

Conference Summary

Tuesday March 27, 2012

**Prospects for Prosperity in the Caspian Basin:
Twenty Years of Diplomatic Relations with the U.S.****8.30am-9.00am: Registration****9.00am: Introductions**

Janusz Bugajski (Senior Fellow, CSIS) opened the biannual conference by presenting three areas to be addressed by the speakers: accomplishments over the past 20 years since diplomatic relations were established between Washington and the Caspian Basin states and objectives for future cooperation; economic reforms and development of business in the post-Communist world; and the role of energy extraction and transportation across the region in developing local economies and fostering trans-regional cooperation between Europe and Asia, and the U.S.

9.10-9.30am: Keynote Address

Amb. **Ross Wilson** (Director, Atlantic Council) presented keynote opening address by summarizing U.S. policy accomplishments in the Caspian Basin region since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Shortly after the formation of new regional states, the U.S. established diplomatic relations and launched several assistance programs for tackling food and medicine shortages, creating democratic and pluralistic institutions and removing problematic Soviet weaponry. The U.S. priority in the region was to establish good bilateral relations, foster democratization and development, and prevent the emergence of any hostility towards the U.S. In addition, the U.S. actively engaged in the development of Caspian energy which was seen as a vital resource for strengthening economies, development and decreasing poverty, as well as a vital tool to prevent Iran from becoming a major energy exporter in the region.

Amb. Wilson concluded by noting that the current phase of Caspian energy development lies primarily in the natural gas sector, and stressed the importance of multiplying the number of pipelines. Also, regional countries have to translate their energy profits into successful economic and social development and prosperity. They have to reduce the state's role in the energy sector, strengthen the rule of law, fight corruption, liberalize trade and develop transport infrastructure. Finally, in order to remain in the region after 2014, U.S. policy will have to pivot. The agenda could be a "negative" one - reducing poverty or dealing with the consequences of poverty, or "positive" - fostering business development and building participatory societies connected to the rest of the world.

9.30-11.00am: Panel One: Twenty Years of Diplomatic RelationsModerator: **Janusz Bugajski**, CSIS

Alex Vatanka (Scholar, Middle East Institute) focused on whether Iran is a spoiler when it comes to the Caspian region. He said that in the last twenty years, Iran was not a spoiler but rather an angry neighbor. It badly wanted to be a pivotal player, but could not participate and eventually failed to stop other regional countries from developing their own energy projects. Iran's reliance on Russia to help it achieve its major goals was a mistake. Instead, Iran should have followed its history and constitution, which prioritize the country's relations with its neighbors and Muslim states. Iran should have invested more in its relations with the Caspian states and should have become a greater player, instead of giving the lead to Russia. The Iranian government was incompetent in its diplomacy. For a long time, it did not know what to do with the newly established Caspian states.

Later, thanks to former president Sayyid Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), it managed to start bilateral relations with the Caspian states. However, these have deteriorated since 2005. As there is no one fully responsible for Iran's foreign policy, it is hard to predict their future actions.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is not afraid of Iran becoming another North Korea - he is already convincing the nation to prepare for self-sufficiency and self-reliance. In addition, its relations with Azerbaijan will become worse, and Iran might not hesitate to support Islamist movements in the region.

Jeffrey Mankoff (Adjunct Fellow, CSIS) talked about the New Silk Road strategy and the U.S. role in it. While the long term vision of the initiative is a trans-Eurasian transport corridor uniting energy, electricity and other kinds of power as well as the transport of goods, the major U.S. goal is to create an environment for economic activity that would shape policies and help to overcome political fragmentation. The U.S. is currently focused on Afghanistan, trying to build Afghan capacities, reduce its isolation, expand regional trade links, and prevent internal fragmentation. Among the major obstacles for the strategy are poor relations among countries in the region which makes border crossing difficult, and corruption. There is also the problem of instability, both in Afghanistan and the region more broadly. In addition, there is a geopolitical element about what role countries like Russia, China and Iran are going to play, and where they fit into the Silk Road vision. The U.S. is primarily focused on building east-west connections.

