sort of sought to-- get in and have-- so far been kind of--

SCOTT HORTON:

Standoffish.

DMITRY GORENBURG:

Yeah. But the r-- the Russians have been standoffish, you mean. And-- I'm not sure if that-- that has to do with the-- the recognition that these are not-- the most-- the-- the most economically viable-- countries. So I think that that sort of speaks a little bit to what I was saying about where-- Putin's mental map of integration-- you know, where-- where the limits are.

It may be that they don't-- he's not that interested in too much integration-- there, recognizing that it would be more of a drain and a burden than-- than a benefit-- for Russia. As for whether Ukraine can be in both, well-- that was-- if it could then we wouldn't have had this whole mess. (LAUGHTER) That-- that part of the whole-- and I-- I-- I'm not an economist, so I don't know if this was-- there are actually-- hard constraints that say you c-- that-- because of the-- I imagine that there are-- because there are different rules in the different customs unions it would probably difficult.

But regardless of that, the E.U. very clearly said, "We can't do that." So-- so from-- from that point of view that was-- that was an option foreclosed, even if-- even if it-- there was some way to make it viable. And finally on-- on Turkey-- it's-- you know, that relationship has been very interesting in recent-- Turkey/Russia have had--

Turkey and Russia have had a somewhat cooperative relationship over the last few years.

But now we're seeing-- Turkey's being very kind of-- making some very strong statements-- defending Crimean Tatars, for example. And-- clearly-- the-- the sort of cultural-- affinities or perhaps to put it another way, the dom-- the-- the Crimean Tatar domestic constituency within Turkey, right, is putting enough pressure on Erdogan. So for-- for-- for-- one reason or another-- those kinds of-- the--

SCOTT HORTON:

Factors.

DMITRY GORENBURG:

--factors are overriding whatever economic-- cooperation benefits Turkey-- had-- had been focused on previously. So, I mean, so far it hasn't gone beyond rhetoric, and rhetoric, you know, is relatively easy-- compared to-- you know, cutting off, you know, energy cooperation.

But it could develop. It could develop. And-- and Turkey-- tur-- as far as Central Asia itself, Turkey has been-- you know, there was-- there were great hopes in the early '90s of, you know, the great-- you know, the big brother kind of approach, which-- led to disappointment-- in-- in Turkey. And after that there were--

SCOTT HORTON:

And in Central Asia.

DMITRY GORENBURG:

Yeah, yeah. Well, in different ways, right? But yes. And-- I think after that there was-- they were much more circumspect in their-- and-- so but there-- there's a lot of, you know-- rather than grand goals and-- pronouncements, it's much more kind of practicality. Are-- Turkish construction companies dominate in a lot of Central Asia. Certainly-- certainly in-- you know, the marb-- the marble palaces of Ashgabat, right? And elsewhere in Turkmenistan.

And-- and so I think that that kinda practical cooperation is likely to continue. And-- prevent-- it doesn't really-- there's not necessarily c-- competing with Russia, it's more of-- it's-- it's complimentary in some ways, again, with Russia. It's-- it's-- it's, you know, certain aspects of economic, you know, Turkeys not as-- as engaged on the security side as it were before, whereas they're more engaged maybe on the economic side.

MICHAEL HALL:

Scott, anything you wanted to add?

SCOTT HORTON:

I'll-- I'll pick up the-- the first question about police. But let me just back up and say, you know, of course it starts with the corruption issue as you noted. And-- and it seems to me that this is-- this is actually one of the huge issues with Ukraine too that hasn't gotten as much analytical attention as it deserves.

'Cause I think what-- one of the things that we saw in Ukraine was the incredible ability of effective corruption-- allegations to delegitimize and bring down a government. It was the number one tool that was used against Yanukovych. And-- and I have a very clear sense right now, though I think a lot of the governments involved don't want this to be reported or in the papers, I have a sneaking suspicion it's going to be soon, the U.S., the Austrians, the Swiss, the Hungarians are working very closely right now with the new government in Kiev, trying to nail this down.

I mean, there is a thesis that-- you know, it's not just Yanukovych, it's the whole RosUkrEnergo deal-- Firtash, this-- Hungarian businessman who was arrested, by the way, recently in Austria, is involved. And these were all used-- this was used as a tool by Moscow to try to destabilize, corrupt, and entangle-- Ukrainian politicians. And I think there's a big effort going on right now to get to the bottom of it.

