

Central Asia

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ANALYST

BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday, July 16, 2003

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BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday/July 16, 2003

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Since December 2002, Russian authorities have sent two extradition requests to Washington for the return of eight Russian citizens held in Guantanamo Bay. The eight were held after being captured fighting for the Taliban in Afghanistan, but extradition requests have seen no reply. Russian displeasure with American silence on this matter was expressed by Deputy Prosecutor General Sergei Fridinsky, who pointed out to U.S. authorities that these requests were not simply 'friendly correspondence', but require a response. The eight 'Russian Taliban' demonstrate dissatisfaction with the squabbling leaders of Russian 'Official Islam' in the Russian Islamic community.

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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The Analyst is an English language global Web journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing the Central Asia-Caucasus region. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports however authors may suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in *The Analyst* (www.cacianalyst.org) and described below.

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Analytical Articles:

Analytical articles require a three to four sentence introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples.

Analytical article structure:

KEY ISSUE: A short three-line statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

BACKGROUND: 200-300 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 200-300 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

CONCLUSIONS: 100'200 words that strongly state your conclusions about the impact of the event or issue.

Specifications for Field Reports:

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGO. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed has for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 500'700 words.

Those interested in joining *The Analyst's* pool of authors to contribute articles, field reports, or contacts of potential writers, please send your CV to: svante.cornell@pcr.uu.se and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

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THE KAZAKH MILITARY LOOKS WEST

Roger N. McDermott

In July 2003, NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson visited Kazakhstan during a trip to Central Asia to promote NATO's relations with these states. Whilst generally praising Kazakhstan for its increasingly deepening cooperation with the Alliance, Robertson particularly thanked President Nazarbayev and the Kazakh parliament for deciding to offer a small number of troops in support of post-war reconstruction in Iraq. This development clearly signals Astana's commitment to its cooperation with NATO, contributing to the stabilization forces within Iraq, despite the international controversy that surrounded the US decision to prosecute the war. However this is only a small part of growing evidence that Astana is actively pursuing a more pro-western approach to its foreign policy and military cooperation.

BACKGROUND: During his meetings with Lord Robertson, President Nazarbayev made a number of suggestions concerning new initiatives with NATO, which may include greater military technical cooperation, exercises, training and offering Kazakh humanitarian aid to Iraq and constructing warehouses within Kazakhstan for humanitarian supplies for both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Kazakhstan has been an active member of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) since joining in 1994, and has sought to capitalize on its closer transatlantic links. In the aftermath of 9/11, as U.S. and western military forces were deployed to Central Asia in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Astana recognized the importance of bilateral military cooperation between its neighbors and the coalition but only slowly responded to the changing security dynamics within the region. Only last month did Kazakhstan make the Shymkent airport in its southern military district available to the Danish air force involved in operations in Afghanistan; initially for emergency landing use only. Such practical support for OEF could well be a prelude to more active measures in support of the Global War on Terrorism.

Kazakhstan has increasingly looked to the West to assist in the important task of its military reform, and this has meant fostering closer ties with NATO and its member states on a bilateral basis. Kazakh military planners regard the U.S. military as a significant factor in vital aspects of reforming the Kazakh armed forces. At a theoretical level, this has involved U.S. help in writing the Kazakh military doctrine and closely examining its military structures. Practical help from Washington is also being stepped up, whilst Kazakhstan appears to welcome such measures.

Indeed, the U.S. is keen to promote the reform of the Kazakh military and has agreed a five-year cooperation plan between the respective defense ministries. That plan reportedly emphasizes providing Kazakh army units with modern military equipment and ensuring interoperability with other NATO subdivisions. Furthermore, the US will help in the creation of a professional army in Kazakhstan, the development of military infrastructure in the Caspian region,

including antiterrorist subdivisions and assistance in developing the Kazakh Navy. Huey II helicopters will be supplied through the 'Foreign Military Financing' (FMF) program to enhance air defense and the possibility of supplying US C-130 military transport aircraft. Mobile vehicles and communications equipment is currently being discussed between Washington and Astana. The U.S. military will also provide training for the Kazakh peacekeeping battalion KAZBAT, as well as further increasing the number of Kazakh servicemen being receiving military training in the US. The number of Kazakh servicemen trained in the U.S. remains fairly small, but is nonetheless significant and growing; in 2001 17 Kazakhs were trained there and this year that number will reach 39.

Whilst Kazakhstan has looked to the U.S. in its quest for international assistance for its military reform, it has also recently strengthened its bilateral ties with France. After a meeting between the defense ministers in March 2003, French Defense Minister, Michele Alliot-Marie held discussions with President Nazarbayev in July 2003. The French offered closer military cooperation, suggested joint military training exercises and most significantly proposed sharing France's experience of professionalizing its armed forces with Kazakhstan, in order to further this key reform, not least since by 2007 Kazakhstan plans to have 50% contract servicemen in its army.

IMPLICATIONS: NATO's attempts to deepen its military and security ties with Kazakhstan, as well other states within Central Asia, has met with a positive response in Astana. Further meetings are scheduled when Lord Robertson next visits the region in September. Given the recent history of the Kazakh government looking to the west to enhance its security and stimulate military reform, it is likely that Kazakhstan will move closer to NATO within its PfP cooperation programs.

Specific tasks linked to improving the condition and combat readiness of the armed forces, such as professionalizing military service, will result in yet more involvement of Western countries keen to strengthen Kazakh security.

Nevertheless, Kazakhstan as a keen participant in the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), will continue to conduct its relations with the West in a cautious methodical manner, aware of its traditionally strong ties with Russia, and recognizing the concerns of neighboring China. Astana cannot afford to alienate either state.

The economic importance of the Caspian Sea, and the historical legacy of an absence of military infrastructure there during the Soviet period, resulted in prioritizing the development of effective defense capabilities in Kazakhstan's Western Military District. It is hardly surprising, in this context, that close attention was paid to this strategically vital area by holding military exercises in April 2003, when the armed forces held *Batys 2003* (West 2003), the largest scale Caspian exercises in the Republic's history. Around 5,000 troops participated, testing their speed and effectiveness in deployment from the Kazakh-Chinese border to the Caspian Sea region, covering a distance of more than 2,500 km and involving 40 troop trains.

CONCLUSIONS: As NATO conducts its defense diplomacy with the Central Asian Republics, it finds in Kazakhstan an invaluable partner keen to look towards the West for security assistance and closer cooperation. Areas of its military reform appear open to intensified western

assistance and these include the supply of modern weapons and equipment. As Kazakhstan observes the difficulty of professionalizing the Russian army, it may yet turn to the experience of western militaries.

Astana's pursuit of a multilayered foreign policy has tangibly emerged within the military and defense establishment. Russia, with its own political reservations, has voiced opposition to the creation of a Kazakh Navy to strengthen its Caspian security. This is likely to be furthered, however, through U.S. military assistance and the supply of hardware. Negotiations between NATO and Kazakhstan are poised to change yet again the evolving security dynamics of Central Asia, which if done in a spirit of cooperation and abandoning the 'zero-sum game' may prove in the long term that close links with the Alliance and strong bilateral ties with Western states are aimed at achieving that which Moscow has long sought: regional stability and enhanced security in this vital geostrategic region.

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EU APPOINTS SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE TO THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

On July 9, 2003, the European Council as a joint action appointed a special representative to the South Caucasus, confirming the willingness of the EU to play a more active role in the region and a need to establish clear lines of responsibility.

The European Council in its decision also underlined the need for co-ordination and consistency as to external actions of the EU in the South Caucasus. The cooperation is based on respect of sovereignty and the territorial integrity of countries of the region. In addition, human rights protection and corruption prevention is of great importance to the EU.