Glen Howard (President, Jamestown Foundation) talked about security in the Caspian Basin/Caucasus region over the past twenty years. Beginning with early 1990's, much activity centered on problems with the Taliban and frozen conflicts. After 9/11, the Caspian Basin and Central Asia became NATO's transit zone to Afghanistan. Following NATO's 2014 withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Caucasus will remain a cockpit of rivalry. The region is dominated by the effects of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War, suffers from Iranian influence, and has an undecided role in the missile defense initiative. Further, as the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics approaches, Russia is trying to insulate the Caucasus. The region is in search for security. The U.S. should focus on developing a security strategy and a vision for the Caucasus region, with Georgia and Kazakhstan as its pillars. Only by building stability in Georgia, the center of the Caucasus, will it be possible to enhance stability and access to the broader region. In addition, Georgia should be accepted into NATO.

Marlene Laruelle (Research Professor and the head of Caucasus-Central Asia Program, George Washington University) emphasized three elements. First, the Caspian Basin has a diversity of external actors, not just the U.S., Russia and Iran. China is becoming a key actor in investment, infrastructure, communication and trade. The Emirates are becoming a platform for trade export between Caspian and Southeast Asian markets. India is involved in nuclear and space cooperation with Kazakhstan. Israel is an important military partner. Turkey stands out with its investment in education. Second, the region is driven by its internal dynamics. Kazakhstan has an ambition to become the regional leader and the key investor in the South Caucasus. There is paradox of cooperation and competition between Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. In addition, minorities are playing an important role in developing economic links in the region.

Third, there are new challenges, including growing economic activities in the Caspian Sea that require preparation for nontraditional threats, and the U.S. is already partnering with regional states on high-tech initiatives. There is also a need to ensure social stability in the oil and gas sectors and to prepare to deal with a growing Islamic civil society. In the future, new cooperation initiatives should involve more regional actors such as Turkey, India or South Korea. It is likewise important to prepare for decreased European influence in the Caspian region. Regime security may become contradictory to the security of the population. Finally, it is necessary to prepare for a new generation of leaders who will not have a post-communist past.

11.10-12.45pm: Panel Two: Road to Economic Prosperity – Energy, Pipelines, and Economic ReformsModerator: **Ariel Cohen**, *Heritage Foundation*

David Rakviashvili (Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Georgia) explained how Georgia has had two meta-projects, which he called “startups”, since becoming independent. The first he described as a “false start” right after independence, which resulted in the near failure of the state. The second was the Rose Revolution. One key aspect of the first startup was that Georgia did not have many friends or supporters in the West during that period. However, the environment was very different by the end of 2003, when Georgia had more friends in the West, especially in Washington. Rakviashvili explained how Georgia emerged with the burden of the Soviet legacy in the early 1990s, with little knowledge of fiscal and economic policies and effective governance. It did not know how to handle its newfound independence, and therefore ended up with a corrupted and criminalized government. Its three civil wars and their consequences had devastating results for the country. Its source of hope, however, was its aspiration to join western institutions. It began shaping its regional policies with the goal that it would become an increasingly valuable transit point from East to West.

Developing this niche has helped Georgia become an important economic hub rather than a failed state. The US expanded relationship with Georgia during its second startup has been very important in helping the country move forward since 2003. Georgia now has positive ratings from the World Bank, and is taking steps toward reforming its state institutions and tax code, promoting a business friendly environment, and investing in infrastructure to attract new investment. Rakviashvili said that Georgia is presently in a “third phase”- it has built a solid platform and is now trying to be not only a transit corridor, but also a production center and a reliable partner to the US and European countries. He concluded by naming the four key sectors of Georgia’s current economy: energy, agriculture, tourism and information technology.

Dr. **Nargiz Gurbanova** (Economic Counselor, Embassy of Azerbaijan) highlighted Azerbaijan’s challenges in the region- the troubled North Caucasus to the north, irredentist claims to the west, negotiations with the Caspian littoral states to the east, and the Iranian nuclear issue to the south. She explained that energy helped consolidate Azerbaijan’s sovereignty, establishing a close nexus between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia. She then outlined Azerbaijan’s energy policy, emphasizing diversification, commercial viability and reliability. She added that Azerbaijan has been a reliable partner to western companies for over 150 years, and that the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) has been successful in developing business well beyond the Caspian, as evidenced by its recent acquisition of gas stations in Switzerland. The country has also made investments worth USD 17 billion in Turkey, and is the biggest taxpayer in Georgia.

Azerbaijan produces more natural gas than oil, and is interested in working closely with its European friends and allies to identify optimal delivery routes. It is, however, wary of problems associated with overdependence on energy revenues, and therefore has set a goal to diversify its resource base. The State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ) is part of an initiative to encourage transparency in the industry. In addition, energy resources have been channeled to SOFAZ to support investment in other countries, which is an important way for Azerbaijan to build international partnerships. Gurbanova concluded with remarks on “Azerbaijan 2020,” a model that Azerbaijan will focus on as it moves forward. This includes the stimulation of innovation in academia and the business community. Making the government transparent and accountable is also important, as is Azerbaijan’s role as a transportation hub along the new Silk Road.

Dr. **Rashmi Shankar** (Senior Economist, World Bank) focused her remarks on Azerbaijan, exploring how the country can transform its natural resource wealth to achieve its ambitious target of economic development. Azerbaijan’s performance has been impressive in recent years, including 15% growth rates, a massive decline in poverty over 15 years to less than 10%, and massive foreign investment flows due to the country’s hydrocarbon resources. President Aliyev has articulated the need for a new growth model for economic diversification. Shankar explained why this is important by elaborating on the goals of economic diversification.

She noted the massive increase in Azerbaijan's public investment and the country's infrastructure growth, which has been built squarely on oil revenues. Azerbaijan has had a construction boom, growing 20% over the past 10 years, compared with 3% growth in the agriculture sector, and 6% in industry. There is an increasing debate in the country about how private investment can start to substitute for some state spending. Export firms are declining, partly due to the "Dutch Disease" effect. Though Azerbaijan has made great strides in reducing poverty, the country now has to focus on how that progress can be sustained and consolidated. Job creation is very important for the country, with its young and growing population. But it is unlikely that the oil or construction sectors can provide enough jobs.

The objective of the new model is to create more diversified economic growth, which will require creating a business environment that enables innovation, facilitates investment, and fosters entrepreneurship. The real challenge is to build the right institutions for the country- very quickly. Further, there is a need to build a highly educated and skilled work force. In a small country like Azerbaijan, the onus is on the non-oil sector. More transparent fiscal rules are also needed. A massive increase in public spending brings attention to its quality, and highlights the need for careful project selection and spending. Some of the areas currently under debate regarding diversification strategy are reforms of market and fiscal institutions, comprehensive education reform, and continued efforts at WTO accession.

Ben Welch (World Bank) began by mentioning a recent report by Goldman Sachs which included Turkey in a new grouping- the "Next 11" (N11), which, along with the BRICS, have a high potential for becoming the world's largest economies in the 21st century. In 1980, Turkey's GDP was USD 17 billion- now it is USD 700 billion. During this period it went from the world's 25th largest economy to the 16th. By 2023, it wants to be among the top 10. When benchmarked to other countries, Turkey's growth rate is second only to China. Turkey's industrial centers have grown rapidly, especially in the eastern parts of the country; its recovery from the crisis was rapid. Still, Turkey has a large current account deficit. While energy's share of its economy has declined, the World Bank estimates that that energy accounts for 20% of Turkey's imports, and 50% of its current account deficit. There is a relationship between Turkish growth and security of the energy supply.

Welch noted a new World Bank country partnership strategy, which works closely with the Turkish government in energy sustainability and security. Turkey has the potential for 27% in energy savings. Welch then highlighted areas of Turkish energy strategy, such as its support for renewables, energy efficiency, and hydro energy. The country is now looking at ways in which it can still use domestic consumption when energy prices spike. It secured a USD 600 million loan for energy sustainability and security, and is looking at not only energy diversification, but also trade diversification- in the Caucasus, the Levant, and with its southern neighbors. As the Turkish government has reoriented its foreign policy, there has also been a rebalancing of trade, as seen in Turkey's 2011 free trade agreements with Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

Dr. **Fred Starr** (Chairman, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute) focused his remarks on transport. The BTC pipeline was extremely controversial and difficult to realize, but Starr argues that it was the most successful venture of US diplomacy since the collapse of the USSR. The cooperation of the 5 governments involved has undergirded both regional prosperity and sovereignty. The Caspian region is going to become the major East-West corridor- there are huge economic interests behind it. Important energy transport pipelines are emerging in both directions. Turkmenistan opened a line to China, and the Chinese premier said he never thought that would happen. New roads are emerging as well, from Hamburg to Hanoi. Starr said that it is very important to see this in terms of continental Eurasia. There is continental big freight on both ends, sending up to half of the product to the other end of the continent by land as opposed to by sea.

