



EURASIA SECURITY WATCH

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Military Innovation; Caucasus; Central Asia; Middle East

KAZAKHSTAN UNVEILS NEW MILITARY STRATEGY

The government of Nursultan Nazarbayev in Astana is shifting its strategic posture. In late March, the former Soviet Republic issued a new military doctrine outlining a fresh set of strategic priorities. Kazakhstan "favors the creation of a system of international relations minimizing the significance of military force," the revamped doctrine declares. However, it also emphasizes the need for a transformation of the military, "taking into account the need to counter such asymmetric threats as terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, illegal arms proliferation, and illegal migration." Such an overhaul, the document concludes, is essential in order to strengthen Kazakhstan's position "as a regional leader." (Moscow Agentstvo Voyennykh Novostey, April 9, 2007)

HAMAS' FRACTURED FUTURE

Locked in an escalating political tug-of-war with its secular opposition, the Palestinian Authority's ruling Hamas movement may be experiencing an internal power struggle of its own. Observers say that the terrorist group-turned-government could be splintering into three distinct movements. The organization's traditional leadership, including president Ismail Haniyeh and military commander Khaled Mishaal, is said to be reinventing itself as political "moderates" in order to better monopolize Palestinian politics. A second group of former government ministers – known as the "rejectionists" for their opposition to the concept of a unity government with the ousted Fatah faction – is seeking a return to Hamas' ideological roots. Finally, the most radical faction, which is believed to be behind the abduction last summer of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit, is intent on ratcheting up pressure on Israel through hostage-takings and prisoner exchanges.

Hamas' internal turmoil may not be good news for Israel, however. Authorities in Jerusalem have expressed worries that the split taking place within Hamas will make it harder to deal with the organization. Palestinian sources confirm these fears are well-founded, warning that "Haniyeh is not able to make decisive decisions because of the opposition he is facing from top Hamas leaders and activists." (*Jerusalem Post*, April 12, 2007)

ALIYEV IN THE DOCK

Azerbaijan is coming under fire in Europe for its questionable human rights practices. A recent session of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, commonly known as PACE, identified the former Soviet republic – along with Belarus – as a place where "human rights and democratic principles are abused." Specifically, the PACE inquiry slammed the government of Azeri president Ilham Aliyev for exerting widespread pressure on human rights activists, non-governmental organizations, and journalists. The panel concluded that there currently is no possibility for a peaceful change of power in Azerbaijan, an important characteristic shared by functioning democracies. (Moscow Regnum, April 19, 2007)

ABU DHABI AND THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF DECLINE

The United Arab Emirates is seeking to develop a "comprehensive policy" to correct the demographic imbalance that dominates the Gulf nation. Currently, natives make up just one-fifth of the country's 4.5 million-person population, with the rest comprised of foreign laborers. The new strategy, recently unveiled by the government of Prime Minister Muhammad bin Rashid al-Maktum, will move beyond education, once seen as the dominant method by which to re-nationalize the country's workplace, to include more "radical" solutions – such as greater organization in the labor market and new curbs on illegal and marginal laborers. (Agence France Presse, April 18, 2007)