The task of the EUSR is to contribute to the implementation of the EU's policy objectives as defined and updated by the Council and to support the work of EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana in the region. The primary task of the special Representative will be to assist the countries of the South Caucasus in carrying out political and economic reforms, especially in the areas of rule of law, democratization, human rights, and good governance. The EUSR should also prevent and assist in the resolution of conflicts in accordance with existing mechanisms and by engaging constructively with "key national actors neighboring the region". The Special Representative will prepare for the

return of peace by promoting the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. The representative will also act in order to encourage and support intra-regional co-operation including economic, energy and transport issues, and to enhance EU effectiveness and visibility in the South Caucasus. The mandate of the EUSR is to develop contacts with governments, parliaments, the judiciary and civil society groups in the region in order to encourage the countries of the region to cooperate on regional themes of common interest, such as common security threats, the struggle against terrorism, trafficking and organized crime. The Representative is also supposed to assist in conflict resolution, especially to improve the possibility for the EU to support UN and OSCE institutions and mechanisms for conflict resolution in the region. In addition, the EUSR is to assist the Council in developing a comprehensive policy towards the South Caucasus. The EUSR acts under the authority and operational direction of the High Representative, and is responsible for the implementation of the mandates of the EUSR. The EUSR is to report to the Political and Security Committee (PSC), which in its turn will stand in contact with the Council. The PSC will provide the EUSR with strategic guidelines and political input. The EUSR will report in person

to the High Representative and to the PSC. In order to ensure consistency of the external actions of the EU, the activities of the EUSR is coordinated with the High Representative and the Commission. Close liaison should also be maintained with the EU member states and other international actors such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The Joint Action entered into force on July 1, 2003 and it is to apply until December 31, 2003. Before the Joint Action expires the EUSR should present a report to the High Representative, the Council and the Commission, making recommendations on further measures to enhance EU policy in the region.

Mr Heikki Talvitie was appointed by the European Council as the European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus. Mr Talvitie, born 1939, has been Undersecretary of State at the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1993-96) and Ambassador of Finland in Belgrade (1984-88), Moscow (1988-92) and Stockholm (1996-2002). He also possesses regional experience, having served as co-chairman of the OSCE's Minsk Conference on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 1995-96.

Anna Jonsson

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE BAKU-ASHGHABAD TUNNEL?

Hooman Peimani

Late in June, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Vilayat Quliyev stated that his government would welcome the resumption of the activities of the Turkmen embassy in Baku. He insisted that the embassy could resume its operation "at any moment", while referring to the Azerbaijani embassy's operation in Ashgabad as "quite normal". The Turkmen government, which closed its embassy's in Baku about two years ago over disputes with Azerbaijan, has recently sought to improve ties with its neighbours as reflected in its interest in normalizing relations with Uzbekistan. Azerbaijan seems to have appreciated this new conciliatory mood in Ashgabad, which they want to explore to end the current unfriendly relations with their Caspian neighbour.

BACKGROUND: Turkmen-Azerbaijani peaceful and tension-free relations began to experience difficulties late in the first half of the 1990s when both countries started their exploration of the Caspian Sea for offshore oilfields. In the absence of a legal regime for the division of the world's largest lake, the two Caspian littoral states found themselves in conflicting situation regarding the ownership of certain oilfields to which both countries had claims. In particular, the ownership of Azeri, Chirag, and Guneshli, as well as the Serdar (according to the Turkmen) or Kyapaz (according to the Azerbaijanis), has been a source of tension between the two Caspian neighbours since the mid-1990s. The first three operating oilfields have formed Baku's largest offshore oilfields providing for the bulk of its annual oil exports.

The lack of a legal regime to determine the share of the littoral states of the Caspian Sea prevented the settlement of the Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan territorial disputes. In July 2001, their disputes over the ownership of certain offshore oilfields reached a hostile stage. Thus, they accused each other of illegal exploration, development or operation of the disputed oilfields to some of which another littoral state, Iran, had claims. Iran and Turkmenistan, on the one side, and Azerbaijan, on the other, also accused each other of violating each other's territorial waters with military and non-military marine vessels.

In such a situation, the sale of two American military boats to Azerbaijan worsened Ashgabad ties with Baku. The former expressed deep concern about the transaction, which it portrayed as a threat to its national security and a provocative action to initiate an arms race. In its reaction to the development, the Turkmen government revealed its purchase of Ukrainian military boats, which in turn provoked a harsh Azerbaijani reaction. The worsening Turkmen-Azerbaijani ties in 2001 led to the closure of Turkmenistan's embassy in Baku as Ashgabad withdrew its staff for unspecified technical reasons without officially severing ties. Consequently, Baku's embassy in Ashgabad continued its operation.

IMPLICATIONS: On June 21, Quliyev's welcoming any future resumption of the Turkmen embassy's normal activities in Baku clearly signalled the Azerbaijani government's intention to normalize ties with its Caspian

neighbour. On the one hand, this development reflects a desire on the part of Azerbaijan to improve ties with their neighbours. Going through a turbulent decade of independence marked with a devastating war with Armenia, Azerbaijan requires peace and political certainty both in its internal and external affairs to address its numerous economic, political and social problems. These are partly inherited from the Soviet era and partly have emerged in the post-independence era as the country has entered a transitional period from a Soviet-style command economy to a type of free enterprise yet to be created. The unresolved conflict with Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh and the occupation of 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory by the Armenians have been the major foreign policy challenge for the Azerbaijani government. Apart from the merits of peaceful ties with neighbours, the resolution of the latter demands Azerbaijan's normal relations with its other neighbours to enable Baku to concentrate all its energy on meeting that challenge with its possible negative domestic implications.

Baku's move in that direction has been reflected in its efforts since last year to improve and expand its ties with its southern neighbour, Iran, a policy reciprocated by Tehran. Such efforts have included Azerbaijani President Haidar Aliyev's official visit to Tehran in May 2002 and the conclusion of economic agreements between the two neighbours. Both sides have continued efforts to improve ties.

Contrary to its ties with Iran, characterized by normal diplomatic relations and significant economic transactions, Azerbaijan's relations with Turkmenistan have been damaged significantly, as seen in the Turkmen embassy's closure. Up to last month, the absence of any apparent interest on the part of Ashgabad to improve ties with its eastern (Uzbekistan) and western (Azerbaijan) neighbours seemed to discourage Baku from taking steps towards that end. However, the Turkmen government's implicit interest in normalizing relations with Uzbekistan damaged by its alleged involvement in a November 2002 assassination attempt on Turkmen President Saparmurad Niyazov hinted at its

possible willingness to normalize relations with another neighbour, Azerbaijan.

Thus, in mid-May, less than six months after the Uzbek ambassador in Ashgabad was declared persona non grata and forced to leave for Tashkent for his alleged involvement in the assassination attempt, Niyazov praised Turkmenistan's relations with Uzbekistan. As evident in that statement, Ashgabad's sudden change of attitude towards Tashkent indicated its intention to break its mainly self-imposed isolation. The Azerbaijanis seem to have appreciated the significance of the development, which they want to canalize towards Turkmen-Azerbaijani ties.

CONCLUSIONS: Quliyev's June 21 remarks aimed at initiating a normalization process by encouraging the Turkmen to reopen their embassy in Baku. This is a logical move not only as a necessity for conducting negotiations over their disagreements, including the disputed oilfields, but also because the Turkmen have not completely severed ties

with Azerbaijan. Currently, both sides seem to be interested in decreasing tensions in their relations with their neighbours as reflected in the mentioned cases. The Azerbaijanis have directly expressed their interest in applying that policy towards the Turkmen, while the Turkmen are yet to spell them out.

In his remarks, Quliyev referred to his government's informing "repeatedly" its Turkmen counterpart about its position on the Turkmen embassy in Baku. Although it is too early to expect the immediate improvement of relations between the two countries and their addressing of all their disputes, the reopening of the Turkmen embassy, a possible development, may prepare grounds for their embarking on a process towards that end.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Hooman Peimani works as an independent consultant with international organizations in Geneva and does research in International Relations.

INVESTMENT SUMMIT HELD IN KYRGYZSTAN

The Third Investment Summit, and the 23rd meeting of the CIS Electric Power Council were held in the state residence in Cholpon-Ata, on the coast of Issyk-Kul lake in early July. The Investment summit gathered President of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akaev, state officials along with international financial organizations representatives, and important foreign businessmen, strategic investors, around the discussion table.

The main points of the agenda were the institutional and legal aspects of the attraction of direct foreign investments, and honest management. Participants also concluded the realization of the third investment matrix and planned the fourth. As Askar Akaev stated, the government made certain progress during the last several years in the sectors of banking and finance, state managing and local administration, the court system, and in the framework of the first, second, and third matrixes.

In 2002, the volume of direct foreign investments into Kyrgyzstan reached US\$118 million, which is 28% over the previous year, noted the President. The Secretary of the President's foreign investments attraction representative informed that by June 30, a few points out of 41 of the third investment matrix plan were not realized. The program particularly specified the simplification of the visa regime for 28 countries, which took two years. As result, guests of Kyrgyzstan coming from developed states are growing in numbers.

However, almost all the participants shared the opinion that the main problem of attracting foreign capital to Kyrgyzstan is corruption in state structures. An anonymous questionnaire held among local officials and businessmen showed that 24% of them think corruption is growing, 31,5% see no changes, and the rest abstained from answering. A majority of respondents consider the

most corrupted structure in the country to be the police. The Law Enforcement System is followed by Customs, Tax Inspection, and the Courts.