One of the problems that goes with-- these revolutions, though, especially ones where the people are shot-- is-- a delegitimizing of the police, right? And I think that happened in Kyrgyzstan in spades. I mean, I have to say, when I go there, just driving around the streets of Bishkek-- I am scared witless sometimes by the lack of respect-- of the people to just traffic rules. They just don't care anymore. Correct me if you think I'm wrong--

DMITRY GORENBURG:

Oh no. (LAUGH)

SCOTT HORTON:

--but I mean, I-- to me it's just like-- and this wasn't the way bef-- way things were before the revolution. And I think a lotta that is driven by lack of respect of the police. And that's one of the huge institutional problems of this third Kyrgyz Republic. And I think they urgently need to do something to shore up-- the respect and the authority of the police. And I think the Georgians had a good program. So I think it's-- it's a plausible way for them to proceed. But in any event, they have-- they-- they have a clear problem, and the Georgians had that same problem too.

The Eurasian Union issue, I-- you know, Dmitry's absolutely right about that. I mean, this is one of the things that dr-- it was maybe the single most important issue that drove-- the Maidan demonstrations, is the perception of elites in Ukraine. I'm talking about businesspeople, bankers, lawyers-- in Kiev, that they were at a crossroads right now.

The country was either going to proceed towards-- a closening with the European Union or it was going to do this deal with Russia with the Eurasian Union that would rule out further-- proximity to Europe. And I think in the view of most of these people, even Russian speakers, that was not a wise decision. And I think that's-- that's one thing that really drove it.

And I think the-- the question about Turkey I think is also very, very interesting. You know, if you read-- you read Turkish press and you read remarks coming from Turkish-- politicians, it is getting, you know, built up, being heated. We're also sort of in the pre-election mode there and we've got a prime minister trying to distract from other matters. But yeah, I-- I mean, I think I see, you know, some possibility of Turkey becoming more assertive. But, you know, I mean, it's a regional power at most. It's not gonna do a lot. But economic interests are very, very strong with Ukraine in particular.

MICHAEL HALL:

Okay, thanks. So-- further round of questions. So one, two. Two for now. Okay, three, okay, three.

* * *TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: The next speaker's accent is difficult at times.* * *

QUESTION:

First of all, a little statement. I am really surprised how well you know Russia. Not only know, you really understand Russia. You feel Russia. I left this country 19 years ago, and when they took (UNINTEL) who came from Russia. I understand, then don't understand. Then you said (UNINTEL). Because it's not just to get information.

But it's a way, I always left my heart there. When I read, for example, Remnick, I jump when he can compare Tarkovsky to Brodsky, court to courts, and make comparison that some was the same. Now my question. I believe that crisis for America and for Russia. Russia it seems to me only benefit first time maybe, top and bottom of country really united, really united. A position which always was a joke, very big. Now it's nothing in Russia.

Putin tremendously benefit from the situation in every possible way. And what America lost, well, maybe several billions dollars, but Russia would took from America and would not invest in America. Not a big deal. But America would tremendously benefit from real enemy right now. After all confusion in Afghanistan

and Iraq, medical care, political-- accusation of each other, now they have a real business to do to deal with. So it seems to me two side just benefit from situation.

ELISE GUILIANO:

Thanks. Elise Guiliano, I teach politics at Columbia-- Russian politics. My question is-- is about existing ties between m-- Russia-- and maybe Kazakhstan and maybe Uzbekistan. Because if we think about this current-- conflict in the new imperial framework in Russian motivation, then we're all talking about, you know, is Kazakhstan afraid of Russia making the same kind of move into Russia? And that's important to discuss.

But if we think about Russia's behavior with Crimea as a kind of kneejerk response to losing Ukraine and kind of-- Putin's taking revenge on the affront of losing influence in such an important country, we could imagine that Putin is very concerned not to lose influence in Kazakhstan, and so maybe wanna work with-- or in Uzbekistan may wanna work with those countries to prevent a similar opposition from forming or gaining popularity in those countries.

So I'm wondering if, you know, you talked a little bit about the ways in which Russia works-- to prevent-- the Islamist opposition there from gaining ground. I wonder if there's existing relationships or exiting (UNINTEL) that Russia could turn now toward really trying to prevent-- an opposition from emerging, well, the opposition that exists to a certain degree in Kazakhstan, from gaining strength or from-- working together with a nationalist opposition and so may try to head off the growth of-- a popular movement to maybe overthrow or expose corruption or whatever you have.

