



## EURASIA SECURITY WATCH

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of  
Security in the Post-Soviet Space

# Eurasia Security Watch: No. 359

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**Related Categories:** Central Asia; Russia

### MIXED DEMOGRAPHY IN THE POST SOVIET SPACE

During the decades of the Cold War, it was well known that the Soviet Union labored under deeply adverse demographic conditions, and not much has changed in the post-Cold War era. A significant portion of the FSU still faces major population decline and negative fertility. But at least one part of the "post-Soviet space" is faring comparatively better. A new study by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty notes that while many parts of the former USSR (including Ukraine, Russia and the Baltic states) have suffered a "staggering" decline in population since the Soviet collapse, signs of a rebound are visible in Central Asia and at least part of the South Caucasus.

For example, while Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and the Baltic States have experienced an overall constriction of their national populations, those of all five Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan have improved considerably since the breakup of the USSR. The trend, the study notes, is attributable to "strong fertility" - with all five Central Asian states and Azerbaijan charting fertility rates above the 2.1 live births per death required for "replenishment." As a result, the study concludes, "[o]nly Central Asia and Azerbaijan will weather the demographic storm affecting the rest of the former Soviet Union." (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty August 2016)

### A TURKISH-AZERI ENTENTE?

Are Turkey and Azerbaijan drawing closer together? Conflicting reports from the region suggest that a military rapprochement between Baku and Ankara may be in the works. Azeri President Ilham Aliyev is expected in coming days to approve a new ordinance authorizing Turkey's military to take control of a number of buildings and strategic sites near the town of Gizil Sherg. That, at least, is the story being reported by Turkish media. But Baku has denied that it authorized any such expanded military presence, above and beyond the 60-70 Turkish soldiers already stationed in the former Soviet republic. (Istanbul *Sabah*, July 21, 2016; *Eurasianet*, July 21, 2016)

### CENTRAL ASIA'S SURVEILLANCE STATES

The Central Asian republics, in particular Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, appear to be leveraging Western cyber tools to expand monitoring and surveillance of their domestic populations. Both Astana and Tashkent are said to have expanded their use of "lawful intercept" capabilities that are readily available on the open market to better track political opposition and dissent within their borders. Those tracked by these systems, in turn, have been targeted by authorities, resulting in instances of "arbitrary detention, forced labor, and torture." (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 3, 2016)

### RUSSIA'S NEW SILK ROAD

The Russian government is moving ahead with plans for a new regional transportation and trade corridor spanning Eurasia. The North-South International Transport Corridor (ITC) was one of the main topics of discussion at the recent trilateral summit between Azerbaijan, Iran and Russia held in Baku. The long-planned conduit is a maritime, rail and road route designed "to connect the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea and beyond to North and Western Europe via the Russian Federation," Russian news agencies report. (Moscow *Sputnik*, August 17, 2016)

[EDITORS' NOTE: While the Corridor is officially being championed as an alternative to the Suez Canal, there is reason to believe that Moscow is competing with a different regional infrastructure project. While envisioned as far back as the year 2000, planning for the ITC appears to have accelerated in recent months in response to China's promotion of its extensive "One Belt, One Road" initiative.]

### JERUSALEM, ASTANA TIGHTEN TIES

The government of Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev is expanding its military ties to Israel. In recent days, an official visit to Israel by Kazakh Defense Minister Imangali Tasmagambetov yielded an agreement for the joint production of unmanned aerial vehicles. As part of the arrangement, the drones will be produced in Kazakhstan using Israeli technology. The deal comes ahead of a planned state visit to the Central Asian state by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in what is being widely regarded as a significant expansion of bilateral relations between the two countries. (Anadolu Agensi, August 23, 2016)