As experts noted, resistance by some official structures to the authorities responsible for foreign investment is quite significant. When the latter puts great effort into removing one administrative barrier, immediately two more appear, such the establishment of licenses in the tourist sphere or new tariffs for insurance contributions.

The President said the fourth investment matrix is decisive, and it will respond to three criteria: be realistic, specific, and manageable. "Our purpose is to make the new matrix maximally concrete, more prioritized, and practical," said Deputy Prime-Minister Joomart Otorbaev, "The third stage will activate economic deregulation, the creation and development of appropriate laws, so as to remove some contradictions hampering attraction of foreign investments into Kyrgyzstan."

In particular, conference participants discussed problems of giving preference, which is not only tax indulgence, but also the simplification of registration of new organizations, easing of licensing processes, and limitations to state interference in business. During the fourth stage of the matrix, the government plans to revise laws connected to free economic zones, deposits and hypothec, financial rent, etc. The intention is to raise efficiency of arbitration courts and protecting investors' rights. Besides, the functions of the Council on economic policy are to be widened. The transfer of partly state enterprises with significant debts to the government will have a special legal base and a definite mechanism.

On June 27, President Akaev met head of the CIS Electric Power Council Anatoly Chubays and

members of the Council. At the conference, ministers and deputy ministers of energy, managers of energy companies, and international energy organizations representatives were present. The meeting was devoted to the integration process of CIS states in the energy sphere. In particular, the participants discussed questions of effective functioning and perspective development of CIS energy systems unification.

As Prime Minister Nikolay Tanaev informed at a press conference, the "first positive steps" towards the export of Kyrgyz electric energy to Russia were outlined in his meeting with Chubays. The Kyrgyz Republic is soon supposed to provide 2-3 billion kwh to Siberian regions through networks in Kazakhstan and Russia.

Another plan is the future participation of Central Asian countries and Russia in the building of the "Kambarata-2" hydroelectric power station in Kyrgyzstan. "I intend to make official visits to Kazakhstan, and then to Uzbekistan. This question needs to be discussed in details," said Tanaev. He also stated that Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed an agreement on the prolongation of electric lines from Batken to Kanibadam and to supply power to this Tajikistani region.

The two high level meetings play a strategic role for Kyrgyzstan. Analysis of the problems worsening investment climate in the country, and responsible realization of the fourth, decisive investment matrix influence the development of the Kyrgyz economy. And the energy integration of Kyrgyzstan to CIS states is an important factor in improving the country's well-being through regulated power export.

Aijan Baltabaeva

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS FRAGILE AS GEORGIA HEADS INTO ELECTIONS

Blanka Hancilova

As the election campaign intensifies before the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2 November 2003, the unwillingness of President Eduard Shevardnadze to seek compromise with the strong opposition over key issues of the election code prompted former U.S. State Secretary James Baker to suggest election guidelines during his July 5-6 visit in Georgia. The election race is entering an increasingly confrontational mode, which is likely to further discredit already weak state institutions, and to push the mounting protest voters out of the non-violent political domain into violent civil disobedience and anarchy.

BACKGROUND: The latest opinion poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in April suggests that if elections were held “tomorrow”, the pro-presidential “Alliance for New Georgia” led by Shevardnadze (officially formed as an election bloc in March 2003 by Shevardnadze’s Citizens’ Union of Georgia, the rather weak Socialist and National Democratic parties, along with some influential, but discredited governors and the Greens), would barely clear the 7% threshold necessary to gain seats in the parliament. While the opposition is still fragmented, on the whole it enjoys considerable popular support.

In the June 2002 local elections, the Labor Party and the National Movement Party, two populist parties running under the slogan of “Tbilisi without Shevardnadze” emerged on top of the race in the capital Tbilisi, clearly showing the increasing power of the protest vote. The CUG, the main pro-presidential party, failed to clear the election threshold in Tbilisi, after Zurab Zhvania, the former Chairman of Parliament was forced to leave it just several days before the elections. Since then, State Minister Avtandil Jorbenadze has assumed the leadership of the CUG, aiming to revamp the ailing party, albeit without convincing success.

Despite low popular support and the weakness of its member political parties, the pro-presidential bloc ardently opposed some of the most popular opposition initiatives, such as the proposal of the United Democrats to increase minimum salary to 115 Laris (US\$55). More recently, the pro-governmental factions of the government, supported by the majoritarian members of parliament, (MPs elected in single-mandate districts, who usually happen to be presidential supporters) have acted jointly to thwart a crucial compromise on electoral administration.

This failure prompted a visit by an American Special Envoy, former Secretary of State James Baker, who “imposed” election guidelines (the “Baker Scorecard”) and brokered a compromise over the Central Electoral Committee composition. The election commissions at all levels should be composed of nine members proposed by the opposition and five members proposed by the pro-governmental forces. The Central Electoral Committee should be led by an independent, non-partisan and respected Head, who would be appointed by the OSCE Mission to Georgia.

Both the government and the opposition have accepted Baker’s proposition, however it is far from clear whether and how this will materialize. The opposition parties have so far failed to agree how their nine seats will be divided, since the Industrialists and the Revival Union (Aslan Abashidze’s party) demand more than one seat. This continuing stalemate demonstrates the level of mistrust in the opposition. Yet the decision on the composition of the Central Electoral Committee is vital for the preparations for the November elections, as well as for securing international assistance for an orderly election process.

IMPLICATIONS: The inflexibility of both the pro-presidential bloc and the opposition has given current election race quite an unconstructive slant. The governmental parties are counting on discord within the opposition camp to prevent a broad and lasting opposition alliance. So far, this expectation has been met, as up to date the opposition leaders have failed to reach a consensus on the proper representation of their partisan interests within the future bloc, despite their repeatedly expressed willingness to form an election coalition.

Both opposition leaders and independent observers agree that the key hope of electoral success for the “Alliance for a New Georgia” is their so-called “administrative resources” – in other words, the ability of the appointed provincial governors and other officials on governmental payroll to influence voters in areas they govern. The frequent visits of Avtandil Jorbenadze, the CUG leader, to the provinces aiming to create his party chapters “top down” while meeting with local government officials, support these fears.

As a result, a dangerous trend emerged in the Georgian parliamentary election race. The blending of administrative powers and the pro-governmental election bloc feeds the frustration of the opposition with the government institutions. The opposition grows unequivocal in its condemnation of the current government, and President Shevardnadze personally. Even some of the more moderate figures, including former parliamentary chairman and leader of the United Democrats Zhvania, have adopted a radical discourse, including calling a June 3 protest rally for the resignation of Shevardnadze.

This radicalization of the opposition, combined with popular dissent (support for the government was between 6 and 10 per cent over the last year), is further radicalizing the political culture in Georgia and bringing back elements of civil disobedience and violence. Electricity shortages triggered spontaneous protests against the government already in winter, and since then the frustration of the public and among the opposition has grown.

Recently, public frustration found yet another escape valve in a student protest, movement "Kmara" ("Enough") that styles itself after the Serbian "Otpor" which was instrumental in bringing down the Milosevic regime in Yugoslavia. Kmara activists have already staged peaceful protests in several provinces.

CONCLUSIONS: As Georgia heads toward the elections that will define the partisan landscape after the end of Shevardnadze's term in 2005, the country would benefit immensely from a constructive election race that would bring forward the platforms and agendas of the competing parties. The importance of these elections is well understood, as polls

show that some 80 per cent of citizens intend to cast their vote in November.

However, the apparent lack of willingness to cooperate on the part of the pro-governmental political forces triggers an aggressive response on the part of the opposition and civil pressure groups. Not only does such confrontational behavior impede the passing of the vital election legislation, but it also builds up a dangerous trend of public aggression against the already weak and under-performing institutions of the state.

The international pressure applied from the OSCE, European governments, and, most visibly, from the United States on the Georgian authorities to ensure a fair election race and free and fair elections have not, so far, proven very productive. However, only continued national and international pressure both on the government and opposition forces can bring about a change of attitude to discussion of the vital legislative and political agendas.

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TENSIONS RUN HIGH BETWEEN THE AUTHORITIES AND OPPOSITION IN AZERBAIJAN

The past week in Azerbaijan was characterized with another wave of tensions between the authorities and opposition parties. Local analysts predict that, as the elections near, these tensions will increase even more due to the disagreements between the ruling and opposition parties over the conduct of the election campaign.