So-- is there-- do you-- could you see a way in which Putin may say, "I'm gonna direct resources or aid or training to prevent that kind of opposition from emerging"? And, you know, and if so, like, what are the-- in what-- what exists now that he could easily shift-- toward that kind of-- policy?

MICHAEL HALL:

And the third?

QUESTION:

To what extent-- is the Uyghur situation in China-- influencing China's perception of the region, if at all?

MICHAEL HALL:

Great. Great. Okay, so again, three questions. So opportunities within the crisis--

between the-- the U.S. and-- and Russia at this point. The second, so whether or not--

DMITRY GORENBURG:

Or is it a crisis?

MICHAEL HALL:

Or is it a crisis, right. Crisis or opportunity, I guess, or both. The question again about whether or not Russia-- may direct its resources to-- to preventing the emergence of opposition within-- the region particularly in Kazakhstan. And so Uyghur-- issue in China's policy.

DMITRY GORENBURG:

Okay. It is a crisis, and the reason why is because it's much broader than just the U.S. and Russia. For-- I agree with you on the-- the Russia, you know, the-- the-- this union of top and bottom and-- and so forth. I'm not convinced that it's gonna last very long, because this-- the-- the glory of-- throwing off the humiliation of the breakup of the Soviet Union will last for a bit.

But if-- the economy really-- gets bad, people will, you know, the glory will fade and the-- economic pain will-- will be-- will-- will come to the forefront. Much as-- everyone in Serbia united around Milosevic-- when the-- NATO was bombing Serbia, but that didn't prevent him from being-- tossed out through popular protests just-- a year or two later.

So-- so that's on the-- on the Russian side, I think-- you know-- Putin is kinda gambling with high stakes on this. And the danger is that having seen the effect p-- of popular support for this kind of adventure-- would he do something like this in the future if his-- support starts to decline? You know, do it somewhere else if the opportunity presents itself? So that-- that's-- that's-- a danger.

For the U.S.-- I think, you know, it's all fine to have a rhetoric about a real enemy or whatever, but-- it's-- a confrontation with-- with Russia does not actually help U.S. Security in any way. U.S.-- you know, depending on how this plays out-- it, you know, if it's-- if there's a continued serious confrontation, that, you know-- having two countries with-- the largest nuclear weapons arsenals, you know, in confrontation is not a good thing for-- for-- for security.

Even if it doesn't-- it distracts from-- the-- the-- some-- ish-- you know, where-- where the-- the issues that the U.S. was starting to focus on-- going forward, especially, you know, the rise of China, right? And we've already been distracted from the rise of China once-- by-- by Islamic terrorism.

If you-- people have kind of forgotten that the Bush foreign policy for the first six months of his term was all about focusing on China, and then that got-- that got-- kinda got derailed. And now Obama was also pivoting to Asia and so forth. So-- so that I think is something also to keep in mind.

As far as the larger crisis that-- the-- the real crisis here is the threat to-- well, to-- to part-- twofold. One-- to the threat to the whole notion of territorial integrity, right? I mean, this is-- a norm in international law that has, I think, done a lot for reducing conflict and-- and maintaining stability. And-- and to the extent that that is weakened is not a good thing.

And two, the way it's been weakened by-- this-- the-- the scariest part of Putin's speech for me-- for-- for the parliament was when he was talking about protecting ethnic Russians-- abroad. Because as we've discussed, there's many-- ethnic Russians all over the place that could be protect-- if-- if-- if circumstances arise.

And what's more, there are lots of other people all over the world that could be protected by their neighbors of, you know, Chinese and Malaysia. Or-- you know, all sorts of ethnic minorities in different parts of af-- Africa belonging to neighboring states supposedly. And-- Hungarians in Romania. I mean, there's just-- the examples are infinite.

And-- and that, again, that-- that idea-- and it turns all those people into a potential fifth column, right? That-- that-- even if nobody actually does anything, the governments of the countries where they live could start viewing them with distrust. And that-- and that is-- could be v-- have very negative s-- effects on-- on human security.

Elise's question on-- I think they've already been doing-- doing this all along. I-- I-- I'm not sure if-- I didn't mean to-- to imply-- what I-- what I was trying to say is that the rhetoric is about protecting these-- these states from-- Islamic terror. They-- they've-- every-- they-- that is a worry for them. I-- I'm not saying that they-- that's-- just-- just a fig leaf. But it's always been a second part where-- maintaining-- regime stability-- against internal domestic opposition.