A vast amount of goods are capable of being shipped along these new transportation networks. New railroads are also emerging in the Caucasus and Turkey, which ship goods onward to European markets beyond the

Bosporus. Other lines go across the Caucasus and north to Odessa, all the way to the Baltics. Railroads to the east are equally developing, from Turkmenistan to the Afghanistan border.

The first piece of the Afghan railway is in place, and from there it will go across the belt of India. There is a continental-wide rail system coming into being. New ports are also being developed, such as a major facility south of Baku, as well as others in Batumi on the Black Sea and Turkmenbashi on the Caspian, and the ports in Kazakhstan - all are being interconnected. There are new players and interests involved in all of this too- not just Turkey, Iran and Russia. During the Russia-Georgia War, those who took interest outside the region were connected to the BTC pipeline. If such a scenario would be repeated, the Europeans would be involved in a more serious way, as would China and India. The region is becoming one of the most vulnerable sections of global energy infrastructure, like the Strait of Hormuz or the Panama Canal. The international community has an interest in keeping it secure and open. Russia's interests there will shrink relative to the growing interests of everyone else. Dr. Starr said that everything will continue to happen in the region with or without the US. Although the US should embrace this transportation revolution, for the time being, it has been very passive.

The New Silk Road strategy is getting vaguer and vaguer; Marc Grossman, the US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, has not made one mention of it. Starr concluded with the following policy recommendations for the US: 1.) Promote a "hands off" attitude in the region- "we won't mess with it, if you don't either." 2.) Abandon the false notion that dangerous actions in the North and South Caucasus are just internal affairs, since they directly affect the security of this transit route. 3.) Recognize the need for posting ambassadors to regional countries, and encourage the CIA to do more serious research on the region. 4.) Encourage the National Security Council to agree on who is in charge of these issues. 5.) These issues won't go away; they must be addressed more actively.

Dr. **Ariel Cohen** (Heritage Foundation) remarked on the importance of keeping violence and ethnic strife in the region at manageable levels and preventing active warfare and terrorism. He explained that, following the 1994 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire, there was greater investment in Azerbaijan and in Armenia too, even without a peace treaty. Of course, it would be desirable to have a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict which would change the environment in terms of economic ties and opening borders. In contrast, Cohen pointed out that the North Caucasus has not received serious investment after the wars in Chechnya, because the violence is too high. Though Russia is trying to stimulate the region's economy with tourism and promotion of ski resorts development, Cohen is skeptical about these measures' success. His second major point emphasized Caucasian resilience. Over the last 100 years, the Caucasus faced war, communism, deportations, and the collapse of Soviet Union, among other challenges. Nevertheless, there has been a recreation of elites who emphasis trade, business, culture, science and the arts.

In terms of the software of economic development, the rule of law and a reliable legislative base is incomplete in many cases. More needs to be done to ensure that law enforcement is transparent, such as by developing the enforcement ability of local courts. Cohen concluded by pointing out that if these issues are addressed over the next 20 years, the region may have more sustained economic growth, especially stemming from the continued development and transport of energy resources.

Greg Saunders (Senior Director, BP) brought attention to the extraordinary changes in the region over the past 20 years. What was once worry over regime survival, is now worry over the right development line. 20 years ago, countries in the region possessed extra energy assets, and they opted to develop and monetize them. For countries like Kazakhstan, which produces 500,000-700,000 barrels of oil a day, and Azerbaijan, which produces 1,000,000 barrels a day, it was the right decision to make. These countries realized that in order to develop, they had to integrate regionally.

This required them to reach out to other newly independent states; to integrate economically, to collaborate politically, and cooperate through infrastructure, especially via energy pipelines. Kazakhstan worked through

Russia, Azerbaijan through Georgia and Turkey. But whereas the aforementioned cooperation has been mainly about oil, the next game is going to be about natural gas. While oil provides a means for transport, gas provides electricity, heat, and energy diversification, and will be increasingly important in relation to climate change.

Azerbaijan made a commitment to export gas westward from the Shah Deniz field in Azerbaijan to Georgia and Turkey, and additional supplies are coming in 2017. Turkmenistan, for its part, is exporting gas to the east. After agreements made last October, for the first time, Caspian gas is being exported from Azerbaijan through Turkey and on to European markets. At the same time, Caspian basin countries are committed to supplying gas to their neighbors- Azerbaijan, for example, is committed to supplying all of Georgia's gas needs after its conflict with Russia. Saunders concluded with the reminder that the liquidity provided for by energy supplies helps countries take on the right development models.