Foremost, the point of content between the two sides remains the registration of Rasul Guliyev, the chairman of Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP) by the Central Election Commission (CEC). Guliyev, a former speaker of the Parliament, has been living in exile in the U.S. since his resignation from his position in 1996. In June 2003, the Central Election Commission rejected the registration papers of Guliyev, motivating the decision as he holds a U.S. "green card" and thus carries some obligations in front of another state, which is prohibited by Azerbaijani law. The Democratic Party, in turn, has been arguing that Guliyev holds refugee travel documents and that hence, the decision of the CEC is illegal. To this date, the CEC has registered 18 other candidates, including the incumbent President, his son Ilham Aliyev, as well as dozens of opposition leaders.

On July 14, the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan has considered the case and rejected the appeal of the ADP. Guliyev supporters argue that the court's decision was politically biased and that they will apply to the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights to get

Guliyev registered. Meanwhile, they also continue holding street rallies to protest the decision of the CEC and complain to international organizations about the case. ADP has held a number of unauthorized rallies in the last two weeks, most of which were broken up by police forces. Hundreds of ADP members were taken into custody.

Last week, the Coordinating Center of Opposition, which unites nine major opposition parties, has issued a statement in which it condemned the rejection of Rasul Guliyev's candidacy and accused the CEC of biased conduct in the pre-election activity. Specifically, the opposition parties complained about the double standards towards the candidates. The ambassador of the OSCE to Azerbaijan Peter Burkhardt expressed concern about the non-registration of Rasul Guliyev and said that it should be the electorate that makes the choice, not the CEC.

Meanwhile, the tensions between the two sides further escalated when the police arrested the drivers and bodyguards of two other opposition parties, Musavat and Popular Front. The arrest happened when the traffic police stopped the cortege of the two chairmen and confiscated the cars on the basis of their illegal registration. A police statement read that the "opposition leaders' cars had illegal numbers and that they created a hazardous situation on the road".

Opposition parties immediately issued a statement, calling the incident as an "act of terror and political pressure" on the opposition forces. The daily *Yeni Musavat* even claimed that the "terror" was planned well in advance and that Musavat members had been informed about it beforehand. Another daily, *Zerkalo*, speculated that the arrest was agreed at the high levels of the authorities.

Many local observers claim that the arrest of the car cortege and bodyguards of the two opposition leaders is not a simple road incident related to the violation of the law but a well planned action of pressure against them. Should these pressures increase, the pre-election situation will also become tenser and no one can exclude the outbreak of violence.

During this week, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe members Andreas Gross and Martinez Cassan arrived in Azerbaijan for another monitoring of Azerbaijan's fulfillment of its obligations in front of this organization. The tensions between the authorities and the opposition parties might become the focus of their trip as well, as the opposition parties are looking at the international organizations as a way to pressure the government.

Fariz Ismailzade

FROM RUSSIA TO CUBA: THE JOURNEY OF THE RUSSIAN TALIBAN

Andrew McGregor

Since December 2002, Russian authorities have sent two extradition requests to Washington for the return of eight Russian citizens held in Guantanamo Bay. The eight were held after being captured fighting for the Taliban in Afghanistan, but extradition requests have seen no reply. Russian displeasure with American silence on this matter was expressed by Deputy Prosecutor General Sergei Fridinsky, who pointed out to U.S. authorities that these requests were not simply 'friendly correspondence', but require a response. The eight 'Russian Taliban' demonstrate dissatisfaction with the squabbling leaders of Russian 'Official Islam' in the Russian Islamic community.

BACKGROUND: The Iraq war has raised concerns regarding the political environment and profitability of Caspian oil, with some arguing that it fundamentally changes the situation there. Fear are that large multinational companies will shift resources for Iraqi exploration, thus slowing down Caspian development and transit projects, and delaying the flow of the Caspian oil to the international markets. Question that arise are what role the U.S. is planning to play in the region in view of continuing instability in Iraq, while the Iranian regime is pursuing development of weapons of mass destruction and may be coming under increasing U.S. pressure to stop its nuclear program? These concerns, among other, reverberated through a number of conferences which took place in Turkey recently.

On the one hand, Iran's stance is, at least outwardly, moderating. Mehdi Safari, Iranian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, expressed a relatively moderate position on the Caspian boundary delineation issue, putting his country's claims in the context of international law. While Iranians have in the past demanded an equal share of all Caspian oil, today their claims are being scaled down. Iranian representatives also made a pitch to become a transit country for abundant Kazakhstani oil through a proposed North-South oil pipeline – a suggestion supported by a number of participants, from the French TotalFinaElf, to a small Georgian company which currently specializes in rail transport of Kazakh oil to Iran. However, in less official settings Iranian contradict their message with accusations and claims against the U.S. The Iranian rhetoric, articulated among other by senior officials of the Energy Ministry, stick out as a sore thumb in a generally cooperative atmosphere, justifying suicide bombers and claiming that U.S. policy is ruled by a two percent minority of the population, which includes the international Zionist conspiracy and arms manufacturers. Iranian officials' statements that Bin Laden is a tool of American intelligence agencies have not helped, either. French and Russian sympathy for the Iranian views are also a problematic element.

Meanwhile, Kazakhstan is stepping up efforts to work with TotalFinaElf, Phillips and ENI to develop a pipeline which

will allow the export of oil from the giant Kashagan field to the CPC pipeline, as noted by Uzakbay Karabalin, president of the government-owned KazMunaiGaz. A trunk to Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) is also under consideration. Kazakhs representatives have, however, warned that a decline in Western investments could force Kazakhstan to "turn to the East", giving a priority to a pipeline to China. It may also increase oil swaps with Iran, already underway.

While BP is moving aggressively to finalize the construction plans for BTC pipeline, the Balkan countries and Ukraine are only beginning to lay down the framework for transit pipelines which will bypass the congested Bosphorus straits. Presentations of the Burgas-Vlore (Albania) pipeline by Albanian-Macedonian-Bulgarian (AMBO) corporation, which claimed to offer at some future point a considerably cheaper transit price due to the ability of the deep water port in Vlore to accommodate large tankers, have caused some interest. So has a Romanian scheme called Constanta-Pancevo-Omisalj-Trieste to build a pipeline via Romania, Yugoslavia and Croatia, presented by Andrei Razvan Grigorescu, Romanian Secretary of State.

Dr. Mejid Kerimov, Minister of energy of Azerbaijan, in the concluding keynote speech focused on expanding natural gas exports to already gas-inundated Turkey, which currently receives gas from Russia and Iran. The Shah-Deniz giant field, one of the largest in Eurasia, is planned to supply 6.6 billion cubic meters. A Shah Deniz-Erzurum pipeline with its 14 wells will be constructed with financing of \$3.2 billion, good part of it coming from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

IMPLICATIONS: Policy makers and oil companies in the region are concerned that the opening of Iraq to new oil and gas development will make the investment climate and geopolitical reality for pipeline transit more competitive, possibly taking a bite at profitability and available financing.

U.S. policy is grounded on the goal of helping the Caspian countries use their oil resources to develop their economies and societies; that is a long-term strategy that will not change because of Iraq. A senior U.S. diplomat, however, has recently called on Caspian countries to liberalize their

economies and fight corruption, warning that unless that takes place, the flow of Western investment may diminish.

Private investors and financing institutions face political risks, such as a potential flare-up of Nagorno-Karabakh or other local conflicts, but they clearly have sufficient comfort that projects such as the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline will not be disturbed. On the other hand, there is no question that Iraq will compete with the Caspian for western financial resources. The U.S. policy is likely to increasingly focus on encouraging Caspian governments to develop a more favorable investment climate. But oil companies view projects such as AIOC and BTC as designed with a long time horizon, which includes price scenarios far below the current levels.

Financing for the BTC pipeline has been delayed by about three months. According to some observers, this is time well spent as it has been used by the developers to ensure that the project meets the most stringent environmental and social standards. International Financial Institutions now seem more than comfortable with these aspects of the project.

CONCLUSIONS: The Iraq war and its aftermath is changing the geopolitical and geo-economic outlook in Iran, Turkey, Russia and the Caspian states. Interviews with officials and experts from the region indicated that policy adjustments are taking place across the region to integrate into the new reality. The new post-war environment is characterized by the need for greater competitiveness for oil and gas projects in terms of both profitability and available financing. Another elements is the need to make both green field extraction projects and pipelines more attractive for foreign investors through deregulation and lower tariff and taxation regimes. Most importantly, however, there has been a change in the regional thinking on U.S. policy. In fact, an understanding that American power is here to stay in the region for the foreseeable future has developed into a consensus in recent months.