I mean, that's why we see all of the-- Uzbek efforts to-- you know, repress anyone who expresses opposition and brand them an-- you know, an Islamic terrorism-- terrorist while they're at it, whether or not they have any inclinations to that. So think the-- the-- the-- the-- cooperation with security services is already there. I don't know specifically, Uzbekistan is perhaps the most-- fraught relationship, but I'm sure that, you know, even as there are-- t-- ebbs and flows, there's still a level of cooperation there as well. But-- in the other countries I think it's much closer. Okay, and finally-- Uyghurs. China's-- I mean, this-- this is one of the reasons that China's been so-- resistant to endorsing this move, I think, is that Uyghurs, Tibetans--

SCOTT HORTON:

Taiwan.

DMITRY GORENBURG:

Taiwan. I really thought that-- the ini-- my initial thought after it was clear that Russian troops-- without insignia were in Crimea was that they were going to create a Taiwan. Put Yanukovych in Crimea and have-- you know, a one Ukraine policy. But-- that's not the direction (LAUGHTER) they went in. But yeah, I think China's very cautious about any kind of-- weakening of this n-- norm of-- territorial integrity. In part because of minorities in China, and also-- and because of China's-- Chinese minorities in other countries.

MICHAEL HALL:

Okay, Scott, anything you wanted to--

SCOTT HORTON:

Well, I-- I just come back to the question of crisis, you know. I mean, I think it's a fair question. Is this a crisis? What kind of crisis? It is, right now, I think a minor crisis. Is it a U.S./Russia crisis? There's a tendency in certain parts of the media and certain political people to play it and pitch it that way.

That seems to me fundamentally wrong in many different ways. I mean, you know-- it is-- the core-- the core of the crisis is, you know, the decisionmaking rights of people in Ukraine, this being a highly fragmented state. And it seems to me that responsible political management would-- would aim at downplaying the possibility of broader international crisis, and particularly a militarization of the crisis, which is highly undesirable.

And I think if you look at what Merkel has said, what Obama has said-- I think there's-- there's pretty-- a pretty broad consensus on the Western side that that, you know, it shouldn't be allowed to turned into that-- that sort of crisis. But in the end it's also something that is in the course of development.

And I think-- you know, we're there to be mobilization of Russian troops in-- in-- the territory of Ukraine beyond-- Crimea, I mean, that would transform it-- considerably. It would become-- much, much more acute-- at that point. But I think there's still a very firm resolve on the Western side that this is not gonna be dealt with on a military level. And I think that's-- that's a very wise-- approach to things.

With respect to Kazakhstan, I think, you know, you asked the obvious question. But I think if you look very closely at Kazakhstan and politics over the last ten years-- you know, Russia plays smart, you know-- peripheral imperial interest politics. They've always done that. They've always had favorites who are in the, let's say favorite elite figures within Kazakhstan who are not necessarily on the friendliest terms-- with the president.

And then more, if you look at every single other country it's the same thing. I mean,

even in Tajikistan where there's a government in place which is-- has the closest possible relationship, nevertheless they absolutely shield and protect some of his major opposition figures in-- in Moscow. And that has, you know, obvious advantages to them. By the way, you know, the U.S. does the same thing. It's smart politics to do that. But I think, you know, in light of what's happened in Ukraine, it may take on-- a different aspect in the future.

And-- and finally I think-- Uyghur-- I really-- I'm wondering, looking at what's going on in China right now in light of this-- this Kunming-- slashing incident-- that's being-- that's being really hyped in China. The government is playing it up. And I'm wondering if this is not going to lead to-- a more aggressive posture on-- Chinese-- on the Chinese side for domestic security purposes-- focusing on repression and control of Uyghur activists.

And if-- if so, and I suspect that is likely right now, although I don't see exactly how it's gonna unfold, but one thing I think that is predictable is going to be a clampdown on Uyghurs-- and-- and the Central Asia-- abroad, but especially in the Central Asia region. So that'll be the major ask of the Chinese in dealing with these governments.

MICHAEL HALL:

All right. On-- on that-- uplifting note, we-- (LAUGHTER) we are actually at the end of our allotted time here. So I-- I think-- I think that Scott and Dmitry can hang around for a few more minutes if people have other questions. But first of all, I do want to take the opportunity to thank them both. Dmitry for this (APPLAUSE) outstanding paper-- and Scott for finding the time to come down and-- and share your thoughts with us. Thank you everybody.

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *