
BTC briefing, like pipeline, skirts troublespots azeri revelations.

By line: Matthew Russell Lee at the U.N
Inner City Press, NY 13/7/2006

UNITED NATIONS, July 13 -- An oil pipelines gambit came to interim fruition on Thursday. The Baku - Tblisi - Ceyhan curving route, avoiding Armenia, breakaway parts of Georgia and most Kurdish parts of Turkey, is a testament to its precarious position. At a briefing at the UN, Inner City Press asked the outgoing Ambassador of Georgia Revaz Adamia to explain BP's funding of a 700 person defense force for the pipeline. "They are not soldier," Amb. Adamia answered.

"They are high tech people."

Inner City Press asked the Ambassador of Azerbaijan Yashar Aliyev about the avoidance of Armenia. We cannot deal with them until they stop occupying our territory, he said. "You mean Nagorno - Karabakh?" Not only that, Amb. Aliyev answered. That's only four percent. Few people know this, but Armenia has occupied twenty percent of our territory.

But we digress. The pipeline is more than a tube for oil, the Ambassadors read from their scripts. A four-minute movie was shown. Later the full 20-minute film was screened, as waiters served lamp chops and salmon on a skewer. "Bill Clinton was there at the birth," a Georgian representative said. "He offered American guarantees so the work would get done. It avoids this" -- he pointed on a map at Russia -- "and here," pointing to Iran and the Middle East. "If only Turkmenistan agrees to provide its gas," he said wistfully. He added his view that Armenia gets away with incursions in Azerbaijan due to U.S. support. It's an issue rarely touched on at the United Nations.

Georgia

Inner City Press asked outgoing Georgian Ambassador Ademia where he's going. "Back to science and business," he answered. "Oil," guess-whispered one wag -- not this one -- in the crowd.

Full disclosure: this reporter consumed, on the pipeline proponents' tab, several skewers of meat and a glass of Borjomi mineral water, named for a national park in Georgia which environmentalists say is put at risk by the BTC pipeline.

At the UN, A Day of Resolutions on Gaza, North Korea and Iran, Georgia as Side Dish

Byline: Matthew Russell Lee at the U.N.

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 -- Just as there are big countries and little countries, at the UN there are big issues and then other issues, sometimes called non-issues. On Wednesday at the UN, there were serial stakeouts by the Ambassadors of France and the United States, off the cuff comments by the Ambassadors of Russia, China and the UK, and side speeches by the Palestinian Permanent Observer and the UN's head of peacekeeping Jean-Marie Guehenno.

Taking questions from a half-dozen journalists at the noon briefing -- where Inner City Press asked about a UNHCR conflict-of-interest

investment with Ivan Pictet, who's on the UN Investment Committee, click here for that article -- was the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Georgia, Heidi Tagliavini, soon to leave her post and return to Switzerland. Still she was diplomatic, preferring not to comment on yesterday's outbursts from Georgia's parliamentary speaker and the Russian ambassador, rather referring obliquely to "mis-information" being a problem in Abkhazia.

Inner City Press asked if she views as mis-information the allegations of money laundering, including for terrorism, in Abkhazia.

"Thank God my mandate doesn't include bank regulation," she replied. She went on to describe Abkhazia as a "dark area" where certainly money laundering could happen. In response to Inner City Press' second question, about South Ossetia, she described the Abkhazians as more professional, and having a longer independent history, than is the case in South Ossetia. Asked if Georgia should be allowed to speak before the Security Council when it is on the agenda, she respond that she personally thinks that's right, but it is of course up to the Security Council. In the hall outside Room 226, the Georgia ambassador noted that Russia should not be able to block Georgia's attendance and speaking, since these are procedural and not substantive matters. That and a token, a New York wag replied.

At another stakeout, Inner City Press asked the UN's head of peacekeeping Jean-Marie Guehenno for more information on the release of the final five of the peacekeeper in Ituri in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Mr. Guehenno replied that the problem in Ituri is "young men with guns," and that even those are disarmed can't find a job. He said, in a sanitized on-camera version, that those negotiated with, Peter Karim, changed from day to day.

Inner City Press asked if in his briefing to the Council about the African Union summit in Banjul, the issue of the Secretary-General's new deference to a "Mugabe-selected mediator" came up. Mr. Guehenno replied both that it had not come up, and that he was not sure if the mediator was Mugabe-selected. Inner City Press asked, "what is the mediator's mandate? Between whom is he mediating -- Mugabe and the Blair government in the UK, or Mugabe and the opposition in Zimbabwe?" Mr. Guehenno said he is not the one to ask, that the question should be directed to and answered by Department of Political Affairs. Okay then.

The main action was dueling resolutions: the Qatari resolution on Gaza, not expanded to cover Lebanon, texts and more texts on North Korea, and forthcoming text on Iran. In the midst of these, all covered elsewhere, French ambassador Jean-Marc de La Sabliere let drop that he met with the Thai candidate for Secretary-General. Inner City Press pursued at the stakeout the fate of the Gaza electrical power plant, which UN humanitarian chief Jan Egeland said Tuesday should be repaired by Israel. Inner City Press asked U.S. Ambassador John Bolton if he had any comment on this. He replied, "I don't have any comment." Dan Gillerman, the Ambassador of Israel, said that his country has "no intention to punish" civilians, but that he has "no information on the plant." Inner City Press asked to be updated, and asked OCHA to amplify Jan Egeland's reference to an "American insurance company" now possibly barred from paying out on the policy due to sanctions against Hamas. Who paid the premiums?