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IRANIAN AZERI LEADER SUPPORTS THE FEDERALIZATION OF IRAN

On July 3, the most influential leader of the Azerbaijan population of Iran and head of the Movement of National Revival of Southern Azerbaijan (MNRSA) Mahmudali Chehregani arrived in Baku. He is a supporter of reforms in Iran with the use of strong American backing.

Chehregani was elected to the Iranian parliament from Tebriz in 1996, however the Iranian authorities prohibited his election and since then, Chehregani suffered from torture during arrests at several occasions.

Chehregani's last visit to Baku took place in March of last year, from where he left for the West. His present visit to Baku coincides with greater American pressure on the Iranian regime. Washington considers Chehregani as a trustworthy figure. He has inspired trust being both an academician and a charismatic person. According to Chehregani himself, "representatives of the American government see in his movement the only real force in Iran which can resist to the regime of mullahs". At his final press conference in Baku, he declared that "in the nearest future, the struggle of southern Azeris will give results. The transformation of Iran into a federal state in the nearest 18 months is a reality".

Thus Chehregani sees the future of Iranian Azerbaijan within the framework of a federation, but with a parliament, a government, and a

militia of its own. Chehregani appears convinced that there are plans for the democratization of Iran in Washington, and that "this historical chance cannot be missed".

At the same time, he emphasized that the struggle of Azeri Turks for their rights requires the support of the international democratic community. "In the West, the idea of a partition of Iran is not supported. Therefore, at this stage, it will be more reasonable to create a state for Azeri Turks within an Iranian federation. The 35 million Azeris of Iran cannot remain outside of process of democratization, and, in order to avoid the situation of the Iraq Turkmens, we must be in the vanguard of struggle for democracy", declared Chehregani.

Some natives of Southern Azerbaijan have criticized Chehregani, accusing the leader of MNRSA of betraying the interests of southern Azeris in opposing the partition of Iran. A statement by the representative of the World Congress of Azeris Teymur Eminbeyli noted that Chehregani struggles for the integrity of Iran, for its federalization. "If they will change their position, we can start to cooperate. Now it is impossible".

Meanwhile, Chehregani's visit to Baku coincided with the activation of the national liberation movement of Azeris in Iran and with the fourth

anniversary of the suppression of a students' demonstration by the Tehran regime.

A traditional annual campaign on the fortress Bezz, from where the legendary Azerbaijani leader Babek headed resistance against the Arabian yoke in the ninth century, took place in Southern Azerbaijan with the alleged participation of about 2 million people. "Despite the actions of the Iranian authorities, a campaign of Azeris in honor of Babek's birthday has taken place. It was more radical and politically sated than previous ones", - the head of Baku bureau of MNRSA Huseyn Tukelly informed. He also informed that for the first time, the campaign was carried out under the Azerbaijani banners.

The reaction of the Iranian embassy in Baku to Chehregani's statements was surprisingly cool. As the press-secretary of the embassy Izzetullah Jalali declared, the Iranian government is not going to take preventive measures concerning the oppositional leader for his revolutionary appeals in the press. "Tehran faithfully supports the freedom of speech and pluralism of opinions", declared Jalali. He also noted that there no need to make a revolution in Iran. "Azeris of Iran already made a revolution in 1979 and are very satisfied with its results".

Gulnara Ismailova

NEWS BITES

KAZAKH PARLIAMENTARIANS CALL FOR OPENNESS ON 'KAZAKHGATE'

4 July

Three influential Kazakh parliamentarians -- Communist Party leader Serikbolsyn Abdildin, Vladislav Kosarev, and Tolen Tokhtasynov -- have written a letter to President Nazarbaev, calling on him to reveal the names of the high-level Kazakh functionaries allegedly involved in the bribery scandal known as "Kazakhgate," because the affair is damaging the image of the country at home and abroad. Tokhtasynov read the letter to the joint session of parliament held that day. Its authors point out that no official Kazakh media outlet has explained the affair, although the independent media are publishing a great deal about it and the entire country is aware of the affair. He noted that recently Nazarbaev had told London's "Financial Times" that former Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin was involved in Kazakhgate. The parliamentarians added that the people of Kazakhstan would also like to know if the country will be able to recover the large sums that are believed to be sequestered in Western banks. (respublika.kz)

FOUR RUSSIANS KILLED, 11 INJURED IN CHECHNYA CHOPPER CRASH

6 July

Four Russian soldiers were killed and at least 11 injured in a helicopter crash in separatist Chechnya, Interfax reported. "The helicopter suffered a catastrophe a few seconds after liftoff," the news agency quoted air force spokesman Alexander Drobyshevsky as saying. Drobyshevsky said officials were not yet sure what caused the crash outside the breakaway republic's second largest city Gudermes, but did not rule out that it was shot down by a rebel missile. However Denis Vyazemtsev, a spokesman for Chechnya's security department, told Interfax that technical failure likely caused the chopper to crash shortly after take-off. Russian military helicopters have regularly been the target of guerrilla attacks since war between federal troops and separatist rebels broke out in October 1999. News of the crash came one day after suspected Chechen rebels carried out a major suicide attack in the Russian capital, killing at least 16 other people at an open air rock concert. (AFP)

RUSSIA'S PUTIN VOWS TO CRUSH CHECHEN 'TERRORISTS'

7 July

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russian President Vladimir Putin, his trip to Asia canceled over weekend suicide bombings, issued a fresh vow on Monday to crush Chechen separatists by rooting them "out of cellars and caves." Moscow city

authorities declared Tuesday a day of mourning for the 13 rock concert-goers who died when two women wired with explosives blew themselves up. News reports said five people remained in hospital in serious condition. New violence was reported from Chechnya itself. Military sources said a helicopter which crashed on Sunday, killing five servicemen, may have been shot down. Putin chaired his weekly meeting with senior ministers after canceling a trip to Uzbekistan and Malaysia. He said only uprooting terrorism would solve Russia's problems. "The bandits acting in Chechnya are part of the international terrorist network," a grim-looking Putin was shown telling the Kremlin meeting on national television. "With such people it is pointless carrying out preventive measures. They must be rooted out of the cellars and caves in which they are hiding and destroyed." No state, he said, would be "pushed around by terrorists. Nor will Russia. The first step in such a direction will mark the beginning of the collapse of the state and the number of victims will rise dozens, hundreds, thousands of times." Security forces link Saturday's attacks to Chechen rebels who have been fighting Russian rule in the southern region for a decade, though no one has yet claimed responsibility. The bombing brought mass violence back to the city of more than 10 million for the first time since separatists, including women with explosives strapped to their waists, held hundreds of theater-goers hostage for three days last October. A total of 129 hostages died when security forces used gas to rescue them. (Reuters)

SEVEN ARMENIAN PRO-COMMUNIST PARTIES ALIGN

7 July

Seven Armenian pro-Communist parties announced their merger into the United Communist Party of Armenia on 7 July. The seven are the Communist Party of the Working People, the United Progressive Communist Party, the Workers' Union, the Union of Communists, the Party of Intellectuals, the Marxist Party, and the Renewed Communist Party of Armenia. The original Communist Party of Armenia founded in 1920 continues to exist as a separate entity. (ITAR-TASS)

FRENCH DEFENSE MINISTER VISITS KAZAKHSTAN

7 July

French Defense Minister Michele Alliot-Marie paid her first visit to Kazakhstan on 7 July, discussing military and technical cooperation with President Nazarbaev and the country's top military leadership. Alliot-Marie told journalists that the French leadership is interested in cooperating with its partners in Central Asia to analyze the unstable situation

developing in that region. She also offered French help to Kazakhstan in professionalizing its army and discussed French interest in using Kazakh military testing grounds for joint training exercises. Kazakh Defense Minister Colonel General Mukhtar Altynbaev told journalists that a project to teach French to the Kazakh military is under way with the assistance of the French Embassy in Almaty. France has offered to provide training for Kazakh officers at French military institutions and technical assistance for Kazakh peacekeepers in Iraq. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