1.00-1.30pm Luncheon Keynote:

Moderator: **Heather Conley**, Director, CSIS

H.E. **Elin Suleymanov** (Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan) explained that if you look back on the past 20 years of US policy in the Caspian Basin, the most tangible result of US foreign policy has been in the energy field, most notably the BTC pipeline. The US has been instrumental in encouraging positive developments in the region. The Ambassador explained that long term US commitment has been key to the region's success, as evidenced by both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations' support for the BTC pipeline. As a result, people perceived it not as a "Clinton" or a "Bush" policy, but as an "American" policy. The Ambassador then spoke of Georgia and Azerbaijan's example of successful cooperation in the energy sphere, a relationship defined by voluntary and mutually beneficial cooperation based on energy projects like the BTC pipeline. He then highlighted Azerbaijan's successes, mentioning that the country's GDP is three times what it was in 2006. He explained how the BTC pipeline has acted as an anchor for Azerbaijan's development, allowed for sustained US commitment to the country, and encouraged regional success. The vision which originated in Baku was not limited to Baku alone, however. The Ambassador explained that Azerbaijan knows that its region needs to be successful in order for Azerbaijan to be successful.

One of the key factors which allowed for Azerbaijan's success was the 1994 Deal of the Century between the Azerbaijani government and a BP-led oil consortium to develop Azerbaijan's hydrocarbon resources. The Ambassador reminded the audience that since the USD 8 billion Deal of the Century was signed 18 years ago, Azerbaijan has not changed a letter of the agreement. He also outlined Azerbaijan's track record of commitment to the US, including post 9/11 support, troop contributions to Kosovo and Afghanistan, and Azerbaijan's roundup of extremists trying to attack Israeli and American targets within Azerbaijan. He said that Azerbaijan is also an important example of what could be the post-soviet legacy of Muslim identity.

Despite the positive developments, there a sad shadow that comes from the fact that Azerbaijan still has a conflict with Armenia, which casts doubt over the future of region. This shadow, he said, however, is unnecessary. The Ambassador argued that one cannot avoid considering the possible consequences of renewed hostility between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Ambassador then argued that the countries of the region need to think about how to build a region that comes together, and not retreat to ethnic and religious pigeonholes. Azerbaijan is a diverse nation, and the Caucasus a diverse land. Both Azerbaijan and the Caucasus could be an example for the future, or it could all fail- this is a question that is still open. The picture of the region, despite all the challenges that exist, looks brighter than the Ambassador imagined years ago. Azerbaijan is now working to support the efforts of its regional allies to build a successful region that reaches its potential. The Caspian region is important, he concluded, and the road to the Caspian lies through the Caucasus.

2.00pm: Concluding Comments:**Janusz Bugajski, CSIS****Ariel Cohen, Heritage Foundation**

In conclusion, Ariel Cohen remarked that U.S. policy toward the Caspian Basin that started under the Clinton administration engaged the region via the Caucasus and Central Asia. However, this changed with the post-9/11 shift to Afghanistan. Cohen noted that though the war in Afghanistan is eventually going to end, the US' geopolitical interests there will remain because the Caspian lies at the crossroads between north and south, east and west. People have been trading in all directions for three thousand years. This trend will continue now, facilitated by the regions' hydrocarbon resources. The Caspian Basin involves Russia, Iran, Turkey, China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and others. If one looks at the map and understands geography, one can't walk away from the region. Unfortunately, there are people who don't know history and didn't study geography or geopolitics.

Further, Cohen said that the US should be able to talk to Azerbaijan and Armenia, Georgia and Russia, and push for the resolution of conflicts, though he added that we are walking away from that mission. Solutions to regional challenges cannot be imposed; they have to come from the countries in the region themselves- and that's difficult.

Energy resources are being transported from Central Asia to Azerbaijan's network and shipped further west. Kazakhstan, due to pressure from Russia, does not want a pipeline to the west. They chose a barge bridge system instead, which is limited in capacity. Now Kazakhstan will have to decide between China, Russia or the West. In addition, economic development cannot progress without the rule of law, and functioning market institutions and educational systems. Without progress in these areas, the next generation will be subject to deteriorating conditions in the region. In conclusion, the US role should be that of intermediary, investor and engager. The US needs to sustain its involvement in the region.