Especially, after the insurance company became arguably barred from paying on the policy? Developing....

Feedback: editorial [at] innercitypress.com

UN Office: S-453A, UN, NY 10017 USA Tel: 718-716-3540

UN's Corporate Partnerships Will Be Reviewed, While New Teaming Up with Microsoft, and UNDP Continues

Byline: Matthew Russell Lee at the U.N.

UNITED NATIONS, July 13 -- The UN under Kofi Annan has increasingly worked with corporations. Questions have been raised about background checks and safeguards. A day after Inner City Press reported that the UN's Geneva-based refugee agency had not known that Swiss banker Ivan Pictet is on the UN Investment Committee when the UNHCR Kashmir Relief Note placed money with the Pictet Funds India Equity fund, the agency's spokesman mused, "Isn't the UN Investment Fund based in New York?"

Inner City Press asked if it would have been helpful to UNHCR if the UN system had a database of the companies controlled by the outside business people who serve on bodies like the UN Investment Committee. A Google search for that committee and Pictet found close to nothing. It appears that there is no easy way to find who is on the UN Investment Committee.

UNHCR's Ron Redmond answered that that it would "have been helpful to have that type of information... For UNHCR to look it up is labor intensive, with all the possible company names." He later added in writing, "Any additional information on prospective corporate partners is of course always welcome; it would facilitate our screening processes." Mr. Redmond states that UNHCR was never required to ask SocGen to cease using the UNHCR visibility logo, in part because the brochure that it was on was only intended to be used for a brief period. But records show that individuals high in UN Headquarters chided UNHCR for the use of such terms as UNHCR "teams up" with SocGen. Despite this in-house chiding, or perhaps because the chiders refuse in their defensiveness to comment for the record, this practice continues in the UN system to this day, literally.

Click here to view the UN's World Tourism Organization's July 12, 2006 press release, "UN tourism agency teams up with Microsoft," which was published on the UN News Center just as UNHCR SocGen-derilab's April 5, 2006 press release was. They just keep teaming up.

As the UN increasingly has intercourse with corporations, basic safeguards are still not in place. Inner City Press has previously reported on the lack of background checks when corporations are allowed to join the UN Global Compact, and has twice been rebuffed in requests to interview or ask questions of corporate CEOs who have come to meet the Secretary General or on other Global Compact business.

At Thursday's noon briefing, spokeswoman Marie Okabe was asked if any of the individuals in the Secretariat who were asked to comment on the UNHCR - Pictet - Societe Generale transaction had in fact spoken or provided guidance. We're still working on it, Ms.

Okabe answered.

Near six p.m., Ms. Okabe called Inner City Press and said she had spoken about the matter, as requested, with Under Secretary General Mark Malloch Brown. "They are aware of the issues," Ms. Okabe said. "This case highlights the complexities of the UN's partnerships with the private sector and so current guidelines and practices of various funds and agencies and programs will be reviewed" to try to avoid "potential conflicts of interest" and misuses of UN logos.

Great. But what about the continued "teaming up," now with Microsoft? There's more work to be done.

[A note on UNHCR's work about Uzbekistan: the agency managed to visit in Kazakhstan with Gabdurafikh Temirbaev, the Uzbek dissident threatened with refoulement back to Tashkent, and has, its spokesman said, gotten a commitment to be able to review Uzbekistan's extradition request.]

Alongside UNHCR's work, unlike at the UN Development Programme, at least UNHCR answered the questions and acknowledged that things could be better. On UNDP and human rights, on UNDP and refusal to answer press questions, what will happen?

Zimbabweans

On the issues surrounding UNDP, the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General managed to get some response from UNDP to a question Inner City Press asked UNDP in writing more than a week ago: why does UNDP help the government of Uzbekistan to collect taxes, given the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' finding that this government shot and killed its own people in Andijan in May 2005. Here now is UNDP's response:

"As far as your UNDP/Uzbekistan questions from the other week, here's what I can tell you... in Uzbekistan and most of the 140 developing nations where UNDP operates, UNDP works with government and civil society on a broad range of governance projects, including economic reforms, of which tax administration and fiscal policy are a significant component. Other governance projects in Uzbekistan focus on gender equality, internet access, and public administration reform. It may be worth noting that UNDP works in a wide range of political environments, from Costa Rica to North Korea, with the belief that UNDP's mandate as a development agency is to work constructively on behalf of the people of the developing world wherever and whenever possible."

One wag wondered if UNDP's programs in Uzbekistan might involve technical assistance on not putting political dissidents in boiling water, as the U.K.'s former ambassador in Tashkent has testified takes place. And see above, that UNHCR has managed to visit in Kazakhstan with Gabdurafikh Temirbaev, the Uzbek dissident threatened with refoulement back to Uzbekistan, where he would face torture -- perhaps with tax funds UNDP helped to collect. UNDP has still not even purported to answer the week-old question about UNDP's funding of Robert Mugabe's purported "Human Rights Council." Now the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights has called for a boycott. What was that again, about UNDP working with civil society? To be continued.

Feedback: editorial [at] innercitypress.com

UN Office: S-453A, UN, NY 10017 USA Tel: 718-716-3540