KARZAI APOLOGISES FOR EMBASSY ATTACK

8 July

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has apologised to Islamabad after protesters attacked Pakistan's embassy in Kabul. He told Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf that those responsible were enemies of peace and stability in the country and promised to compensate them for the damage. The ransackers broke away from a 1,000-strong rally in protest against alleged Pakistani incursions into Afghanistan. After Tuesday's attack, Pakistan lodged a formal protest with the Afghan Government and accused its security forces of failing to prevent the 'mob' from entering the building. At a news conference President Karzai said: "I strongly, strongly, strongly condemn this action. "Those who committed this act are not the enemies of Pakistan. They are the enemies of Afghanistan, peace in Afghanistan. They are the enemies of friendship between Afghanistan and Pakistan". The Afghan Foreign Ministry said it would pay compensation for the damage and guarantee the mission's security. Afghan hostility towards Pakistan mounted at the weekend after it criticised President Musharraf for allegedly speaking of a power vacuum in Afghanistan and apparently claiming the government did not represent all ethnic groups. Officials also accused Pakistan of sending troops into Afghan territory during operations on the border - a charge rejected by Pakistan. Government officials were among those who took to the streets of Kabul for a second day of protests. "We want good relations with Pakistan but we will not tolerate anybody's interference," said the governor of the central bank, Anwar Ulhaq Ahady. (BBC)

ARMENIAN CONSTITUTIONAL COURT REJECTS OPPOSITION ELECTION APPEAL

8 July

The Constitutional Court on 7 July rejected an appeal by the opposition alliance Artarutiu to invalidate the results of the party-list voting in the 25 May parliamentary election. The opposition argued that as a result of deliberate and widespread falsification, the percentage of votes cast for Artarutiu under the proportional system was reduced from more than 50 percent to 14 percent. The court acknowledged that widespread irregularities occurred during the election process, but denied that the opposition arguments constituted hard evidence that could serve as a legal basis for invalidating the election outcome. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN OPPOSITION TO APPEAL ELECTION OUTCOME AT EUROPEAN COURT

9 July

The opposition Artarutiu election bloc will appeal the official results of the 25 May parliamentary election in the European Court of Human Rights, Artak Zeynalian, a leading member of the Hanrapetutiu party, told journalists in Yerevan on 9 July. On 7 July, the Armenian Constitutional Court rejected an appeal by Artarutiu to annul the results of the party-list vote. Artarutiu claimed that the official results were falsified to give the bloc only 14 percent of the party-list vote, whereas in fact it garnered over 50 percent of the party-list vote. (Noyan Topan)

THREE MORE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES REGISTERED IN AZERBAIJAN

9 July

Meeting on 9 July, the Central Election Commission (CEC) formally registered three more presidential candidates, raising the total number to 15. The three are Abutalyb Samedov, chairman of the pro-government Alliance in the Name of Azerbaijan; Elshad Musaev, who was nominated by the Great Azerbaijan group of voters; and Hafiz Hadjiev, head of the Modern Musavat party. Musaev's application was initially rejected. The CEC rejected the application of self-nominated Hadji Abdul on the grounds that the documentation he submitted in support of his candidacy contained errors. The CEC also accepted three other presidential nominations – from architecture professor Kamran Rustamov; Vahdat Party leader Tahir Kerimli; and Musa Tukanov, who was nominated by a group of voters as his United Communist Party has not yet been formally registered by the Justice Ministry. (Turan)

OSCE SECRETARY-GENERAL VISITS SOUTH OSSETIA

9 July

Jan Kubis met in Tskhinvali, the capital of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, on 9 July with President Eduard Kokoyty and Emergency Situations Minister Boris Chochiev. Kokoyty said he fears Tbilisi is planning to deploy the crack forces trained by the United States within the parameters of the Train and Equip program against his breakaway republic. He also accused Georgia of failing to allocate \$800,000 it has pledged for the restoration of South Ossetia's economy. Meeting with Kubis in Tbilisi two days earlier, Georgian Minister for Special Assignments Malkhaz Kakabadze argued that the format for talks on resolving the conflict with South Ossetia should be simplified, but did not specify how. At present, Georgia, Russia, South Ossetia, and the Republic of North Ossetia -- which is a subject of the Russian Federation -- are participating in the conflict-resolution process. (Caucasus Press)

UN INDEX OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT SHOWS DECLINES IN THREE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES

9 July

The UN Development Program's Index of Human Development for 2003 shows declines for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The declines have been attributed to lower life expectancy, lower literacy rates, reduced incomes, and poorer education. Indicators from some of the post-Soviet states -- in addition to the three Central Asian states, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine showed declines -- put them at the same level as many underdeveloped countries. Akipress.org noted that the index ranked Turkmenistan 82nd among the 175 countries assessed, while Kyrgyzstan ranked 102nd and Tajikistan ranked 113th. (akipress.org)

RUSSIAN-TURKMEN TALKS IN ASHGABAT END**9 July**

The Russian-Turkmen intergovernmental commission set up to resolve problems resulting from the revocation of dual citizenship ended two days of negotiations on 9 July, with both sides giving upbeat assessments of the progress made. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksei Fedotov, who headed the Russian delegation, told journalists that the Turkmen side has officially promised that the rights of Russian citizens living in Turkmenistan and holding dual citizenship will not be infringed, which he said was the main Russian objective in the talks. The previous day, Interfax quoted Fedotov as saying the negotiations were "difficult." Fedotov said on 9 July that the results of the commission session should fully satisfy the interests of Russian citizens. The two sides reportedly signed a protocol declaring that the 10 April agreement between Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov and Russian President Vladimir Putin on revoking dual citizenship will be implemented in accordance with the laws of both countries after it is ratified. Another member of the Russian delegation, State Duma Foreign Relations Committee Deputy Chairman Sergei Apatenko, told journalists that the Russian delegation saw nothing that would confirm media stories of Russian citizens being driven from their homes. Apatenko noted, however, that the delegation is concerned about the unavailability of publications from Russia, the lack of education in Russian, and the poor job prospects for Russian speakers. According to turkmenistan.ru on 9 July, Niyazov joined the negotiations several times by telephone. (RFE/RL)

WORLD BANK PUBLISHES ANALYSIS OF UZBEK LIVING STANDARDS**9 July**

The World Bank office in Tashkent has published the first analysis of living standards in Uzbekistan. The study found that more than one-quarter of the population is poor, with one-third of those are living in extreme poverty. A sharp decline in foreign investment was reported to be a major factor contributing to increased poverty. According to the World Bank experts, Uzbekistan now has one of the lowest rates of foreign investment in the CIS. The government is relying on small business to boost the economy, but

reportedly 66 percent of small enterprises have been compelled to pay bribes. The World Bank study also found that one of the main problems of the Uzbek population is health care because of reductions in government spending. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT SIGNS BILL ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING**10 July**

Kazakh President Nazarbaev has signed a bill strengthening articles in the Criminal Code relating to trafficking in human beings, deputy head of the presidential administration Igor Rogov told Interfax Kazakhstan. The official said the problem has become acute in Kazakhstan because the country's citizens often fall into the hands of traffickers when they go abroad in search of work, and that Kazakhstan itself is a transit country for trafficked persons. Several articles of the Criminal Code are applicable to trafficking cases: Article 125 covers abduction, Article 126 deals with unlawful deprivation of freedom, Article 128 prohibits recruiting people for exploitative purposes, Article 133 prohibits trafficking in minors, and luring persons into prostitution and maintaining brothels are covered by articles 270 and 271, respectively. The purpose of the new legislation is to change or add wording to specify that the articles apply to trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation, and to increase the sentences specified for these crimes. Kazakhstan has been criticized by a number of international human rights organizations for failing to adequately criminalize human trafficking. A special working group is being set up within the government's Crime Commission to draft proposals on fighting human trafficking. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

U.S.-TRAINED GEORGIAN BATTALION DEPLOYED IN SOUTH OSSETIA**10 July**

A force of approximately 80 Georgian soldiers from a U.S.-trained battalion has been dispatched to join a peacekeeping battalion currently deployed in the unrecognized breakaway Republic of South Ossetia on July 10. Since April 2002, the United States has been conducting a specialized program, known as the Train-and-Equip Program, designed to bolster the Georgian military's counterinsurgency capability. Officials of the Georgian Defense Ministry are cited as reporting that the commandos will be deployed at the checkpoints in Nikozi and Kurti and will conduct joint patrols together with the Russian and Ossetian peacekeepers currently in the area. (Civil Georgia)

ABKHAZ PARLIAMENT-IN-EXILE THREATENS TO JOIN GEORGIAN OPPOSITION**10 July**

The Tbilisi-based Abkhaz parliament-in-exile, which comprises the Georgian deputies to the Abkhaz parliament elected in late 1991, adopted a resolution on 10 July condemning the Georgian government's Abkhaz policy. Council Chairman Tamaz Nadareishvili told journalists after

the session that the council is convinced that there is no longer any hope of resolving the Abkhaz conflict peacefully, and that the Georgian government should therefore resort to military action against the breakaway republic. He implied that if the Georgian government fails to do so, the council will withdraw its support for the pro-presidential For a New Georgia bloc. As he has done on numerous previous occasions, Nadareishvili also demanded the withdrawal of the Russian peacekeeping force deployed in the Abkhaz conflict zone, and a UN "Peace Enforcement" operation to bring Abkhazia back under Georgia's control. (ITAR-TASS)