Janusz Bugajski thanked the panelists and the participants for their attendance and discussion at the Caspian Basin conference.

Speakers' Biographies

Janusz Bugajski is a Senior Fellow with the CSIS Europe Program. He previously served as a senior research analyst for Radio Free Europe in Munich and as a consultant on Central-East European affairs for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. Department of Defense, the International Republican Institute, the Free Trade Union Institute (of the AFL-CIO), the International Research and Exchange Board, and BBC television in London. He has published articles in numerous journals and newspapers in the United States and Europe. He chairs the South Central Europe Area Studies program for U.S. Foreign Service Officers at the Foreign Service Institute and has testified before various congressional committees, including the Helsinki Commission, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the House Defense Appropriations Committee. Bugajski holds an M. Phil. in social anthropology from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Ariel Cohen is a Senior Research Fellow at the Heritage Foundation. He has served as a consultant to both the executive branch and the private sector on policy toward Russia, Eastern and Central Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. He participated in a long-term study known as Russia 2025 conducted by the World Economic Forum and in Multilateral Deterrence Study for Office of Secretary of Defense and in other projects. A former member of the Board of Directors of the California-Russia Trade Association, from 1985-1992 Ariel Cohen has managed media research projects for Radio Liberty's then-Soviet audience.

Cohen is a member of the Council of Foreign Relations, International Institute of Strategic Studies in London, and Association for the Study of Nationalities. He holds doctorate from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Massachusetts.

Heather Conley serves as Director and Senior Fellow of the Europe Program at CSIS. Prior to joining CSIS, she served as senior adviser to the Center for European Policy Analysis, an independent, nonpartisan public policy research institute dedicated to the study of Central Europe. From 2005–2008, she served as the executive director, Office of the Chairman of the Board of the American National Red Cross, where she focused her efforts on developing the first comprehensive reform to the governance structure of the American Red Cross Board since 1947, incorporating best governance practices for nonprofit and for-profit sectors. She has served as the State Department liaison for the U.S. Department of Defense's Global Humanitarian Assistance Program (HAP). She received her B.A. in international studies from West Virginia Wesleyan College and her M.A. in international relations from the Johns Hopkins University Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

Nargiz Gurbanova is Economic Counselor at the Embassy of Azerbaijan since August 2010. She is responsible for promotion of US-Azerbaijan bilateral economic cooperation, including the areas of energy, ICT, trade, agriculture, industry and tourism. Gurbanova has more than 10 years of experience in the foreign service of Azerbaijan. She started her career in the Department of Economic Cooperation and Development of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was responsible for promoting economic cooperation with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, EU and OSCE. Later, she served 4 years as Economic Officer in the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Austria. From 2008 to 2010, she was the head of the division for cooperation with the EU at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Gurbanova has master's degrees in both international relations and international management, as well as a PhD in political science (environmental governance) from Vienna University in Austria.

Glen Howard is President of the Jamestown Foundation. He is a regional expert on the Caucasus and Central Asia. Howard was formerly an Analyst at the Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) Strategic Assessment Center. His articles have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, and *Jane's Defense Weekly*. Howard has served as a consultant to the private sector and governmental agencies, including the U.S. Department of Defense, the National Intelligence Council and major oil companies operating in Central Asia and the Middle East.

Marlène Laruelle is a Research Professor of International Affairs at the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at George Washington University. Her main areas of expertise are Russia's domestic evolutions, identity issues, nationalism, citizenship and migration in the post-Soviet space.

Jeffrey Mankoff is an adjunct fellow with the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program and a visiting scholar at Columbia University in New York City. He was a 2010–2011 Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow based in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs at the U.S. Department of State. Previously, he was associate director of International Security Studies at Yale University and adjunct fellow for Russia studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. He was also formerly a John M. Olin National Security Fellow at Harvard University, a Henry Chauncey Fellow in Grand Strategy at Yale University, and a fellow at Moscow State University. His areas of expertise include Russian/Eurasian affairs, great power relations, foreign policy decisionmaking, ethnic conflict, and energy security. Mankoff also teaches courses on international security, Russian and Central Asian affairs, and modern diplomatic and military history. He received his Ph.D. and M.Phil. in diplomatic history, as well as his M.A. in political science from Yale, and his B.A. in international studies and Russian from the University of Oklahoma.