INTERIOR MINISTER SAYS SUICIDE-BOMBER NETWORK IS OPERATING IN RUSSIA

10 July

Interior Minister Boris Gryzlov told journalists on 10 July that there is a direct connection between the 5 July suicide bombings and the 9 July attempted bombing attempt of a central Moscow restaurant. Gryzlov said the 5 July attack, in which two women believed to be Chechens reportedly killed themselves and 13 others when they detonated separate explosive devices at a rock concert, and the 9 July attempted bombing were carried out by a group of terrorists unified under a joint command structure that is sending suicide bombers to various Russian cities. He said the ministry has obtained information that will lead it to the group's command network. (Interfax)

TAJK CENTER FOR LAND-MINE PROBLEMS FINALIZES FUNDING

11 July

Great Britain has allocated \$250,000 to fund the establishment of a Center for Land Mine Problems in Tajikistan presidential press spokesman Saidov told Asia Plus-Blitz. The funding commitment, which according to Saidov includes the possibility of future financial support as long as the problem of land mines exists in Tajikistan, gives the green light for opening the center. It is a joint project of the Tajik government and the UN Development Program, which will manage the project. One of the center's main tasks will be removal of land mines from Tajikistan, which not only has minefields planted by Uzbekistan along the border of the two countries, but also has land mines left over from the Tajik civil war in 1992-97. The center is also expected to play a major role in the implementation of Tajikistan's commitments under the 1997 Convention on Prohibition of the Use of Anti-Personnel Mines. (Asia Plus-Blitz)

TURKMENISTAN SIGNS ANOTHER MAJOR GAS CONTRACT

11 July

The Turkmen government signed contracts on 11 July with the Ukrainian state gas firm Naftohaz Ukrayina for the sale of 36 billion cubic meters of Turkmen natural gas and with the Russian firm Itera for the sale of up to 10 billion cubic meters of gas in 2004. Both purchasers agreed to the price of \$44 per 1,000 cubic meters – the same price agreed to in the 25-year

gas deal with Gazprom that was signed in April. The Ukrainian and Itera sales will bring total Turkmen natural-gas sales to more than \$2 billion. However, as is usual in Turkmen gas deals, half the amounts of the latest deals will be paid in hard currency and half in goods and services. Niyazov also suggested that he and the heads of state of Russia and Ukraine should get together at the September CIS summit to discuss the construction of a new gas pipeline along the shore of the Caspian Sea to carry enough gas to meet existing and future contracts. Niyazov added that the purchasers of Turkmen gas, Gazprom and Naftohaz, should determine the route and financing of the new pipeline. (RIA-Novosti)

U.S. AMBASSADOR SAYS RUSSIA MIGHT KNOW WHERE DEPOSED IRAQI PRESIDENT IS

11 July

Alexander Vershbow told Interfax on 11 July that Moscow could help the United States to combat attacks on coalition forces in Iraq by people loyal to deposed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. He urged Moscow to share with U.S. intelligence any information that it has about pro-Hussein groups or about the whereabouts of Hussein and his sons. Vershbow added that the United States "categorically condemns the recent terrorist acts in Moscow" and will provide Moscow any information that can prevent such acts in the future. Vershbow also said that the United States does not consider the Russian Embassy in Baghdad a diplomatic mission. He said that it is unreasonable to send a diplomatic mission to a country that has no government with which it can deal. (Interfax)

GEORGIAN AUTHORITIES FIND 25,000 BLANK RUSSIAN PASSPORTS ON TURKISH SHIP

11 July

Georgian authorities confiscated 25,000 blank Russian passports Wednesday printed in the Russian and Abkhaz languages from a Turkish ship sailing on the Black Sea. The ship was sailing from the Turkish port of Trabzon to Sochi, Russia when stopped by the Georgian coast guard, the head of the coast guard's border patrol department, Koba Bochorishvili, told Georgia's Rustavi 2 television. The passports were confiscated as illegal cargo and the ship allowed to proceed to Sochi. Georgian officials have repeatedly complained to Russia about its practice of issuing passports to Abkhazian separatists. The Georgian Foreign Ministry said Wednesday it would investigate whether there was official Russian involvement with the passports and if confirmed, issue a note of protest. Abkhazia, a lush Black Sea province in Georgia's northwest, won de facto independence in 1993 after driving out Georgian government forces in two years of fighting. Separatists have refused to bow to Georgia's control and U.N.-sponsored peace talks have stalled. Russian peacekeepers have patrolled the dividing line between separatist and Georgian-controlled territory since 1994 under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Independent States, an alliance of former Soviet republics. (AP)

ABKHAZ OPPOSITION DEMANDS ARDZINBA'S RESIGNATION

11 July

The Amsakhara public-political movement, consisting of the 1992-93 Abkhazian war veterans, adopted a resolution at a July 10 congress, urging de facto President of Abkhazia Vladislav Ardzinba for resignation.

The Amsakhara opposition movement claims that Ardzinba is unable to cope with the grave crime situation in Abkhazia and strengthen Abkhazia's independence. Vladislav Ardzinba, who is undergoing a further course of treatment in Moscow, said he would not step down before his presidential term expires in October 2004. Vladislav Ardzinba had to dismiss the former Premier Genadi Gagulia and the entire cabinet on April 8 after the categorical demand of the Amsakhara movement. (Civil Georgia)

NATO CHIEF ON VISIT TO CENTRAL ASIA

11 July

NATO on Thursday hailed the willingness of ex-Soviet Central Asia to take part in "a united front against terrorism", but said this fight must not be used by local rulers as a pretext to stifle domestic opposition.

"Terrorism is a clear threat to people in this region," George Robertson, Secretary General of the defense alliance told a news conference during a brief visit to Kazakhstan.

"Terrorists confront free society in a way that we have never seen before. We must have a common united front against terrorism. "But we must not do so at the expense of the liberties of free society which the terrorists would attack," Robertson said in answer to a question about a clampdown on human rights in Uzbekistan. Most of the authoritarian regimes in the five countries making up the vast, resource-rich region sprawling between Russia and China have enthusiastically embraced the U.S.-led war on terror in their unstable neighboring Afghanistan. But their poor human rights records are widely seen as having deteriorated since the attacks on U.S. cities on September 11 2001, after which the region's leaders gave vital support, including the use of airbases, to Washington. Uzbekistan, the most populous Islamic ex-Soviet state, boasts cordial ties with the United States, which keeps an unspecified number of troops at an airbase there. But human rights watchdogs and Western governments are harshly critical of Uzbek President Islam Karimov, saying he exploits the threat of religious extremism to crack down on internal dissent. Human rights groups believe at least 10 people have died in Uzbek jails from torture since the September 11 attacks, and the United Nations says the use of torture there is systemic. (Reuters)

GEORGIAN ARMED FORCES FACING SERIOUS FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

11 July

Georgian Defense Ministry asked Georgian President and Commander-in-Chief Eduard Shevardnadze to summon an extraordinary meeting of the National Security Council. The meeting is necessary due to the disastrous financial standing

of the Georgian Armed Forces, a source in the Georgian Defense Ministry reported to RBC. Over the first six months of 2003, the Georgian Armed Forces received only 62 percent of due financing, and many servicemen have not received their pays for a considerable period of time.

Moreover, the implementation of several military programs was off. Some of them were aimed at promoting Georgia's joining NATO. Additionally, the government, following a corresponding IMF requirement, has recently made a decision on budget cuts, for a third time since the beginning of the year. The cuts focused on the funds that should have been allocated to the Armed Forces and law-enforcement agencies. (RBC)

OVER 5 TONS OF DRUGS CONFISCATED IN TAJIKISTAN IN PAST 6 MONTHS

11 July

Some 5 tons of drugs, including 3 tons of heroin, have been confiscated in Tajikistan with the assistance of Russian frontier guards over the first six months of 2003. The amount over the same period last year was half as much, reports Avaz Yuldashev, press-service chief of the Tajik president's drug control agency. He made a point of the greater bulk of narcotics being delivered to Tajikistan from Afghanistan. There is evidence of 62 heroin-producing laboratories in Northern Afghanistan on the Tajik frontier. (RIA-Novosti)

GEORGIA'S UN AMBASSADOR ACCUSES RUSSIAN BASES OF TRAFFICKING IN WEAPONS

12 July

Revaz Adamia on 8 July accused the Russian military of engaging in the illegal trafficking of small arms. Adamia claimed that the three Russian military bases in Georgia serve as "the major source of arms and weapons for various secessionist, criminal, or terrorist groups" and noted that the bases are not "under the effective control of their central command and are located in the areas with lucrative black markets for illicit arms trade." Adamia concluded that the situation at the "three bases poses a major threat to the security of Georgia." Despite a formal agreement concluded at the 1999 OSCE summit in Istanbul to withdraw from Georgian territory, Russia maintains military bases in Batumi, Akhalkalaki, and Gudauta. (Civil Georgia)

ARMENIAN PARLIAMENTARY DEPUTY SPEAKER WARNS OF DANGER OF REOPENING BORDER WITH TURKEY

12 July

Speaking at a 12 July press conference, Armenian parliamentary Deputy Chairman Vahan Hovannisian warned that opening the Turkish-Armenian border would place "Armenia's interests under direct threat." Hovannisian explained that an unrestricted opening of the border with Turkey would lead to irreparable harm to Armenian agriculture and would spur a "flood of cheaper products in the Armenian market," leading to "serious losses" for Armenian farmers. The deputy speaker recommended that

Armenia should place higher priority in the reopening of the railway link through Abkhazia, suggesting that the Abkhaz route would "enable Armenia to export competitively priced products." The Armenian-Turkish border has been closed for a decade as a result of Turkey joining the Azerbaijani-imposed trade and transport blockade of Armenia. (Armenpress)

FOREIGN MINISTRY DEPLORES AMBASSADOR'S STATEMENTS

13 July

Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko said on 13 July that Ambassador Vershbow's statement implying that Russia has information about the whereabouts of deposed Iraqi President Hussein or his sons is "incorrect." He said that bilateral relations have reached such a level that there are constant, reliable channels for the exchange of such information, including confidential channels. Therefore, Yakovenko said, it is wrong to appeal for such information through the mass media. In a separate statement, the Foreign Ministry expressed concern about U.S. unwillingness to guarantee the diplomatic status of the Russian Embassy in Baghdad. The United States as an occupying power is obligated to do this under international law, the statement said. (RIA-Novosti)

NINE RUSSIAN SERVICEMEN KILLED IN CHECHEN REBEL ATTACK

13 July

Nine Russian servicemen died when their vehicle ran over a mine in southern Chechnya and rebel Chechens lying in ambush nearby opened fire, military sources said. Five other servicemen were seriously wounded in the incident late Saturday, the sources at federal military headquarters for the Northern Caucasus at Rostov-on-Don, in southern Russia, said as quoted by the Interfax news agency. The rebels opened fire with grenade-launchers and automatic weapons from the right bank of the Argun river after an explosive device had caused the vehicle to stop. The servicemen, part of an engineering team, died in the ensuing gunfight, the sources said. It was not yet known how many rebels were killed. The defence ministry in Moscow confirmed the report, Interfax said. Six Russian servicemen were killed in two separate incidents in Chechnya earlier on Saturday, three in a landmine blast and three in a bomb attack. Mine blasts and low-level attacks continue to take a daily toll on Russian forces and pro-Russian administrators in the breakaway republic where Moscow sent in troops to put down a separatist insurgency in October 1999. The Kremlin has called a presidential election in Chechnya on October 5, arguing that the counter-insurgency campaign has been successful. (AFP)

AZERBAIJANI SUPREME COURT REJECTS OPPOSITION BID FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY

14 July

The Azerbaijani Supreme Court ruled on 14 July against a motion by the opposition Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (ADP) seeking to register its exiled leader, former parliament speaker Rasul Guliev, as its candidate in the 15 October presidential election. The opposition party was petitioning the court to overturn a decision by the Central Election Commission declaring Guliev ineligible. The head of the Baku office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Peter Burkhardt, expressed concern over the ruling. Guliev, a former deputy prime minister as well as parliamentary speaker before resigning in 1996, faces outstanding criminal charges of corruption and embezzlement in Azerbaijan. Although Guliev fled Azerbaijan and lives in self-imposed exile in the United States to evade the charges, he continues to lead the opposition DPA and is seen by some as one of the most formidable opponents to 80-year-old President Heidar Aliiev. (Interfax)

U.S. FUNDS CONSTRUCTION OF BRIDGE BETWEEN TAJIKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN

14 July

The United States has earmarked \$12 million for construction of a bridge over the Pyandzh River between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, according to the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe. The bridge is expected to help in the economic integration of the Central Asian region by making possible the establishment of new trade routes. The project is reported to be the result of discussions among the U.S., Tajik, Afghan, Russian, and Norwegian governments. According to the embassy, a group of U.S. Army engineers has arrived in Tajikistan to study possible locations for the bridge, which will be the first to link the two countries across the Pyandzh. Construction is expected to start this fall. (RIA-Novosti)

CHECHNYA GETS FIRST PRESIDENTIAL RUNNER

14 July

A little-known businessman became the first person to declare his intention to run for president of Chechnya, officials said Monday, in an Oct. 5 election the Kremlin hopes will help end the nearly four-year conflict in the breakaway republic. Rebels continued their hit-and-run attacks in Chechnya, killing 10 Russian servicemen over the past 24 hours, an official in Kadyrov's administration said on condition of anonymity. Three pro-Moscow Chechen policemen were killed when their car hit a land mine. Said-Khamzat Gairbekov informed Chechnya's election commission that he intends to run, said Bulaisari Arsakhanov, the commission's deputy chairman, according to the Interfax news agency. He must collect signatures from 20,000 people — 2 percent of Chechnya's voters — to get his name on the ballot. Gairbekov, 60, has lived for several decades in Russia's southern Astrakhan region, where he is the deputy director of a construction company, Interfax said. Chechnya's Kremlin-appointed acting president, Akhmad Kadyrov, is widely believed to be running, though he has not officially declared

his candidacy. Russian officials are pushing elections as part of their peace plan. The first step was a March referendum in which Chechen voters approved a new constitution, cementing the region's status as part of Russia. Then, last month, the Russian parliament passed an amnesty for rebels not accused of serious crimes. (AP)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT ENDORSES U.S. ELECTORAL PROPOSALS

15 July

In comments in his weekly radio address on 14 July, President Eduard Shevardnadze affirmed his support for a set of U.S.-drafted electoral proposals. The president welcomed the 10-point U.S. proposals, more commonly known as the "Baker Scorecard," after former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker presented the proposals in Tbilisi earlier this month. Shevardnadze dismissed reports that Baker urged him to resign, noting that he will complete his term as president through 2005. Of the 10 points in the Baker proposals, the most significant measures include a call for the government to reconstitute the Central Election Commission (CEC) by nominating five members and allowing the opposition to appoint nine, and a recommendation that the OSCE select a respected, nonpolitical member of Georgian society as CEC chairman. The engagement of the United States in the Georgian electoral process reflects concern over mounting political instability in the face of the November parliamentary election. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZ NONGOVERNMENTAL GROUP PROPOSES CIVIL-SOCIETY OVERSIGHT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT REFORM

15 July

The Kyrgyz Association of Nongovernmental and Noncommercial Organizations has proposed the creation of a council of civil-society representatives to ensure the transparency of planned reforms of the country's law enforcement agencies, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported on 13 July, quoting association chairman Toktaiym Umetalieva. The association has also suggested that the Internal Affairs Ministry be renamed the Law Enforcement Ministry. Umetalieva said that her group, unlike many other NGOs, supports a project to prevent mass public disturbances that is part of a 3.6 million-euro program prepared by the OSCE to assist in reform of the Kyrgyz law enforcement system. The NGOs that object to the project assert that the training police receive in controlling mass public disturbances will be used to crush legitimate protests. President Askar Akaev has said that civil society representatives will be welcome to observe the implementation of the training program. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT SUPPORTS PEACE ENFORCEMENT IN ABKHAZIA

16 July

The parliamentary special session on July 16 adopted a decree over Abkhazia with 147 votes to 1. The decree urges the President and the executive authority to apply to the UN Security Council to enforce Chapter 7 of the UN Charter in Abkhazia, to take steps towards changing of peacekeeping operations' mandate and prepare particular proposals over internationalization of peacekeeping operations in the conflict zone of Abkhazia. The Parliament of Georgia still adheres to the previously adopted parliamentary decrees regarding the withdrawal of Russian peacekeeping troops deployed in the conflict zone under the CIS auspices, and expresses serious concern over non-fulfillment of these decrees by the executive authority. (Civil Georgia)