David Rakviashvili is the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Georgia since February of 2011. Rakviashvili joined the Government of Georgia in February 2008 as Deputy State Minister for Reintegration. In this capacity, his portfolio included participation in Geneva Discussions, liaising with international organizations and working in various inter-agency commissions. Prior to joining the Government of Georgia, Rakviashvili's professional background included teaching and performing music, mountain guiding, rescue operations, lecturing and entrepreneurship. As a self-employed businessman he worked at almost every level – from an entry position to the CEO of a leading Georgian tourism and events management company. Rakviashvili holds a B.A. in Geology and a M.A. in International Relations and National Security.

Greg Saunders is the Senior Director, International Affairs, responsible for US political and government relations in support of BP's global portfolio of commercial operations. He joined BP's Washington office in 2004. Saunders was previously posted to BP's corporate headquarters in London and Algeria. Prior to joining BP, Saunders was Director for Policy at the Corporate Council on Africa. He culminated a career with the U.S. government, serving in various posts in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. Saunders graduated from West Point in 1976 with a Bachelor's Degree in Engineering. He has an MBA from George Washington University and an M.A. in International Relations from the Naval Postgraduate School. He is also a graduate of the French École de Guerre in Paris.

Rashmi Shankar is Senior Country Economist for Azerbaijan at the World Bank. She holds a PhD in Economics from the University of California at Santa Cruz, and an MA in Economics from the Delhi School of Economics. Shankar has published both journal and policy articles in the areas of international macroeconomics, banking, and trade. She joined the Bank in 2006 and has worked as the Senior Economist for Guatemala and Costa Rica, as well as for Ecuador and Nicaragua where she was responsible for policy dialogue on fiscal, growth, and competitiveness issues. She has produced and managed both analytical and lending operations at the World Bank. Prior to joining the Bank, she was a tenure-track Assistant Professor at the Department of Economics, Brandeis Business School. She has also previously worked at the World Bank Office in Delhi, India and at the Indian Council for Research in International Economic Relations, also in Delhi.

Frederick Starr is the founding chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program. He is a Research Professor at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University. He began work in the Turkic world as an archaeologist in Turkey and went on to found the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, which opened U.S. research contact with Central Asia. Starr served as vice president of Tulane University and president of Oberlin College and the Aspen Institute. He has advised three U.S. presidents on Russian/Eurasian affairs and chaired an external advisory panel on U.S. government-sponsored research on the region. He has also organized and co-authored the first comprehensive strategic assessment of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Afghanistan for the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1999 and has followed up by close involvement in drafting of recent U.S. legislation affecting the region. He holds a Ph.D. in History from Princeton University, an M.A. from King's College, Cambridge University, and a B.A. from Yale University.

Amb. **Elin Suleymanov** is Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan since October of 2011. Prior to that, for over five years, Amb. Suleymanov had been the nation's first Consul General to Los Angeles and the Western States, leading the team which established Azerbaijani diplomatic presence on the West Coast. Earlier, he served as Senior Counselor at the Foreign Relations Department, Office of the President in Baku, Azerbaijan and as Press Officer of the Azerbaijani Embassy in Washington, DC. Amb. Suleymanov's experience before joining the diplomatic service includes working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Azerbaijan, as well as with the Open Media Research Institute in Prague, Czech Republic, and Glaverbel Czech, a leading manufacturing company in East-Central Europe. A graduate of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Medford, Massachusetts, Amb. Suleymanov also holds graduate degrees from the Political Geography department of the Moscow State University, Russia, and from the University of Toledo, Ohio.

Alex Vatanka specializes in Middle Eastern affairs with a particular focus on Iran. From 2006 to 2010, he was the Managing Editor of Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst, based in Washington. From 2001 to 2006, he was a senior political analyst at Jane's in London where he mainly covered political developments in the Middle East. He joined the Middle East Institute as a scholar in 2007. Since 2006, he also lectures as a Senior Fellow in Middle East Studies at the US Air Force Special Operations School (USAFSOS) at Hurlburt Field. A native of Iran, he holds a B.A. in Political Science from Sheffield University and an M.A. in International Relations at Essex University.

Ben Welch is the Turkey Country Officer at the World Bank in Washington, DC. He has previously worked at The Institute of World Politics in Washington, DC and YouGov in London, and served as a junior consultant at The Company Agency, a strategic communications consultancy based in London. He received his undergraduate degree from Trinity College, Dublin and has also studied at St. John's College, Cambridge and Georgetown University.

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